THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY

LEVITICUS, NUMBERS



From biblical text...to contemporary life

ROY GANE

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NIV Application Commentary
Series Introduction

THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY SERIES is unique. Most commentaries help us make the journey from our world back to the world of the Bible. They enable us to cross the barriers of time, culture, language, and geography that separate us from the biblical world. Yet they only offer a one-way ticket to the past and assume that we can somehow make the return journey on our own. Once they have explained the *original meaning* of a book or passage, these commentaries give us little or no help in exploring its *contemporary significance.* The information they offer is valuable, but the job is only half done.

Recently, a few commentaries have included some contemporary application as *one* of their goals. Yet that application is often sketchy or moralistic, and some volumes sound more like printed sermons than commentaries.

The primary goal of the NIV Application Commentary Series is to help you with the difficult but vital task of bringing an ancient message into a modern context. The series not only focuses on application as a finished product but also helps you think through the *process* of moving from the original meaning of a passage to its contemporary significance. These are commentaries, not popular expositions. They are works of reference, not devotional literature.

The format of the series is designed to achieve the goals of the series. Each passage is treated in three sections: *Original Meaning*, *Bridging Contexts*, and *Contemporary Significance.*

Original Meaning

This section helps you understand the meaning of the biblical text in its original context. All of the elements of traditional exegesis—in concise form—are discussed here. These include the historical, literary, and cultural context of the passage. The authors discuss matters related to grammar and syntax and the meaning of biblical words.[1] They also seek to explore the main ideas of the passage and how the biblical author develops those ideas.

After reading this section, you will understand the problems, questions, and concerns of the *original audience* and how the biblical author addressed those issues. This understanding is foundational to any legitimate application of the text today.

Bridging Contexts

THIS SECTION BUILDS a bridge between the world of the Bible and the world of today, between the original context and the contemporary context, by focusing on both the timely and timeless aspects of the text.

God's Word is *timely.* The authors of Scripture spoke to specific situations, problems, and questions. The author of Joshua encouraged the faith of his original readers by narrating the destruction of Jericho, a seemingly impregnable city, at the hands of an angry warrior God (Josh. 6). Paul warned the Galatians about the consequences of circumcision and the dangers of trying to be justified by law (Gal. 5:2—5). The author of Hebrews tried to convince his readers that Christ is superior to Moses, the Aaronic priests, and the Old Testament sacrifices. John urged his readers to "test the spirits" of those who taught a form of incipient Gnosticism (1 John 4:1—6). In each of these cases, the timely nature of Scripture enables us to hear God's Word in situations that were *concrete* rather than abstract.

Yet the timely nature of Scripture also creates problems. Our situations, difficulties, and questions are not always directly related to those faced by the people in the Bible. Therefore, God's word to them does not always seem relevant to us. For example, when was the last time someone urged you to be circumcised, claiming that it was a necessary part of justification? How many people today care whether Christ is superior to the Aaronic priests? And how can a "test" designed to expose incipient Gnosticism be of any value in a modern culture?

Fortunately, Scripture is not only timely but *timeless.* Just as God spoke to the original audience, so he still speaks to us through the pages of Scripture. Because we share a common humanity with the people of the Bible, we discover a *universal dimension* in the problems they faced and the solutions God gave them. The timeless nature of Scripture enables it to speak with power in every time and in every culture.

Those who fail to recognize that Scripture is both timely and timeless run into a host of problems. For example, those who are intimidated by timely books such as Hebrews, Galatians, or Deuteronomy might avoid reading them because they seem meaningless today. At the other extreme, those who are convinced of

the timeless nature of Scripture, but who fail to discern its timely element, may "wax eloquent" about the Melchizedekian priesthood to a sleeping congregation, or worse still, try to apply the holy wars of the Old Testament in a physical way to God's enemies today.

The purpose of this section, therefore, is to help you discern what is timeless in the timely pages of the Bible—and what is not. For example, how do the holy wars of the Old Testament relate to the spiritual warfare of the New? If Paul's primary concern is not circumcision (as he tells us in Gal. 5:6), what *is* he concerned about? If discussions about the Aaronic priesthood or Melchizedek seem irrelevant today, what is of abiding value in these passages? If people try to "test the spirits" today with a test designed for a specific firstcentury heresy, what other biblical test might be more appropriate?

Yet this section does not merely uncover that which is timeless in a passage but also helps you to see *how* it is uncovered. The authors of the commentaries seek to take what is implicit in the text and make it explicit, to take a process that normally is intuitive and explain it in a logical, orderly fashion. How do we know that circumcision is not Paul's primary concern? What clues in the text or its context help us realize that Paul's real concern is at a deeper level?

Of course, those passages in which the historical distance between us and the original readers is greatest require a longer treatment. Conversely, those passages in which the historical distance is smaller or seemingly nonexistent require less attention.

One final clarification. Because this section prepares the way for discussing the contemporary significance of the passage, there is not always a sharp distinction or a clear break between this section and the one that follows. Yet when both sections are read together, you should have a strong sense of moving from the world of the Bible to the world of today.

Contemporary Significance

THIS SECTION ALLOWS the biblical message to speak with as much power today as it did when it was first written. How can you apply what you learned about Jerusalem, Ephesus, or Corinth to our present-day needs in Chicago, Los Angeles, or London? How can you take a message originally spoken in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and communicate it clearly in our own language? How can you take the eternal truths originally spoken in a different time and culture and apply them to the similar-yet-different needs of our culture?

In order to achieve these goals, this section gives you help in several key areas.

(1) It helps you identify contemporary situations, problems, or questions that are truly comparable to those faced by the original audience. Because contemporary situations are seldom identical to those faced by the original audience, you must seek situations that are analogous if your applications are to be relevant.

(2) This section explores a variety of contexts in which the passage might be applied today. You will look at personal applications, but you will also be encouraged to think beyond private concerns to the society and culture at large.

(3) This section will alert you to any problems or difficulties you might encounter in seeking to apply the passage. And if there are several legitimate ways to apply a passage (areas in which Christians disagree), the author will bring these to your attention and help you think through the issues involved.

In seeking to achieve these goals, the contributors to this series attempt to avoid two extremes. They avoid making such specific applications that the commentary might quickly become dated. They also avoid discussing the significance of the passage in such a general way that it fails to engage contemporary life and culture.

Above all, contributors to this series have made a diligent effort not to sound moralistic or preachy. The NIV Application Commentary Series does not seek to provide ready-made sermon materials but rather tools, ideas, and insights that will help you communicate God’s Word with power. If we help you to achieve that goal, then we have fulfilled the purpose for this series.

The Editors

1. Please note that in general, when the authors discuss words in the original bibilical languages, the series uses a general rather than a scholarly method of transliteration.

General Editor's Preface

ONE OF THE MAJOR WEAKNESSES of modern culture is our loss of morality. We misunderstand the nature of laws and rules and commandments, calling them *legalisms;* and then, based on this misunderstanding, we reject them. We think legalism and morality are the same thing. We don't like either one and begin to squirm when the subject of morality comes up.

Actually, many of us begin to squirm as well when the subject of the biblical books of Leviticus and Numbers comes up—and for much the same reasons: our discomfort with morality. We don't like reading what appear to be the outdated dictates of a grouchy God who seems to have gotten up on the wrong side of bed. What is the point?

This is what makes Roy Gane's commentary so helpful. He tells us the point. One of his primary emphases is that Levitical laws are not legalistic and outdated. By carefully and thoroughly taking us through each chapter and verse, we discover that we can learn from other people's morality, even when their culture is radically different from ours.

The point is this: If you read Leviticus and Numbers faithfully, your squea-mishness about morality itself will begin to disappear. In order to explain this lesson, let me elaborate on two ideas that emerge from reading this authoritative material. (1) The laws of Leviticus depend for their efficacy on the fact that they are created by and implemented in a community of people. They describe the "dynamic worship system of ancient Israel," a system that has theological meaning. These are not laws for individuals.

These are laws that are only secondarily about safety and health and order and good manners. Make no mistake, they are about safety and health and order and good manners—but only after they are about the worship of God, which is the precondition, the setting, of all the Levitical laws. Why are we to love our neighbor (17:9)? Because we cannot worship God unless we love our neighbor as ourselves. Once this is established, we discover that loving our neighbor creates good, safe, healthy, intercommunal

relationships.

We live in a culture where we tend to understand laws and rules and commandments primarily as they relate to us as individuals. Because we live in an individualistic age, it takes deliberate effort to realize that individual morality is rooted in communal morality. In the Bible, this is not made as explicit as it could because in biblical times it was assumed that the values of the community precede those of the individual. Today the order is reversed, and understanding the Levitical laws demands that we include in our hermeneutic an acknowledgment of the Bible's priorities.

(2) The laws of Leviticus only make sense to us if we are able to transpose their meaning from a cultural context three millennia in time and half a world in distance from our own. The content of the laws of Leviticus can seem strange. The questions on mildew in chapter 13, for example, can only be understood by those who live in a tropical country where this is still a problem. The solution to "destructive mildew"—to have the priest adjudicate whether or not the article in question is to be destroyed—is not something most modern church leaders would like to have added to their job description. Nevertheless, the community implications of this law are manifest. Any destructive force that has the potential to spread throughout the body of Christ is something we should all be concerned with corralling.

Even the most arcane of the laws found in Leviticus have at their root a principle that we should be able to make application to our lives. As we have said, the general hermeneutical principle is to attempt to see the communal meaning of what we are tempted to interpret as individual laws. As Roy Gane helps us to see in this commentary, there is great, practical wisdom in these two books.

Is it any wonder, given these two ideas, that the New Testament so often refers to the laws of Leviticus to explain the morality of the people of the kingdom of God? They are laws sent to us by God through Moses. That means they are important. They are laws that ordered the lives of a "holy, tribal community centered in the divine presence." Since that is what we long to happen in the church (and churches) of today, we could do worse than try to live the lifestyle created by these laws.

God's call to holiness is not a call to be embraced by hermits. It is a call that is always lived out in relation to a community, a group of people centered in the worship of God—a group of people situated in a wider world of decentered, sometimes immoral, sometimes amoral cultural groups. It turns out that in many ways we are not so different from this tribe wandering in the deserts of Sinai after all.

Terry C. Muck

Author's Preface

PERHAPS A CONFESSION is an appropriate way to begin a commentary on Leviticus and Numbers. Before 1980, the idea of turning to these books for inspiration was foreign to me. I am embarrassed to admit that as an undergraduate theology student, I did not even bother to enroll in an excellent course on the biblical sanctuary and its services, taught by my father, simply because I was completely uninterested in the topic.

My initial interest in pursuing study of the Hebrew Bible arose from fascination with prophecy and Psalms. Having studied music composition, I aimed to set Psalms to music for congregational singing and realized that a study of Hebrew poetry and its rhythm would facilitate creation of simple melodies to complement the biblical texts. So after an intensive summer course in modern Hebrew at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I enrolled in undergraduate and then graduate study of biblical Hebrew at the University of California, Berkeley.

The professor of biblical Hebrew at that university was Jacob Milgrom, whose preoccupation with Leviticus and Numbers plunged me into what I had regarded as a deserted realm of blood and guts, far from the aesthetics of Psalms. Over a number of years, our progress through the Hebrew text of Leviticus and Numbers and their many interpretations was slow and thorough, generally covering only a chapter or two per semester. As an extreme example, we spent an entire session of two and a half hours on one Hebrew letter: a preposition *b* in Leviticus 17:11.

As Milgrom guided his students in unfolding the text, I progressively came to grasp his main point: The dynamic worship system of ancient Israel encapsulates profound theological meaning. Furthermore, although relationships with the New Testament were not under discussion, a new world of understanding opened up to vastly enrich and nuance my Christian understanding of God's character and the way he interacts with and restores faulty human beings like me. So driving home late at night from Milgrom's seminar along Highway 80 in my ancient 1962 Ford Falcon, I found myself pounding on the steering wheel and yelling with excitement.

To Jacob Milgrom, whose unparalleled contributions to modern research on Leviticus and Numbers are referenced throughout the present commentary, I owe my love of these towering Torah books and my ability to comprehend them. I am also grateful to my parents, Erwin and Winsome Gane, for passing on their love of God and his Word and giving me an initial foundation for Bible study.

Encouragement, stimulating ideas, and helpful reactions have come from many other sources, including Baruch Schwartz (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and John Walton (Wheaton College); my Old Testament Department colleagues at Andrews University—Richard Davidson, Jacques Doukhan, Constance Gane (my wife), Jiri Moskala, and Randy Younker; my students, especially Moise Isaac, and Paul Lippi. Several have contributed by collecting secondary source materials, including illustrations: Kathy Ekkens (my secretary) and a succession of graduate student research assistants over several years—Jan Sigvartsen, Oleg Zhigankov, Wann Fanwar, Afolarin Oje-wole, Gregory Arutyunyan, Alexander Carpenter, Schuan Carpenter, and James Wibberding. Kathy Ekkens and Jan Sigvartgen compiled the author and ancient literature indexes.

My wife and daughter—Constance and Sarah Gane—have tarried during my long stay at Mount Sinai and in the wilderness without undue grumbling or partying. Their support has been warm and constant even as they have looked forward to completion of the journey. Ultimate support has come from God, whose Torah is the reason for this study and who provides hope of a Promised Land as our final destination.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ABL	R. F. Harper, ed., *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunijk Collections of the British Museum*
abridg.	abridged
AHw	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	*Altorientalische Forschungen*
ASORDS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
AfTJ	*Africa Theological Journal*
AThR	*Anglican Theological Review*
ATSDS	Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series
AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
b.	*ben/bar,* son of
b.	*Babylonian Talmud*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAGD	Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*

BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A. Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BerO	Berit Olam
Bib	*Biblica*
BibB	Biblische Beiträge
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BO	*Bibliotheca Orientalis*
BRev	*Bible Review*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BSC	Bible Student's Commentary
BSem	Biblical Seminar
BST	Bible Speaks Today
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	Calvin's Commentaries
cf.	*confer* (compare)
ch(s).	chapter(s)
CHL	Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum
ChrCent	*Christian Century*
ComC	The Communicator's Commentary
COS	*The Context of Scripture*, ed. W. W. Hallo
CT	*Christianity Today*
CTM	*Concordia Theological Monthly*
CUD	*College and University Dialogue*
DARCOM	Daniel and Revelation Committee series

EB	Expositor's Bible
EBC	*Expositor's Bible Commentary*
ed(s).	editor(s)
EJ	*Encyclopaedia Judaica*
EM	*Encyclopaedia Miqra'it*
ErIsr	*Eretzr Israel*
EstBib	*Estudios Biblicos*
et al.	*et alii*, and others
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GKC	E. Kautzsch, ed; A. E. Cowley, transl., *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HLR	*Harvard Law Review*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
ILR	*Israel Law Review*
Int	*Interpretation*
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley
ITC	International Theological Commentary
ITL	International Theological Library
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAGNES	*Journal of the Association of Graduate Near Eastern Students* of the

	University of California, Berkeley
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JATS	*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JR	*Juridical Review*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and*
	Roman Period
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament:
	Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KW	Kierkegaard's Writings
LBI	Library of Biblical Interpretation
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LHC	Layman's Handy Commentary
LLA	Library of Liberal Arts
LXX	Septuagint
m.	*Mishnah*
MT	*Modern Theology*
MTZ	*Münchener theologische Zeitschrift*
n.	note
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB95	New American Standard Bible Update
NASB	New American Standard Bible

NCB	New Century Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIB	*New Interpreter's Bible,* ed. L. Keck, et al.
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NPNF[1]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Series 1
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
orig.	original publication
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studien*
PAAJR	Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PRR	Princeton Readings in Religions
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RB	*Revue biblique*
repr.	reprinted
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RTR	*Reformed Theological Review*
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
SBLSymS	SBL Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World

SBONT	Sacred Books of the Old and New Testaments
SCR	*Studies in Comparative Religion*
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SPIB	Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici
SR	Studies in Religion
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StBoT	Studien zu den Bogazköy-Texten
STR	*Sewanee Theological Review*
t.	*Tosefta*
TDOT	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
TI	Text and Interpretation
TLOT	E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
transl.	translation/translated by
TWOT	R. L. Harris, G. Archer, and B. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHS	United Bible Societies Handbook Series
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
v(v).	verse(s)
VAT	Vorderasiatische Abteilung Tontafel (tablets in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin)
VE	*Vox Evangelica*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WPL	Wordsworth Poetry Library
WSC	Wisconsin Studies in Classics
WesTJ	*Wesleyan Theological Journal*

y.	*Jerusalem Talmud*
YOS	Yale Oriental Series
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Introduction to Leviticus

WHY SACRIFICE TIME on reading Leviticus? A graduate student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem joined an elderly couple for evening worship. Continuing their faithful program of reading the Bible from cover to cover every year, the Palmers rapidly read through several chapters of Leviticus. When they had finished, eighty-year-old Mrs. Palmer reacted: "You know, sometimes when I read that book, I wonder what the Lord was up to. Did the Almighty get up on the wrong side of the bed?" The student responded: "It's true, Leviticus does have some difficulties, but many of those hard-to-under-stand passages can be explained." At this she lifted her hand and exclaimed: "No, don't start giving us explanations; we'll never get through!"[1]

So why would anyone *want* to read and understand Leviticus? If the present commentary were on the Psalms, the Gospel of John, or Paul's letter to the Romans, or if it were directed primarily to a Jewish readership, we could skip that kind of question and nobody would notice. Leviticus for Christians, however, is another matter.

A commentary on Leviticus must explain convincingly why it is important that this biblical book should be read today. Unless this question is answered clearly and compellingly, people will not bother to penetrate to its full meaning for today.[2]

True, this book of twenty-seven chapters contains more direct speech by God himself than any other book of the Bible and it is placed at the heart of the Torah or Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), which forms the foundation for all of Scripture. So even though Leviticus is the shortest book of the Pentateuch, we get the impression that it should be important. However, aside from narratives in chapters 8—10 (consecration and inauguration of the sanctuary and its priesthood) and 24:10—23 (the blasphemer), and covenant blessings and curses in chapter 26, Leviticus consists of laws. Even the narratives contain divine laws embedded in them (10:8—11; 24:15—22), and the events described in chapters 8—10 are ritual ones closely related to the sacrificial procedures prescribed in laws of

the previous chapters (chs. 1—7).

What do laws addressed to an ancient, obsolete culture have for modern Christians?[3] Ritual laws, which take up much of Leviticus, are particularly challenging because they were designed to regulate a worship system that is foreign to us. Their meanings are not obvious to us, and explanations provided by the biblical text are few and cryptic. Instructions for sacrifices, which involve slaughtering animals for no apparent practical purpose, include a lot of details that can be tedious and gory to readers who are not butchers, veterinarians, or biologists. Even if we wanted to observe or participate in such rituals, we cannot because the Israelite sanctuary/temple and its Aaronic priesthood are gone.

If we take the New Testament seriously, it is worthwhile to pause and reconsider our attitude toward Leviticus. For one thing, in 2 Timothy 3:16 the apostle Paul writes: "*All* Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (emphasis supplied). For Paul "all Scripture" certainly included Leviticus. More specifically, the fact that the New Testament refers to the Old Testament ritual system in order to explain what Christ has accomplished and is continuing to accomplish indicates that knowledge of the rituals should be helpful, and may even be indispensable, for comprehending the richness of salvation through Christ (e.g. Luke 24:27; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:20; Heb. 7—10; Rev. 4—5).

Linkage between the Old and New Testaments includes the fact that Israelite ritual bathing and celebration of the Passover formed the basis for Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper/Communion. So by grasping the meanings of the earlier practices, we enhance comprehension of our own rituals.

The fact that Christ's death on the cross, as described in the Gospels, was so much more painful than the animal sacrifices (cf. Isa. 52:14) indicates that the latter were mitigated and relatively humane "shadows." There had to be blood to make the point (Heb. 9:22), but it was obtained with a minimum of suffering by slitting the throat of an animal so that it would quickly go unconscious from loss of blood.[4] Apparently nothing short of this kind of disturbingly graphic procedure could adequately impress on ancient people the eternal death-and-life consequences of sin and of salvation through a single sacrificial transaction that had not yet occurred (cf. Rom. 6:23).

As shadows/prototypes, the ancient sacrifices that were necessarily

repeated many times and were officiated by faulty priests could not really take away sins (Heb. 10:1—4). However, because they were performed on earth, where people could experience them by participation, they served a useful purpose as dramatic illustrations. No single kind of sacrifice could adequately prefigure the richness of Christ's sacrifice, just as no single picture in an anatomy and physiology textbook can capture the full complexity of a living organism. Although each kind of sacrifice is an inadequate illustration, this very inadequacy benefits us by breaking down the complexity so that we can grasp one aspect at a time.

So why not skip Leviticus and jump to the "real thing" in the New Testament? An analogous question provides some perspective: Why should a medical student spend time with distorted, analyzed, two-dimensional pictures, diagrams, and explanations in an anatomy and physiology textbook when real, living human bodies are available for examination? The answer is that the textbook teaches the budding physician what on earth he or she is looking at when confronted with the real thing. Similarly, we need Leviticus as a textbook so that when we encounter Christ's sacrifice, we can gain the full impact.

We will find that the animal sacrifices were God's "altar calls," symbolizing the way he relentlessly extends mercy with justice to faulty people. These rituals revealed his loving character and his desire for restoration and maintenance of intimate interaction with those whom he claimed as his own. While the ritual worship and theocratic civil institutions of ancient Israel are long gone, the God revealed by them remains the same. Herein lies the precious, timeless significance of Leviticus for twenty-first-century Christians.

The laws of Leviticus were not isolated from practical human experience. Rather, their details were given in the context of a grand story that recounts Israel's formation from an oppressed group of slaves to a powerful "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), among whom the deity dwelt (25:8). Divine laws addressed real life and were intended to shape its destiny with God. In this sense each law is a kind of distilled story.

Through Leviticus we can learn what God is like in relation to ourselves and how we can effectively interact with him across the boundary between the seen and unseen spheres. While our modern situation is outwardly different from that of the Israelites in significant respects, we too can participate in transactions with God (through prayer rather than sacrifice) and profit from their experience because it parallels our own on a deeper level: The Lord continues to deliver us from slavery (to sin) and transforms

us into “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9) so that he can dwell with us and be our God (Rev. 21:3).

Although laws in Leviticus designed to protect and enhance divine-human and human-human relations outside worship are routinely dismissed as Mosaic civil legislation that served only the Israelite theocracy, they encapsulate timeless and valuable principles. Many of them exemplify subprinciples of the foundational principle of love, which underlies the moral/ethical Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; Deut. 5; cf. Matt. 22:36—40; Rom. 13:8—10). It is true that the “civil” laws of Leviticus (in Lev. 18—20; 24—25), like those of other Pentateuchal books (e.g., in Ex. 21—23; Num. 35; Deut. 15; 17; 19—25), are clothed in the garb of an ancient culture and its judicial system. Nevertheless, without succumbing to legalistic “oughtism,” we can gain the practical benefit of observing them to the extent that their principles can be applied in our own life situations.[5]

Of course, discovering new principles threatens our status quo, especially when they are introduced as “Thus saith the Lord.” We pay human physicians to interfere with our lifestyles and counselors to help us adjust our relationships, but when our Creator gives us prescriptions and counsel free of charge, we tend to resent his meddling and to regard our accountability as a kind of “guilt trip.” The truth is, our responsibility to him is simultaneously accountability to ourselves, because his instructions are based on cause and effect, like the Surgeon General’s recommendations for good diet and exercise and warnings against smoking. Ignorance is as blissful as undiagnosed cancer.

Leviticus is not welcome in an environment of feel-good, self-help, “cafeteria-style” religion. Nor are other parts of the Bible. George Barna explains why not:

> In the last quarter-century it seems that we have learned how to sell Bibles but not how to sell what’s in the Bible. Increasingly, people pick and choose the Bible content they like or feel comfortable with, but ignore the rest of God’s counsel. This tendency seems especially prolific among young adults and teenagers. What can we do to elevate the prominence, credibility, and perceived value of God’s Word in the eyes of a fickle and distracted public?[6]

Nothing I say here about the healing relevance of Leviticus for the lives of modern Christians can compare with the searing experience of Minnie

Warburton, a victim of abuse as a child, who found cleansing and vindication in the incest laws of Leviticus 18.[7] Nor are my words anything like the remarkable report of Rob Bell, pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan, which he planted in February of 1999 to reach unchurched and disillusioned people in Grand Rapids. To ensure that any success the church enjoyed would be due to the power of God rather than simply human resources, and to demonstrate that *every* part of the Bible—even Leviticus—is for today, Bell spent the first year preaching through Leviticus verse by verse. He says:

> Why start a church with Leviticus? Why not a series on relationships or finding peace? That would be a safer approach. Leviticus cannot be tamed. Its imagery is too wild. We ventured into its lair and let it devour us, trusting that God would deliver us with a truer picture of his Son.
>
> … We discovered that the Bible is an organic whole: these concepts do connect, these images do make sense. For the first time, many in our congregation began to realize, this story is my story. These people are my people. This God is my God.[8]

It turned out that Leviticus was surprisingly effective because it met the needs of contemporary people for visual imagery, grappling with tough questions and a sense of community. Even more important, it awakened in those who previously had no belief in God a need for salvation through his Son.

The response has been exuberant. After a high school football game, a man called out to Rob, “Hey, Pastor! Leviticus is turning our world upside down. We’re rocked to the core.” Then two high school kids caught up with him, saying, “We’ve been talking about what you said. That was awesome! Can’t wait for Sunday. See ya!” So what did Bell start preaching after he finished Leviticus? The book of Numbers, of course![9]

Authorship

WHO IS THE author of Leviticus? It depends what you mean. If you are referring to the source of the ideas, most of the book (the legislation) is presented as a series of speeches by the Lord. So in this sense God is the primary author. Whether or not you believe it is up to you, of course, but this is what Leviticus claims.

If you are thinking of the human author, Leviticus consistently maintains that the chief recipient and transmitter of its divine speeches was Moses, so it can be regarded as coauthored. The bibliographic reference could read:

> God and Moses, *Leviticus.* Sinai: Israel Publications, second millennium B.C.

Again, this is a matter of belief. Mosaic authorship at this level goes with divine authorship. For Christians it is significant that the New Testament, including direct speech of Jesus, refers to legislation in Leviticus as authoritative and from Moses.[10]

If you mean the person(s) who actually wrote down the words of Leviticus, the book is—strictly speaking—anonymous. If you believe other Pentateuchal passages that speak of Moses as writing messages from the Lord (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Deut. 31:9), you can allow for the possibility or even probability that Moses similarly recorded the divine speeches that form the bulk of Leviticus. In Jewish tradition, accepted by Christian interpreters until modern times, Moses is the human author (including the writer) of Leviticus.

Contributions to the Pentateuch by persons other than Moses would in no way invalidate his central, monumental contribution to the Torah or diminish its inspiration.[11] As Joseph ben Eliezer Bonfils (second half of the fourteenth century A.D.) said regarding Ibn Ezra's comment on Genesis 12:6, "what difference does it make whether Moses or some other prophet wrote it since the words of all of them are truth and were received by prophecy?"[12] Similarly, the apostle Paul did not distinguish between the inspiration and authority of primary and secondary authors/editors—"All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). It is the divine authorship that is crucial. While we can acknowledge what

Leviticus says about itself in terms of basic divine-Mosaic origin, we do not know how it reached its final form, who was involved in the writing-editing process, or how long this took (during Moses' lifetime? into the monarchy? completed by Ezra?) because no hard evidence regarding these questions has come to light.

Methodology

WHAT IS A fruitful methodology for studying Leviticus? Modern interpreters generally seek to understand the plain sense of Leviticus rather than to engage in the allegorical, spiritualizing, mystical, or midrashic modes of exposition practiced centuries ago.[13] Since the same text is the starting point for every investigation, scholars agree on many aspects. Nevertheless, it is surprising that conclusions derived from the plain sense are as divergent as they are.

Perhaps the most powerful factors behind lack of agreement among Leviticus scholars are differences of opinion regarding the authorship and audience of the book.[14] What was the worldview of the author (or group of authors), as shaped by his historical context? What audience and situations(s) did he intend to address? What did he intend to accomplish? The answers to such questions are significant for gaining the full message of any literary production. Without them, for example, we could read *Gulliver's Travels* purely as entertainment and miss the level of political satire that was Jonathan Swift's primary motivation. What would we make of *The Screwtape Letters* if we lacked the preface by C. S. Lewis?

Looking at Leviticus in terms of what it says about itself within the canonical context of the Pentateuch, God through Moses addressed a neonatal nation of freshly liberated slaves in the Sinai Desert sometime during the latter half of the second millennium B.C. In this light, the initial purpose of the book was to establish and maintain enduring patterns of divine-human and human-human interaction that are appropriate and necessary for a holy tribal community centered in the divine Presence.

Once we have a provisional grasp of the overall historical setting and purpose, we can gain a more coherent, detailed, and nuanced comprehension of the message that Leviticus was designed to convey to an ancient audience by exploring various aspects of the text: rhetorical and thematic structure; (Hebrew) grammatical, syntactic, and semantic indicators; and the historical, literary, and cultural context within the ancient Near East.

It is an exciting time to study Leviticus. Tools and data are rapidly expanding. Powerful Bible software programs, such as Accordance, facilitate a close reading

of the biblical text, intratextual or intertextual comparisons, and the exhilarating joy of discovery through "surfing" the Bible. Fresh methodologies, such as that of anthropologist Mary Douglas, are helping scholars view old texts and problems from new angles. Meanwhile, archaeology and related disciplines continue to feed us ancient Near Eastern material culture and texts that shed light on ancient religion, language, law, and lifestyle that is relevant to Leviticus.

In our quest for *original meaning*, we can discover underlying dynamics, themes, and principles that are exemplified with reference to, but not dependent on, the original target culture. With these *bridging contexts* as a kind of template, we can faithfully apply the contours of the book's message to our twenty-first-century century A.D. life situation so that we arrive at *contemporary significance.*

If the message of Leviticus is from God, as it claims and as Jesus believed it to be, its impact is transformational. It cannot remain in the study but must be unleashed into the rest of the life. As Jesus said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28). The Moses portrayed in Leviticus would certainly approve of approaching this book with the questions: What does the Word of God say to me? How can I obey it? After bridging the contexts and exploring contemporary significance, we should then step outside the pages of this commentary into *contemporary action.*

Structure and Themes

WHAT ARE THE structure and themes of Leviticus? Our first question must be: Of what does Leviticus consist? Is it a self-standing book, or is it part of a larger whole? If the latter, how do we know where it begins and ends? We will find that Leviticus is structurally and thematically linked to the preceding book of Exodus, continuing Israel's experience with God from the point where divine communication comes from the tabernacle inside the desert camp rather than from Mount Sinai outside it (see comments on Lev. 1:1). We will discover that Leviticus ends when Numbers 1 resumes the account of Israel's journey with a date formula that is followed by organization of the community in preparation for conquering Canaan.

Between preparations for the worship system through construction of the tabernacle in Exodus and resumption of the march toward the Promised Land in Numbers, Leviticus fills a crucial niche in an ongoing process: constitution of the core values and practices that make the Israelites one holy nation not only under God, but also with his holy Presence in their midst. Thus Leviticus is located at the structural and conceptual heart of the Pentateuch as its third book,[15] a separate unit but also part of a cumulative development that depends on Exodus and paves the way for Numbers.[16]

"Leviticus," the LXX name of the book, is not primarily about the Levites. Indeed the book of Numbers tells us more about the tribe of Levi as a whole. Leviticus is not even primarily about the Aaronic priests, who belonged to the tribe of Levi. Rather, it is about God's call to a life of holiness in relation ato himself and other members of the community of faith, introduced with the words: "The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" (Lev. 1:1). Appropriately, this opening has provided the Hebrew name of the book: *wayyiqra'*, "Then he [Yahweh] called.…"

In Leviticus, as in countless other works, literary structure highlights themes,[17] and structure can legitimately be found on more than one level. A strong case can be made for the structural centrality of chapter 16, both because it contains the middle divine speech[18] and because its culmination of ritual matters (chs. 1—16) paves the way for laws on holy living to be observed by a

morally cleansed community (chs. 17—27).[19]

W. Shea has proposed that the overall structure of Leviticus is a large chiasm or introversion in chapters 1—25 with chapter 16 at its center, followed by concluding chapters (chs. 26—27). This approach is instructive even though Shea recognizes that it does not neatly account for everything, most notably placement of the blasphemer narrative in 24:10—23:[20]

Cultic legislation (chs. 1—7)
  Priestly history (chs. 8—10)
    Personal laws of uncleanness (chs. 11—15)
      Day of Atonement (ch. 16)
    Personal moral laws (chs. 17—20)
  Priestly legislation (chs. 21—22)
Cultic legislation (chs. 23—25, except history in 24:10—23)
Conclusion (chs. 26—27)

J. H. Walton acknowledges that chapter 16 plays an important role, but he views the structure of Leviticus from the angle of preserving the sanctity of sacred space, which is divided into a series of zones. These zones move outward from the place of God's Presence at the sanctuary: holy of holies, holy place (outer sanctum), courtyard, camp, and outside the camp.

> … Leviticus deals with issues of equilibrium zone by zone as it speaks of space, status and time, and the qualifications and procedures associated with each. Chapters 1—23 concern equilibrium relative to deity, and chaps. 24—27 concern equilibrium relative to Israel.[21]

Divine Equilibrium

Equilibrium of Sacred Space: Maintenance Procedures and Qualifications

Chs. 1—7	Sacrifices to maintain the holiest center zone
Chs. 8—10	Priests set up to maintain enclosure zone
Chs. 11—15	Purity regulations to maintain the camp zone
	Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), which resets the holiness of the

Ch. 16 entire sacred compass annually

Ch. 17 Maintaining holiness from outside the camp

Equilibrium of Sacred Space: Disqualifications from Sacred Space

Chs. 18—20 Disqualification of people from the camp

Chs. 21—22a Disqualification of priests from the enclosure

Ch. 22b Disqualification of animals for use in the center

Equilibrium of Sacred Times

Ch. 23 Sacred festivals

Human Equilibrium

Ch. 24a Human equilibrium in sacred space (center zone)

Ch. 24b Human equilibrium in status (in the camp)

Ch. 25 Human equilibrium in setting times (outside the camp)

Ch. 26 Establishing or disrupting equilibrium across the zones

Ch. 27 Sacred objects vowed to the Lord (movement through zones)[22]

By emphasizing sacred space in this way, Walton offers healthy balance to the Christian preoccupation with viewing Leviticus in terms of soteriology (study of salvation) that is concerned with a person's status in regard to sin.[23] We will find that Leviticus has plenty to say about remedies for sin, and soteriological issues are profoundly illuminated by restoration of sacred space that is defined with reference to God (see esp. comments on chs. 4 and 16). However, Leviticus is primarily about the Presence and character of God in relation to his people and only secondarily concerned with sin, which interferes with the divine-human relationship.

Notice that Walton sees a transition from chapters 1—17 to chapter 18 and following, but not a drastic break that divides Leviticus, according to the old scholarly consensus, into a bipartite structure consisting of Priestly Torah ("P": chs. 1—16/17) and Holiness Code ("H": chs. 17/18—26/27). Chapters 1—17 concentrate on ritual matters, including sacrifices and ritual purity. Even sexuality is treated from a ritual viewpoint (chs. 12; 15). Chapter 18, however, focuses on moral/ethical aspects of sexuality: sexual unions that the Lord forbids. This emphasis on the moral holiness of all Israelites living in God's land, combined with exhortations to obey his commands (18:2—5, 24—30) and repeated identification of the divine authority behind the legislation—"I am the LORD (your God)" (vv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30)—are the hallmarks of the following chapters.

Although chapter 18 introduces a shift in emphasis, this is not the first time that moral concerns have surfaced. In chapter 4 the purification offering expiates for inadvertent violation of any of God's prohibitive commandments (v. 2), which would include ethical ones. In 6:1—7 (Heb. 5:20—26) wronging another person through a false oath requires a reparation offering. Here again, a ritual remedy can address an ethical wrong.[24]

Further contributing to cohesion between the earlier part of the book and chapter 18 is 11:44—45:

> I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

Here the Lord elevates what would otherwise be merely a mundane aspect of Israelite daily life (i.e., diet) into a matter of sacred significance that is relevant to maintaining harmony with their holy Deliverer. Notice the repeated self-identifications: "I am the LORD your God" (11:44) and "I am the LORD" (v. 45). Aside from these two verses, all instances of this formula appear in chapters 18—26. Because of the close affinity between 11:44—45 and the later "holiness" portions of Leviticus, some scholars hold that it is an "H" ("Holiness") interpolation.[25] But whatever the prehistory of the passage may be, in the present form of the text, chapters 18—26 expand on this robust conceptual kernel.

M. Douglas has offered the fascinating proposal that Leviticus is a "ring composition" like that found in the Greek classics.[26] This is a literary device

> by which the conclusion of a speech or digression and the return to the main flow of the narrative was indicated with some verbal reminiscence of its beginning. Such verbal and thematic echoes … were developed over the centuries into a powerful means for securing both unity and intensity in narrative.[27]

For Douglas, the central turning point of Leviticus is chapter 19 (see bottom of diagram, below), rather than chapter 16. The tipoff that chapter 19 is in the middle of some kind of structure is the close parallel between chapters 18 and 20, which frame it on either side with laws regarding sexuality and Molech worship. Douglas outlines the scheme of the book as follows:[28]

Second turn,
Righteousness
(ch. 26)

Latch (ch. 27)
Holy Things

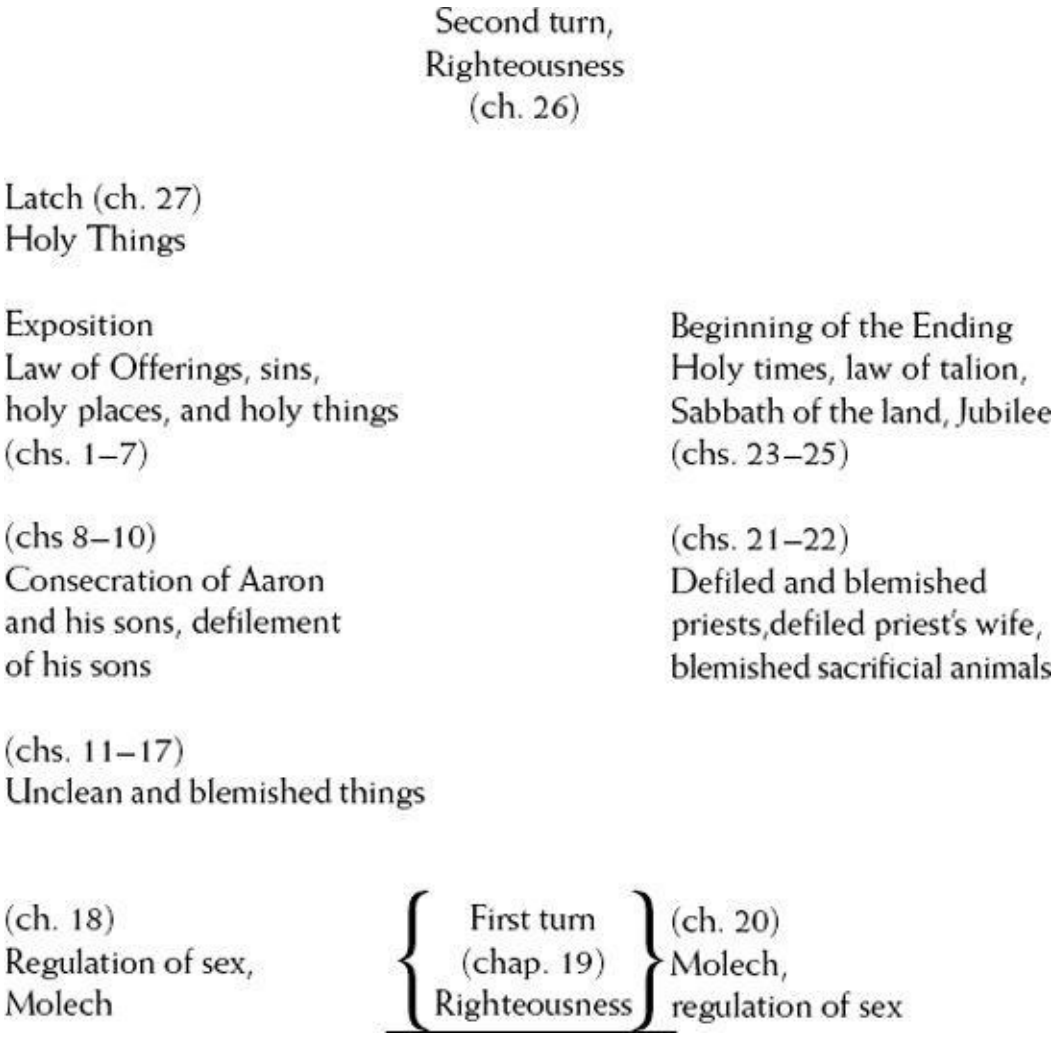
Exposition
Law of Offerings, sins,
holy places, and holy things
(chs. 1—7)

(chs 8—10)
Consecration of Aaron
and his sons, defilement
of his sons

(chs. 11—17)
Unclean and blemished things

Beginning of the Ending
Holy times, law of talion,
Sabbath of the land, Jubilee
(chs. 23—25)

(chs. 21—22)
Defiled and blemished
priests, defiled priest’s wife,
blemished sacrificial animals



The central structural position of chapter 19 focuses attention on the astounding depth of its teaching with regard to the nature of holiness, which is the overarching theme of the entire book.[29] Following the introduction to divine speech addressed to all Israelites, the "theme command" in verse 2 echoes the call of 11:44—45 to emulate divine holiness. The rest of chapter 19 consists of instructions for preserving divine-human and human-human relationships. The connection is obvious: The way God expects his people to be holy as he is holy is by leading holy lives that are in harmony with his relational character. While it is not possible to cover every facet of life in a limited series of laws, the variety of examples provided here emphasizes the comprehensive scope of practical holiness.

While love as the underlying principle of holy living is implied throughout Leviticus 19, it surfaces in verse 18b as the middle injunction of this chapter of 37 verses: "Love your neighbor as yourself." So love is at the heart of Leviticus

19, a pivotal chapter of Leviticus, the central book of the Torah (Pentateuch),[30] which is the foundation of Scripture (cf. Matt. 22:36—40)!

Obviously any outline of the literary structure of Leviticus is a scholarly abstraction that is limited at best. Rather than pitting the various proposals against each other, the most useful approach is to recognize them for what they are and learn from them regarding complementary aspects of holiness, which reach ritual and ethical high points in the twin peaks of chapters 16 and 19.

Like Shea's proposal, my own tentative outline of the book (see in detail below) has seven sections, of which the fourth/middle one is chapter 16. My first four sections coincide with his, but the last three, which extend holiness to all aspects of Israelite life, do not:

I. Sacrificial Worship (chs. 1—7)

II. Description of Ceremonies That Founded the Ritual System (chs. 8—10)

III. Purity Versus Impurity (chs. 11—15)

IV. Purgation of Sanctuary and Camp on Day of Atonement (ch. 16)

V. Holy (Sacrificial) Slaughter (ch. 17)

VI. Community Holiness (chs. 18—20)

VII. Special Holy Entities (chs. 21—27)

Within the sixth section, chapters 18 and 20 frame chapter 19 and thereby highlight its importance (see above):

VI. Community Holiness (chs. 18—20) Sexuality (ch. 18)
Comprehensive Life of Holiness (ch. 19)
Terminal Penalties for Inexpiable Offenses, Including Sexual Ones (ch. 20)

The seventh section deals with a series of eight holy entities, with the central positions occupied by the light and bread of the sanctuary's outer sanctum (24:1—9) and the divine name of the deity (24:10—23), whose Presence resides in

the inner sanctum. Notice that this section integrates the problematic blasphemer unit (24:10—23) and chapter 27, which has generally been regarded as an appendix tacked on after the real conclusion of the book with the covenant blessings and curses in chapter 26.

VII. Special Holy Entities (chaps. 21—27)

A. Holy Priests (21:1—24)

B. Holy Offerings (22:1—33)

C. Holy Times (23:1—44)

D. Holy Light and Bread (24:1—9)

E. Holy Divine Name (24:10—23)

F. Holy Land (25:1—55)

G. Holy Covenant (26:1—46)

H. Holy Consecrations and Redemption of Them (27:1—34)

1. Paul Lippi, personal communication.

2. R. Coote, "Review of *The Book of Leviticus,* by Gordon J. Wenham," *Int* 35 (1981): 423.

3. Cf. M. Warburton, "Letting the Voice of Leviticus Speak," *STR* 37 (1994): 163.

4. Cf. J. Milgrom, "Profane Slaughter and a Formulaic Key to the Composition of Deuteronomy," *HUCA* 47 (1976): 14—15; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 154—55.

5. See esp. Contemporary Significance section of Lev. 17.

6. G. Barna, quoted in Tim Stafford, "The Third Coming of George Barna," *CT* (August 5, 2002): 34—35.

7. See Contemporary Significance section of Lev. 18.

8. Rob Bell, "Life in Leviticus," *Leadership Journal* 24 (Winter 2002): 45.

9. Ibid.

10. Luke 2:22 (referring to Lev. 12); Matt. 8:4//Mark 1:44//Luke 5:14 (referring to Lev. 13—14); Mark 7:10 (referring to Lev. 20:9).

11. S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (EB; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 5—17.

12. J. ben E. Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paneah,* quoted in N. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 91.

13. See R. Gane, "Leviticus, Book of," in J. H. Hayes, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 55—56.

14. Ibid., 56—58.

15. Cf. D. Damrosch, "Leviticus," in R. Alter and F. Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1987), 66—67, 75—76.

16. R. Rendtorff, "Is It Possible to Read Leviticus as a Separate Book?" in J. Sawyer, ed., *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22—27, 33—35; G. Auld, "Leviticus at the Heart of the Pentateuch?" in Sawyer, ed., *Reading Leviticus,* 40—51.

17. See, e.g., Y. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in J. W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 50—117, esp. 87—89 on inverted structures in Leviticus. For chiastic/inverted and parallel line structures in the latter "holiness" portion of Leviticus, see M. Hildenbrand, "Structure and Theology in the Holiness Code" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

18. W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (BIS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 86—87.

19. J. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), xxxiv—xxxv, 217, 224.

20. W. Shea, "Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus," in F. Holbrook, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (DARCOM 3; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 131—68, esp. 149.

21. J. H. Walton, "Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus," *BBR* 11 (2001): 299; cf. diagram on 300.

22. Ibid., 299—304, esp. 304.

23. Ibid., 298.

24. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 230; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2440—46; D. Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 396—98; against

N. Snaith, “The Sprinkling of Blood,” *ExpTim* 82 (1970—71): 24; I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 175—78.

25. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 69, 105; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 694; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1343.

26. M. Douglas, “Poetic Structure in Leviticus,” in D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz, eds., *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 247—55, esp. 253; endorsed by Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1364—65.

27. J. K. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (WSC; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 13.

28. M. Douglas, “Poetic Structure in Leviticus,” 253. For chaps. 1—17 in a ring, with 17:3—4 repeating the instruction of 1:2—4 that slaughter of animals must take place at the sanctuary, see M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 192—3.

29. On holiness as the central theme of Leviticus, see, e.g., W. Kaiser, “The Book of Leviticus,” in NIB, 1:1131; W. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 24.

30. On arrangement of the Pentateuchal books as a chiasm with Leviticus at its center, see Radday, “Chiasmus,” 84—86.

Outline of Leviticus

I. Sacrificial Worship

A. Prescriptions for All Israelites (1:1—6:7 [Heb. 5:26])

1. Burnt Offering (1:1 — 17)

a. Introduction (1:1—2)

b. Herd Animal Victim (1:3—9)

c. Flock Animal (1:10—13)

d. Bird (1:14—17)

2. Grain Offering (2:1 — 16)

a. Raw Flour (2:1 — 3)

b. Cooked (2:4—10)

c. Prohibition of Yeast, Honey; Requirement of Salt (2:11—13)

d. Fresh Heads of Grain (2:14 —16)

3. Well-Being Offering (3:1 — 17)

a. Herd Animal (3:1—5)

b. Flock Animal (3:6—16)

c. Prohibition of Eating Suet/Fat and Blood (3:17)

4. Purification Offering (4:1—35)

a. Introduction (4:1—2)

b. High Priest As Offerer (4:3 — 12)

c. Community (4:13 —21)

d. Chieftain (4:22—26)

e. Commoner (4:27—35)

5. Graded Purification Offering (5:1—13)

a. Cases of Sin (5:1—4)

b. Remedy: Confession and Sacrifice (5:5 —6)

c. Alternate Less Expensive Offerings (5:7—13)

6. Reparation Offering (5:14—6:7 [Heb. 5:26])

a. Sacrilege Against Holy Things (5:14—16)

b. Suspected Sacrilege (5:17—19)

c. Sacrilege Against Oaths (6:1—7 [Heb. 5:20—26])

B. Additional Sacrificial Instructions for Priests (6:8 [Heb. 6:1]—7:38)

1. Burnt Offering (6:8—13 [Heb. 6:1—6])

2. Grain Offering (6:14—18 [Heb. 6:7—11])

3. High Priest’s Regular Grain Offering (6:19—23 [Heb. 6:12—16])

4. Purification Offering (6:24—30 [Heb. 6:17—23])

5. Reparation Offering (7:1—6)

6. Portions for Priests (7:7—10)

7. Well-being Offering (7:11—36)

a. Thanksgiving, Votive, and Freewill Offerings (7:11—21)

b. Prohibition of Eating Suet/Fat and Blood (7:22—27)

c. Portions for Priests (7:28—36) C. Summary (7:37—38)

II. Description of Ceremonies That Founded the Ritual System

A. Consecration of Priests and Sanctuary (8:1—36)

1. Preliminary Assembly of Materials and Persons (8:1—5)

2. Washing, Dressing, Anointing (8:6—13)

3. Sacrifices (8:14—30)

a. Purification and Burnt Offerings (8:14—21)

b. Ordination Offering (8:22—30)

4. Instructions for Priests (8:31—36)

B. Inaugural Service (9:1—24)

1. Preliminary Assembly of Materials and Persons (9:1—7)

2. Sacrifices (9:8—21)

a. Purification and Burnt Offerings for Priests (9:8—14)

b. Purification and Burnt Offerings for Nonpriestly Community (9:15—16)

c. Grain and Well-Being Offerings (9:17—21)

3. Blessing and Divine Acceptance (9:22—24)

C. Tragic Disruption (10:1—20)

1. Mistake and Death of Nadab and Abihu (10:1—7)

2. Responsibility of Priests to Maintain Discernment (10:8—11)

3. Responsibility of Priests to Eat Their Portions (10:12—20)

III. Purity Versus Impurity

A. Distinctions Between Pure (Permitted for Eating) and Impure Animals (11:1—47)

1. Land Animals (11:1—8)

2. Sea Creatures (11:9—12)

3. Birds (11:13—19)

4. Winged Insects (1 1:20—23)

5. Carcasses That Defile by Touch (11:24—40)

6. Swarmers (11:41—45)

7. Summary (11:46—47)

B. Physical Ritual Impurities from Human Sources (12:1—15:33)

1. Postpartum Genital Discharge (12:1—8)

a. Case of Impurity (12:1—5)

b. Sacrificial Remedy (12:6—8)

2. Scaly-Skin Disease (13:1—14:57)

a. On Persons (13:1—46)

b. On Fabrics = Mold (13:47—59)

c. Ritual Purification of Persons (14:1—32)

d. Diagnosis and Ritual Purification of Houses (14:33—53)

e. Summary (14:54—57)

3. Genital Discharges (15:1—33)

a. Abnormal Male (15:1—15)

b. Normal Male, Including Impurity of Female From Intercourse (15:16—18)

c. Normal Female = Menstruation (15:19—24)

d. Abnormal Female (15:25—30)

e. Concluding Warning and Summary (15:31—33)

IV. Purgation of Sanctuary and Camp on Day of Atonement

A. Preliminary Instructions (16:1—5)

B. Preparatory Ritual Activities (16:6—10)

C. Rituals of Purgation (16:11—28)

1. Purgation of the Sanctuary by Purification Offering Blood (16:11—19)

2. Disposal of Moral Evils from Camp on Azazel's Goat (16:20—22)

3. Concluding and Postrequisite Ritual Activities (16:23—28)

D. Conclusion: Community Observances, Date, Summary (16:29—34)

V. Holy (Sacrificial) Slaughter

A. Requirement for Sacrificial Slaughter of Sacrificeable Animals (17:1—9)

B. Prohibition of Eating Blood (17:10—14)

C. Requirement for Purification After Eating Unslaughtered Carcasses (17:15—16)

VI. Community Holiness

A. Sexuality (18:1—30)

1. Opening Exhortation (18:1—5)

2. Prohibition of Incest (18:6—18)

3. Prohibitions of Other Misuses of "Seed" = Semen/Child

(18:19—23)

4. Closing Exhortation (18:24—30)

B. Comprehensive Life of Holiness (19:1—37)

1. Opening Call to Holiness (19:1—2)

2. Examples of Religious, Social, Ethical, and Agricultural Holiness (19:3—36a)

3. Closing Exhortation (19:36b—37)

C. Terminal Penalties for Inexpiable Offenses (20:1—27)

1. Molech Worship and Occult (20:1—6)

2. Exhortation (20:7—8)

3. Dishonoring/Cursing Parents (20:9)

4. Sexual Offenses (20:10—21)

5. Exhortation (20:22—26)

6. Occult (20:27)

VII. Special Holy Entities

A. Holy Priests (21:1—24)

1. Restrictions on Priests Regarding Mourning and Marriage (21:1—9)

2. Restrictions on High Priest Regarding Mourning and Marriage (21:10—15)

3. Prohibition of Physically Blemished Priests from Officiating (21:16—24)

B. Holy Offerings (22:1—33)

1. Qualifications and Disqualifications for Eating Holy Food (22:1—16)

2. Qualifications and Disqualifications of Animal Sacrifices (22:17—30)

3. Concluding Exhortation (22:31—33)

C. Holy Times (23:1—44)

1. Overall Introduction (23:1—2)

2. Sabbath (23:3)

3. Yearly Festivals (23:4—44)

a. Spring Festivals (23:4—22)

b. Autumn Festivals (23:23—44)

D. Holy Light and Bread (24:1—9)

1. Oil for Sanctuary Lamps (24:1—4)

2. "Bread of the Presence” for Sanctuary Table (24:5—9)

E. Holy Divine Name (24:10—23)

1. Narrative of Brawling Blasphemer (24:10—14)

2. Laws Against Blasphemy and Assault (24:15—22)

3. Conclusion of Narrative (24:23)

F. Holy Land (25:1—55)

1. Sabbatical Year (25:1—7)

2. Jubilee Year (25:8—55)

a. Cyclical Release to Restore Economic Equilibrium (25:8—24)

b. Remedies for Stages of Sold Property, Lost Property, and Slavery (25:25—55)

G. Holy Covenant (26:1—46)

1. Blessings for Obedience to God’s Commandments (26:1—13)

2. Curses for Covenant Violation Through Disobedience (26:14—39)

3. Restoration (26:40—45)

4. Summary (26:46)

H. Holy Consecrations, and Redemption of Them (27:1—34)

1. Consecrations Through Vows (27:1—25)

a. Of Persons (27:1—8)

b. Of Animals (27:9—13)

c. Of Real Estate (27:14—25)

2. Other Holy Items (27:26—33)

3. Summary (27:34)

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Leviticus 1:1

THE LORD CALLED to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said,

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS CONTINUES THE STORY of Israel's epic journey to freedom in the Promised Land of Canaan. It may be regarded as a literary unit that comprises a book, but it belongs to the larger whole of the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy). While most of Leviticus consists of laws, beginning with instructions for sacrificial rituals to be performed at the sanctuary, this legislation is placed within a narrative framework that picks up where the story of Exodus ends.

According to Exodus 19:1, the Israelites came to the Sinai Desert in the third month after they left Egypt. At the end of this book the tabernacle was set up "on the first day of the *first* month in the second year" (40:17; emphasis supplied; cf. v. 2), that is, the second year after the Israelites had left Egypt. Numbers 1:1 begins exactly one month later—"on the first day of the *second* month of the second year" (emphasis supplied)—with the Israelites still in the Sinai Desert. So the basic chronological framework of the book of Leviticus, sandwiched between Exodus and Numbers, occupies only one month in the Sinai Desert.

We must allow for the possibility that some earlier and later materials may have been incorporated into Leviticus for topical reasons. Some instructions were delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai (7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34), perhaps before the tabernacle was set up. Notice that Moses' last recorded trip up Mount Sinai was in Exodus 34. The blasphemer narrative, with its accompanying law-giving (Lev. 24:10—23), could have occurred at any time while the Israelites were camping in the desert. Even so, after the multi-millennial scope of Genesis and Exodus covering most of a century, Leviticus presents a mighty concentrated dose of divine revelation!

Confirming that Leviticus is intended as the next volume in a series, its first verse is a grammatical and structural continuation of the last few verses of Exodus. In Hebrew its first word is a *waw* consecutive form in which *waw* ("and") is prefixed to a verb meaning "call."[1] So we can render literally: "And he Called …."[2] It is true that an initial *waw*can simply be stylistic, without indicating that anything has gone before.[3] However, real continuity in this case is confirmed by the fact that 1:1 completes a literary structure that begins in

Exodus.

We discover the structure that binds Exodus and Leviticus together by looking for a parallel to the first three words of Leviticus: *wayyitjra'M Mose h* ("And he called to Moses"). This search is easy to execute with a Bible software program.[4] The only other verse in the Hebrew Bible containing exactly the same words, including the same verb form, is Exodus 24:16: "and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD[5] called to Moses *[wayyitjra"el Mošeh]* from within the cloud." Here "the LORD" *(yhwh,* the personal name of Israel's God) calls to Moses from his glory cloud at the summit of Mount Sinai in order to give him directions for constructing the tabernacle and instituting its priesthood (Ex. 25—31). Similarly, in Leviticus 1:1 the Lord calls to Moses from the "Tent of Meeting" (i.e., the tabernacle) to communicate instructions for ritual activities to be performed at the tabernacle (Lev. 1—7). The parallel is striking.

The parallel becomes more striking if we take into account the verses immediately before Leviticus 1:1 (i.e., Ex. 40:34—38). At the very end of Exodus, after the tabernacle has been built according to plan and Moses has finished setting it up (chs. 35—40), the Lord's cloud covers it and his glory fills it. So the divine cloud and glory have moved from "settling" (škn) on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16) to "settling" (40:35, also *škn)* over God's "tabernacle" *(miškan,* "place of settling/dwelling"[6]), in which the ark of the covenant contains a copy of the law proclaimed on Mount Sinai (25:16, 21; 40:20). This climactic moment signals a transition from one phase of Israel's story to the next.[7]

Now the sanctuary, rather than Mount Sinai, is the place of theophany and therefore the legislative capitol of the nation, from where the Lord calls to Moses. Because it is there, over the ark and between its two cherubim in the Most Holy Place, that the Lord promises to meet (Niphal of *y'd)* with Moses and give him commands for the Israelites (Ex. 25:22; cf. Num. 7:89), the sanctuary is called the "Tent of Meeting *[mo'ed,* also from root *y'd]"* (Ex. 40:34—35; Lev. 1:1).

Now notice the way in which the section Exodus 40:34-Leviticus 1:1 parallels the order in Exodus 24:16:

The cloud covered *[ksh]* Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16a)
And he [the LORD] called *(qr')* to Moses (Ex. 24:16b)
The cloud covered [ksh] the "Tent of Meeting" (Ex. 40:34—38)
And he [the LORD] called [qr᾽] to Moses (Lev. 1:1)

This literary parallel is tight in that it involves repetition of specific Hebrew words *(ksh*, "cover"; *qr'*, "call") and a unique combination of words *(wayyiqra' 'el Mose h*, "And he called to Moses"). So Exodus 40:34-Leviticus 1:1 is clearly a structural unit that is meant to be read in light of Exodus 24:16. Now here is the punch line: the Exodus 40:34-Leviticus 1:1 unit *crosses the boundary between the two books and thus structurally binds them together.*

It is obvious that the rituals prescribed in Leviticus require the sanctuary that is described and set up in Exodus. However, the parallel that we have found between the introductions to instructions for (1) setting up the sanctuary and its priesthood (Ex. 25—31) and (2) performing sanctuary rituals (Lev. 1—7) shows that these two major bodies of legislation, seven chapters each, are placed in literary parallel to each other. This fact underlines the essential way in which their respective contents complement each other.[8]

Bridging Contexts

TRANSFORMATION. ISRAELS TRANSFORMATION from slaves to God's holy people is part of a larger saga that begins in Genesis with the stories of creation, the Flood, and God's promise to make of Abraham a great nation of countless descendants through whom he will reveal himself to the world as the Source of all blessing (Gen. 12:1—2; 15:5; 17:5—6; 22:17—18; 28:14).[9] Where Leviticus ends, the book of Numbers carries on. So while the whole of Leviticus constitutes a book, it has an inter-dependent relationship with the preceding and following books of the Pentateuch.[10]

In spite of the many obstacles recounted in Genesis and Exodus, Abraham's descendants did multiply and the Lord brought their multitudes from slavery as he had promised (Ex. 12—15; cf. Gen. 15:13—16). God had promised them the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:18—21; 17:7—8), but it was at Mount Sinai that he made a nation out of this motley crew. There he gave them a national constitution (his law) and a portable capitol (the tabernacle). He taught them how to live as one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. This was not legalism or ritualism. It was survival as a people, and only as one people could they survive. Without the God of Abraham to hold them together, they would splinter, scatter, be vanquished, and vanish.

The laws given in Exodus (esp. chs. 20—23) were important, but it was the sanctuary that was to be the "nuclear power plant," energizing the Israelites' faith and thereby transforming them into a potent, unified channel of divine revelation. While the physical structure of the sanctuary was crucial (chs. 25—31; 35—40), it was the resident Presence of God that made the place powerful, and it was through dynamic interaction with him in worship that the Israelites accessed his holy power.

This is where Leviticus comes in. Here at the heart of the Torah, the focus of this middle book of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) is on the way God's people are to interact with divine holiness, both in worship and in other aspects of life.[11] Against common misunderstanding, Leviticus is no bore; it is core!

Contemporary Significance

ENCOUNTERING THE GOD OF ULTIMATE REALITIES. While many of us lack even a single gene that can be traced back to Abraham, the saga of his descendants is part of a larger story to which every person born on Planet Earth belongs. According to the Bible, the entire human race was created by God and fell into sin, which resulted in suffering and death (Gen. 1—3). Since then, God seeks to restore harmonious intimacy with estranged, broken humanity through a cumulative stream of covenants. These covenants include the ones established with Abraham and the Israelites, and they culminate in the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31—34), by which One of Abraham's descendants brings blessing to all people (Gal. 3:8, 16). Despite the deficiency of our DNA, by belonging to Jesus the Jew we are adopted into the family of Abraham and become heirs of the promises God gave him (v. 29).

If you are adopted into a family or naturalized as a citizen, you gain a new identity by joining a group of people. Their story becomes your story. I was born in Australia and came to the United States with my family at age seven so that my father could pursue graduate study. At first we experienced some culture shock, such as the first time my mother answered a knock at the door and was confronted by children in strange costumes chorusing "trick or treat," which she heard as "trigger treat." But during our twelve years as resident aliens we gradually came to identify with America and Americans. So when it became clear that we would stay, we chose to become U.S. citizens. Now the history of America is our history and its destiny is our destiny.

Not only can we connect with the Israelites because they and their culture are part of the worldwide web of humanity to which we also belong. Through our "new covenant" naturalization as Abraham's heirs, their promises are our promises, and their salvation history becomes our salvation history. Moreover, as part of this history, their Leviticus is our Leviticus.

When we read of worship at the sanctuary, we can experience the awe of approaching God's Presence, feel the weight of life-and-death consequences for human faultiness that is written with the blood of innocent animals, and rejoice in release from guilt and fear through provision for expiation that God has mercifully provided. Having encountered the God of ultimate realities in the

graphic, sensory, visual world of Leviticus, we will want to return and linger often to gaze, listen, smell, touch, and ponder.

1. Cf. 2 Kings 1:1, which also begins with a *waw* consecutive (imperfect) verb, thereby grammatically tying it to 1 Kings.

2. Cf. Num. 1:1, lit., “And the LORD spoke.” Ex. 1:1 also begins with “And,” but it is not attached to a verb (see P. Enns, *Exodus* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 40). In such contexts at the beginnings of literary units, translators generally omit this “And” for the sake of good English style, thereby giving up the “hook” to that which goes before.

3. Esp. *waw* consecutive with the verb “to be”: Josh. 1:1; Judg. 1:1; 1 Sam. 1:1, etc.

4. I am using Accordance, without which I would no longer dream of studying the Bible in any depth.

5. Heb. “he"; the NIV supplies “the LORD” here.

6. From the same root skn; see 40:35.

7. Enns, *Exodus,* 598—99.

8. While the bulk of Ex. 25—31 is fulfilled in chs. 35—40, this does not include fulfillment of ch. 29 (consecration of the priesthood and sanctuary), which is delayed until Lev. 8. This relationship between Ex. 29 and Lev. 8 constitutes another important link between the two books.

9. See J. H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 393—94, 401—4.

10. R. Rendtorff, “Is It Possible to Read Leviticus as a Separate Book?” 22—35; cf. G. Auld, “Leviticus at the Heart of the Pentateuch?” in Sawyer, ed., *Reading Leviticus,* 40—51.

11. On the way Leviticus calls the community to enact holiness through ritual and ethical practice, see F. H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Leviticus 1:2—17

SPEAK TO THE Israelites and say to them: ‘When any of you brings
an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either
the herd or the flock. 3“'If the offering is a burnt offering from the
herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the
entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the
LORD. 4He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it
will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5He is to
slaughter the young bull before the LORD, and then Aaron’s sons the
priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides
at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 6He is to skin the burnt offering
and cut it into pieces. 7The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on
the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8Then Aaron’s sons the priests
shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning
wood that is on the altar. 9He is to wash the inner parts and the legs
with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt
offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

10“'If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the
sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. 11He is to
slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron’s
sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.
12He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including
the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. 13He is to
wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring
all of it and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made
by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

14“'If the offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, he is to
offer a dove or a young pigeon. 15The priest shall bring it to the altar,

wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. [16]He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. [17]He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.’”

Original Meaning

WHEN THE LORD calls to Moses from the "Tent of Meeting" (1:1), he wastes no time launching into a series of commands regarding the heart of worship: sacrifice. In 1:2—17 he covers voluntary burnt offerings offered by private individuals. Following the introduction of the overall burnt offering case by "When …" (ki, v. 2), there are three legal "paragraphs" prescribing the correct procedure for burnt offerings of herd animals (i.e., bovines; vv. 3—9) and flock animals (i.e., sheep and goats; vv. 10—13), as well as birds (vv. 14—17). Each of these paragraphs comprises a subcase, beginning with the word "if" *('im*, vv. 3, 10, 14).

Sacrifices and other rituals that utilized all kinds of materials and victims, including animals and even sometimes human beings, were an essential part of religious life from earliest times all over the ancient world, including Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt, Syria/Palestine, and Greece.[1] Like other peoples, the patriarchal ancestors of the Israelites practiced animal sacrifice (Gen. 22:13; 31:54; 46:1), as did the Israelites themselves even before they received the instructions in Leviticus (Ex. 12:1—13, 21—28; 24:5—6). Thus, for them this form of worship was not strange at all.

For us, however, it is a different matter. Given that animal sacrifices are foreign and even repulsive to us, how do we begin to understand the divine message and get something out of it? Where is the meaning in a ritual? The first step is to find out how rituals work. Most important, we must ascertain how ritual activity carries meaning.

Systems of activity. Rather than getting into a complicated, abstract discussion of ritual theories that scholars (including myself) have proposed,[2] let's begin with the obvious: A ritual is a system of activities. Thus, we can learn about some properties of rituals by comparing them with nonritual activity systems, with which everyone is familiar. We do many of these each day.

Do you get ready for work on Mondays? What activities are necessary for this? At the very least, you need to get dressed. Before you get dressed, you must get out of bed and locate the clothes you will put on. We could call these *prerequisite* activities. Then you start the actual process of dressing. Although

some things must be done before others, your routine is capable of some flexibility. Because your *goal* is the reason for the activity system, it determines the activities you must include and shapes their order.

Dressing may belong to a larger activity system, such as getting your family ready for the day. This illustrates the fact that activity systems, like all other systems (e.g., physical, social, or conceptual systems), are *hierarchical*, with systems consisting of smaller systems and making up larger systems.

When you finish dressing, you may need to tidy your room by putting away the items you decided not to wear. This would be *postrequisite* activity.

Now we are ready to start reading the first ritual instructions in Leviticus 1:2—3:

> *When* any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. *If* the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. (emphasis supplied)

The wording here indicates *voluntary* sacrifices. In this context an Israelite can choose when to bring an animal offering to the Lord, but having made this choice, the animal must be domestic, whether from the herd (bovines, e.g., bulls) or from the flock (sheep or goats). The menu of options continues. If it is a burnt offering from the herd, certain rules apply. (1) The choice of the animal must be male and without blemish. (2) The location is specified: "the entrance to the Tent of Meeting," that is, the courtyard in front of the tabernacle, where the outer altar is located. Following these rules enables the offering to achieve its goal through acceptance by the Lord (1:3).

Since a valid burnt offering can only take place at the sanctuary, leading the animal victim to this location is prerequisite to the ritual activity system. Leviticus 2:13 commands another activity that is prerequisite to any sacrifice: adding salt.[3]

Leviticus 1:4—9 prescribes the burnt offering ritual proper, which includes a series of activities that are explicitly mentioned (regular type below) or implied by practical necessity (italics):

> lean one hand on head of the animal slay (slit the throat of) the animal[4]
> *collect blood*[5]
> present blood to the altar dash blood against sides of altar flay (remove the hide of) the animal dismember/quarter the carcass stoke the altar fire

arrange wood on the altar *present body pieces, head, and suet to the altar*[6] arrange the body pieces, head, and suet (hard fat) on the altar fire wash entrails and shins *present entrails and shins to the altar*[7] burn (turn into smoke) the entrails and shins on the fire

Leviticus 1:10—13 prescribes the same kind of ritual, but with a sheep or goat. Since verses 4—9 have already established the procedural pattern/paradigm with reference to herd animals, verses 11—13 abbreviate the list of activities for flock animals, except that verse 13 explicitly mentions presentation of the entrails and shins (to the altar).

Leviticus 1:14—17 outlines the burnt offering of a bird, which must be from a domesticated species—dove or pigeon—just as other sacrificial victims must be domesticated animals that cost their owners something and thus represent value that is transferred from the offerers to the Lord (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24). While the bird ritual contains the essential components of blood application and burning on the altar, there are differences in procedure because of the small size and physiological makeup of the creature.[8]

Burnt offerings involve some of the same kinds of factors that can be found in connection with your dressing for work. (1) Practical constraints affect the order of activities. For example, the throat of a herd or flock animal must be slit before its blood can be collected and then applied to the altar. (2) There is a certain amount of leeway within the overall pattern/paradigm of activities. Flaying or quartering can begin from the front of the animal and work to the back, or vice versa. (3) External authority plays a role in governing activities. For the burnt offering the authority is the Lord. In the case of dressing for work the authority consists of cultural norms, which can be influenced by biblical principles of decency (e.g. Deut. 22:5).

While your dressing may have become fairly regularized as a routine, any relevant external authority (e.g., your company or society) is concerned only with the result and does not dictate the steps of your procedure. There are some routines, however, that are *fixed/formulaic*. For example, to withdraw money from an ATM or to go online, you must follow the protocol set by the bank or your Internet provider. If you fail to go through the series of specified steps in just the right order, your process will be invalidated. Similarly, rituals are fixed/formulaic activity systems. The Lord is concerned with the burnt offering *procedure* as well as its *result.*

Like nonritual activity systems, burnt offering activities produce change in the material world through time.[9] Butchering an animal makes the burnt offering

similar to the way in which people obtain meat for food (cf. Gen. 18:7). Reinforcing this connection is the fact that in Leviticus 1:9, the parts containing or likely soiled by dung—entrails and shins—must be washed before they are burned on the Lord's altar.[10]

The meaning of a ritual is found in its unusual goal. By viewing the burnt offering as preparation of meat for food, we can account for a number of activities. However, we are at a loss to explain leaning one hand on the head of the animal, manipulation of blood, or burning the valuable meat to ashes that later need to be cleaned up and dumped outside the Israelite camp (Lev. 6:10—11). From a mundane point of view the burnt offering is wasteful and absurd and fails to achieve a practical goal through ordinary cause and effect, except that the priest keeps the hide of the animal for his utilization (7:8). This secondary benefit cannot be the overall goal of the burnt offering because providing the hide to the priest does not require all of the activities included in the activity system, such as leaning one hand on the head of the animal and applying its blood to the altar.

Now we have an apparent contradiction. A burnt offering is an activity system and an activity system is defined by its goal, which is to accomplish a particular kind of change. But there is no ordinary, practical goal that calls for all of the burnt offering activities. The real goal is not an ordinary one; that is, it is not achieved through physical activities by the kind of cause and effect that operates in the mundane material world. Here we reach the boundary between ritual and nonritual activity.

Leviticus 1:9 tells us that the *overall goal* of the burnt offering is to provide a gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord. The word for "gift" here is *'isseh*, which is usually understood to mean something like "an offering made by fire" (NIV), derived from the similar word, *es* ("fire"). However, the idea that, *isseh* means "gift" is suggested by its close relation to a word in Ugaritic (itt), which is from the same Semitic family of languages as Hebrew, that means "gift."[11] More significantly, the meaning "gift" fits Hebrew usage in that the word applies to sacrificial gifts of food to the Lord, such as burnt offerings (Num. 28:2) and well-being offerings (Lev. 3:11, 16), but not purification offerings (so-called "sin offerings"), even though they were burned on the altar. Purification offerings were token payments of "debt" rather than gifts (see comments on Lev. 4).[12]

The Lord receives his food "gift" in the form of smoke by "smelling it." So the smoke functions like incense. In fact, the verb in 1:9 for burning a burnt offering on the altar (Hiphil of *qtr*, "make smoke") is from the same root as the word for "incense" (qeto*ret*, cf. 16:12—13).

We can compare and contrast the Old Babylonian epic Atrahasis, in which the gods smell a sacrifice offered by Atrahasis after the flood (cf. Gen. 8:21) and gather like flies to consume it because they have been starving as a result of the annihilation of the human population.[13] The parallel passage in the epic of Gilgamesh speaks of the sacrifice of Utnapishti as providing a sweet savor that the gods smelled.[14] Unlike these gods, the Lord of Israel does not need human food (Ps. 50:9—13).

In Numbers 28:2 the Lord refers to regular burnt offerings as "food" *(lehem),* but he receives his meat in an extraordinary way, through smoke. What appears to be impractical wastefulness is due to the fact that the receiving party in the *transaction* (transfer of something of value) is superhuman. He does not belong to our ordinarily accessible material world. While God can accept a gift of food (Lev. 1:4, 9), he does not visibly take it unless he chooses to appear in human form (Gen. 18:1—8) or sends fire to consume a sacrifice (Lev. 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38).[15]

On one occasion Abraham gave God a gift of food literally rather than through a ritual. When the Lord appeared to him as a traveler with two companions, Abraham asked Sarah to make bread cakes, and he gave a calf to his servant to prepare as meat (see above). Then he set the food before the three "men," along with curds and milk, and they ate (Gen. 18:1—8). Just as Abraham showed his friendship by offering a meal, which turned out to be a sacrifice, the Israelites demonstrated their desire for a good relationship with the Lord by giving him sacrifices as food gifts. These were more than hospitality. They enacted various dynamics of the day-by-day maintenance and healing of the divine-human relationship.

Through rituals the Israelites could enjoy limited *interaction* with God. They could come to the sanctuary, the "Tent of Meeting" (1:1, 3, 5, etc.), and give something tangible to him to express their devotion, thanks, or desire to receive forgiveness. In the case of the burnt offering, they could give him a token food gift (v. 9) and receive his gracious response of expiation, that is, removal of evil (Piel of *kpr,* usually translated "make atonement"; v. 4).

Bridging Contexts

MAKING INTERACTION POSSIBLE. The sanctuary was a controlled environment that made interaction possible in spite of the divine-human separation that had resulted from sin. It was somewhat like the glass (or plexiglass) "bubbles" devised by modern medical science to protect people whose bodies lack functional immune systems. A few years ago there was a "bubble boy," who would have died if he had ventured out of the environment that isolated him from germs. Through his bubble he could see people, talk to them, and come close to them. But he could not touch them or even sit on his mother's lap.

At the Israelite sanctuary, God came as close to his people as possible. However, his glorious Presence was behind the inner veil in the Most Holy Place. only the high priest could enter there and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16). Even then, he had to be shielded from God's glory by an incense smoke screen or he would die (16:12—13). Just as the "bubble boy" had to be isolated from disease, God maintained a pure environment, separate from the world of sin outside. Unlike the condition of the "bubble boy," God's holy glory was lethal to people outside.[16]

Ritual is a bridging mechanism that spans a gap between persons or things that cannot ordinarily interact with each other.[17] This bridge requires faith in the existence of unseen beings (such as God) and/or other entities (such as sin) and the ability of a particular activity system, correctly performed, to interact with it/him/her. Viewed within the context of a system of beliefs, ritual has power to do things that other kinds of activity cannot do.

How to read a ritual text. The ideal way to study rituals is by direct observation. However, our only access to ancient rituals is through texts, which only *reflect* rituals, without fully capturing the experience of the activity.[18] Although Leviticus does not provide every detail of ritual performance, it standardizes the essential steps of legitimate procedure so that the Israelite rituals could accomplish their intended purposes.[19]

Leviticus provides two kinds of information regarding its rituals: (1) procedure of the physical activities performed, and (2) the interpreted goal/meaning of those activities. The activities served as a kind of *vehicle* to

convey a load of meaning that was attached to them by the authority behind the ritual, namely, the Lord. Because belief in his authority was basic to the worldview that informed the biblical ritual system, it is impossible to adequately understand these rituals without taking this belief into account.

To illustrate the two levels of meaning, we can distinguish between them in Leviticus 1:3—9, indicating physical actions with *italics* and aspects of meaning with bold type:

> If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance on his behalf before the Lord. He shall *lean his hand* on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, to expiate for him. The bull shall be *slaughtered* before the Lord, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall *present* the blood and *dash* the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The burnt offering shall be *flayed* and *quartered.* The sons of Aaron the priest shall *stoke* the fire on the altar and *lay out* wood upon the fire. Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall *lay out* the quarters, with the head and suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. Its entrails and shins shall be *washed* with water, and the priest shall *turn all of it into smoke* on the altar as a burnt offering, a food gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord.[20]

Verse 9 states the overall meaning of the burnt offering in terms of what the offerer does for God. This idea of a food gift for him is carried out by cutting the animal into pieces, washing some of them, and burning them on the altar. Verses 3 and 4 show what the offerer desires from the Lord: *acceptance* for *expiation.* In the following paragraphs we will explore the nature of this acceptance and expiation, and within this framework we will account for the remaining components of physical activity: hand-leaning, blood manipulation, and allocation of the hide that is removed by flaying. Then we will see how aspects of the burnt offering apply to Christ. In the process we will uncover dynamics and principles that we can pursue into the Contemporary Significance section.

Acceptance and enjoyment. When a burnt offering was done properly in the right place, "God did not simply accept the worshiper and the offering—it gave him pleasure."[21] This does not mean that he literally enjoyed the smell of burning animals. My wife, who grew up in Nepal, tells me that Hindu animal sacrifices emit an obnoxious stench. What pleased God was the faith in him (Heb. 11:4—6) that the sacrifices expressed.

What matters is not so much whether the offerer can feel "ownership" of his

or her form of worship but whether the Lord wants to own and enjoy it. Cain could relate to his offering because he grew it, but God did not accept it (Gen. 4:3—5) since he lacked faith (implied in Heb. 11:4). The Israelites connected with their golden calf, but God rejected the glittering bovine because they denied his real Presence among them when they worshiped this cold, hard, metal substitute that could not even moo, let alone serve as an adequate representation of deity (Ex. 32; cf. 1 Kings 12—13).

Expiation. The burnt offering was a two-way transaction between the offerer and the Lord. The benefit received by the offerer as a result of giving a food gift to the Lord was the infinitely greater gift of expiation (Lev. 1:4). "Expiation" renders *kipper,* the Piel form of the verb *kpr,* usually translated "make atonement" (so NIV). "Atonement" is an English word that was originally a combination of words: *at-one-ment.* The idea is that two parties become "at one" with each other through a process of reconciliation. Thus, "atonement" is reconciliation.

However, *kipper* does not describe a complete process of reconciliation as "make atonement" does, so *kipper* does not mean "make atonement." In Leviticus 4 a priest accomplishes *kipper* on behalf of a sinner as the prerequisite to forgiveness directly granted by the Lord (4:20, 26, 31, 35). Obviously, it is forgiveness that brings reconciliation to completion. Because *kipper* is before this point, it cannot refer to full reconciliation.[22] Rather, *kipper* is removal, that is, *ex*piation, of evil that stands in the way of reconciliation.[23]

The fact that *kipper* is removal explains how the term can be used in 14:53 for purgation of a house from ritual impurity that is offensive to God. What sense would it make to say that *kipper* means "atonement" = reconciliation between the house and God?

Reconciliation with God necessarily includes removal of sin because it is foreign to him and therefore obstructs the divine-human relationship. God is love (1 John 4:8), but sin is selfishness, and the two are incompatible. In a sense we can say that God is allergic to sin. If we really care about him, we will want to give up what bothers him.

While animals cost their offerers something (2 Sam. 24:24), they could not buy expiation because God was already their ultimate Owner (Ps. 50:10—13). Sacrifices were only tokens that expressed faith in the Lord's free gift of expiation (cf. Isa. 55:1). They were like the Christmas present that I gave my parents when I was seven years old. Our family was poor because we had just moved to the United States so that my father could pursue graduate study. When Christmas came, I had almost nothing of value to give my parents. So I wrapped

a dime they had given me and gave it to them as a Christmas present. The gift cost me something. In fact, it was the only dime I possessed. The little coin expressed love in response to the love my parents had already given me; it did not buy their love.

Hand-leaning: identification of transferring owner. Leaning/laying one hand on the head of an animal identified the offerer as its owner, who was transferring the victim to God and who would in turn receive the benefit of that sacrifice. In the Israelite sacrificial system, the cases in which the biblical text specifies leaning one hand[24] on the head of a victim correspond to those in which identity of the offerer, to whom ownership of the victim was attributed and to whom the benefits of the sacrifice were directed, had to be indicated.[25] This gesture was required for offering an animal from one's herd or flock, whether the offerer was an individual,[26] a group within the community,[27] or the community as a whole.[28]

The "identification of ownership" view of sacrificial hand-leaning is supported by the wording of Leviticus 1:4, the only place where the text interprets the gesture with one hand: "He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on *his* behalf to make atonement for *him* (emphasis supplied). The wording, which repeatedly refers to the offerer, indicates that acceptance on behalf of this individual, rather than someone else, depended on performance of hand-leaning. Even if another person led the animal into the sanctuary courtyard, the gesture eliminated any possible doubt regarding the identity of the owner/offerer.

When an offering is not a herd or flock animal but rather a bird or a grain item, no leaning of the hand is specified (e.g., 1:14—15; 2:2, 8), even in a purification offering to remedy sin (5:7—13). This correlates with the fact that carrying such a small offering in the hand and then handing it directly to the priest would allow for no ambiguity regarding the identity of the offerer.[29]

So far we have been talking about private offerings, which were performed when individuals chose to do them. There were also public offerings that God required at particular times according to the calendar (e.g., Num. 28—29). Since these sacrifices had "appointments" with God, there would be no question regarding the identity of their offerers. This seems to explain why there is no evidence, even in the detailed instructions of Leviticus 16 (see vv. 11, 15), that hand-leaning was required in calendric sacrifices.

The "identification of ownership" interpretation covers occurrences of hand-leaning in all kinds of sacrifices, including well-being offerings (3:2, 8, 13), which were not required to expiate *(kipper)* for sins.[30] But there was more to hand-leaning than simple identification of ownership. Since the owner was the

giving party in a transaction, hand-leaning signified the *end* of ownership.[31] From this point on, the animal was dedicated to the Lord for his utilization. Thus, when hand-leaning was required, it identified the offerer/owner of the victim, to whom the benefits of the sacrifice belonged, within the context of transferring offering material from the offerer to the Lord.[32] Whether or not hand-leaning was required in a particular sacrifice, it was the giving over of the offering as a whole through proper performance of the ritual in its entirety that accomplished the transaction by transferring something of value to the Lord (see, e.g., 1:9; 4:20, 26, 31, 35).[33]

A modern analogy to hand-leaning would be the signature that the owner of a car places on the title to a vehicle as part of the transaction by which he or she sells it. The signature alone does not accomplish transfer, but by legally identifying the one who has the right to sell it, the signature contributes to the transfer by focusing and legitimizing it.

For Christians it is not necessary to prove that hand-leaning *by itself* accomplishes transfer of sin to Christ so that he can bear its penalty as the substitute for the sinner. For one thing, hand-leaning as identification of departing ownership complements rather than contradicts the idea of transfer. For another, in the book of Hebrews Christ's substitution is based on the fusion of two roles in him: As Priest he takes the sins of others upon himself and as Victim he dies for those sins (Heb. 7:23—28; 9:11—14, 23—28; 10:1—14; see Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 10:17).

Slaughter and application of blood. In an Israelite animal sacrifice the victim was slain so that its blood and body could be used, but slaughter itself was a relatively low point in terms of sanctity.[34] It involved no contact with the most holy altar and therefore could be performed by the lay offerer (e.g., 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:24, 29, 33). Manipulating the blood and placing the animal pieces on the altar fire, however, always had to be performed by a consecrated priest.

The presence or absence of slaughter is not a valid criterion for determining whether an Israelite ritual was a sacrifice. A sacrifice did not necessarily include slaughter at all. For example, in 5:11—13 an offering of grain was a purification offering that served as the functional equivalent of an animal sacrifice. Conversely, a nonsacrificial ritual could include killing a victim. In Deuteronomy 21:1—9 an unsolved murder calls for a ritual in which a heifer's neck is broken. Because the ritual does not involve transfer of the animal to the Lord, even by a gesture in the direction of the sanctuary (cf. Num. 19:4), it cannot be a sacrifice. Rather, it is a nonsacrificial elimination rite to remove moral culpability.[35]

While slaughter was not a defining element in Israelite sacrifice, there is no question that it was important. At this moment the blood drained away, carrying with it the life by which expiation on the altar was accomplished (cf. 17:11).

Dashing blood against the sides of the altar (1:5, 11) separated the blood from the flesh of the gift that was delivered to the Lord in the form of smoke. So his food gift was a *kosher* one, with the blood drained out at the time of slaughter. In this way he showed respect for life, which is represented in the blood (17:11). He also set an example for human beings, whom he has never allowed to eat meat from which the blood has not been drained at the time of slaughter.[36]

Making a burnt offering *kosher* in the biblical sense required only drainage and disposal of the blood, which were accomplished by pouring it out at the base of the altar (4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34). However, it was applied to the sides of the altar, indicating that it served a higher goal. Indeed, the sacrifice expiated for the offerer (1:4) by virtue of the life carried by the blood (cf. 17:11).[37]

While other peoples in Syria/Palestine and Greece practiced blood sacrifices, which in some cases involved pouring out blood to deities (cf. Ps. 16:4), we do not have evidence that they performed theologically significant manipulation of blood by applying it to sacred objects for expiation as the Israelites did. In this and related respects, the Israelite sacrificial system appears to be unique.[38]

Leviticus 1 does not specify the nature of the sin remedied by a voluntary burnt offering, by contrast with 4:1—6:7, where certain kinds of sins require mandatory purification or reparation offerings. We will further examine the role of blood and the scope of expiation when we investigate other types of sacrifices.

Animal's hide: agent's commission. The hide of a burnt offering animal was removed by flaying. This facilitated cutting up the animal into pieces so that they could be placed on the altar. The hide was not burned but rather assigned by the Lord to his representative, the officiating priest (7:8), as what could be called an "agent's commission." As Jesus once said to his disciples as he sent them forth to minister: "The worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7; cf. 1 Tim. 5:18).

New Testament significance of the burnt offering. A token food gift at the Israelite altar was a powerful spiritual experience that expressed transformation of the offerer's relationship with God at the time when it was performed. According to the New Testament, the life-and-death consequences graphically portrayed in such rituals reached fulfillment in the awesome sacrifice of Christ, God's gift to all humanity (John 3:16), whom John the Baptist introduced as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29).

John could have referred to Christ as "the Bull of God," the "Ram of God" or

the “Goat of God.” But he chose “the Lamb of God.” Why? For one thing, Isaiah had prophesied that God’s Servant, who would suffer for the sins of his people (Isa. 53:5), would be “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (v. 7). Also, the foundational sacrifice of the Israelite sacrificial system was the regular burnt offering, consisting of a lamb in the morning and another lamb in the evening (Num. 28:1—8). All other sacrifices were performed in addition to this. By calling Jesus “the Lamb,” John implied that Jesus is the basic sacrifice, as if to say: “Here is the One who fulfills the whole sacrificial system!”

Several factors in the burnt offering of Leviticus parallel aspects of Christ’s sacrifice as portrayed in the New Testament. (1) Just as animal sacrifices were to be physically unblemished (1:3; 22:17—25), Christ was morally unblemished, “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19), in that he did not sin (Heb. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). By allowing himself to be a sacrificial victim, he died in place of sinners (Isa. 53:5, 10, 12).

(2) Leaning one hand on an animal victim correlates with the role of Christ that Isaiah prophesied: “Surely he has borne *our* infirmities and carried *our* diseases” (Isa. 53:4, emphasis supplied). Christ atones for us by taking our troubles on himself.

(3) Just as a burnt offering expiated for an offerer (Lev. 1:4), the New Testament affirms that Christ’s blood sacrifice frees believers from their sins. To express this dynamic process, the New Testament employs the legal metaphors of “ransom” (1 Peter 1:18—19; cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6), “redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7), and release from debt (Matt. 6:12). The ransom or redemption price that Christ paid was himself.

(4) Christ’s human life was totally consumed when he was sacrificed on the cross (see, e.g., Heb. 7:27—“when he offered himself,” i.e., all of himself), just as a burnt offering involved consumption of all edible portions (and nonedible parts except for the hide; Lev. 1).

(5) The Hebrew word translated “burnt offering” *(’olah)* literally means “ascending.” It was burnt *up,* going vertically to God in the form of smoke as if it were incense, to be accepted by him as a pleasing aroma (1:9). Although the Presence of God hovered at the earthly Most Holy Place, smoke from the altar outside went up to God’s heavenly residence, linking heaven and earth. Similarly, after his death on the cross, Christ ascended to heaven (cf. Judg. 13:20). When he appeared to Mary Magdalene just after his resurrection, he said to her: “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17, NRSV). This verse suggests that after appearing to Mary, Jesus ascended to heaven that day, after which he returned to earth and appeared to his other disciples for several weeks before permanently ascending (Luke 24; Acts

1).

Here is something astounding: Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene *before* he went up to heaven the first time! He interrupted the ascending offering of himself, the most important event in human history, to comfort one distraught, forgiven sinner. Unlike religious leaders, Jesus' family, and even the closest of his other disciples, Mary understood that Christ's mission to earth was to save sinners like her, the weakest of the weak. It was Mary who had uniquely anointed him ahead of time for his burial (John 12:1—8), whom he honored with a unique encounter while his sacrifice was in progress.

As the ultimate good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:33—35), Christ did not let his rendezvous with destiny keep him from turning aside to help someone in need. Unlike the priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan, Christ was not on the way to participate in a ritual "shadow." He was actually in the process of the stupendous reality to which all the "shadows" pointed! But helping people was the reason for his sacrifice in the first place. So he did not let his task of providing expiation for the whole world, crucial as it was, prevent him from caring for Mary's feelings.[39]

Contemporary Significance

RITUAL CONNECTS THE seen and unseen worlds. When my daughter was three years old, she watched me reaffirm my Australian roots by throwing a boomerang in our large backyard in Michigan. With practice, I was able to make it circle around and land at my feet. Intrigued, Sarah asked to try it. She made the boomerang wobble and land on the ground a few feet in front of her. She tried again with the same result. Frustrated, she threw the boomerang up in the air. When it came down, she exclaimed: "God didn't catch it!"

The next morning at breakfast, I asked Sarah what she had meant. I was amazed to learn that she thought the boomerang came back to me because God was catching it and throwing it back. She thought I was interacting with the divine realm, playing catch with God! If Sarah were right, I would have been engaging in the kind of interaction that takes place in a burnt offering. To use boomerang language, we could say that God "caught" the offerings of the Israelites and "threw back" blessings.

Rituals, including Christian rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper/communion, transcend the boundary between the seen and unseen realms. So does prayer. The difference is that prayer is communication and ritual is interaction. Like ritual, prayer is foolish, irrational, and wasteful to those who do not believe.

Although we are sinful and mortal, we are not completely cut off from God. Through prayer and ritual, it is as though we can reach out and touch him. When Jesus came, people could touch him because he came without a "bubble" to isolate him from the moral and physical disease of the fallen human race. His death and resurrection make it possible for us to be restored to face-to-face communion with God, so that rituals will no longer be needed (cf. Rev. 21:22).

Ritual can do things beyond the capability of words. Like language, it communicates through symbols, but ritual packs a special punch because its meanings are acted out. It is a motion picture that paints ten thousand words.

If you doubt the power of ritual, remember the funeral of President John F. Kennedy after he was shot in Dallas in November 1963. His young widow planned the ceremonies. Jacqueline Kennedy may have had her faults, but her mastery of ritual was remarkable. Who can ever forget the riderless horse, the

wail of a lone bagpiper, or the eternal flame? There was no need to explain these simple, elegant symbols. The world understood and sobbed.[40]

Although our spiritual transactions with God are carried out directly with him, symbolic rituals such as the Lord's Supper/communion and baptism are important insofar as they express our attitudes and interactions with him. Reacting to John 3:5, a college student stated that she did not feel the need to be baptized because this ceremony is symbolic, and what is symbolic is not real, and what is not real is not important. That seems logical, but what about a parallel situation: college students in love and contemplating marriage. A young man says to his fiancé: "I love you and want to spend my life with you. But as for the wedding, that's just a ceremony. It's symbolic and therefore unreal and unimportant. Why don't we just skip it?" How will that go over? If he doesn't want to publicly affirm his commitment, how will she feel about his love for her? Ritual is symbolic, but it is important because it expresses a real change in relationship that has tremendous consequences even though it is intangible.

As rituals connect the seen and unseen worlds, they bring the human participants together. On the value of family traditions for celebrating events such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Sabbath, *Woman's Day* magazine reports:

> Indeed, experts tell us that these kinds of shared experiences have a profound effect on family life. Rituals help bind us together, give everyone a sense of belonging and create lasting memories. They also help define our relationships. "Rituals are a lens through which we can see our emotional connections to family members and dear friends," says Evan Imber-Black, Ph.D., a professor of psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City and coauthor of *Rituals for Our Times.* "They show us who we are to each other."[41]

Acceptable worship to God. A few years ago a mentally disconnected man somehow slipped through the security shield around Queen Elizabeth II and managed to trespass into her private quarters. Maintaining her composure, the queen chatted with him so that he would remain calm, but only until her guards came and hauled him away. That is not the way to get an audience with a monarch!

Because the Lord is the ultimate Monarch, the overwhelmingly superior party in any interaction, he controls protocols of interaction with him. Unlike Cain's vegetables or the Israelites' party calf, our worship should approach God according to his principles so that he will want it. If we insist on making our own rules of worship, regardless of divine principles, we deny the lordship of the one

we claim to worship! By contrast, if we approach him humbly, as even the mightiest of his angelic creatures do (Isa. 6:1—4), we acknowledge that he is the Master of the Universe. If we come full of ourselves, he will send us away empty, but if we come hungry for acceptance, he will fill us with good things (cf. Isa. 57:15; Luke 1:53).

Divine principles of worship allow for tremendous variety, including cultural diversity. The psalmist's "joyful noise" (e.g., Ps. 95:1—2; 98:4—6) is as legitimate as Habakkuk's silence (Hab. 2:20). However, usurping divine prerogatives, failing to exalt God as the supreme center of our worship, or misrepresenting him by violating instructions for religious practice that he has specified constitute serious problems.

For example, after Gideon's divinely empowered military victory, he made a golden ephod, which was a garment worn by priests (Judg. 8:27; cf. Ex. 28:6—14). It was not long before this unauthorized *instrument* of worship became the *object* of worship, an idol.[42] The medium overpowered the message. once people focused on the instrument more than on God, they lost sight of him, and it was easy to switch gods and turn to Baal worship (Judg. 8:33—34). This is the *rest* of the story that we don't hear about in church school.

What happens when church buildings, liturgies, music and musicians, sermons, and ministers of the gospel themselves become the focus of attention? All of these may be wonderful and legitimate by themselves, testifying to the quality of that which they honor. Indeed, God himself is the founder of fine aesthetics. According to the book of Exodus it was he who directed the Israelites to make gorgeous high priestly vestments and a magnificent tabernacle for impressive ceremonies (cf. Sir. 50:5—21). Biblical books such as Psalms and Isaiah bring the highest calibre of musical and literary achievement to service of the Lord. But how do the infrastructure and procedures of our worship shape attitudes toward God? Has our worship become at least to some extent a party, performance, parade, or charade? Are we marketing primarily by emphasizing the externals, somewhat the way a soap manufacturer once advertised: "As we couldn't improve our product, we improved the box." Does a new believer have an opportunity to fall in love with God, or does she fall in love with the charismatic personality of the minister?

True worship is like the ministry of John the Baptist, who said of Christ: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). In practical terms, the challenges facing a worship leader today are daunting. The same worship style that projects one group to the pearly gates sinks another to the nether regions. Minor elements become major litmus tests and battlegrounds. Personal tastes are elevated to the status of eternal principles: Of course God only accepts what I

accept! How could it be any other way?

Here is a call for cooperation, communication, unselfishness, and, above all, sensitivity to the needs of others. Even when mistakes are made, if people know that they are part of a corporate learning curve, the outcome can be amicable and productive.

Total sacrifice for others. In Philippians 2:3—8, Paul shows that there is more to receiving Christ's total sacrifice than gratitude, moral cleansing, and joy. We are called to imitate Christ in the sense that we sacrifice our desires to God for the good of other people. It is not that we pay the price of their salvation in any way, but that our lives are totally dedicated to redemptive service. This is how Paul can refer to himself as poured out like a sacrificial drink offering (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6).

Total commitment to service for others is the hallmark of the truest Christianity. There are many inspiring examples of people who have voluntarily given up all of their resources, energies, comforts, and even their lives to touch needy people with their Lord's compassion. We immediately think of Albert Schweitzer, who renounced a brilliant scholarly and musical career for a medical clinic at Lambarene, and Mother Teresa, who relinquished what comfort she had to minister to the human dregs of Calcutta.

Lough Fook, a Chinese Christian, pitied those of his countrymen who had become slaves in African mines. He wanted them to enjoy the hope of the gospel, but how could he gain access to them? His solution was to sell himself as a slave for a term of five years. He was transported to Demerara, where he toiled in the mines. While he worked, he told his fellow laborers about the Lord. Before he died, two hundred of them were liberated from despair by accepting Jesus as their Savior. By doing the unthinkable, humbly taking the role of a slave as Jesus did (Phil. 2:7), he reached the unreachable.

Although voluntary "sacrifices" made by human beings contribute much to the world, they are nothing compared to what Christ did. David Livingstone reflected on his pioneering work in Africa: "I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk about 'sacrifice' when we remember the great sacrifice which he made who left his Father's throne on high to give himself for us."[43]

1. See, e.g., M. J. Selman, "Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East," in R. Beckwith and M. Selman, ed., *Sacrifice in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 88—104.

2. R. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, forthcoming), chs. 1—3. See also idem, *Cult and Character: Purification*

Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming), ch. 1 ("The Locus of Ritual Meaning"). On conceptual issues involved in formation of theories regarding ritual and ritualization, and on methodologies for analyzing them, see C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York/Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992); R. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (SCR; Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1990), 13—15, 192. On such questions regarding the sacrificial category of rituals, see A. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (ASORDS 1; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 3—17.

3. Addition of salt is not included in the activity outline of any ritual, suggesting that it is preliminary to commencement of ritual proper. Cf. Ezek. 43:24, where two animals are presented before the Lord at the temple, priests throw salt on them, and then they are sacrificed as burnt offerings. In *m. Tamid* 4:3, Ezekiel's procedure is not followed: The regular burnt offering and its cereal accompaniment are salted after the animal is cut up into pieces.

4. On slaughter as slitting the throat, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 154—55.

5. Cf. 2 Chron. 29:22.

6. Cf. Lev. 9:12—14.

7. Cf. Lev. 1:13.

8. For procedural and zoological details, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 169—71.

9. See Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure,* ch. 1.

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6,* 159—60.

11. J. Hoftijzer, "Das Sogenannte Feueropfer," in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (VTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 114—34.

12. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 161—62.

13. Atrahasis III v. 30—36; W. G. Lambert, and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis-. The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, repr. 1999; orig. 1969), 98—99.

14. Gilgamesh XI 160—62; A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), 94.

15. R. Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), 54.

16. Ibid., 52.

17. E. Leach, *Culture & Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols*

Are Connected (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 82.

18. Nevertheless, R. Grimes points out that investigation of ritual as performance should inform readings of ancient ritual texts "because in all but the most bookish traditions, ritual texts exist to serve ritual enactments, not the other way around" *(Ritual Criticism,* 9).

19. R. Knierim, *Text and Concept in Leviticus 1:1—9: A Case in Exegetical Method* (FAT 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 31, 64—67, 89—90, 94—97, 98—106. For R. Rendtorff the primary function of the texts for ensuring proper performance explains why they say so little about the meanings of the sacrifices (The *Old Testament: An Introduction,* transl. John Bowden [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 98).

20. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 133.

21. A. P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 95.

22. See S. R. Driver, "Propitiation," in J. Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Scribners, 1911), 4:131.

23. On *kipper,* see, e.g., ibid., 4:128; B. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord* (SJLA 5; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 55—77, 123—27; B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 95—102; B. Lang, **"'** *[kipper],"* in *TDOT,* 7:288—303; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 1079— 84; N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (JSOTSup 56; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 87—109.

24. Not two hands; against *m. Menah.* 9:8.

25. For the "identification of ownership" theory in comparison with other views, see e.g. R. Peter, "L'imposition des mains dans l'Ancien Testament," *VT* 27 (1977): 48—55; D. P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *JAOS* 106 (1986): 433—46.

26. Burnt offering—Lev. 1:4; well-being offering—3:2, 8, 13; purification offering— 4:4, 24, 29, 33.

27. Burnt offering—Ex. 29:15; Lev. 8:18; Num. 8:12; purification offering—Ex. 29:10; Lev. 8:14; Num. 8:12.

28. Purification offering—Lev. 4:15; 2 Chron. 29:23.

29. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement," 439.

30. J. Matthes, "Der Sühnegedanke bei den Sündopfern," *ZAW* 23 (1903): 118—19.

31. See F. H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 121—2.

32. See Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 3 ("'Outer Altar' Purification Offerings"); idem, *Ritual Dynamic Structure,* ch. 2.

33. H. C. Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement," *HUCA* 47 (1976): 31—35.

34. Compare S. R. Driver and H. A. White, *The Book of Leviticus* (SBONT 3; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1898), 66. Against the famous "abstract scheme of sacrifice" originally published by H. Hubert and M. Mauss in 1898 *(Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function,* transl. W. D. Halls [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964], 19, 32—3, 35, 44—5).

35. D. P. Wright, "Deuteronomy 21:1—9 As a Rite of Elimination," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 387—403.

36. See Contemporary Significance section on Lev. 17; Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure,* ch. 2.

37. Ibid.

38. See, e.g., Selman, "Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East," 96—101.

39. Gane, *Altar Call,* 79—80.

40. Ibid., 55—56.

41. P. S. Kramer, "Family Traditions: Making Moments You and Your Children Will Always Cherish," *Woman's Day* (November 19, 1996), 68. See also R. Fulghum's wonderfully insightful and practical book, *From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives* (New York: Ivy Books, 1995).

42. R. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1996), 80.

43. In M. Walter, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 900.

Leviticus 2

When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering
is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it 2and take
it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine
flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial
portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the
LORD. 3The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it
is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

4"'If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of
fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers
made without yeast and spread with oil. 5If your grain offering is
prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and
without yeast. 6Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. 7If
your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of fine flour and
oil. 8Bring the grain offering made of these things to the LORD; present
it to the priest, who shall take it to the altar. 9He shall take out the
memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an
offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. 10The rest of the
grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons, it is a most holy part of
the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

"'"Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without
yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to
the LORD by fire. 12You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of
the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing
aroma. 13Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt
of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings-add salt to all
your offerings.

14"'If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, offer

crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. [15]Put oil and incense on it, it is a grain offering. [16]The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the LORD by fire.

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 2 PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONS for grain offerings, which are like burnt offerings in that they involve turning offering material into smoke for the Lord on the outer altar. Two major categories of grain offerings are those that are uncooked (2:1—3) and those that are cooked (2:4—10). A special category is the firstfruits offering of grain (2:14— 16), which acknowledges that the harvest providing for human needs comes from God. Separating the normal cooked or uncooked varieties from the firstfruits offering, verses 11—13 state rules regarding certain ingredients of grain offerings in general, which also apply to all other kinds of sacrifices.

Like any good food preparation manual, the language of Leviticus 2 clearly indicates logical relationships between its parts. Betty Crocker would approve. As we would expect in procedural case law, Leviticus 2 introduces the procedures for each of the major categories with *ki* (“when …"; 2:1, 4).[1] Also in accordance with case law, additional subcategories of the cooked grain offering (following the first one—baked in an oven) are introduced by *’im* (“if”): “if your grain offering is prepared on a griddle” (2:5) or “if your grain offering is fried in a pan” (2:7).[2]

(ki) Uncooked grain offerings (vv. 1—3
Preparation (v. 1)
Ritual (vv. 2—3)
(ki) Cooked grain offerings (vv. 4—10)
Preparation (vv. 4—7)
Baked in an oven (v. 4)
(im) Prepared on a griddle (vv. 5—6)
(im) Fried in a pan (v. 7)
Ritual (vv. 8—10)

In Leviticus 2:1 the one bringing a grain offering is referred to as *nepes* (generic “living being, person"; see also 4:2, 27; 5:1, etc.), which is the functional equivalent of *’adam* (generic “man” = “human being"; cf. 1:2). Both of these terms cover women as well as men (Num. 5:6). Women could also offer

sacrifices. In fact, under some circumstances they were required to offer them (Lev. 12:6—8; 15:29—30).[3]

In 2:1—3 the grain offering handed over to the priest was to be semolina/grits *(solet)* of wheat (cf. Ex. 29:2; 2 Kings 7:16). Although this was not "fine flour" in terms of texture, it was "fine" in the sense that it was choice food (cf. Ezek. 16:13, 19) rather than ordinary flour (cf. 1 Kings 4:22).[4] Preparation of the uncooked grain offering included adding olive oil and incense over the grain (Lev. 2:1). The oil helped the offering burn on the altar and the incense enhanced the "pleasing aroma." Both oil and incense are associated with joy (Prov. 27:9).

A grain offering obviously involved no butchering, blood, or hide to serve as a priest's "commission." So the priest kept the remainder of the grain offering after he scooped a handful from it and burned that part as a token portion *('azkarah)* for the Lord on the altar (2:2; cf. 6:14—18). This was the procedure for grain offerings on behalf of nonpriests. The grain offering of a priest, by contrast, was completely burned on the altar (6:23), with no "agent's commission" because the priest was also the offerer.

Verses 11—13 present two general rules. The first is a prohibition against yeast because of the even broader rule that no yeast/leaven or honey (probably agriculturally produced fruit honey here) may be turned into smoke as a food gift to the Lord. This does not apply to offerings that are not burned on the altar, including firstfruits of processed foods *(re^{r}sit,* "first-processed"; v. 12; cf. Num. 15:19—21) and leavened loaves made of "first-ripe" *(bikkurim)* wheat (23:17).[5]

The second general rule is a positive one: The "salt of the covenant of your God" must be included with all (kol) grain offerings, again as an application of a more general rule: All (kol) offerings, implicitly including animal sacrifices, must be salted (2:13; cf. Ezek. 43:24—priests salt animals for burnt offering).

Whereas the earlier instructions in Leviticus 2:1—10 concern grain offerings from semolina of wheat, verses 14—16 tell what to do if (^{J}im; v. 14) you bring a "first-ripe" *(bikkurim)* grain offering. The fact that this section begins with, *m* rather than *ki* ("when") suggests that it resumes the series of subcases within the overall category of cooked grain offerings. This makes sense because its preparation includes a kind of cooking: "You shall bring milky grain parched with fire, groats of the fresh ear" (v. 14).[6] The ritual process at the sanctuary is the same as in the other cases (v. 16), but Leviticus 2 separates this parched variety from the earlier cooked offerings because it includes frankincense like uncooked offerings (v. 15; cf. v. 1), it consists of fresh, natural barley (23:10—11) rather than a ground wheat product,[7] and it is mandatory rather than voluntary (cf. Ex. 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Num. 18:13).

Bridging Contexts

CAN AN OFFERING without death be a “sacrifice"? The apostle Paul appealed to his fellow Christians “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1). A *living* sacrifice? Isn’t that an oxymoron? Doesn’t a sacrifice require the death of that which is sacrificed? Not necessarily, according to Leviticus 2. Therefore Paul does not utter a contradiction in terms.

In Leviticus 2:2, 9 the token portion of a grain offering that is burned on the altar is called “a food gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord.”[8] There is no mention of expiation here (cf. *kipper* in 1:4), but otherwise the goal/meaning of the grain offering is the same as that of the burnt offering (1:9). So the grain offering is also a sacrifice.

If a grain offering is a sacrifice even though it involves no death or blood, we must abandon the common notion that death is a defining characteristic of “sacrifice.” In fact, the English word “sacrifice” did not originate from an idea of death. Rather, it derived from the concept of “making holy” (Lat. *sacra*, “sacred/holy” + *facere*, “to make”), that is, transferring something to the sacred realm.

Of course it is usage in the original Hebrew, not English etymology or usage, that defines the biblical concept. In Hebrew, the idea of “sacrifice” in general is conveyed by the noun *qorban.* For example, in Leviticus 1 this word appears in the overall introduction to sacrifices in general (1:2) and at the beginning of each subsection of the chapter, introducing burnt offerings of herd animals (1:3), flock animals (1:10), and birds (1:14). The meaning of *qor-ban* is associated with that of the Hiphil verb from the same root *qrb* (lit., “cause to come near”), which can refer not only to preliminary conveyance of offering material to the ritual location (e.g., 1:3), but also to formal ritual presentation to the Lord (e.g., 1:5, 13).[9] This formal presentation *transfers something to the holy God for his utilization.* So a *qorban* (“sacrifice, sacrificial offering”) *makes* something *holy* by giving it over to the holy domain of God.

Therefore, the meaning of the Hebrew word *qorban* coincides with the etymological meaning of the English word “sacrifice,” and this does not

necessitate the component of killing.

Bloodless grain offerings are also sacrifices *(qorban* in 2:1, 4, 5, 7, 13) that are brought/presented (Hiphil of *qrb)* to God (2:1, 4, 8, 11, 13—14). Furthermore, in 5:11—13 an offering of grain serves as a purification offering *(hatta't;* so-called "sin offering") that is functionally equivalent to a more expensive purification offering of a flock animal or of birds. It provides expiation *(kipper)* so that a sinner who cannot afford a blood sacrifice can receive forgiveness (5:13; cf. 5:11). If a purification offering of an animal is a sacrifice,[10] such an offering of grain must also be a sacrifice. This is the exception acknowledged in Hebrews 9:22: "… the law requires that *nearly* everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (emphasis supplied).

The exceptional functional equivalent of grain does not negate the foundational significance of blood as the instrument of *kipper,* that is, expiation/ransom in Israelite sacrifice. According to Leviticus 17:11 (see comments), the Lord has assigned all blood ritually applied to his altar the function of ransoming *(kipper)* the lives of his people. So there is no application of blood to the altar that does not have to do with some kind of *kipper.*

The token offering of grain in Leviticus 2 serves as a simple gift to the Lord, expressing a positive relationship with him and honoring the One who provides "daily bread" (cf. Matt. 6:11). The idea of "gift" is found in the Hebrew label for this kind of sacrifice: *minhah,* which has the basic meaning of "gift/present." In nonritual use the word is used for gifts to people who are treated as superior: Jacob's present of animals to Esau (Gen. 32:13, 18, 20, 21; 33:10), the gift of choice products that Jacob/Israel sent with his sons to Joseph (43:11, 15 25, 26), Ehud's tribute (required gift) to King Eglon of Moab (Judg. 3:15, 17, 18, with Hiphil verb of *qrb,* "to present"), and the tribute sent to King Solomon by his vassals (1 Kings 4:21). Similarly, both Cain's offering from the fruit of the ground and Abel's sacrifice from his flock are called *minhah* in the generic sense of "gift" to God (Gen. 4:3—5). However, in the special system of rituals performed at the Israelite sanctuary (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers), *minhah* is used in the narrower sense of a gift to the Lord specifically consisting of grain.

Returning to Romans 12:1, God's people can be "living sacrifices" in the sense of consecrating themselves to the Lord, presenting themselves as gifts for his holy service (1 Peter 1:14—16; referring to Lev. 11:44; cf. v. 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).

No leaven or honey. Ingredients of sacrifices carry meanings by association. Leviticus 2:11 prohibits burning yeast/leaven or honey on the Lord's most holy altar. Leavening involves fermentation, which is a form of decay and therefore

related to the concept of death. In connection with the ritual impurity laws of Leviticus 11—15, we will find that because death/impurity and life/holiness are antagonistic, the Israelite ritual system requires them to be kept apart from each other (see, e.g., 7:20—21; Num. 19:13, 20). Paradoxically, slain sacrificial animals are in a special category and do not defile the holy altar with death.

Several sources from late antiquity, including the New Testament, also reflect the association of leaven with deterioration:

> "Leaven in the dough" is a common rabbinic metaphor for man's evil propensities (e.g., *b. Ber.* 17a). The New Testament mentions "the leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Cor 5:8) and "the leaven of the Pharisees," which is "hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1; cf. Mark 8:15). This view is shared by the ancients: "Leaven itself comes from corruption, and corrupts the dough with which it is mixed … and in general, fermentation seems to be a kind of putrefaction" (Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 109). Plutarch records that the Roman high priest (Flamen Dialis) was forbidden even to touch leaven (ibid.).[11]

The honey in Leviticus 2:11 is probably from fruit rather than from bees, as in 2 Chronicles 31:5, where "honey" is included in first-processed *(re^{r}sit)* agricultural produce from fields.[12] Although it is not necessarily fermented, it is excluded from the altar, apparently because it is susceptible to fermentation (cf. Num. 6:3—4, where a Nazirite is prohibited from consuming even unfermented grape products because grapes ferment easily and are used for making fermented wine).

Social salt. Leviticus 2:13 requires that all grain offerings be seasoned (lit., "salted") with salt: "Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings." Here addition of salt enacts the idea of "covenant." "Covenant" and "salt" also appear together in Numbers 18:19, where the Lord refers to his portions of sacred offerings that belong to the priests "as a perpetual due; it is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and your descendants as well" (NRSV). Notice that here "salt" is used metaphorically to emphasize permanence (cf. 2 Chron. 13:5).

It is easy to see why "salt" is used to express permanence. Literal salt is a preservative.[13] So a "covenant of salt" is a preserved/permanent covenant. Similarly, "the salt of the covenant of your God" (Lev. 2:13) is the ingredient of a sacrifice that symbolizes the permanent, binding nature of the covenant. The fact that according to this verse *every* Israelite sacrifice was to be salted shows

that every sacrifice functioned in the context of the enduring covenant relationship between the Lord and his people that was established at Sinai through sacrifices (Ex. 24:3—8).

Salt carried additional meanings. In ancient times people who shared salt were bound together as a group by mutual obligations.

> A neo-Babylonian letter speaks of "all who tasted the salt of the Jakin tribe" *(ABL* 747, r. 6), referring to the tribe's covenantal allies. Loyalty to the Persian monarch is described as having tasted "the salt of the palace" (Ezra 4:14). Arab. *milhat*, a derivative of *malaha* ("to salt") means "a treaty" (G. B. Gray 1903: 232). "There is salt between us" implies among Arab bedouin a treaty stipulating mutual aid and defense (R. Smith 1927: 270). The Greeks likewise salted their covenant meals and referred to salt as "holy" *(Iliad* 9.214; Heliod. 4.16). Thus it is likely that in Israel as well salt played a central role at the solemn meal that sealed a covenant (e.g., Gen 26:30; 31:54; Exod 24:11).[14]

In the New Testament, Jesus calls his followers "the salt of the earth," who must retain their "saltiness," that is, their distinctiveness, in order to be a valuable influence in the world (Matt. 5:13). While "saltiness" suggests improvement of flavor, it also provides preservation. Both as a flavoring and as a preserving element, salt must be spread out and mixed with that which it benefits. So Christians should spread out and mingle with others in order to improve the moral "flavor" of their society and to "preserve" it from moral decay (cf. Lev. 2:14—16).

In Mark 9:50 Jesus admonishes: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." This idea is related to Colossians 4:6: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." In these verses "salt" is a metaphor for social grace and tact that enables people to get along with each other. While the primary emphasis is on the "flavor" of salt, the social context is close to the covenant setting in which salt "preserves" good relationships.

Contemporary Significance

"LIVING SACRIFICES." BLOODLESS Israelite sacrifices of grain have helped us to understand that we can truly offer ourselves to God as "living sacrifices" and "be transformed by the renewing" of our minds rather than conforming "to the pattern of this world" (Rom. 12:1—2). By meeting the needs of other people, we can give gifts that are "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15—16).

The "pattern of this world" (Rom. 12:2) is greed and self-gratification, all in the name of survival. To many the idea of sacrificing everything on God's altar of service for others is suicidal folly, or at least a sign of mental instability. Paradoxically, however, just as the ancient Israelite altar of sacrifice represented life, giving oneself up for a higher purpose opens the door to ultimate fulfillment. Albert Schweitzer discovered this:

> He who sacrifices his life to achieve any purpose for an individual or for humanity is practicing life-affirmation. He is taking an interest in the things of this world and by offering his own life wants to bring about in the world something which he regards as necessary. The sacrifice of life for a purpose is not life-negation, but the profoundest form of life-affirmation placing itself at the service of world-affirmation.[15]

Because of his global vision, Schweitzer was willing to move out of his comfort zone, to get out of the "saltshaker,"[16] in order to spread the benefit of his influence to those who needed it most. So as a "living sacrifice" he became "salt of the earth." In the process, he discovered that God preserved the precious things that he thought he had given up:

> When I first went to Africa I prepared to make three sacrifices: to abandon the organ, to renounce the academic teaching activities to which I had given my heart, and to lose my financial independence, relying for the

rest of my life on the help of friends.

These three sacrifices I had begun to make, and only my intimate friends knew what they cost me.

But now there happened to me, what happened to Abraham when he prepared to sacrifice his son. I, like him, was spared the sacrifice. The piano with pedal attachment, built for the tropics, which the Paris Bach Society had presented to me, and the triumph of my own health over the tropical climate had allowed me to keep up my skill on the organ…

For the renunciation of my teaching activities in Strassburg University I found compensation in opportunities of lecturing in very many others.

And if I did for a time lose my financial independence, I was able now to win it again by means of organ and pen.[17]

It is possible to serve without a polished personality, CV, budget, infrastructure, or even a specific agenda. Philip Yancey describes a rather eccentric older woman by the name of Louise Adamson, who makes a difference in urban Atlanta with no staff or organized program. She simply asks God each day to use her. Calling her contribution a "Jericho Road ministry," after Jesus' parable of the "good Samaritan" who helped a wounded man on the road to Jericho, she looks for those in need and distributes food and clothing that people give her for this purpose. She gets calls at all hours of the day and especially at night to assist individuals and families in crisis, such as battered wives and starving elderly folk. In addition, she serves as official guardian for a number of children assigned her by the Juvenile Court.[18]

Kierkegaard observed that it is unusual for people to follow Christ's example of self-sacrificing love:

> Christ required "followers" and defined precisely what he meant: that they should be salt, willing to be sacrificed, and that a Christian means to be salt and to be willing to be sacrificed. But to be salt and to be sacrificed is not something to which thousands naturally lend themselves, still less millions.[19]

Why is this? Before becoming "salt" to benefit others, a Christian must experience the enduring, assuring "salt of the covenant" of his or her God. Stable, long-term "saltiness" of moral preservation, tact, and social solidarity in the human sphere has its source in the divine-human covenant relationship. Without this relationship, the "salt" has lost its "saltiness" (Matt. 5:13; Mark

9:50; Luke 14:34); it has nothing to give. But a Christian who maintains the permanence of the covenant, often “salting” his or her “living sacrifice” with renewed commitment, as Louise Adamson does every day, has everything to give.

Basic needs, basic praise. In the ancient world, grain products were basic food for sustaining life. Thus Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Give us today our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). Martin Luther recognized that in a wider sense “daily bread” here applies to the full range of our needs, for which we rely upon God to provide:

> Everything that nourishes our body and meets its needs, such as: Food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, yard, fields, cattle, money, possessions, a devout spouse, devout children, devout employees, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and other things like these.[20]

By offering a gift of grain (Lev. 2), an ancient Israelite praised the Lord, who meets human needs. For a follower of God who internalizes this concept, the implications for daily life are profound. Every fulfillment of need is a holy gift. Every meal is communion with God. M. Buber has said that when a person eats in holiness, the table becomes an altar.[21]

Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). It is Christ through whom God meets ultimate needs through his living and dying sacrifice. When as few as two or three share a meal in his name, they are unified as a worshiping community with Christ among them (cf. Matt. 18:20).

The grain offerings outlined in Leviticus 2 were not for expiation from sin. Similarly, today we can offer gifts of things or service to God just because we love him, we are grateful, and we want to honor him. This is simple, basic praise. “Praising God is one of the highest and purest acts of religion. In prayer we act like men; in praise we act like angels.”[22]

Francis Schaeffer understood that praise is not just giving something such as music to God, but also offering the whole of one’s life to God: “One day all Christians will join in a doxology and sing God’s praises with perfection. But even today, individually and corporately, we are not only to sing the doxology, but to be the doxology.”[23] This kind of praise sounds like a “living sacrifice"!

1. on this kind of “procedural law” as a subcategory of “case law,” see

R. Knierim, *Text and Concept in Leviticus 1:1—9,* 31, 65, 94—97, 98—106.

2. For details regarding the various kinds of preparation, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 183—85.

3. on participation of women in ritual worship, see M. Gruber, "Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," in J. Neusner, B. Levine, and E. Frerichs, eds., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 35—48.

4. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6,* 179.

5. On the distinction between "first-ripe" and "first-processed" firstfruits, see ibid., 190—91.

6. Transl. ibid., 178. For other possible explanations of *'im* at the beginning of this verse, see 192—93.

7. Compare A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus,* ed. V. Ryssel (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1897), 447.

8. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 177—78.

9. R. Gane and J. Milgrom, *qarab," TDOT,* 13:142.

10. K. Koch excludes purification *(battait)* offerings from the category of sacrifices so that he can maintain consistency with Lev. 16:5, where the same term *hatta't* exceptionally applies to the nonsacrificial goat for Azazel. However, to sustain this notion he must manipulate the biblical evidence by asserting that in 4:31 the notice that purification offering fat is a "pleasing aroma" to Yahweh is "the result of textual corruption" (see **"'** in *TDOT,* 4:316).

11. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 189.

12. Ibid., 189—90.

13. See Philo, *The Special Laws,* 1.289.

14. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 191; cf. J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews, and M. W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 122.

15. A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Development,* transl. C. E. B. Russell (New York: Henry Holt, 1936), 6.

16. See R. M. Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism As a Way of Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

17. A. Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought,* transl. C. T. Campion (New York: Henry Holt, 1948), 230.

18. P. Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1997), 68—75.

19. S. Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon "Christendom,"* transl. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 34.

20. M. Luther, *The Small Catechism* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 10.

21. In M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations,* 371.

22. T. Watson, in ibid., 739.

23. F. Schaeffer, in ibid.

Leviticus 3

IF SOMEONE'S OFFERING is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the LORD an animal without defect. 2He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. 3From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 4both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 5Then Aaron's sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

6"'If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the LORD, he is to offer a male or female without defect. 7If he offers a lamb, he is to present it before the LORD. 8He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 9From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 10both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 11The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the LORD by fire.

12"'If his offering is a goat, he is to present it before the LORD. 13He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 14From what he offers he is to make this offering to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,

15both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 16The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the LORD’S.

17“‘"This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood."’

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 3 OUTLINES the procedure for the *se—lamim* sacrifice, which can be translated "well-being offering" (so-called "peace" or "fellowship" offering). The Hebrew term is a plural noun, found also in Ugaritic texts without vowels as *slmm*.[1] The root of the word is slm, from which are also derived *salom* ("peace"), *salem* ("whole/sound"), and *sillem* ("repay"). On the basis of these and other etymological connections, including related Akkadian words that mean "covenant" and "gift," interpreters have proposed various explanations of *selamim*, none of which are conclusive.

The translation "well-being" (NJPS; NRSV) comes from the idea of *ìa lem* ("whole/sound"), reflecting the fact that this sacrifice is offered for happy circumstances (see below).[2] At the same time, "well-being" is not far removed from *salom* ("peace"), which is more than absence of conflict. For example, Jacob told Joseph: "Go and see if all is well with [lit., 'see the *salom* of'] your brothers and with [lit., 'the *salom* of'] the flocks, and bring word back to me" (Gen. 37:14).

The well-being offering is called *zebah s*^{e}*lamim* (Lev. 3:1) because it belongs to the *zebah* category of sacrifices. This category differs from burnt and purification offerings in that those who offer *zebah* sacrifices eat the meat, thereby materially benefiting from their own sacrifices. In English Bibles *zebah* is usually translated simply "sacrifice" because it is a slaughtered (verb *zbh)* offering, but it does not cover all kinds of sacrifices (unlike *corban).*

At first glance it is surprising that 3:1 does not begin as an overall case introduced by *ki* ("when)," but rather as a subcase introduced by *'im* ("if"). The reason is that 1:2 has already provided the overall case of voluntary animal sacrifices in general: "When [ki] any of you brings an offering *[qorban]* to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock." Just as burnt offerings from the herd, from the flock, and from birds are subcases of this overall case, each introduced by *'im* (1:3, 10, 14), so two kinds of well-being offerings constitute subcases under the same overall case: from the herd (3:1—5) and from the flock (3:6—16), the latter including sheep (vv. 7—11) and goats (vv. 12—16).[3]

While well-being offering animals, like burnt offerings, must be without physical defect, there are two differences. (1) While a bird can be a burnt offering (1:14—17), birds are not used for well-being offerings. (2) Whereas burnt offerings from the herd or flock must be male (1:3, 10), a well-being offering can be either male or female (3:1, 6). In Leviticus 3 a physiological difference between sheep and goats requires that these flock animals be treated separately: The suet/fat of the sheep that is turned into smoke on the altar includes its fat tail (3:9), which a goat does not have (cf. 3:14).

Application of blood to the sides of the outer altar is the same as in the burnt offering. However, the suet (hard fat) portions are removed and only those parts are turned into smoke.[4] Leviticus 7 provides additional information: While the offering as a whole is brought to the Lord (3:1, 6, 12) and the fat is burned for him (3:16), the breast and thigh are allotted by God to the priests as their commission (7:31—36) and the offerer eats the rest (7:15—21). So there is a three-way distribution of the body of the animal among the Lord, the priests, and the offerer.[5]

Since other sacrifices of which edible portions may be eaten—grain, purification, and reparation offerings—are "most holy" (2:3, 10; 6:17, 25, 29; 7:1, 6; Num. 18:9), they can only be eaten by consecrated priests (2:3, 10, etc.). The lesser sanctity of "holy" well-being offerings makes their meat accessible to laity.

The offerer's portion is sacrificial meat from an animal that has been dedicated to God. It is a sacred meal that continues a ritual, unlike eating a steak purchased at Safeway or a hamburger from McDonald's. So the Lord's ritual rules follow the food out of the sacred precincts to govern some aspects of its consumption. (1) It must be eaten by the second day (7:16) or on the first day if it is a thanksgiving offering (7:15). (2) Because the meat is holy and therefore must not be brought into contact with ritual impurity, the offerer must be ritually pure in order to eat it (7:19—21).

At the end of Leviticus 3, verses 16b-17 state general sacrificial rules regarding suet/fat and blood that are especially relevant to the well-being offering because its fat is removed for the Lord and the flesh is consumed by the offerer: "All the fat is the LORD's.… You must not eat any fat or any blood."

Bridging Contexts

MOTIVATIONS FOR SACRIFICING a well-being offering. The basic purpose of burning the fat of a well-being offering on the altar is similar to that of turning the burnt offering and the token portion of the grain offering into smoke: to offer a food gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord (Lev. 3:5, 11, 16; cf. 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9, 16). That this is *afood* gift is emphasized in 3:11, 16 by addition of the word *lehem* ("food/bread").[6]

Leviticus 3 does not mention expiation *(kipper)*[7] or any other motivation for the sacrifice. However, chapter 7 outlines three subcategories of well-being offerings, each of which has a different motivation: thanksgiving *(todah,* 7:12—15), vow *(neder,* 7:16), and freewill/voluntary *(nedabah,* 7:16).

Well-being offerings of thanksgiving could express gratitude to the Lord for all kinds of blessings, such as good crops, increase in flocks and herds, protection, or deliverance from trouble (cf. Ps. 107:17—22). A votive offering paid a vow by which an Israelite had promised to offer such a sacrifice to the Lord. Making such a vow could be motivated by desire for a particular blessing (cf. Gen. 28:20—22; 1 Sam. 1:10—11, 24—28). An Israelite could offer a freewill offering anytime, when the other kinds of sacrifices did not apply. Because Leviticus 17:1—9 only allowed Israelites dwelling in the desert camp to eat sacrificeable animals if they sacrificed them at the sanctuary as well-being offerings, during that period of journeying a desire for meat would have been a significant motivation for such a sacrifice.[8]

Christians tend to think of the Israelite sacrifices primarily or even exclusively in terms of atonement for sin, but 7:12—16 teaches us that sacrifices could be performed on an array of joyful occasions.[9] Moreover, the harvest Festival of Booths, taking place at a time when thanksgiving to the Lord would be appropriate (like the American Thanksgiving holiday), involved more sacrifices (mainly burnt offerings) than any other festival (Num. 29:12—38). "The sacrificial system was solemn, but it was not morbid. It was dynamic and it could be joyful."[10]

Partaking of Christ. Jesus stunned his hearers when he said in John 6:53—56:

> I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

When he explained this to his disciples, he emphasized the idea of receiving life through his words (John 6:63). So this cannibalistic kind of language, which goes so far as to require violation of the absolute prohibition against consuming blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:10—12; cf. Acts 15:20, 29), speaks of a metaphorical kind of sacrifice.

When Jesus spoke in a similar vein during the Lord's Supper/communion service (Matt. 26:26—28), he clearly referred to himself as a sacrificial Victim:

> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."
>
> Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Here, in the context of the actual sacrifice of Christ's body, he spoke of his blood being poured out rather than his followers drinking it. But there is a metaphorical relationship between the sacrifice of his body and the ritual of eating the bread.[11] The latter represents metaphorically partaking of his body, just as an Israelite ate his well-being offering.

Why a variety of sacrifices? In the New Testament, the one sacrifice of Christ fulfills all of the Old Testament sacrifices (Heb. 9:25—28), which by themselves could not really save anyone (10:1, 4). So why was it necessary for the Israelites to offer a variety of sacrifices? The answer lies in the fact that no single kind of animal sacrifice could express even the basic aspects of provision for reconciliation with God. For example, how can a victim that is wholly consumed (burnt offering) also allow the offerer to partake of it (well-being offering)? These are mutually exclusive in physical terms, like having your cake and eating it too.

The Israelite sacrifices laid out the dynamics of divine-human reconciliation the way physiology textbooks show organisms dissected into parts so that they can be understood. Such a textbook, with its pictures and diagrams, is seldom beautiful and necessarily involves distortion of perspective. But you hope that a physician who examines your body has studied the book well in medical school.

The book is not the ultimate reality, but without it the physician would not know what he or she is looking at. Similarly, without the animal sacrifices, it would be much harder to understand when we ponder Christ's sacrifice in the New Testament. If we jump to the ultimate reality without studying the old Testament "textbook," we miss a lot.

Differences between the various Israelite sacrifices emphasized aspects that were later combined in Christ's sacrifice. The most important differences among the former had to do with blood and flesh: To what parts of an altar was the blood applied? Who received the flesh? The following table reviews the burnt, grain, and well-being offerings of Leviticus 1—3 and previews the purification and reparation offerings of the following chapters by summarizing these major kinds of sacrifices with regard to the ways in which their blood and flesh were handled. *Italics* indicate features that are unique to given kinds of sacrifices.

Reference	Offering	Blood on altar	Flesh went to:
Lev. 1	burnt	sides	*the LORD*
Lev. 2	grain	*(no blood)*	*(no flesh)*
Lev. 3; 7:11–36	well-being	sides	*priest + *offerer*
Lev. 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30	purification	*horns*	*priest
Lev. 5:14–19; 7:1–7	reparation	sides	*priest

*except when the offerer is a priest (see, e.g., 4:11–12).

Burnt offerings, of which the flesh was wholly consumed on the altar for the Lord, pointed to the need for a total sacrifice. Although grain offerings involved no blood or flesh, they were sacrifices of basic food acknowledging that God meets human needs, including ultimate needs (cf. John 6:35, 48—Christ, the "bread of life"). Well-being offerings expressed the benefit of taking the sacrificial victim into one's own life. A purification offering, in which blood that represented life was emphasized by application to the *horns* of the outer altar or altar of incense, highlighted the need for sinners to have their lives ransomed. A reparation offering, which was preceded by literal payment of reparation/restitution, acknowledged that sin creates debt that must be paid by sacrifice even when the sinner puts things right to the extent of his or her ability.

We gain a balanced picture of Christ's sacrifice only by contemplating *all* of the ancient Israelite sacrifices, which teach us that reconciliation with God requires both payment of a "legal" debt for sins that have been committed and transformation of life by his power.

By looking at what Christ has done in light of the earlier rituals with animals,

we see the multifaceted richness of his sacrifice, which is so radiant in splendor that its full glory must be appreciated from various angles. Compare the Hope diamond in the Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., which is in a display case that rotates every few seconds to unleash dazzling, constantly changing rainbow light from various combinations of perfect facets. Unlike the beauty of this gem, the attractiveness of Christ's sacrifice is not on the surface. As the prophet Isaiah foresaw, the suffering of God's Servant was hideous and gruesome. He was more likely to repel than to attract (Isa. 52:14—53:3). It is only when we recognize his self-sacrificing love that we see the glory.[12]

> Christ on the cross is the ultimate paradox: horrifying in ugliness, supreme in beauty. We gaze at the grotesque form of the carpenter from Nazareth, lifted up between earth and heaven, cursed by both. There we see a mirror of ourselves, of the fate that we deserve, but for the grace of God. And there we see the heart of God, reaching out with love so mysteriously pure, so alien to our selfish world, that we come out of curiosity and hope. From deep within us the cross event awakens a primal longing for something we once had and lost: love the way it is meant to be.
>
> There is evidence all around us that God exists. But it is Christ on the cross who answers our questions about God's character, draws us to desire an intimate relationship with Him, and gives us hope that we can be and have all that is good.[13]

Here is glory and hope that make the Hope diamond look like a worthless pebble!

Contemporary Significance

SACRIFICE WITH JOY. The well-being offering reminds us that healthy interaction with God does not always focus on problems, including the need to get rid of sins that separate us from him. How do we like it when every exchange with another person revolves around that person's troubles? Soon we can get to feeling that the individual is self-centered, does not really care about us, and does not believe in our ability to help. Similar dynamics apply to the divine-human relationship. L. Crabb says it more jarringly than I would dare: "Whenever we place a higher priority on solving our problems than on pursuing God, we are immoral."[14]

Like ancient Israelites who brought well-being offerings to the sanctuary, we can joyfully express thanks to God in all kinds of ways, including prayer, praise through music, and tangible gifts to him and his work of service for others. We can also fulfill vows of commitment, resources, or service, and we can simply express love and devotion to him anytime we wish. In these ways we can learn to live in God's presence. Brother Lawrence (Nicholas Herman of Lorraine, 1611—1691) profoundly described this experience:

> But when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him and doing anything that may displease Him, at least wilfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and, if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become *habitual*, and the presence of God rendered as it were *natural* to us.[15]

No matter how rich or poor our outward circumstances, there is *always* a reason to rejoice. At the very least, we have the rich hope of a better, eternal life through Christ's sacrifice. If this doesn't evoke thankfulness, praise, and spontaneous outbursts of devotion, what could?

Does a person who wins millions of dollars or the ultimate vacation getaway restrain joy if it is not to be utilized or enjoyed immediately? Of course not. There is a lot of jumping up and down, hugging with happy tears, and gleeful

squealing to accompany repeated exclamations: “Wow! Can you believe this has really happened to us? Thank you! Thank you!” So why aren’t we just as exuberant when we have received through Christ an infinitely more valuable gift package that includes eternal life free of all unhappiness or pain, with a secure place of residence in a perfect world (John 3:16; 14:1—3; Rev. 21—22)? Talk about an ultimate getaway!

Why are we so restrained? Don’t we really believe? “The opposite of joy is not sorrow. It is unbelief.”[16] So joy is not merely an emotion, it is a principle, a moral imperative: “Know that joy is rarer, more difficult, and more beautiful than sadness. Once you make this all-important discovery, you must embrace joy as a moral obligation.”[17] Unlike self-gratification, joy looks upward to God and onward to what he offers needy people.

1. A singular form *(selem)* shows up in Amos 5:22 as well as in Ugaritic texts.

2. For details on the various theories, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 220—21.

3. See ibid., 203.

4. The text precisely identifies the suet portions. On the physiological details, see Milgrom, *Leviticus i-is,* 205—13.

5. See R. Gane, “‘Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” *VT* 42 (1992): 198.

6. In 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22, etc., *lehem* refers to sacrificial “food,” including meat. In other contexts the same word means specifically “bread” (e.g., 7:13; 8:26, 31, 32).

7. But see comments on 17:11 regarding the *kipper* meaning of well-being offering blood.

8. For life in the Promised Land, when many could live at a distance from the sanctuary, Deut. 12:15—16 allowed nonsacrificial slaughter of sacrificeable animals.

9. on joy in connection with meals following ancient Greek sacrifices to olympian deities, see W. Durant, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939/1966), 2:195.

10. R. Gane, *Altar Call,* 89

11. On the bread as “microcosmic modelling,” see M. Douglas, “The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus,” *MT* 15 (1999): 219—23.

12. Gane, *Altar Call,* 12, 58—62.

13. Ibid., 344.

14. L. Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 38.

15. N. Herman (1611—1691), *Brother Lawrence: The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life*, transl. from French (New York: Revell, 1958), 22.

16. Leslie Weatherhead, in *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*, 537.

17. André Gide, in ibid., 536.

Leviticus 4

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone
sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’S
commands— 3“"If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the
people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin
offering for the sin he has committed. 4He is to present the bull at the
entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand
on its head and slaughter it before the LORD. 5Then the anointed priest
shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the Tent of
Meeting. 6He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it
seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.
7The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of
fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The
rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt
offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8He shall remove all
the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat that covers the inner
parts or is connected to them, 9both kidneys with the fat on them near
the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the
kidneys—10just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of
burnt offering. 11But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the
head and legs, the inner parts and offal—12that is, all the rest of the
bull—he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean,
where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap.

13“"If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does
what is forbidden in any of the LORD’S commands, even though the
community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. 14When they
become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a

young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting.
15The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head
before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD.
16Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the
Tent of Meeting. 17He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it
before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain. l8He is to put some
of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent
of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the
altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. l9He shall
remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, 20and do with this
bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. in this way the
priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. 2lThen
he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the
first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.

22"When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in
any of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. 23When he is
made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a
male goat without defect. 24He is to lay his hand on the goat's head
and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered
before the LORD. It is a sin offering. 25Then the priest shall take some
of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns
of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the
base of the altar. 26He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the
fat of the fellowship offering. in this way the priest will make
atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.

27"If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does
what is forbidden in any of the LORD'S commands, he is guilty. 28When
he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his
offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect. 29He is
to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the
place of the burnt offering. 30Then the priest is to take some of the
blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt
offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 3lHe
shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship
offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to
the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he

will be forgiven.

32“"If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect. 33He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. 34Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 35He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

Original Meaning

WHEREAS CHAPTERS 1—3 of Leviticus provide instructions for *voluntary* burnt, well-being, and grain offerings, 4:1—6:7 deal with *mandatory* purification and reparation offerings, which the Israelites were required to offer when they committed certain kinds of sins.

Burnt and well-being/zekjh offerings were known and performed before the Israelite tabernacle was constructed (Gen. 8:20; 22:13; Ex. 18:12; 20:24; 24:5).[1] In early times the burnt offering could serve not only as basic worship of the Lord but also to remedy sin (Job 1:5; 42:8—9). However, with commencement of the sanctuary services officiated by Aaronic priests, purification and reparation offerings were initiated as specialized expiatory sacrifices to remedy some (but not all) kinds of sins. An additional function of the purification offering was to remove severe physical ritual impurities that were incompatible with the divine holiness that resided among the Israelites.

Remedy for sin. Leviticus 4 introduces the *hatta't* sacrifice, which is commonly translated "sin offering" because *hatta*, is also a word for "sin" (e.g., Gen. 4:7; 18:20; Ex. 10:17; Lev. 4:3, 14, 23, 26, 28, 35), and in passages such as Leviticus 4 the *hatta't* sacrifice is required when people violate divine commandments. However the *hatta't* sacrifice, often paired with a supplementary burnt offering, is also used for purification from severe physical ritual impurity (e.g., 12:6—8; 15:14—15, 29—30). This accords with the fact that the Piel verb of the same root *hf* can mean "un-sin" in the broader sense of "purify," with objects of purification including the outer altar (8:15) and an ordinary house (14:49, 52). At least in the latter case, sin as moral fault cannot possibly be in view: How can a literal house have sinned? It is clear that *hatta't* as a kind of sacrifice has taken on this broader meaning and should therefore be understood as "purification offering," a rendering that covers both purification from sins and purification from physical ritual impurities.

The usual translation "sin offering" is misleading because it implies that the *hatta't* sacrifice deals only with sin as moral fault and that it is the only sacrifice to do so.[2] As a symptom of its inadequacy, the interpretation "sin offering" generates problems that do not really exist, such as the question: How has a

woman sinned in giving birth, so that she must sacrifice a “sin offering” (12:6—8)? She has not sinned at all. Rather, she has enjoyed the divine blessing to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28; 9:1, 7; 35:11). Her sacrifice is for physical ritual impurity, which is not “sin” in the sense of moral fault (see comments on Lev. 12).

The category *hatta't* (“purification offering”) includes a much wider variety of rituals than any of the other types of Israelite sacrifices. Here is an overview of the kinds of purification offerings that would follow the initial consecration and inauguration of the sanctuary and its priesthood (Ex. 29; Lev. 8—9).



At this point we will focus on the purification offerings prescribed in Leviticus 4, which are required to remedy inadvertent violations of any of the Lord’s commands (4:2) once the sinners realize what they have done. An inadvertent (root *sgh/sgg)* fault is an error that involves an aspect of ignorance: The wrongdoer unwittingly goes astray and violates a divine command without knowing it at the time. The violation can be accidental or the person can know what he or she is intentionally doing in terms of activity but does not realize that it is wrong.[3]

For an ancient Israelite, inadvertence could result from failure to notice the status of objects (e.g., tithe or firstfruits), persons (e.g., menstruating wife), or time (e.g., Sabbath or festival). Modern mundane examples can arise from overlooking signs and so unwittingly driving the wrong way down a one way street, missing a stop for a toll ticket, or starting to enter a restroom designated for the opposite gender—all of which I have done at least once; absent-minded professors like me are inadvertences waiting to happen!

Leviticus teaches us about the nature of sin and about what God thinks of it. While an inadvertent fault is not as serious as a wrong that is motivated by an attitude of rebellion (cf. Num. 15:22—30), it is still a sin that must be taken seriously and properly remedied. Similarly, although I was not arrested for failing to pick up a toll ticket while on the way to special lectures at the Chicago Theological Seminary, I had to pay the highest possible amount of toll when I left the highway. My inadvertence, because of an absorbing discussion with the colleague who was riding with me, did not excuse me from fully addressing my mistake.

Since mandatory purification offerings do not fit under the heading of voluntary sacrifices (1:2), the legislation of chapter 4 begins with a new overall heading: “When *[ki]* anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in

any of the LORD'S commands—" (4:2). The remainder of Leviticus 4 outlines subcases. If (^{J}im) the "anointed priest" (i.e., high priest)[4] or if (^{J}im) the entire Israelite community have sinned (4:3—12, 13—21, respectively), the sacrificial blood is to be applied in the outer sanctum/compartment of the tabernacle (4:6—7, 17—18). In a case when *(^{J}aser)* a chieftain or if (^{J}im) a commoner has sinned (4:22—26, 27—35, respectively), the blood is applied to the outer altar in the courtyard (4:25, 30, 34).

The most important procedural difference between purification offerings in Leviticus 4 has to do with locations of blood applications. On this basis we can distinguish between what can be called "outer sanctum" (vv. 3—21) and "outer altar" (vv. 22—35) purification offerings. Further differentiating the two kinds is the fact that the officiating priest is to eat the remainder of an "outer altar" purification offering (6:26, 29) unless it is on behalf of himself (9:8—11), but an "outer sanctum" sacrifice is never to be eaten (6:30). Rather, it is disposed of by incineration outside the camp (4:11—12, 21). Now we are ready to examine the two kinds in more detail.

"Outer sanctum" purification offering. In Leviticus 4 either the high priest (4:3—12) or the entire community (4:13—21) sacrifices a bull.[5] The procedures for the high priest and community are the same, with the qualification that in the latter case, the representative elders rather than the high priest lean their hands (one hand each) on the head of the victim (v. 15). The high priest officiates both rituals.

Including collection of blood and presentation of suet to the altar (in italics), which must be inferred from practical necessity, the list of activities performed in the "outer sanctum" purification offering is as follows:

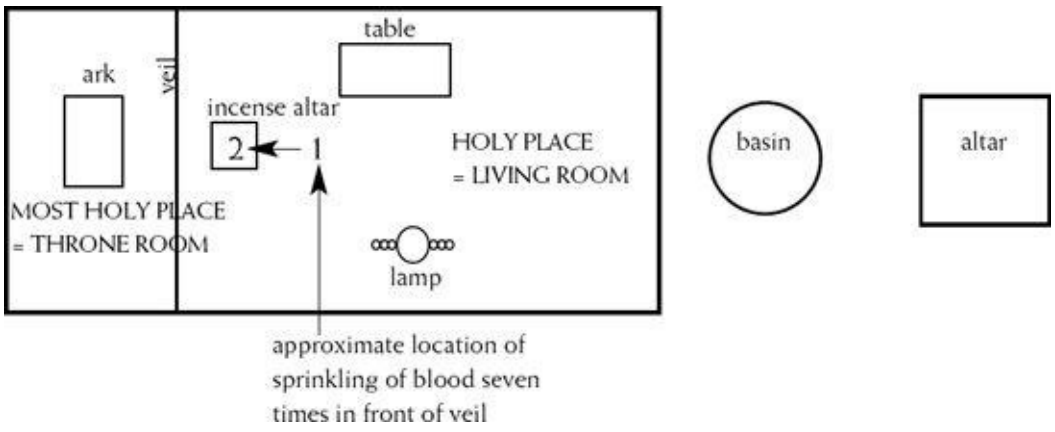
lean hand on head of animal slay animal *collect blood*[6]
bring some blood into outer sanctum
dip finger in blood and sprinkle blood seven times in front of (inner) veil
put some blood on horns of incense altar
pour remaining blood at base of outer altar
remove suet
present suet to altar[7]
burn suet on altar
carry remainder of animal to clean place outside camp incinerate remainder of animal

Notice that the high priest performs two applications of blood in the outer sanctum. First he sprinkles it seven times in front of the *paroket*, that is, the inner veil (4:6, 17). Then he daubs some blood on the horns of the altar of incense (4:7a, 18a). Following these applications, he goes out to the courtyard and disposes of the remaining blood by pouring it at the base of the outer altar (4:7b; 18b).

The procedure with the blood is clear, except for one factor: Where is “in front of the (inner) curtain/veil"? Whereas the Mishnah reads “on the veil” (m. *Yoma* 5:4), the Babylonian Talmud records the rabbinic opinion that the sprinkling was toward the veil (b. *Yoma* 57a). Modern scholars have sided with either of these views.[8] Careful examination shows that the sevenfold sprinkling should be performed not “on the veil,” but in front of the incense altar, that is, east of this altar and therefore further from the ark.[9]

The parallel between blood applications in the “outer sanctum” purification offering for inadvertent sin (ch. 4) and applications of blood in the outer sanctum on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16), both of which involve sevenfold sprinkling and putting blood on the incense altar, indicates that the sprinkling is performed in the same location on both occasions. On the Day of Atonement, following the pattern set in the inner sanctum—*once on an object* followed by *seven times in front of that object* (16:14—15)—the meaning of “do the same” in the outer sanctum (16:16b)[10] is to put blood once on the (horns of the) incense altar (cf. Ex. 30:10) and then to sprinkle blood seven times in front (east) of the incense altar.[11]

By sprinkling blood seven times in the inner sanctum on the Day of Atonement (16:14—15), the high priest contributes to purging this area (16:16a). The words “he is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting” (16:16b) indicate that by a sevenfold sprinkling in this area, he similarly purges the *area* of the outer sanctum.[12] So it makes sense that the sprinkling would be in front (east) of the incense altar, in the central part of the area, rather than between the incense altar and the inner veil. Since the location would be the same in Leviticus 4, we can diagram the movement of blood applications there as follows:



The words “in front of the (inner) curtain/veil” in 4:6, 17 do not require that the sevenfold sprinkling be closer to the veil than the incense altar. In light of how “in front of (Jet *peney)* is used elsewhere, the sprinkling is simply located in the outer sanctum, that is, somewhere in the area in front of the inner sanctum, the boundary of which is defined by the veil (cf. Gen. 33:18; Lev. 10:4; 2 Kings 16:14).[13]

“Outer altar” purification offering. The outline of activities belonging to the “outer altar” purification offering appears three times in 4:22—35 to allow for variations concerning the offerer and the animal victim. A chieftain is required to bring a male goat (vv. 22—26), but a commoner offers a female flock animal, whether a goat (vv. 27—31) or a sheep (vv. 32—35).

The “outer altar” ritual differs from the more elaborate “outer sanctum” type (see above) in several respects. (1) The “outer altar” sacrifice uses flock animals rather than bulls. (2) An ordinary priest can officiate it. (3) There is only one application of blood: to the horns of the altar *outside* the sacred Tent. (4) The officiating priest eats the meat.

The following list gives activities belonging to the “outer altar” purification offering that are explicitly mentioned in at least one of the three sections of Leviticus 4 that concern this kind of sacrifice (4:22—26, 27—31, 32—35) or in the additional instructions to the priests in chapter 6 (“eat meat"; 6:26, 29), or that are implied by practical necessity (italics):

lean hand on head of animal slay animal
collect blood[14]
present blood to outer altar[15]
put some blood on horns of altar pour
remaining blood at base of altar
remove suet

present suet to altar[16]
burn suet on altareat meat

Bridging Contexts

PAVING THE WAY for divine forgiveness. The goal or meaning of each "outer sanctum" or "outer altar" purification offering is provided by the text of Leviticus 4 at or near the end of the section prescribing it (4:20, 26, 31, 35), except for the first section regarding the high priest's sacrifice. While there are variations in wording the goal formula, the goal is the same in each case. So although the "outer sanctum" type has a more elaborate procedure, it provides the same kind of benefit as the "outer altar" sacrifice. The high priest's offering is not explicitly assigned a goal, but in context he receives the expiation he needs as do the other offerers.

Procedural differences between the "outer sanctum" and "outer altar" types are due to the fact that the former remedies inadvertent sins of community-wide rather than individual impact, namely, the sin of the high priest, who represents the people before the Lord (see, e.g. Ex. 28:29—30, 38), or of the community itself. This vastly wider scope explains why the "outer sanctum" offering requires the most expensive victim (bull), the highest ritual functionary (high priest), blood applications inside rather than outside the sacred Tent, and performance of two blood applications rather than one.

The repeated purification offering goal formula (4:20, 26, 31, 35) has two parts. (1) What the priest accomplishes by officiating the ritual is that he makes "expiation" (Heb. *kipper,* see Bridging Contexts section on Lev. 1) on behalf of the offerer with regard to the offerer's sin. Since expiation refers to removal of evil, the ritual removes the sin.

(2) The offerer "will be forgiven." This passive expression does not say that the priest grants forgiveness. Since the sinner has violated one of God's commandments (4:2, 3, 13, 22, 27), the one who forgives must be the Lord himself (cf. Ex. 34:6—7). As his representative, the priest makes expiation by performing the ritual, but he has no authority to forgive. This agrees with use of the same verb *slh* ("forgive") elsewhere: It is never performed by a human being, but always refers to a kind of pardon granted directly by God, which only he can give.[17]

God expects us to forgive one another for the ways in which we hurt each other, as the Lord's Prayer says, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven

our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). But in a higher sense, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Teachers of the law who asked this rhetorical question regarded Jesus as a blasphemer when he forgave a paralytic (2:5—7; cf. Luke 5:21). They were right unless he was divine.[18] Understanding the stakes, Jesus addressed the thoughts of his critics and demonstrated his divine power by healing the paralytic (Mark 2:8—12).

God has *never* delegated to *any* human being the right to forgive in the way Jesus did. It is true that Christ said to his disciples, "whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; 18:18, NAS95—correct translation of Greek tenses here). But this means that he authorizes his church community to make decisions in accordance with what has already been decided in heaven. Similarly, Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, [their sins] have been forgiven them; if you retain the [sins] of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23, NAS95). A specific example of retaining sins was Peter's condemnation of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1—11), which showed insight into God's judgment against them.

Unlike the inevitable effect of purity from a properly performed ritual to remove physical ritual impurity (e.g., Lev. 12:7—8), forgiveness for moral fault does not automatically result from sacrifice. Since God alone decides whom to forgive, he is free to reject a hypocritical sacrifice that is unaccompanied by sincere penitence and a desire to obey him (see, e.g., 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11—20).

A broken Altar, Lord, thy servant rears,

Made of a heart, and cemented with tears…[19]

We have found that removing sin through an expiatory sacrifice had to be performed before God granted forgiveness. Therefore the goal of a purification offering to remedy a moral fault in this way can be summed up: *to remove sin, prerequisite to divine forgiveness.*

What does a purification offering purge? In Leviticus 4 it is clear that in each case the sin belongs to the offerer, who committed it. Verse 26 explicitly calls it "his sin" (NRSV) and verse 35 says that the expiation is "for the sin he has committed." However, from published English translations it is not immediately certain where the sin is located when the sacrifice removes it. Is it still on/in the offerer, or has it previously gone to the parts of the sanctuary to which the priest applies the sacrificial blood?

The Hebrew text tells us that apart from the initial purification of the outer altar when it was consecrated (Lev. 8:15; cf. Ex. 29:36) and the unique sacrifices

that purge the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), *purification offerings throughout the year remove evils from their offerers* rather than from the sanctuary and its sancta.[20] Direct evidence is found in the preposition *min*, which first appears in the goal formula for the chieftain's "outer sanctum" purification offering: "This is how the priest must perform the rite of expiation for him to free him from [min] his sin, and he will be forgiven" (Lev. 4:26 NJB). Following a verb that signifies removal of something (e.g., *kipper,* "expiate"), the preposition *min* with a word for that which is targeted for removal (e.g., sin or ritual impurity) indicates that "from" which someone/something is freed (see also 5:6, 10; 14:19; 15:15, 30).[21]

The first part of the purification offering formula includes the following components: *kipper 'al* + offerer + *min* + evil belonging to offerer ("perform removal for the offerer from an evil belonging to the offerer").[22] This would be like saying that a surgeon performs removal for a cancer patient from cancer belonging to that patient. There is no question that the evil is located in the patient when it is removed. When a purification offering goal formula is abbreviated by omitting *min* + evil belonging to offerer (e.g., 4:20, 31), it is still functionally equivalent and therefore means the same thing as the fuller version. There is no hint that the ritual removes evil from the sanctuary and/or its sancta.[23]

Leviticus 12:7 supports removal from the offerer. This verse tells us the result of a purification offering (coupled with a burnt offering) that remedies the physical ritual impurity of a woman who has just given birth: "and then she will be ceremonially clean from (min) her flow of blood" (NIV). In this context, *min* prefixed to a term for the woman's impurity cannot mean anything but "from," indicating that the evil is removed *from her.*[24]

Further support is found in Numbers 8:21, which states that when Aaron offered a purification offering paired with a burnt offering (cf. v. 12) on behalf of the Levite work force, he made expiation *(kipper)* "for them to purify them." Here the final "them," referring to the Levites, functions as the direct object. So the ritual affected the offerers, not the sanctuary (see comments on Num. 8).[25]

The conclusion that a purification offering removes evil from its offerer withstands a number of potential objections.[26] (1) It does not deny a role to an Israelite's prior repentance or washing with water. Repentance or washing contributes to the remedial process, but neither completes it; sacrifice accomplishes the final stage.[27] One who commits a sin for which a purification offering is required can receive divine forgiveness only when the sacrifice is accomplished; there is no indication that repentance alone can result in

forgiveness.[28]

(2) Another objection is the fact that purification offering blood was physically applied to sanctuary objects rather than to persons. However, in our study of Leviticus 6:27 we will find a good reason why purification offering blood, which removed evil from persons, was not placed on the offerers themselves: Why put an evil back on the one who is being freed from it? The question remains: So why should the blood, the transfer agent that washed away and carried moral or ritual evil from the offerer, go to part of the sanctuary, which was God's domain? Because God has freed offerers from "debt" toward him by accepting/absorbing the "cost." Later God himself was freed from the "cost," as represented by the cleansing of his sanctuary through special application of purification offering blood to it on the Day of Atonement (see Bridging Contexts of ch. 16).

Notice that the role of purification offering blood in relation to a moral or ritual evil depended on where the evil was located at the beginning of the sacrifice. If the evil was located on an offerer who needed expiation prerequisite to forgiveness or physical ritual purification, the blood transferred the evil from him or her at the sanctuary. When evils had already reached the sanctuary and accumulated there, as they had by the Day of Atonement, the blood of additional purification offerings transferred them from the sanctuary. Compare the fact that you can use water to wash yourself in a bath and then use more water to clean the bath from the dirt that came from your body. At each stage water contacts the bath, just as purification offering blood contacted the sanctuary at each stage, but the role of the bath/sanctuary changes as the pollution moves.

(3) A third objection to the idea that a purification offering removes evil from its offerer is the fact that on the Day of Atonement the same kinds of blood applications to parts of the sanctuary are explicitly said to purge these objects/areas (16:14—19). However, aside from the change in location of the evil being removed (see above), we should recognize that similar or identical physical actions can carry different meanings because no action, ritual or otherwise, has meaning in and of itself. Rather, the meaning of an action in a particular context is assigned to it by some kind of authority, which in this case is the Lord.[29] Compare the fact that symbolic gestures in everyday life, such as motioning with an extended thumb by the side of a road to hitch a ride or swiveling our heads from side to side to say "no" have no inherent meaning. Culture attaches meaning, which is why these motions do not necessarily mean the same thing in other cultures.

(4) It is true that in Leviticus 20:3 and Numbers 19:13, 20 the sanctuary is

automatically defiled when people commit the grave offenses of Molech worship or neglect to undergo purification from corpse contamination. In each of these cases, the sinner is condemned to the terminal punishment of "cutting off," with no opportunity to receive the benefit of expiation (cf. Num. 15:30—31; contrast vv. 22—29). Thus, automatic defilement and sacrificial expiation to benefit the sinner are mutually exclusive. Therefore, "outer altar" and "outer sanctum" purification offerings that provide expiation for sinners cannot remedy defilement that has already reached the sanctuary automatically (see comments on Lev. 20:3).[30]

The fact that "outer sanctum" and "outer altar" purification offerings were to remove evils from their offerers tells us that these sacrifices played an essential role in restoring divine-human relations. For a Christian this means that the sacrifice of Christ, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), is essential for removing from a sinner the evil that separates him or her from God. Human repentance is no substitute for divine sacrifice and is only possible because Christ died and rose again "that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel" (Acts 5:31). Peace with God is "through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Rom. 5:1—2; cf. 8:1—3). Without the shedding of Christ's blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:13—26).

Because purification offerings performed throughout the year did not purge parts of the sanctuary, we see that evils removed from offerers at the sanctuary by means of these sacrifices remained there and were included among the accumulated impurities and sins that had to be annually purged out on the Day of Atonement (16:16). Thus, each evil was treated in two stages of sacrificial expiation *(kipper):* First it was removed from the offerer by an "outer altar" or "outer sanctum" purification offering (e.g., ch. 4). Then the same evil was removed from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).

Blood, debt, and ransom. In any other kind of animal sacrifice, the Israelite priest dashed/tossed the blood on the sides of the outer altar (e.g., 1:5; 3:2; 7:2). Only in a purification offering did the officiant put blood on the horns of an altar, which were projections from its four upper corners and formed its highest parts, thereby highlighting the importance of the blood.[31]

The more prominent the blood, the more powerful its expiation. Thus, the remedy for sin of communal scope involved not only daubing blood on the *highest points* of the incense altar, it also called for application of blood *inside* the sacred Tent, in the outer sanctum. In these ways blood was extended toward God in two directions: vertically toward his heavenly dwelling (Ps. 11:4) and

horizontally toward his Presence enthroned above the ark in the earthly Most Holy Place (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15).[32]

It should be apparent by now that application of blood carried the core of the overall meaning/function of the purification offering: to expiate for the offerer, prerequisite to divine forgiveness. This expiation was *required* when a person's sin or serious ritual impurity brought him or her under obligation to the Lord. So rather than a token gift, a purification offering constituted token payment of *obligation* or *debt* in order to remove a difference that came between the divine-human relationship.[33] This does not mean that the ritual purchased expiation, the price of which is out of reach of human beings (Ps. 49:7). However, it was a mandatory token, as when a parent requires a child who has misbehaved to give up a money "allowance" in order to learn the seriousness of doing wrong.

Several additional factors reinforce the idea that a purification offering functioned as a token debt payment. (1) Although the suet/fat of a purification offering was turned into smoke as "an aroma pleasing to the LORD" (Lev. 4:31), it is never called an *'isseh* ("gift") of food (so-called "offering made by fire").[34] Contrast the suet of a voluntary well-being offering, which constituted the, *'eh* portion for God (3:3—5, 9—11, 14—16). The purification offering was not a voluntary gift because it was a mandatory token payment of a "debt" to God, whose order had been violated.[35]

(2) The offerer of a purification offering was not permitted to eat any of the meat. Only the priest was to eat his portion as an "agent's commission" (6:26, 29). However, if a priest performed a purification offering on his own behalf or on behalf of the entire community, which included himself, he was not allowed to eat it and the meat was disposed of by incineration (4:11—12, 21; 6:30; 9:11). The fact that an offerer could not benefit from his or her own purification offering can be explained by the principle that a debtor cannot receive back part of a debt payment.

(3) A purification offering was performed first when it was paired with a burnt offering (see 9:8—14, 15—16), apparently because a debt (purification offering) must be paid before a gift (burnt offering) is accepted.[36] If you owe someone $100 and then give that person $100, it is a debt payment rather than a gift. If you subsequently give more, it is a gift.

The suet of a purification offering, emphasizing token debt payment, complemented the blood, which stood for sacrificed life that God appointed to ransom the life of the offerer (see comments on 17:11), who in this case would be the debtor. It was the entire ritual, including both of these elements, that was necessary for expiation (4:20, 26, 31, 35)[37] in the sense of removing debt to God

that demanded the life of the offerer.

Purification offerings pointed to sacrifice as the means by which God can answer our prayer: “Forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12). The fact that the debt is paid and thereby removed by a blood sacrifice shows that it is not just any debt. It is debt for life, which is signified by blood (cf. Lev. 17:11).

It is no accident that the Hebrew noun *koper* (“ransom”), referring to the price of a life (Job 33:24; Isa. 43:3; cf. Ex. 30:12), comes from the same root *kpr* as the verb “expiate” *(kipper).* By ransoming us through his blood (1 Peter 1:18—19; cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6) and by being lifted up on the cross (John 12:32) rather than on the horns of a literal altar, Christ has paid and thereby removed/expiated our debt, which was so great that it demanded our death because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). He gave up his life for our lives, bringing a happy ending to Romans 6:23: “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” His payment of our obligation so that we might live, eternally rather than for just a few decades, is God’s gift to us.

“Ransoming life through sacrifice is a serious reality. It is not simply a beautiful figure of speech to inspire us while the choir sings, the pipe organ plays, and the sun streams through stained-glass windows.”[38] We learn the value of ransom when we consider what happens when it is not paid. An Israelite murderer was ineligible for ransom and therefore had to die (Num. 35:31). A person who committed a “high-handed"/defiant sin was ineligible for offering an expiatory sacrifice and therefore was “cut off,” a divine penalty that most likely refers to extirpation of the sinner’s line of descendants (15:30—31).[39]

Neglecting to give a ransom *(koper)* to the Lord for the life of each Israelite counted in a census would result in a plague (Ex. 30:11—16; cf. 2 Sam. 24:15).

At the threshing floor of Araunah/Ornan, guilty David was ransomed by sacrifices when he offered to die in place of the people of Jerusalem, who were about to be destroyed with those who had already perished because of the census he had wrongfully ordered (2 Sam. 24:17—25; 1 Chron. 21:16—27). It is no coincidence that the temple built by Solomon was erected at the very spot where David’s sacrificial ransom for human life took place: on Mount Moriah at the threshing floor of Ornan (2 Chron. 3:1). Mount Moriah was where innocent Isaac, the beloved son of Abraham, had been ransomed by a ram caught in a thicket (Gen. 22:13). So the permanent place of sacrifice was located at the place of ransom for human life, where the stories of Isaac and David came together.[40] Ransom for human life was central to the Israelite system of sacrifices for sin, after which came the ultimate ransom provided by Christ—the innocent, beloved Son.

Contemporary Significance

THE COST OF forgiveness. Forgiveness is not to be taken for granted as if it is easy, to be dispensed the way we hand out compliments. To for*give* means to *give* up something. True forgiveness is tough. It is not automatic and it has a cost, even for God—especially for God, who absorbs the prerequisite cost in the sacrifice of his Son.

We should have a forgiving attitude as Jesus did when he was being crucified, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). If we do not forgive others, we cannot receive forgiveness from God (Matt. 6:12). However, forgiveness should not be an unthinking "knee-jerk" reaction. We need to keep in mind the cost of forgiveness.[41] In West Paducah, Kentucky, Michael Carneal, age 14 and a student at Heath High School, shot and killed three of his female classmates. Within a very short time, surviving members of his class put up a sign assuring, "WE FORGIVE YOU, MIKE!" Dennis Prager, a talk show host in Los Angeles, reacted negatively to this example of what he calls a "feel-good doctrine of automatic forgiveness":

> Even by God, forgiveness is contingent on the sinner repenting, and it can be given only by the one sinned against. "And if your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him," reads Luke 17:3—4. "And if seven times of the day he sins against you, and seven times of the day turns to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him."[42]

Perhaps Prager underestimated the pain carried by the students who offered forgiveness to Michael. Perhaps it was not as automatic and meaningless as it appeared. But Prager is right that true forgiveness is not automatic; it is a deliberate and conscious choice. It is not only something that is given; it is a transaction between two parties, the one who committed the offense and the one who has been wronged. Although the latter can unilaterally offer forgiveness, the transaction is not complete until the former repents and accepts the benefit of forgiveness. Leviticus understood this: Although God continually made forgiveness available, a sinner was only said to be "forgiven" when he or she accepted God's provision by offering a sacrifice (4:31, 35).

True forgiveness can be agonizing. In the book of Genesis, when Jacob's sons showed up in Egypt to buy grain, Prime Minister Joseph did not immediately post a sign saying, "I FORGIVE YOU, BROTHERS!" or even reveal his identity. Rather, he tested them to find out whether they were the same sort of miserable scoundrels who had stripped him, thrown him in a pit, callously sat down to eat, and sold him to a living death of slavery (Gen. 37:23—28). Because they passed the character tests he devised, showing that their malignantly selfish attitudes were dead and that they had sincerely repented for what they had done, Joseph became willing to reveal himself in order to forgive them (45:1—3).

Philip Yancey comments:

> When grace finally broke through to Joseph, the sound of his grief and love echoed throughout the palace. *What is that wail? Is the king's minister sick?* No, Joseph's health was fine. It was the sound of a man forgiving.
>
> Behind every act of forgiveness lies a wound of betrayal, and the pain of being betrayed does not easily fade away.[43]

First, Joseph made known his identity, then he expressed forgiveness by words and actions of kissing and weeping (Gen. 45:4—15). He did not reveal himself until he was ready to forgive.[44] When he forgave, he absorbed a cost so great that his brothers could only have paid it with their lives (cf. Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7). Joseph's brothers knew this, which is why they were speechless with terror at Joseph's presence when he revealed himself (Gen. 45:3). Their worst nightmare had incarnated. The skeleton had walked out of the closet, robed in majesty and with absolute power of life and death over them! No wonder Joseph had to work so hard to reassure them that his forgiveness was genuine (45:4—15), even later after Jacob died (50:15—21)!

Thousands of years have not made it easier to forgive. Corrie ten Boom describes her intense struggle in Munich in 1947, when she was approached by a man who had been one of the cruelest Nazi guards at the concentration camp in Ravensbruck, where she had suffered and her sister Betsie had died. He had become a Christian. He knew that God had forgiven him, but he wanted to hear from Corrie that she had also forgiven him. He stood there with his hand held out, but Corrie had trouble responding. She describes her thinking:

> The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."
>
> I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience.

> Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.[45]
>
> What happened next is stunning:
>
> And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."
>
> And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.
>
> "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart."
>
> For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. But even so, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Romans 5:5, "… because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."[46]

Like Joseph, Corrie absorbed a cost. In human terms, she had every right to bear a monumental grudge. She defied her emotions in order to consciously and painfully give up what she had against him. This was no "feelgood doctrine of automatic forgiveness." The good feeling came only *after* the deliberate choice was made and acted on, just as the swollen Jordan River parted for the priests carrying the ark only after they dipped their feet in the water (Josh. 3:15—16).

> Martin Luther kept things in perspective when he prayed:
>
> Grant forgiveness also to those who have harmed or wronged us, as we forgive them from our hearts. They inflict the greatest injury upon themselves by arousing thy anger in their actions toward us. We are not helped by their ruin; we would much rather that they be saved with us.[47]

Never having been severely victimized, I have felt utterly inadequate to explain forgiveness to a Holocaust survivor in Jerusalem, a descendant of slaves

in Jamaica, and a Hispanic woman in California who was sexually molested by a relative when she was a child. Not having been through their experiences, I cannot truly empathize or understand. Anything I say will only trivialize the evil and the pain. All I can do is to offer a hug and point to those who have found healing by absorbing great cost, such as Joseph, Corrie, and God.

Unlike Joseph and Corrie, God went after Adam and Eve to reveal himself *before* they showed any sign of repentance (Gen. 3:8—9). God's willingness to continue revealing himself to human beings in all kinds of ways, most fully when Christ emigrated to our Planet (John 1:14), has consistently demonstrated his desire to forgive. If he did not want to forgive, why would he bother to reveal himself? Any discouraged person who doubts that God forgives can look at a Bible and be reassured by its very existence.

If it can be excruciating to forgive *after* those who have hurt us show repentance, how much tougher must it be for God, with his undulled sensitivity, to offer forgiveness *before* we even want to repent and while we are still inflicting wounds of betrayal? By providing for the sacrifice of his Son, he has mercifully opened the way for reconciliation even before wrongdoers realize what they have done (Rom. 5:7—8).

Just as the carcass of the purification offering to expiate for the community was incinerated outside the camp (Lev. 4:21), so Christ suffered rejection, reproach, and agony outside Jerusalem in order to provide forgiveness for others. Any abuse that comes to us as a result of having identified with him to accept the restoration that he offers is nothing in comparison (see Heb. 13:11—13).

Letting go of the burden. When the Lord accepted a purification offering and granted forgiveness, the sinner no longer bore the burden of evil. Witnessing the blood and smoke, a sincerely repentant Israelite could have assurance that his or her relationship with God was truly restored even though no heavenly voice or banner let down from the sky proclaimed, "I FORGIVE YOU!"[48] "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:14; cf. Rev. 1:5).

One of the most beloved passages in Christian literature is John Bunyan's allegorical depiction of expiation from sin:

> Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders,

> and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.[49]

Notice that Christian let his burden of sin go, and once it was gone, he accepted that reality. He did not go spelunking in order to retrieve it. Corrie ten Boom draws on another metaphor: "'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And even though I cannot find a Scripture for it, I believed God then places a sign out there that says, NO FISHING ALLOWED.'"[50]

The act of letting go and accepting that God hurls "all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19; cf. Ps. 103:12) is a transaction, not simply a feeling. Hannah Whitall Smith describes the experience of a woman who had accepted Christ, but who had trouble letting go of the "burden" and whose emotions wanted to go "fishing":

> Every emotion she had within her rose up in rebellion against it, and had she considered her emotions to be her king, she would have been in utter despair. But she had learned this secret of the will, and knowing that, at the bottom, she herself did really choose the will of God for her portion, she did not pay the slightest attention to her emotions, but persisted in meeting every thought concerning the trial, with the words, repeated over and over, "Thy will be done! Thy will be done!" asserting in the face of all her rebelling feelings, that she did submit her will to God's, that she chose to submit, and that His will should be and was her delight! The result was, that in an incredibly short space of time every thought was brought into captivity; and she began to find even her very emotions rejoicing in the will of God.[51]

This woman found the sure result of letting go: peace and joy (cf. Rom. 5:1, 10—11). Joyless, melancholy Christians would do well to ask themselves whether they have failed to totally let go. If so, it is time to go up the hill again, take another look at the cross, and let the burden roll back into the sepulchre for good.

Corporate guilt. In Leviticus 4 a more serious situation of corporate wrongdoing calls for a more intimate and elaborate transaction with the Lord to make amends (4:13—21).[52] This makes perfect sense. If an individual wrongs someone, the solution is simple by comparison with a case in which an entire nation is guilty.

Leviticus 4 teaches us that the complexity of corporate guilt and the ease of remedy that can "slip through the cracks." The fact that everyone else is responsible *does not absolve a large group from responsibility* to rectify its moral failures. The ancient Israelites learned this during their desert wandering, as we will see in the book of Numbers, and also later in their history. Other ancient peoples reproved in biblical "prophecies against the nations" (e.g., Isa. 10, 13—35; Jer. 46—51; Ezek. 25—32) also learned it the hard way. So did the United States during the Civil War, according to Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, in which he expressed the idea that the country paid for slavery with blood on battlefields. The price of corporate guilt is paid one way or another—if not constructively, then destructively.

Although the United States is not and should not attempt to be a theocracy as ancient Israel was, in the "Pledge of Allegiance" we affirm that our country is "one nation under God," thereby acknowledging basic moral accountability to him. He has the address of a nation just as he does of an individual. Whatever the polls may say about political factors involved in our domestic and international affairs, we must preserve our sense of moral perspective and humility—including willingness to admit and remedy our mistakes—or we will surely go the way of the Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians.

1. The vegetable and animal sacrifices of Cain and Abel are called *minhah* (Gen. 4:3—5), the term used in the Israelite sanctuary system in the narrower, technical sense of "grain offering" (Lev. 2, etc.).

2. A. R. S. Kennedy and J. Barr, "Sacrifice and Offering," in J. Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible, ed., F. C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, rev. ed. (New York: Scribners, 1963), 874; J. Milgrom, "Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?" VT 21 (1971): 237—39.

3. J. Milgrom, "The Cultic  and Its Influence in Psalms and Job," *JQR* 58 (1967): 115—25, esp. 118. B. Levine summarizes the two related aspects of inadvertence as understood by the rabbis: "(1) inadvertence with respect to the facts of law; and (2) inadvertence with respect to the nature of the act" *(Leviticus* [JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 19).

4. Although ordinary priests were also anointed (Ex. 29:21; 40:14—15; Lev. 8:30), the high priest received a special anointing on his head (Ex. 29:7; Lev. 8:12), and in Lev. 6:22 "the anointed priest" is the high priest in Aaron's line of succession (cf. Ex. 29:29—30).

5. See comments on Num. 15:22—26 regarding a variant ritual for the

community.

6. Cf. 2 Chron. 29:22.

7. Cf. Lev. 1:13.

8. E.g., B. Baentsch held that the blood was to be sprinkled in the area before the veil *(Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri* [HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903], 323), but J. H. Kurtz argued against this position *(Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament,* transl. J. Martin [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980; repr. of 1863], 215 n. 1).

9. For a more detailed discussion see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 4.

10. The rabbinic tradition that 16:16b refers to the 1 + 7 pattern in the inner sanctum (b. *Yoma* 56b) correctly interpreted this aspect of the ritual. However, this tradition understood the blood applications to be sprinklings performed once upward plus seven times downward (cf. *m. Yoma* 5:3—4).

11. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament,* transl. J. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952 [orig. 1874]), 2:400—401.

12. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6,* 1034.

13. On the spatial function of the inner veil, see R. Gane and J. Milgrom, TD1S *paroket," TDOT,* 12:96. Compare the Akkadian cognate *parakku,* which can refer to an area: the shrine or cella of a deity *(AHW,* 2.827—9).

14. Cf. 2 Chron. 29:22.

15. Cf. Lev. 1:5.

16. Cf. Lev. 1:13.

17. P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 105; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 143—44 n. 48. C. Macholz points out that *slh* is like *br'* ("create") in that it takes only the deity as subject ("Das 'Pas-sivum divinum,' seine Anfänge im Alten Testament und der 'Hofstil,'" *ZNW* 81 (1990): 247—53, esp. 248.

18. J. McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, Ill.: Living Books, 1977), 19.

19. George Herbert, in R. Atwan & L. Wieder, eds., *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 160.

20. With A. Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (LBS; New York: KTAV, 1967), 266; B. Levine, *Leviticus,* 18. For a far more detailed analysis, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 6. Against the influential theory of J. Milgrom ("Israel's

Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *RB* 83 [1976]: 390—96, reprinted in *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* [Leiden: Brill, 1983], 75—81; see now *Leviticus 1—16*, 254—58), which is followed by M. Anderson and P. Culbertson, "The Inadequacy of the Christian Doctrine of Atonement in Light of Levitical Sin Offering," *ATR* 68 (1986): 310, 315, 322; D. P. Wright, "Day of Atonement," ABD, 2:72—73; F. H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 76—77; K. C. Hanson, "Sin, Purification, and Group Process," in H. T. C. Sun et al., eds., *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 177; and A. P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 124—25, 132—34.

21. H. C. Brichto has recognized similar "privative" use of the preposition *min* in Lev. 15:15, 30 ("On Slaughter and Sacrifice," 33). His understanding of privative *min* in such contexts accords with Milgrom's interpretation of the noun *hatta't* ("purification offering") as derived from the privative Piel of the verb *ht*, ("purify"), which can describe the effect of the *hatta't* sacrifice (Ex. 29:36; Lev. 8:15; Ezek. 43:20, 22, 23; 45:18; Milgrom, "Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?" 237; idem, *Leviticus 1—16*, 253). On the privative Piel in general, see GKC, §52h. Notice that in Lev. 16:16 the inner sanctum rather than one or more persons is freed from *(min)* evils on the Day of Atonement.

22. The word for "priest," indicating the one who performs the expiation, usually follows *kipper 'al* + offerer.

23. H. Maccoby points out that when a chieftain's sin is removed from him (Lev. 4:26), it is the same sin that he committed, not another sin of contaminating the altar *(Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999], 178—79).

24. Milgrom's translation agrees *(Leviticus i—is*, 742). A. Rodriguez also agrees *(Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus* [AUSDDS 3; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1979], 104—5).

25. Cf. Lev. 16:30: "to cleanse you," with "you" as direct object.

26. Against Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 390—96, etc. (see above).

27. Compare Lev. 14, where repeated pronouncements of purity (vv. 8, 9, 20) signify completion of successive stages of purification (Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 60—61).

28. R. E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 322.

29. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 1; cf. F. Staal, *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 127—29, 134, 137, 140, 330; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 279:

“Ritual substances have no intrinsic force: they are powered by the will of God.”

30. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 7; see also idem, *Altar Call,* 214—15.

31. On the various uses and connotations of horns in the Bible and the ancient Near East, see M. L. Süring, *The Horn-Motif in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography* (AUSDDS 4; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1980), esp. 313—17, 323—25, 440—41.

32. Gane, *Altar Call,* 92—93.

33. On this meaning of *kipper,* “expiate,” see Brichto, “On Slaughter and Sacrifice,” 26—8, 34—5.

34. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 161—62, 253. For a discussion of this word, see comments on 1:9.

35. Ibid., 253; Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement,* 452. For the concept of “harm” to God, who is “duty-bound to uphold the moral order of the universe,” see R. Cover, “Sin, Sinners: Old Testament,” *ABD,* 6:38.

36. See *t. Parah* 1:1; Kennedy and Barr, “Sacrifice and Offering,” 875. On the difference between the procedural order, in which the purification offering is actually performed first (e.g., Lev. 9), and the administrative order, in which the burnt offering is listed first (e.g., Num. 28—29), see A. Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts,” *Bib* 51 (1970): 494—98.

37. Brichto, “On Slaughter and Sacrifice,” 30—33, 35. W. Kaiser missed this point in the context of the burnt offering when he states, “The atoning work is completed in the sprinkling of the blood” (“The Book of Leviticus,” in NIB, 1:1012). While Christians emphasize blood, Christ spoke of his sacrifice both in terms of flesh and blood (Matt. 26:26—29; John 6:53—58; 1 Cor. 11:23—26).

38. Gane, *Altar Call,* 72.

39. D. Wold, “The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth”* (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1978), 251—55.

40. Gane, *Altar Call,* 73.

41. Ibid., 106.

42. D. Prager, “When Forgiveness Is a Sin,” *Reader’s Digest* (March, 1998): 38; reprinted from *The Wall Street Journal* (December 15, 1997).

43. P. Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 85.

44. Gane, *Altar Call,* 109.

45. C. ten Boom and J. Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord* (New York:

Jove, 1974), 54—55.

46. Ibid., 55.

47. M. Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 27.

48. Compare Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 134.

49. J. Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come, Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream* (Books For The Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 82.

50. Boom and Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord*, 53.

51. H. W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life* (Books For The Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 48—49.

52. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 172—73.

Leviticus 5:1—13

IF A PERSON sins because he does not speak up when he hears a
public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned
about, he will be held responsible. 2"'Or if a person touches anything
ceremonially unclean— whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals
or of unclean livestock or of unclean creatures that move along the
ground—even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean and
is guilty.
3"'Or if he touches human uncleanness—anything that would make
him unclean—even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it he
will be guilty.
4"'Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether
good or evil—in any matter one might carelessly swear about—even
though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be
guilty.
5"'When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in
what way he has sinned 6and, as a penalty for the sin he has
committed, he must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the
flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for
his sin.
7"'If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves or two young
pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for his sin—one for a sin offering and
the other for a burnt offering. 8He is to bring them to the priest, who
shall first offer the one for the sin offering. He is to wring its head
from its neck, not severing it completely, 9and is to sprinkle some of
the blood of the sin offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the
blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering.
10The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the
prescribed way and make atonement for him for the sin he has

committed, and he will be forgiven.

11“'If, however, he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He must not put oil or incense on it, because it is a sin offering. 12He is to bring it to the priest, who shall take a handful of it as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. It is a sin offering. 13In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering.'”

Original Meaning

PURIFICATION OFFERING OR reparation offering? Many readers of the Bible have been puzzled by Leviticus 5:1—13. Does this passage provide instructions for purification offerings, as in the preceding chapter, or does it have to do with reparation (so-called "guilt") offerings, as in the following section (5:14—6:7)? In support of the former, the sacrifices here are designated *hatta't* ("purification offering; 5:6—9, 11—12). On the other hand, the victim that the offerer must bring for his or her sin is called an *'ašam* (5:6—7), the same word that later means "reparation offering" (5:15—16, 18—19; 6:6).

We can settle the matter by recognizing that the language of Leviticus unambiguously places a given ritual in a particular category in any of three ways:

1. The ritual label can appear in a verbless (nominal) clause, most often immediately followed by a pronoun, which is translated "It is a *label of ritual type* (…)" Thus, "it is a burnt offering …" (1:9, 13, 17), or, "it is a purification offering" (4:24; cf. v. 21).
2. The ritual label can immediately follow the preposition *l* ("as/for"), for example, "as a well-being offering" (3:6) or "as a purification offering" (4:3, 14, 32, 33).
3. The ritual label can be placed next to the word *qorban,* the generic term for "sacrifice." In 2:1, 4 the grain offering is *qorban minhah* (cf. v. 12). The introduction to the well-being offering in 3:1 reads literally: "If his sacrifice *(qorban)* is a well-being offering …"

Returning to 5:1—13, we find that this passage clearly labels its sacrifices as *hattet* through the first two of the strategies listed above: in a nominal clause, "it is a purification offering" (vv. 9, 11—12), and with preposition l,"as a purification offering" (vv. 6—8, 11). Notice the parallel in verse 7, where one bird is offered "as [l] a purification offering" and the other "as [l] a burnt offering." Just as "burnt offering" is a kind of sacrifice here, so is "purification offering." By contrast, the word *'ašam* does not appear in 5:1—13 as a label for a type of ritual.

While *’ašam* in 5:6—7 does not label the sacrifice as a “reparation offering,” it refers to a function of the purification offering. In verse 6 the *’ašam* is for the sin *(hatta,)* that the person has sinned *(hata’)*, which is abbreviated in verse 7 to *“’asam* [for] that which he has sinned [hata’].” The abbreviated wording is paralleled in verse 11, with *qorban* (“sacrifice”) as the functional equivalent of *’asm: “qorban* [for] that which he has sinned [hata’].”[1] So the *qorban*, consisting in this case of a purification offering, has an *’ašam* function.

The purpose of an *’ašam* is illuminated by 1 Samuel 6, where the Philistine priests and diviners explained to their people how they should send back the ark of the covenant to the Israelites (1 Sam. 6:3—5). The Philistines understood that by seizing the ark of the covenant, they had wronged Israel’s deity, for which he was punishing them. Therefore they must return to him an *’asam*, that is, something of value as a reparation, to make up for what they had done.

Just as gold tumors and rats served as an *’ašam* (“reparation”) from the Philistines to the Lord (1 Sam. 6:3—5), so in Leviticus 5:6—7 a purification offering functions as an *’asam* from an Israelite sinner to the Lord. When the word *’ašam* labels a particular kind of ritual, there is emphasis that a sinner must make reparation of a literal amount of property, including restitution of the principal plus a 20 percent penalty, to the wronged party before bringing the sacrifice (5:16, 6:4—5).

The *’ašam* in 5:1—13 consists of a purification offering rather than a reparation offering because the cases of sin here (see below) do not involve literal amounts of value for which reparation can be made. It is true that in addition to confession before bringing a sacrifice, the situations in 5:1—13 implicitly require action to put things right by fulfilling delayed obligations: testifying (v. 1), undergoing ritual purification (vv. 2—3), or fulfilling an oath (v. 4). The difference is that the liability lies in the area of action rather than property to which a price tag can be attached.

While sacrifice expiates for a sin of neglect, it does not fulfill the neglected obligation. Jonathan Edwards was on target:

> Sacrifice does not take the place of performing a known duty. And though the obedience of saints has no merit, yet it is pleasing and acceptable to God; it is as a sweet-smelling savour, and is compared to sacrifices, and preferred before them. 1 Samuel 15:22.[2]

Experiencing/feeling liability. Milgrom has shown that Hebrew words from the root *’šsm*, like other Hebrew terms for sin, can refer to punishment for wrongdoing as well as to sinful actions themselves.[3] Such *’šsm*, consequences

cannot be lumped under the customary catch-alls “guilt” or “is guilty,” but are differentiated into parts of the process that moves from committing a wrong to suffering punishment for it or making reparation (moving down the middle column below):[4]



Milgrom interprets the stative verb *ʿsm* as “feel guilt” in Leviticus 4:13, 22, 27; 5:2—5, 17; 6:4; and Numbers 5:6.[5] He explains this feeling: “It is not a metaphor or mental abstraction, but a physical reality, felt in pain or illness—literally pangs of conscience.”[6] Thus in Leviticus 5:2—5, when a person sins in any of several ways and then has a negative experience that involves or generates cognitive dissonance, he or she must confess and bring a purification offering. Compare the case of the Philistines, who experienced liability when plagues gave them the impression that the God of Israel was opposed to what they had done and was holding them accountable (1 Sam. 6).

Unlike Milgrom, Knierim takes the verb *ʿsm* to mean “*incurring* guilt-obligation.”[7] This more traditional interpretation fails to explain 5:17—19, where a sinner who is *ʾašam* must sacrifice a reparation offering even though he does not know the nature of the offense. Of course the individual is guilty. That is not in question. The issue is: How can the person be prompted to bring any sacrifice at all? The answer is: He cannot, *unless* he or she somehow *experiences* liability (see table above) in the sense that the obligation generates a kind of cognitive dissonance.[8]

Someone on the Internet has reported the following familiar scenario, which reflects similar uncertainty: “I was at the airport, checking in at the gate, when the airport employee asked, ‘Has anyone put anything in your baggage without your knowledge?’ I said, ‘If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?’ He smiled and nodded knowingly, ‘That’s why we ask.'”

Compare 4:22—23, 27—28, where an inadvertent sinner who is *ʾašam* or his sin is made known (Hophal of yd’) to him (by someone else) must bring a purification offering. If *ʾašam* here only means that the sinner has objectively incurred a “guilt-obligation,” how will he or she know to bring a purification offering in the event that nobody else points out the sin? Milgrom must be right that in these contexts *ʾašam* represents an alternative way for sinners to find out about their inadvertent faults. Consequently, the word must include the idea of “feeling guilty.”

“Graded” purification offering. The fact that 5:1—13 concerns purification offerings explains why verse 6 can skip over the ritual procedure that uses a

female flock animal. The activities are simply the same as in 4:27—35, the commoner's purification offering. However, 5:1—13 differs from chapter 4 in three respects. (1) Whereas chapter 4 covers inadvertent violation of any divine command (4:2, 13, 22, 27), 5:1—13 cuts a much narrower swathe by dealing with specific kinds of non-inadvertent (= advertent) cases not covered by the earlier legislation (see below). (2) Leviticus 5:1—13 requires a sinner to confess before bringing a sacrifice (v. 5). (3) In chapter 4 sacrificial victims of different values are determined by the status of the sinners, but in 5:1—13 a descending gradation of victims/materials is based on what sinners can afford.

Leviticus 5:1—13 continues a major organizing principle of the book: Gradations of sacrificial victims/materials are presented in order of descending value, beginning with and therefore honoring the more valuable offerings even if the lesser ones may have been sacrificed more frequently in actual practice.[9]

Burnt:	herd (1:3–9) →	flock (1:10–13) →	bird (1:14–17)	
Grain:				grain (ch. 2)
Well-being:	herd (3:1–5) →	flock (3:6–16)		
Purification:	herd (4:3–21) →	flock (4:22–35; 5:6) →	bird (5:7–10) →	grain (5:11–13)

By comparison with chapter 4, we see that the rituals in 5:1—13 comprise a related but distinct subcategory of purification offerings. Following the rabbis, who called this the "ascending and descending" sacrifice because of its gradation of victims/materials in accordance with the economic ability of the offerer, Milgrom terms it the "graduated purification offering."[10] While it does make allowances for the poor, the fact that its function is distinguished from the chapter 4 rituals in other ways as well—non-inadvertence and prior confession—indicates that it is not simply a poor person's purification offering.

A bird cannot be offered by itself as a purification offering, presumably because it is too small a victim, so it is accompanied by another bird for a burnt offering (5:7—10). Whereas the priest simply drains out the blood of the burnt offering bird against the side of the altar (1:15), he sprinkles some blood of the purification offering bird there (not on the horns as in other purification offerings) and then drains out the remainder at the base of the altar (5:9; cf. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34).

That the bird rituals are a unit is shown by the fact that the expiation *(kipper)* formula is stated only once, covering both rituals as a single complex (5:10).[11] The combination of a purification offering with a burnt offering serves as the functional equivalent of a single purification offering of a flock animal (cf. 5:6). So the burnt offering supplements the *quantity* of the purification offering (cf.

Num. 15:24—28).[12] It is true that a burnt offering expiates (1:4; 16:24; cf. 14:19—20; Job 1:5; 42:8), but in combination with a purification offering its function is subsumed to provide what amounts to a greater purification offering.[13]

In Leviticus 5:11—13 the purification offering of grain is like the uncooked semolina offering in 2:1—3, except that its quantity of flour is specified as one tenth of an *'epah*[14] and no oil or frankincense are added because it is for an unjoyful occasion of sin. After the priest turns the token portion to smoke on the altar, the remainder belongs to him "like the *minhah*" (5:13). Although it consists of grain, it is not a *minha h* ("grain offering"); the text insists that this is a purification offering (5:11—12). Like other purification offerings, it provides expiation *(kipper)* prerequisite to forgiveness (5:13). However, it is unique as the only mandatory expiatory sacrifice that lacks blood (cf. Heb. 9:22).

Bridging Contexts

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF EXPIATION. In Leviticus 4 the sins remedied by purification offerings are limited to those committed "inadvertently." In 5:1—13, however, confession plus the graduated purification offering expands the scope of expiation beyond inadvertence, which is not mentioned here, to sins committed through omission or neglect,[15] including failure to supply required testimony (v. 1) and forgetting to perform a duty to the Lord, whether ritual purification (vv. 2—3) or fulfilling an oath (v. 4).[16] Later we will find that reparation offerings also remedy some deliberate sins (6:1—7; Num. 5:5—8). Nevertheless, each of these cases of non-inadvertent sin remedied by a purification or reparation offering involves some kind of mitigating factor that places it with inadvertent wrongs in the category of *nondefiant* offenses rather than with flagrant, defiant violations, for which no animal sacrifice can expiate (Num. 15:30—31).

In the contrast between expiable nondefiant sins and inexpiable defiant wrongs, we see God's "bottom line" for maintaining a relationship with his people: The criterion is not simply whether a person deliberately breaks his law, but whether a violation carries an attitude of defiant disloyalty to him. The focus is relational. It is true that in a sense every sin is disloyal and tainted with an aspect of rebellion against God. But for him the most important thing is whether or not a person really wants him as Lord. A deliberate sin is a serious mistake that may be committed for any of a number of "reasons," including lust, anger, and fear, but not all deliberate sins are rebellious in the sense of defiantly casting off basic allegiance to God.

In 5:1, because deliberate neglect to give mandatory testimony is graciously associated with cases of forgetfulness (5:2—4), implying that it is not defiant, it can be remedied by a purification offering. This concession appears to acknowledge the risks of testifying and encourages squeamish witnesses, who could not otherwise be identified by human agency, to voluntarily speak up even after they have delayed.[17]

Notice the factor of delay. Committing an inadvertent offense and realizing it only later (ch. 4), balking at a requirement to testify (5:1), or forgetting a duty to

undergo ritual purification or to fulfill an oath (5:2—4) all involve delay between the time when evil occurs and the time when it is expiated.[18]

Just as inadvertence does not excuse a person from responsibility to remedy a fault, neither do forgetting or procrastinating. As in United States law, negligence was culpable when an Israelite had a legal duty to act. Delay expiates nothing. In fact, where fulfillment of an obligation to God is concerned, time is of the essence and inordinate delay *constitutes sin,* as shown by the fact that a person who is purified or fulfills an oath in a timely manner incurs no sin at all. Although physical ritual impurity itself is not sin in the sense of moral fault, violation of a divine command regarding treatment of ritual impurity, including a requirement for timely purification, is sin.

Leviticus assumes that God can hold everyone accountable because he sees, knows, and remembers everything that happens. You can run, but you can't hide! This is especially relevant to 5:1, where a person who fails to support the judicial process by testifying is warned that this "secret" sin is not hidden from the Lord. In this context a publicly proclaimed oath or (conditional) curse *('alah)* of adjuration would serve notice that the call for witnesses was divinely enforced. The effect of such a proclamation would be like making everyone in a modern community solemnly place his or her hand on a Bible and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Witnesses would likely be afraid to commit culpable negligence, which would be a form of perjury punishable by God (cf. Judg. 17:1—2).

Confession is good for the soul. Verbal confession is a precondition for sacrificing a graduated purification offering (Lev. 5:5). This is the first instance of the word for "confess" (Hithpael of ydh) in the Hebrew Bible. The other instances in Pentateuchal *ritual* law are the unique case of 16:21, where the high priest confesses while leaning both hands on the (nonsacrificial) live goat for Azazel on the Day of Atonement, and Numbers 5:7, where confession is required along with restitution to the wronged party before a reparation offering.

In Leviticus 5:5 and Numbers 5:7, confession precedes bringing a sacrifice to the sanctuary.[19] So there is no evidence in the Pentateuch for verbal confession at the sanctuary in connection with leaning one hand on the head of the victim just before it is slaughtered. Therefore the confession required by Leviticus 5:5 and Numbers 5:7 cannot be to a priest; it must be to the Lord, and of course, payment of reparation to any human party that the sinner has wronged would necessarily involve confession to that person as well.

It is true that at the sanctuary the offerer would need to inform the officiating priest what kind of sacrifice to perform, which would imply that he or she had

done something belonging to a general category of sin. Also, the gesture of leaning one hand on the head of an animal or handing a bird or grain item over to a priest served as an implicit confession. But at the sanctuary, the precise nature of the fault safely remained between the offerer and the Lord, who alone forgives sins against him. As Charles Spurgeon advised, "confess to God, but not to man unless you have wronged him, and confession of the wrong is due to him."[20]

James 5:16 advocates voluntary confession of faults between believers so that they can offer intercessory prayer on behalf of each other, as Moses did for the Israelites when they confessed their wrong in speaking against God and against him (Num. 21:7). However, this kind of intercessory role was not part of the exclusive, official job description of the ancient Israelite priesthood.

In Pentateuchal ritual law, confession before sacrifice is required only in cases that involve deliberate sin (Lev. 5:5; Num. 5:7).[21] So it appears that verbal confession, demonstrating repentance and loyalty to the Lord by humbly acknowledging accountability to him, is needed to affirm that a deliberate sin is not defiant. With an inadvertent fault there would be no question of possible defiance because the sinner would not even know that he or she was violating a divine command.

In Leviticus 5:1 an Israelite who has sinned bears culpability/blame *('awon)* that inevitably leads to punishment unless it is removed by confessing and offering a sacrifice (5:5—6). So by providing for expiation through confession and sacrifice, the Lord opens a door to freedom from condemnation and its ensuing punishment. There is only one door, and in order to escape, the sinner must choose to go through it. He or she is under obligation to accept the means that God has provided by coming boldly to the sanctuary, confident because God has promised forgiveness to those who repent.

Because we have a sympathetic high priest in God's heavenly temple (Heb. 4:14—15), we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (4:16). Even when all our instincts clamor for cover to shield our shame from the bright light of divine holiness (cf. John 3:20), the right place for us to be is right there at the throne, claiming the promise:

> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness….
>
> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (1 John 1:9—2:1)

A state of denial expiates nothing. The fig leaves of cover-up, like the first one that was attempted by Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:7), yield nothing but scratchy discomfort. The sooner you confess the better. "Confession is telling God you did the thing he saw you do. He doesn't need to hear it as much as you need to say it."[22] The catharsis of confession is good for the soul, the only avenue to peace with God and healing of cognitive dissonance (Ps. 32:3—5).

Why sacrifice? The need of the Israelites for mercy does not adequately explain the need for expiatory sacrifices. The Lord could forgive apart from such rituals before the sanctuary was constructed (e.g., Ex. 34:6—7) and during its period of operation, as shown by the stories of David (2 Sam. 12:13) and King Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:12—13; cf. 30:18—19). Even sacrificial expiation at the sanctuary did not accomplish divine forgiveness but was only prerequisite to it (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35).

Why should God deal with sin through sacrifice when he could do without it? Some have plausibly suggested that the ritual system was to teach moral values, contrasting divine holiness with human sinfulness.[23] Similarly, D. P. Wright proposes that the system of purities taught the Israelites the difference between holy and profane, pure and impure categories so that they could properly and safely relate to the Lord, who was dwelling in their midst. Even when focusing on "lesser impurities, this Pentateuchal tradition really has the larger moral issues and goals of religion as a major concern."[24]

Wright is surely correct as far as he goes, which is within the context of ancient Israelite rituals. But what about the culminating sacrifice of Christ? If sin causes God pain, why would he choose to immeasurably augment his suffering by giving up his Son to the worst possible death?

Christ's sacrifice is crucially necessary because it enables God to *maintain his justice when he extends mercy* by forgiving human beings who have violated his law. Only this sacrifice makes it possible for God to be just when he justifies those who believe (Rom. 3:26). Why must grace be so expensive? Why is it so important for God to be just? Because justice and mercy are the two sides of love. If God were to compromise one in favor of the other, whether by doling out easy grace or by protecting himself from pain with a steely armor plate of rejection over his heart, he would not really be a God of love as he claims to be (Ex. 34:6—7; 1 John 4:8), and therefore his government would amount to a hypocritical *tour de farce.*

We are not talking about a kind of legal fiction by which God somehow pays himself off through Christ's sacrifice. The glory of the cross is what it reveals

about God's character: He is willing to pay a staggering cost to maintain his absolute integrity as the God of love, who simultaneously maintains justice and offers mercy.

Only if God really *is* love can his intelligent created beings *have* love, which is crucial to their existence.

> Why is love so important? Because real, unselfish love is the only basis on which intelligent beings with free choice can live in harmony and not destroy each other. Love is as essential to the long-term survival of the human race as food and water are to our short-term survival. Ultimately we cannot live without love.[25]

Anyone who doubts the truth of this statement is out of touch with daily news, which reeks with examples of mutual assured destruction (MAD) generated by un-love.

Contemporary Significance

MERCY AND JUSTICE. A grandfather found his young grandson jumping up and down in his playpen, crying at the top of his lungs. When little Johnnie saw him, he reached up his chubby hands and implored, “Out, Gramp, out!” The elderly gentleman stooped to lift the boy out of his predicament, but just then Johnnie’s mother approached with the words, “No, Johnnie, you are being punished, so you must stay in."

The grandfather found himself torn between the simultaneously opposing forces of mercy and justice. Tears and hands reached into his heart, but he also respected the mother’s wisdom in firmly correcting her son for misbehavior. Love found a way to resolve the dilemma: Since Gramp couldn’t take Johnnie out of his pen, he crawled in with him!

On a vastly grander scale, that is what God has done for us. Justly incarcerated as humans have been in mortality that results from sin (Rom. 6:23), the Lord came to dwell with his people in their camp (Ex. 25:8). Then the divine Word stooped low, sacrificing his divine prerogatives to become flesh and make his dwelling among us (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6—7).

If mercy and justice are crucial components of God’s love, which he offers to us (Rom. 5:5), it stands to reason that we should think about how to implement them *together in a balanced way.* It is not always as easy as getting into a playpen with a toddler, and it is not only parents and grandparents who find themselves caught between the opposing demands of mercy and justice. I have been stuck as a teacher. A few years ago, several students in my class on the biblical sanctuary failed to notice that my quiz had questions on the back of the same sheet of paper. When they missed the points, they requested mercy. Since several had done the same thing, I thought mercy was justified on this one occasion as a kind of “warning ticket.” But others, who did not benefit from this mercy, thought I was being unfair. Mercy to one can be injustice to another!

Mercy sounds more “user-friendly,” more warm and fuzzy, but justice is every bit as valuable. What good is mercy if your civil rights are being trampled or you are a victim of crime? In such cases what you want and need is a stiff dose of justice on your behalf.

Here are a few initial guidelines for balancing mercy and justice:

1. Mercy and justice are principles to be implemented as decisions; they are not simply emotions.
2. Do not attempt to give mercy without first taking justice into account. Justice is the standard/rule governing a given situation, which serves as an anchor to keep you from falling over as you extend mercy.
3. Realize that both justice and mercy can be expensive and require toughness to maintain. Justice may require confrontation with an oppressor to free a victimized person from injustice. Mercy can involve giving up something tangible or intangible that you could rightfully claim, writing it off as a loss.
4. Mercy can be an effective form of discipline if the one being disciplined understands the demand of justice and the cost of the gift of mercy.
5. In a group situation, make sure to grant mercy in the same way to everyone, regardless of what they choose to do with it.
6. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5)!

Equal opportunity. Leviticus established a number of equal opportunities in terms of gender, economic position, and social status. Regarding gender, we have already found that sacrifices were for women as well as men. A well-being offering could be an animal of either gender (3:1, 6), and the important purification offering of a commoner was required to be a female flock animal (4:28, 32). Later we will investigate a crucial purification offering of a cow to produce ashes for cleansing from corpse contamination (Num. 19). So both genders played roles that were later fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice (John 1:29).

Paul affirmed: "There is neither … male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). So women and girls can be "living sacrifices" to God along with their brothers in the faith (cf. Rom. 12:1). If we really follow the biblical teaching, the church will lead the way to wholesome equality based on unity rather than getting bogged down with political collisions ("gender benders").

With regard to economic position, Leviticus 5:1—13 establishes equal-opportunity accountability and expiation for persons of different means. Poor sinners incur the same kind of liability as more well-to-do folks.

> Some people may think that they are unknown and insignificant in the congregation or in society, but they are known by God Almighty. And God had them in mind every bit as much as the influential people when he made provision for purification through sacrificial atonement.[26]

Compare Leviticus 1, where a poor person can bring a burnt offering of a

bird (1:14—17) so that “no one was barred from access or from worship on the basis of income or ability.”[27]

Human society tends to be highly stratified, with large gaps between people who are “important” and those who are insignificant. In Leviticus 4, however, the difference between a chieftain and a commoner has only a minor impact on their purification offerings: male goat versus female goat or sheep. Before the divine King, worldly status shrinks to insignificance. In Israel there are no politics in expiation.

Elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, monarchs played highly significant religious roles.[28] But in Leviticus there is no human king of Israel because the setting of this book is before the period of the Israelite monarchy. It is the high priest, not a king, who represents the Israelites before the Lord. Even if there were a king, he would be classed with the other civil leaders, such as the chieftains, and barred from the priesthood (cf. 2 Chron. 26:16—21). By establishing separation of powers between priests and civil leaders, God ensured that monarchs would not be viewed as god-kings like the pharaohs, some rulers of Mesopotamia, and possibly the Hittite emperors. A leader invested both with civil and religious authority wields dangerously excessive power over his people and tends to usurp divine prerogatives.

1. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 303.

2. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 6:1607.

3. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 339.

4. Ibid., 339—45, esp. 345.

5. Ibid., 373—78; J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (SJLA 18; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 7—11, 104.

6. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1425.

7. R. Knierim, אָשָׁם ʾašam ‘*asam* guilt,” *TLOT*, 1:193.

8. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, 74—76.

9. Cf. instructions for constructing the tabernacle, beginning with the ark (Ex. 25:10—22) in the Most Holy Place and then moving to other items (25:23—27:21; 30:1—10).

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 307—18; cf. Levine, *Leviticus*, 28—29.

11. Cf. R. Rendtorff, *Leviticus* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985—1992), 3:177.

12. Ibid., 29; Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 304.

13. B. Janowski *(Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* [WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982], 192) and Rendtorff *(Leviticus,* 1:38) maintain that a burnt offering expiates only when it is combined with a purification offering.

14. That is, 1.175 liters according to S. Rattray, "The Biblical Measures of Capacity," in Milgrom, *Leviticus i—i6,* 895.

15. Levine distinguishes between sins of commission in 4:1—35 and omission in 5:1—13 *(Leviticus,* 19—20, 25—28).

16. Compare Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature,* 30; Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus,* 148.

17. On leniency to encourage confession, cf. A. Phillips, "The Undetectable Offender and the Priestly Legislators," *JTS* 36 (1985): 150.

18. On the graduated purification offering as the remedy for prolonged impurity (5:2—3), see Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 310—13.

19. Ibid., 302; J. Milgrom, "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *RB* 82 (1975): 194; idem, *Cult and Conscience,* 108.

20. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Spurgeon Sermon Collection* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CDROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 3:483.

21. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 301—2, 373—78; idem, "The Priestly Doctrine," 195—205; idem, *Cult and Conscience,* 119—27.

22. M. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 133.

23. See, e.g., Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus,* 259—60.

24. D. P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity," in G. Anderson and S. Olyan, eds., *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 180; cf. 171—79.

25. Gane, *Altar Call,* 88.

26. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord,* 135.

27. Ibid., 89.

28. See, e.g., *ANET,* 334 (Babylonian), 358—61 (Hittite).

Leviticus 5:14—6:7 (Heb. 5:26)

THE LORD SAID to Moses: 15“When a person commits a violation
and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD’S holy things, he
is to bring to the LORD as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without
defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary
shekel. It is a guilt offering. 16He must make restitution for what he
has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to
that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with
the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven.
17“If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’S
commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be
held responsible. 18He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram
from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way
the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has
committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. 19It is a guilt
offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the LORD.”
6:1The LORD said to Moses: 2“If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the
LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or
left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, 3or if he finds lost
property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any
such sin that people may do—4when he thus sins and becomes guilty,
he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was
entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, 5or whatever it was he
swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the
value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt
offering. 6And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the
LORD, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and
of the proper value. 7In this way the priest will make atonement for
him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he

did that made him guilty."

Original Meaning

MAKING REPARATION TO HEAL A WRONG. Under certain circumstances, an Israelite was to offer a kind of sacrifice labeled as an *ʻasam* ("reparation offering," 5:15, 18; 6:6). Reparation offerings were distinguished from purification offerings in that the former were required for offenses that created literal, quantifiable debt, which called for literal restitution if possible.[1]

Instructions for the ritual procedure appear later in 7:1—7. There the activity system parallels that of the purification offering, except that the blood is dashed on the (sides of the) outer altar, as in a burnt or well-being offering, rather than daubed on its horns (7:2).[2] So the expiatory significance of the blood is less in a reparation offering. This correlates with the fact that the suet/fat of the reparation offering, unlike that of the purification offering, is called an *ʻîsseh* ("gift," 7:5). This is because the offerer makes a literal payment for a specific amount *before* the reparation offering is performed. The purification offering, by contrast, constitutes total debt payment because it remedies sin to which no price tag can be attached.[3]

From our discussion of the same word in 5:6—7, there with the meaning "reparation," we already know that the customary rendering "guilt offering" is inadequate because it fails to capture the sense that an *ʻasam* redresses a liability that has been incurred. Furthermore, "guilt offering," like the translation "sin offering" for the purification offering, is too general: Both kinds of sacrifices remedy sin and guilt.

Whereas the graduated purification offering serves as an *ʻasam* ("reparation," 5:6—7) for cases of omission/neglect that require *action*, the reparation offering serves as an *ʻasam* ("reparation," 5:15; 6:6; NIV "penalty") for situations in which *property* belonging to God or to another human being has been misappropriated and therefore must be restored with a 20 percent (one fifth) penalty before the reparation offering is performed.

In a case that requires a reparation offering, misappropriation of property is done through "unfaithfulness," as described by the verb and noun from the root *mʻl* (5:15; 6:2), which refers to violation of a "legally definable relationship of trust."[4] In the Hebrew Bible, *mʻl* is an offense against the Lord (cf. Num. 5:6)

involving the covenant unfaithfulness of "sacrilege," that is, desecration of something sacred (e.g., Josh. 7; 2 Chron. 26:16—18; 28:19—25; 36:14). Sacrilege includes violation of an oath (e.g., Ezek. 17:18—20), which misuses God's holy name (Lev. 19:12; cf. 20:3; Ezek. 36:20—22).[5] Needless to say, sacrilege is a grave offense that carries severe penalties, as shown by the stoning of Achan for misappropriating property devoted to the Lord for destruction (Josh. 7) and the national exile that resulted from King Zedekiah's violation of an oath (Ezek. 17:18—21).[6]

Leviticus 5:14—6:7, specifying wrongs for which sinners must bring reparation offerings, divides itself into two sections. Each section is introduced as divine speech dealing with a kind of legal case "when" *(ki)* a person *(nepes)* commits *m'l* ("sacrilege," vv. 14—15; 6:1—2). The first kind of case concerns misuse of property belonging to God (5:14—19); the second has to do with misuse of human property through misuse of God's name in an oath (6:1—7).

Misusing the Lord's property. In 5:14—19, there are two subcases, the first regarding inadvertent misuse of which the sinner later becomes aware (vv. 14—16) and the second concerning inadvertent misuse of which he or she remains unaware (vv. 17—19). In the first subcase, an Israelite violates the boundary of holiness by inadvertently misappropriating something that belongs to the Lord for his or her own purpose. An example could be eating produce that has been dedicated as tithe or firstfruits. Such misuse must be committed inadvertently (v. 15) in order to be expiable by sacrifice. This implies that the same offense committed deliberately would have no sacrificial remedy, as in the New Testament account of Ananias and Sapphira, whom the Lord killed because they deliberately withheld something they had dedicated to him (Acts 5:1—11).

Before the reparation offering is performed, the sinner must repay the misappropriated amount plus a 20 percent (one-fifth) penalty to the Lord via the priest. Because of the seriousness of sacrilege, a reparation offering victim is always a ram, the most valuable animal ever required of a commoner (cf. 4:23—chieftain). However, unlike other sacrifices, the offerer has the option of paying the value of the ram to the sanctuary in silver by the kind of shekel weight that is the standard there (5:15; 6:6). Regarding convertibility of values into shekels, see also Leviticus 27.

The second subcase (5:17—19) is baffling if it is read in isolation, but it makes sense in context. The sin is inadvertent violation of any of the Lord's prohibitive commandments (doing a "Thou shalt not") without knowing it *and continuing to not know about it.* Whereas in chapter 4 a purification offering is required when the offender finds out what he or she has done wrong (4:13—14,

22—23, 27—28), in 5:17—19 a reparation offering is required even though the sin remains undisclosed to the sinner.

The stative verb *ʾšsm*, ("experience liability," v. 17) indicates that the unknowing individual has a kind of negative experience (suffering, pain, etc.) involving cognitive dissonance (pangs of conscience) associated with consequences of sin, suggesting that all is not well with the divine-human relationship. Beyond this vague prompting, the sinner is clueless. So how does the sinner know that the wrong is sacrilege, which requires the reparation offering? He doesn't. Neither does he know that it is not sacrilege, which is the worst-case scenario. So to cover any contingency, he offers the sacrifice that would cover the worst possibility: the reparation offering. However, without even knowing for sure that sacrilege is involved, it is impossible to make prior reparation, so this requirement is waived.

For the logic of paying the maximum in a case of uncertainty, I am reminded of the time I failed to pick up a toll ticket as I entered Highway 80/90 on the way to Chicago. When I reached the toll booth at the other end without a ticket to show how far I had come, I was required to pay the maximum toll because I could have come the maximum distance.

Misusing human property along with misusing the Lord's name. In 6:1—7, misappropriation of another human being's property is not said to be inadvertent. Indeed, it is inconceivable that the sins listed here could be anything but deliberate, since they involve being unfaithful to the Lord's commands by deceiving one's neighbor, lying to him, and swearing falsely. Such ethical wrongs against other persons would simply be handled by the civil courts (cf., e.g., Ex. 22:1—15) if it were not for the element of sacrilege (m'l) against the Lord (cf. Num. 5:6) through swearing falsely, thereby misusing God's holy name to defraud.

The key to understanding this passage is the fact that the clause "and he swears falsely" does not refer to a separate wrong.

> Rather, it applies to all of the preceding cases: not only has the offender wronged his fellow but he has denied it under oath. Assumed is that in the ancient Near East the plaintiff could always demand that the unapprehended but suspected criminal be put under oath (e.g., Gudea, Statue B 5.7—9; cf. Thureau-Dangin 1907).
>
> The "sacrilege against the Lord" (v 21) is, therefore, fully clarified: the Lord has been made an accomplice to the defrauding of man.[7]

A sinner who has wronged both a human being and God in this way must

remedy the offense by making reparation to the wronged human party (including a 20 percent penalty) and by offering a ram as a reparation offering to the Lord (6:5—6). As with the graduated purification offering, while sacrifice expiates for sin, it does not replace fulfillment of duty.

Bridging Contexts

SACRIFICE AFTER REPARATION. Alas, sometimes we break things that we cannot satisfactorily fix. During a University of California archaeological expedition to Iraq in which my wife and I participated in 1989, one of our team members discovered a Neo-Assyrian (c. 700 B.C.) foundation box figurine. Unfortunately, even though he was being careful, his small hand pick found the artifact first and it came out of the ground in several pieces. Although it was glued back together, it will never be the same as if it had not been broken.

Similarly, the requirement for an Israelite to offer a reparation offering even though he or she had already paid literal reparation to the injured party reflects the principle that the best human efforts to fix problems caused by moral faults are inadequate. In addition to any other liabilities we incur, whether to God or human beings, the historical fact of *relational* damage (sin) creates an additional kind of debt that must be paid by sacrifice even when we discharge our earthly responsibility to make wrongs right as best we can. We can never come up with enough to pay this debt. All we can give are tokens, which is what the ancient animal sacrifices were.

Having fallen, we are like Humpty Dumpty in that we cannot fix even our own brokenness, even with the aid of "all the king's horses and all the king's men." When we acknowledge that we have done damage and patch things up to the limited extent of our ability, we can only depend on the sacrifice of the King's Son to put everything back together again. He can complete our unfinished business because he is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 22:13).

Ultimate repairation. If the Israelite reparation offering reveals a role of Christ's sacrifice (cf. John 1:29), it encapsulates a mystery. When sinners commit wrong against God, it is God who pays the reparation by giving his Son (cf. John 3:16)![8] What kind of sense does that make? This grace is the profoundly wise "foolishness" of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:18, 21, 23, 25), so paradoxical that it is best expressed with oxymorons.

By giving his Son to the human race to become one of us in order to live and die among us, God has carried out the most effective means of healing our relationship with him. It is faintly reflected in a human strategy for achieving

peace between warring groups as told by Don Richardson, who pioneered work for Regions Beyond Missionary Union among the Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya in 1962. He reports his experience with a powerful "redemptive analogy":

> As told in the book *Peace Child*, the Sawi tribe, my wife and I were shocked to learn, honored treachery as a virtue. Accordingly, Judas Iscariot seemed to them to be the hero of the gospel. Within the Sawi culture, however, existed a means of making peace that required a father to entrust one of his own children to an enemy father who would raise the child. This child was called a "peace child." At a crucial juncture of tribal strife, we were able to present Christ as God's "Peace Child." The Sawi soon grasped the redemptive story of God as the greatest Father giving His Son to reconcile alienated people. Today, seventy percent of the Sawi profess faith in Jesus.[9]

The genius of the "peace child" strategy of reconciliation is that it overcomes the need for reparation on an item-by-item, tit-for-tat basis that can never be adequately satisfied, as gruesomely illustrated by ongoing blood feuds around the world. A "peace child" is the ultimate repairation because his flesh and blood binds two groups into one so that whatever problems they have are shared within a common destiny. The "peace child" covenant of grace absorbs hostilities and liabilities, paying a price and securing a peace that cannot be achieved in any other way.

Identity and reputation. "Identity theft," by which one individual uses another person's name or other identifying information to commit fraud, is big business in the modern world. It is estimated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service that since the mid-1990s, approximately 50,000 people a year have been victims of identity theft. The U.S. Secret Service investigated personal and institutional losses of $745 million in 1997 from this form of crime.

In addition to economic losses, which are bad enough, identity theft often harms the reputation of the victim, in whose name crimes are committed. In an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*, journalist Stacy Sullivan vividly recounts her personal misery since someone ordered telephone service in Los Angeles County in 1996 by using her Social Security number while she was living overseas. The mysterious thief vanished, leaving Sullivan with unpaid phone bills and a damaged rating with the country's three major credit bureaus. After four years and strenuous efforts to navigate through a bureaucratic maze in order to clear her name, her credit report still reflected the delinquent phone bills, and consequently she was unable even to rent an apartment![10]

A reputation, such as a credit rating, is not simply a matter of ego. Rather, it carries weighty practical consequences because a person’s reputation determines whether or not others want to have dealings with him or her.

Identity fraud was not invented in the twentieth century. An Israelite who defrauded another person by misusing the Lord’s name in a false oath (Lev. 6:2—3) thereby used that name/identity to steal. Such abuse of God’s name constituted an additional crime against God.

The fact that the Lord protected his name by one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:7) and by requiring a person who defrauded through a false oath to sacrifice a reparation offering shows his concern to maintain his reputation. In a broader sense, God’s people affect his reputation by whatever they do because they belong to him and are called by his name (Lev. 22:31—32; 2 Chron. 7:14; cf. Ezek. 36:16—32)."

Through our relationship with the Lord, we enjoy the benefits of his name and all that goes with it. So gratitude and common decency demand that we treat his holy reputation with the utmost respect and care in whatever we do because we carry it with us wherever we go. His reputation is essential to his mission of saving human beings. Only as people see that God’s character is love as he claims (Ex. 34:6—7; 1 John 4:8) will they want to interact with him and allow his love to rule in their lives.

Contemporary Significance

THREE ENDURING PRINCIPLES. Reparation offerings exemplify three principles that the modern people of God will do well to apply. (1) We are accountable to God for our treatment of things that are dedicated to him. If we misappropriate something holy, such as tithes or offerings, we should restore that which we have wrongfully taken. The Bible indicates that it is not enough to give back the principal. In addition to that, an ancient Israelite was obligated to pay a 20 percent penalty plus offer a ram (Lev. 5:15—16). This was only for *inadvertent* misuse of something holy. Needless to say, the cost would assist a person to pay closer attention in the future! Anyone inclined to the view that Christians are exempt from such carefulness when it comes to dedicated property should reread the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1—11).

(2) A second principle is that we cannot expect God's acceptance and forgiveness for wronging another person until we have done everything in our power to put things right (Lev. 6:5—6). Jesus affirmed this: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23—24).

"Forgiveness through Christ is not a 'cheap grace' way to declare bankruptcy on our obligations to other people."[12] Zacchaeus understood: "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8). D. L. Moody forthrightly applied the principle to modern life:

> We may sing our hymns and psalms, and offer prayers, but they will be an abomination to God, unless we are willing to be thoroughly straightforward in our daily life. Nothing will give Christianity such a hold upon the world as to have God's believing people begin to act in this way These were the laws that God laid down for His people, and I believe their principle is as binding today as it was then. If we have taken anything from any man, if we have in any way defrauded a man, let us not only confess it, but do all we can to make restitution. If we have misrepresented anyone—if we have started some slander, or some false report about him—let us do all in our power to undo the wrong.[13]

(3) A third principle is that we can give up our guilt feelings to God. Unidentified Guilt Hangups (UGH) drive people to distraction, despair, drinking, drugs, and divorce. Unresolved guilt is one among many causes of "anxiety disorder," which is estimated to afflict nineteen million Americans as "the most common mental illness in the U.S."[14] Often "anxiety is greatest when we don't know why we are anxious."[15] UGHs erode assurance and give birth to depression. But thousands of years ago Leviticus 5:17—19 supplied God's people with a solution: They could be freed from worry by giving the burden of *suspected* guilt over to God at his sanctuary through a reparation offering.

A person who is at a loss to know what to confess is not obliged to figure it all out as Martin Luther vainly tried to do before he grasped grace by faith. There is no need for Freudian psychoanalysis or transcendental meditation to bring subconscious evils to light. Working through the conscience, God's Holy Spirit will reveal all that is necessary (cf. John 16:8). Anything left unknown can be safely turned over to the transcendental medication of Christ's sacrifice. Even when we don't know how to confess, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26).

Accountability to God is crucial to society. The reparation offering underlines the fact that misappropriating something that belongs to someone else, which is stealing (cf. Ex. 20:15), is a serious matter for which the offender is accountable to God. Today misappropriation is still a serious crime. For example, a real estate agent who makes personal use of entrusted funds constitutes a felony.

People who commit crimes think they can get away with it. Often they can, at least temporarily. Human inability to detect or prove covert wrongdoing is a major problem. In ancient Babylonia, one solution was to have a suspected offender thrown into the Euphrates River, which was regarded as divine. If he survived, he was innocent, but if he drowned, he was guilty.[16] Presumably this system worked tolerably well until people learned to swim.

A more common ancient way to get at the truth when insufficient details were known was to require suspects/defendants to take oaths, which could include conditional curses, before God/gods to affirm the veracity of what they were saying. Belief in divine power and all-seeing knowledge would provide incentive to disclose the truth in order to avoid lying to and thereby offending a deity (cf. Lev. 19:12).[17]

Oaths are used similarly in legal situations today for the same reason— lack

of sufficient evidence—and they are subject to the same limitation: The value of such an oath in human law enforcement depends largely on whether or not a person believes in and respects deity. Without basic respect for higher power, respect for obligations toward other human beings is compromised.

The fact that a person who does not believe in divinity lacks adequate external accountability leads Dennis Prager, a Jewish radio talk-show host in Los Angeles, to say that he does not trust such a person. Prager recognizes that safety in human relations ultimately depends on healthy (not fanatical) respect for God. We would be a lot worse off without the amount of such respect that exists in the world today, insufficient as it is. "The fear of the LORD" is not only "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10); it is also the basis of stability in society because a healthy respect for God is a formidable deterrent against many a dastardly deed.

1. Compare Rashi on Lev. 5:4; M. Rooker, *Leviticus* (NAC 3A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 122.

2. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus,* 190—91.

3. Cf. A. Médebielle, "Le symbolism du sacrifice expiatoire en Israël," *Bib* 2 (1921): 300—301.

4. R. Knierim, **"1[Q** *m'l* to be unfaithful," *TLOT,* 2:681.

5. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 345—56.

6. See ibid., 349. Compare the seriousness of misappropriating divine property in the Hittite "Instructions for Temple Officials" *(ANET,* 208).

7. Ibid., 337.

8. Cf. Abraham's covenant ritual in Gen. 15, in which God represented himself as passing between the pieces of dismembered animals, thereby voluntarily binding himself by a conditional curse: "Let me be broken like these animals if this covenant is violated."

9. D. Richardson, "Redemptive Analogy," in R. D. Winter and S. C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* 3d ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 398.

10. Thomas A. Hemphill, "Identity Theft: A Cost of Business?" *Business and Society Review* 106 (2001): 52—53.

11. D. Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 49.

12. Gane, *Altar Call,* 103.

13. D. L. Moody, *Prevailing Prayer: What Hinders It?* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 27, 29.

14. C. Gorman, “The Science of Anxiety,” *Time* (June 10, 2002), 48.

15. F. Staal, *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 135.

16. Laws of Hammurabi, law 2. For translations, see *ANET,* 166; M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 81.

17. See, e.g., Patrick, *Old Testament Law,* 48, 81, 164.

Leviticus 6:8 (Heb. 6:1)-7:10

THE LORD SAID to Moses: 9“Give Aaron and his sons this
command: ‘These are the regulations for the burnt offering: The burnt
offering is to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till
morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar. 10The priest
shall then put on his linen clothes, with linen undergarments next to his
body, and shall remove the ashes of the burnt offering that the fire has
consumed on the altar and place them beside the altar. 11Then he is to
take off these clothes and put on others, and carry the ashes outside the
camp to a place that is ceremonially clean. 12The fire on the altar must
be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add
firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of
the fellowship offerings on it. 13The fire must be kept burning on the
altar continuously; it must not go out.

14‘These are the regulations for the grain offering: Aaron’s sons are
to bring it before the LORD, in front of the altar. 15The priest is to take a
handful of fine flour and oil, together with all the incense on the grain
offering, and burn the memorial portion on the altar as an aroma
pleasing to the LORD. 16Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it, but it
is to be eaten without yeast in a holy place; they are to eat it in the
courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. 17It must not be baked with yeast; i
have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire. Like
the sin offering and the guilt offering, it is most holy. 18Any male
descendant of Aaron may eat it. It is his regular share of the offerings
made to the LORD by fire for the generations to come. Whatever
touches them will become holy.'"

19The LORD also said to Moses, 20“This is the offering Aaron and his
sons are to bring to the LORD on the day he is anointed: a tenth of an
ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning

and half in the evening. [21]Prepare it with oil on a griddle; bring it well-mixed and present the grain offering broken in pieces as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [22]The son who is to succeed him as anointed priest shall prepare it. It is the LORD'S regular share and is to be burned completely. [23]Every grain offering of a priest shall be burned completely; it must not be eaten."

[24]The LORD said to Moses, [25]"Say to Aaron and his sons: 'These are the regulations for the sin offering: The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the LORD in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. [26]The priest who offers it shall eat it; it is to be eaten in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. "Whatever touches any of the flesh will become holy, and if any of the blood is spattered on a garment, you must wash it in a holy place. [28]The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken; but if it is cooked in a bronze pot, the pot is to be scoured and rinsed with water. [29]Any male in a priest's family may eat it; it is most holy. [30]But any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned.

7:1"'These are the regulations for the guilt offering, which is most holy: [2]The guilt offering is to be slaughtered in the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and its blood is to be sprinkled against the altar on all sides. [3]All its fat shall be offered: the fat tail and the fat that covers the inner parts, [4]both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which is to be removed with the kidneys. [5]The priest shall burn them on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is a guilt offering. [6]Any male in a priest's family may eat it, but it must be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy.

[7]"'The same law applies to both the sin offering and the guilt offering: They belong to the priest who makes atonement with them. [8]The priest who offers a burnt offering for anyone may keep its hide for himself. [9]Every grain offering baked in an oven or cooked in a pan or on a griddle belongs to the priest who offers it, [10]and every grain offering, whether mixed with oil or dry, belongs equally to all the sons of Aaron.

Original Meaning

EARLIER DIVINE SPEECHES in Leviticus concerning voluntary and mandatory sacrifices were directed to the Israelite people as a whole (1:2—voluntary; 4:2—mandatory). Now two speeches by the Lord (6:8—23 and 6:24—7:21) are addressed to "Aaron and his sons" (6:9, 25), that is, the priests. Here there are supplementary instructions regarding the same kinds of sacrifices as in 1:1—6:7 and in the same order (burnt, grain, purification, reparation), except that the well-being offering is now placed last (7:11—21). The well-being offering comes at the end because the main organizing principle is apportionment of sacrifices, which distinguishes between most holy offerings accessible only to priests (6:8—7:10), and holy offerings (i.e., well-being offerings), of which laypersons can also receive physical benefit (7:11—21).

Here we look at supplementary instructions for the most holy burnt offerings (6:8—13), grain offerings (6:14—23), purification offerings (6:24—30), reparation offerings (7:1—7), and the summary that dovetails with the latter (7:7—10). In the next chapter we will explore well-being offerings and related matters, plus the conclusion to the sacrificial prescriptions (7:11—38).

Burnt offerings. No portions of burnt offerings are eaten by human beings. So 6:8—12 concerns maintenance of the altar fire (cf. 1:7). A threefold repetition emphasizes that keeping the fire going is of paramount importance (6:9, 12, 13). Leviticus 9:24 will later tell us why: The Lord himself lit it! So when the altar fire consumes a sacrifice, it is the Lord consuming it by fire.

The burnt offering is connected to the altar fire in a special way. (1) A burnt offering is wholly consumed by the fire. (2) It is literally the foundation sacrifice, on which all other sacrifices are physically placed (3:5; 6:12). (3) It is the continual burning of the regular morning and evening burnt offering (Num. 28:1—8) that helps to keep the altar fire burning around the clock, including through the night (Lev. 6:9). So it is logical that the outer altar is termed the "altar of burnt offering" (4:7, 10, 18, etc.).

The directions in 6:10—11 for removing and disposing of ashes from the outer altar to keep the fire going are the only biblical information we have about *physically* cleaning the sanctuary. In this procedure, we see clear demarcations between boundaries of categories relevant to the sanctuary: *holy, profane (non-*

holy), and pure. The ashes must be transferred from the holy domain to the profane realm outside. Because they come from holy sacrifices, the part of the profane realm to which they go must be pure rather than *impure.* Holiness is compatible with purity but not with impurity (cf. 7:20—21).[1]

Grain offerings. Verses 14—23 are subdivided into two parts. The first specifies the way priests must eat their portions of grain offerings brought by laypersons (vv. 14—18). The second, introduced with a new divine speech, gives directions for grain offerings brought by priests (vv. 19—23). Here is recorded a kind of cooked grain offering not included in chapter 2 because it is mandatory. It is offered by Aaron and the succession of those among his descendants who fill the high priestly office, starting at the time when he is anointed and continuing regularly *(tamid)* after that (vv. 20, 22). Paralleling the daily burnt offering complex (Num. 28:1—8), the high priest offers half of his grain offering in the morning and the other half in the evening (Lev. 6:20).

Because the high priest sacrifices his special grain offering on his own behalf, it must be wholly burned up (v. 22), with no portion serving as an agent's commission. Verse 23 places this instruction within a general rule that also applies to grain offerings of ordinary priests: "Every grain offering of a priest shall be burned completely; it must not be eaten."

Purification offerings. Chapter 4 did not say what happens to the remaining meat of an "outer altar" purification offering, which is sacrificed on behalf of a chieftain or commoner (4:22—35). Leviticus 6:24—30 now fills in the blank: It belongs to the officiating priest. Because the meat is "most holy" (6:29), it carries restrictions: The priest must eat it in the courtyard of the tabernacle, and it can only be shared with males among priestly family members.

Verse 30 reminds us of a limitation that we already know from 4:11—12, 21 regarding the "outer sanctum" sacrifices of the high priest and the entire community: "No purification offering, however, may be eaten from which any blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to effect purgation in the shrine; it shall be consumed in fire."[2] This also applies to the special purification offerings that purge the entire sanctuary with blood on the Day of Atonement (16:27). The rule does not mean that every purification offering from which blood is *not* brought into the sacred Tent may be eaten. In the very first sacrifice officiated by the priests, which was a purification offering on behalf of themselves, Aaron daubed the blood on the horns of the *outer* altar, but the remainder of the victim was *incinerated* outside the camp rather than eaten (9:8—11), because the officiating priests were also the offerers and could not receive an "agent's commission" from their own sacrifice (cf. 6:23).

Reparation Offerings and Priestly Portions (7:1—10)

REPARATION OFFERINGS AND PRIESTLY PORTIONS. We have already discussed 7:1—7, which provides the procedural outline for the reparation offering that is lacking in 5:14—6:7 (see comments). Although this outline of activities necessarily includes more detail than the supplementary instructions regarding grain and purification offerings, it similarly leads into the matter of priestly portions: As with the purification offering, the meat of a most sacred reparation offering must be eaten by a male of the priests in the sacred precincts (7:6—7). Since the text has just referred to priestly ownership of purification and reparation offerings (v.7), the following verses (vv. 8—10) take the opportunity to continue conveniently summarizing priestly perquisites for most holy sacrifices.

In the ancient Near East, consumption of sacrificial portions by priests was not confined to Israel. For example, on the fourth day of the Hittite Ninth Year Festival of Telipinu, the following sacrifice takes place:

> 22'-24' [The]n the crown prince o[ffers] 1 bovine and 2 sheep to Telipinu [and] they cut [them open]. Then [th]ey [lay asid]e livers and he[arts] and roast them with a broiler, and the crown pr[ince …
>
> 25'-26' [and they set] the whole livers and hearts before the god; he libates [bee]r and wine three times. (Nr. 7 Obv. I 22'-26').

Later the livers and hearts are eaten by priests:

> 7' Four priests of Kasha … a [turn] (their) eyes [toward the river] 8'-9' and sit down and take the liver[s and hearts] and eat (them) … (Nr. 8 Obv. II 7'-9').[3]

Bridging Contexts

TWO SIDES OF divine fire. The Lord lit the fire on the altar in the courtyard of the desert sanctuary only once, when fire came out from before him and consumed the inauguration sacrifices (9:24). This holy fire on the altar had to be kept going (6:8—13) because it was the dynamic center of the sacrificial system. Offerings consumed by the fire were turned into smoke as "food" for the Lord (e.g., 1:9; Num. 28:2). If the divine fire went out, the power of this symbolism would be drastically diminished.

We can talk about the evocative power of fire from the sun that sustains all life on our planet or fire as a natural "element," control of which sets human beings apart from all other creatures. Because of the essential, mysterious qualities of fire, it plays an important role in rituals of many religions,[4] and in the ancient Near East non-Israelites (and apostate Israelites; Ezek. 8:16) worshiped Shamash, the sun-god. But here our focus is on divine fire from the God of Israel.

When Moses experienced his first close encounter with Israel's deity, the Lord appeared to him in a miraculous flame of fire at an incandescent bush (Ex. 3:2). When the Israelites set forth from Egypt, God's fiery Presence provided guidance, direction, and protection (13:21; 14:24). While his Presence was beneficial to his people, it was simultaneously frightening and dangerous to his enemies. These contrasting qualities parallel those of mundane fire: It is friendly when it cooks our food and heats our houses, but when it gets out of control or is used as a weapon, it can be terrifyingly destructive.

Divine fire associated with God's Presence (cf. Ezek. 1:4, 13, 27; Dan. 7:9—10) is a power beyond human control, which can be a boon or a bane, depending on whether people are with him or against him. For those who are out of harmony with him, it can be an instrument of retributive justice (Gen. 19:24—25, 28; Lev. 10:1—2; Num. 16:35). Even those in accord with him must treat his blazing Presence with the utmost caution and respect for boundaries, as when the Israelites prepared to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:12—13, 18, 23—24).

When the divine Presence took up his abode at the tabernacle, there were strict boundaries so that only authorized personnel were permitted to enter the sacred Tent. Nevertheless, laypeople had access to the divine fire in the sense that they

could bring their offerings into the court and have the priests send them to God in the form of smoke. When the sanctuary and its altar became an ongoing functional equivalent of Mount Sinai, the divine fire came from the mountain to the multitude.

The patriarchs had lit the fires for their own sacrifices, but the Israelite sacrificial system was more potent. As a foretaste of full restoration, when the dwelling of God will be with human beings in the ultimate sense (Rev. 21:3), divinity had come to abide with humanity. Transcendence had become immanent. By making his divine fire accessible to material offerings brought by human beings, God had partly rolled back the separation caused by the curse of sin.

In the New Testament, our God is still "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29; cf. Deut. 4:24). At the cross the positive and negative aspects of divine fire were metaphorically in effect. On the positive side, Christ's human life was consumed for our benefit as a gift. On the negative side, he was consumed by divine retributive justice against our sin (cf. Isa. 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore it is unnecessary to pit the "gift" and "penal substitution" theories of atonement against each other. The event was a complex transaction that embodied more than one aspect. His gift was substitutionary. His substitution was a gift.

In the ancient Israelite sacrificial system, the retributive element of substitution was muted because the Aaronic priests did not die in place of others as Christ did (Heb. 7:27; 9:12—14, 25—26). Nevertheless, the retributive side of divine fire was not far in the background even from the beginning, when fire from the Lord accepted sacrifices on the altar but then destroyed Nadab and Abihu (Lev 9:24; 10:2), all within the same inauguration occasion.

The most dramatic Old Testament connection between Christ and sacrificial fire is found away from the sanctuary. In Judges 13, Manoah offered a burnt offering in the presence of the theophanic "angel of the LORD," whose name is "wonderful" (Judg. 13:18; cf. v. 19; Isa. 9:6) and who is clearly identified elsewhere as the Yahweh himself (Judg. 6:16, 22—23).

> By ascending with the fire of Manoah's burnt offering, the "angel of the LORD" identified Himself with a sacrifice more clearly than at any other time. He went up to heaven with the smoke, which was a "pleasing odor" to the Lord (see Lev. 1:9), thereby prefiguring His offering of Himself more than 1,000 years later.[5]

Homage by the highest religious leader. Since the high priest's grain offering was regular food, like the regular burnt offering with its accompanying

grain offering (cf. Num. 28:1—8), the high priest offered it twice every day—morning and evening (Lev. 6:20). Such a pattern of regular maintenance offerings to deities, based on the fact that human beings ate two meals per day, was also common outside Israel among peoples such as the Babylonians and Hittites.[6]

While the high priest's grain constituted an offering/sacrifice *(qorban;* 6:20), it was not a gift *('isseh).* Rather, it was "the LORD'S eternal due" (6:22, author's transl.). In other comparable attestations of *hoq* ("statute/due"), the word refers to perquisites that the Lord assigned to the priests on a permanent basis as their dues from offerings brought by the Israelites (Ex. 29:28; Lev. 6:11; 7:34; 10:13, 15; 24:9; Num. 18:8, 11,19). By contrast, the high priest's regular offering went the other direction: from the priest to the Lord, who utilized all of it in the form of smoke. In this way the high priest contributed to the regular *(tamid)* complex of rituals that were required for maintaining God's holy Presence among the Israelites.[7] Aside from the regular burnt offering (see above), these rituals included offering incense (Ex. 30:7—8), tending the lamps (27:21; 30:8; Lev. 24:3—4), and changing the "bread of the Presence" every week on the Sabbath (Lev. 24:8).

Among the regular rituals, the high priest's grain offering was a uniquely personal transaction between himself and God. Even though he occupied the highest official religious position in Israel, he rendered homage to the Lord as his superior every day. Thus his ministry was kept in true perspective: He was the house servant of the Most High.

The paradox of purification offering blood. Profound implications for salvation arise from 6:27—28, where there are supplementary instructions regarding unique dynamic properties of the "outer altar" purification offering. In verse 27, anything that touches its flesh contracts holiness from it, which means that it henceforth belongs to the sanctuary. A garment is an exception, however:

> The garment does not become holy by coming into contact with the blood of the purification offering. Instead of being confiscated by the sanctuary, as would any object that is rendered holy, it is restored to its former status by having its so-called holiness effaced through washing. Thus the garment is actually treated as if it were impure, for it is impure clothing that always requires laundering (e.g., 1 1:25, 28, 40; 15:5—8, 10—11). This ambivalence of the purification offering, which will be present in even sharper form in the following verse, should occasion no surprise.[8]

Accidental spattering on a priest's or layperson's garment could happen when

blood spurted from the victim at the moment of slaughter or splashed from the collection vessel as the priest carried it to the altar.[9] So the blood contacts the garment, thereby contaminating it, *before* the blood is applied to the altar.[10] Thus, as N. Zohar has recognized, *the pollution must come from the offerer rather than from the altar.*[11] This agrees with our earlier conclusion (see Lev. 4) that the goal of an "outer altar" or "outer sanctum" purification offering is to expiate *(kipper)* for the offerer from (min) his or her evil, that is, remove the evil from that person (e.g., 4:26; 12:7).

Also recognizing that sacrificial expiation purified persons, P. Jenson has suggested: "While blood is not applied to the person requiring purification, there may have been practical reasons for this."[12] In fact, there is an important conceptual reason. Since the contamination borne by an "outer altar" or "outer sanctum" purification offering comes from the offerer (see above), it is obvious why the blood of such a sacrifice would not be physically applied to the offerer: It is *already* carrying impurity from that person, who has an ownership connection with the animal from which the blood is taken, and who has already physically contacted this victim. Why give the evil back to the one who is trying to get rid of it?

The New Testament applies to Christ's sacrifice the idea that blood cleanses persons: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies *us* from all sin" (1 John 1:7; emphasis supplied). Here sin is removed from the sinners themselves, not from an earthly or heavenly sanctuary.

Just as purification offering blood imparts impurity to a garment, the edible meat for the priest transmits pollution to the vessel in which it is cooked (Lev. 6:28; cf. 11:31—33) in spite of the fact that this flesh never contacts the altar. So paradoxically, a purification offering carries a kind of impurity even though it is "most holy" (6:25).[13]

In order to accomplish purification, holiness and impurity come together in purification offerings even though the two categories are enemies and must be strictly segregated from each other elsewhere in the ritual system (e.g., 7:20—21; 15:31).[14] This kind of sacrifice carries human pollution in a sense that does not neutralize its holiness, just as the waste-bearing function of blood in a living organism does not neutralize the life-giving role of the same blood as it supplies the body with oxygen and nutrients.[15] Blood that carries away waste products is not bad, defective blood; it is simply doing its job. Similarly, the process of removing evil from Israelites did not negate the sacred function of the sanctuary, its rituals, and its priesthood.[16]

Although Christ was born holy (Luke 1:35), during his ministry he came in close contact with diseased and sinful people in order to heal and forgive them. This did not sully him or diminish his holiness. Similarly, the fact that he has borne our sins and his blood has carried them away (1 John 1:7) does not mean that he and his blood are defective in any way. This paradoxical contact between his holiness and our impurity is essential to his mediatorial role as Victim-Priest. Only through his holy touch can we be healed, forgiven, cleansed, and sanctified.

The immunity of the Israelite sanctuary to human sin and physical ritual impurity had its limits: All evils of the Israelites that had affected it throughout the year were to be purged out on the Day of Atonement (16:16, 18—19, 33—34).[17] How did sins and impurities expiated by purification offerings throughout the year get into the sanctuary so that it had to be cleansed? In light of what we now know from 6:27—28 regarding unique transfer properties of purification offerings, the answer is simple: By carrying evils from those who offered them, these sacrifices polluted what they touched even accidentally. Since the ritual required that the blood and suet contact part of the sanctuary, the sanctuary received contamination that had to be removed on the Day of Atonement.

Why would the Lord require temporary contamination of his sanctuary by purification offerings throughout the year? “YHWH prefers that evils be acknowledged, brought meekly to the sanctuary, and turned over to him rather than left to run wild and rampage into the sphere of holiness.”[18] His goal was to purify faulty people, not to pollute his sanctuary, but the effect on the sanctuary was an inevitable side-effect. In our study of Leviticus 16, we will search for the meaning of the sanctuary’s defilement.

Contemporary Significance

KEEPERS OF THE FLAME. At the center of ancient Israelite worship was holy fire. At its core, the religion of God's people was not a social club, political bloc, or system of dogma. It was an ongoing encounter with the divine. For this experience to continue, the "pilot light" had to remain lit. Sparks of any other kindling were ruled out. God's response to Nadab and Abihu's unauthorized fire (Lev. 10:1—2) showed for all time what he thought of that approach, which puts humankind in place of God at the center of worship.

> Whatever is not divinely appointed, is offering up strange fire. There is in many a strange itch after superstition: they love a gaudy religion, and are more for the pomp of worship than the purity; which cannot be pleasing to God. As if God were not wise enough to appoint the manner how he will be served, man will be so bold as to prescribe for him. To thrust human inventions into sacred things, is doing our will, not God's; and he will say, *quis quaesivit haec?* 'Who has required this at your hand?'[19]

As in Old Testament times, God's ministers of the twenty-first century A.D. are to be keepers of the flame and teachers of instruction (Torah) from the Lord, not lighters of the fire and inventors of their own doctrines. Is this a less sacred trust now that Christ has come and realities have taken the place of "shadows" (Col. 2:17)? Is it less important that God be at the center of our worship now that the gospel has come "with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5)? As in days of old, we can expect that where God is present, we will find divine fire that illuminates the dark pathways of our lives, protects loyal ones from evil, and purifies us from sin.

Rather than presuming to preach and teach our own thoughts in order to polish our popular image, we are obliged to allow God's Word, illuminated by his Spirit, to kindle inspiration. Like the Olympic torch, God's gospel fire is to be relayed around the world in all kinds of ways, but it must come from the source —the sacred, eternal flame.

The human touch of holiness. Through purification offerings and through Christ's ministry, God has allowed the unthinkable—holiness contacted by

defilement—to help those who are otherwise without help. Likewise, Christ said to his Father regarding his disciples: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Christians are to be “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” not to remain aloof in isolated piety, but in order “that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). Christ has commissioned his holy people to go out into the dark, polluted environment from which they came in order to praise God, not merely with words, but by serving as he did through contact with everyone in need, which is everyone (John 17:18; cf. Matt. 10; 28:19—20; Acts 1:8). As Francis of Assisi put it, “Preach the gospel. Use words if you have to."

If we take Matthew 25 seriously, caring for those in need is not optional for Christians. Christ takes personally our willingness to contact and help people in unfortunate circumstances, saying, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). Mother Teresa understood:

> Jesus comes to meet us. To welcome him, let us go to meet him. He comes to us in the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the prostitute, the street beggars. He may come to you or me in a father who is alone, in a mother, in a brother, or in a sister. If we reject them, if we do not go out to meet them, we reject Jesus himself.[20]

A young boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his small suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer before starting on his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met a lonely, elderly gentleman, who was sitting in a park just staring at some pigeons. The lad sat down next to him and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a swig of root beer when he noticed that the old man looked hungry. So he offered him a Twinkie. The man gratefully accepted it and smiled at the small boy.

The smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered him a root beer. Again the elderly man smiled. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and got up to leave. But after going a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old man, and gave him a hug. That brought the biggest smile of all.

When the boy walked in the door of his house a few minutes later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked, “What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, “I had lunch with God.” Before his mother could respond, he added, “You know what? He’s got the most beautiful smile I’ve ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old man also went home full of joy. Amazed by the look of peace on his face, his son asked, “Dad, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, “I ate Twinkies in the park with God,” and added, “You know, he’s much younger than I expected."

1. On relationships between the four categories, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 616—17.

2. Transl. ibid., 380.

3. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, ch. 6.

4. See, e.g., R. Payne, “Feeding the Gods: The Shingon Fire Ritual” (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1985).

5. Gane, *God’s Faulty Heroes*, 101.

6. See, e.g., R. Gane, “Schedules for Deities: Macrostructure of Israelite, Babylonian, and Hittite Sancta Purification Days,” *AUSS* 36 (1998): 231—44.

7. On this complex of rituals, see M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 205—10, 216—19.

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie*, 403; idem, “The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX),” *VT* 31 (1981): 64; cf. D. P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 129—32. Milgrom points out that in the *Temple Scroll* (26:10), on the Day of Atonement the high priest must wash the blood of the people’s inner sanctum purification offering goat from his hands and feet, reinforcing the idea that purification offerings carry defilement *(Leviticus i-ie*, 1064).

9. Spattering (Qal of *nzh)* involves uncontrolled movement through the air (cf. 2 Kings 9:33; Isa. 63:3). The Hiphil of *nzh* indicates human control of sprinkling blood in Lev. 4:6, 17. A postbiblical limitation appears in *m.* Zebah.11:3: Only blood that has been collected in a vessel and is fit for sprinkling must be washed from a garment. For a detailed discussion of sacrificial blood, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, ch. 8.

10. Against Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie*, 403, because blood is a sticky substance that would not ricochet through the air from the altar to a garment.

11. N. Zohar, “Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of חטאת in the Pentateuch,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 612.

12. Jenson, *Graded Holiness,* 157.

13. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie,* 403—4. Compare the role of the uniquely holy Day of Atonement purification offerings, which carry defilement from the sanctuary (see comments on Lev. 16).

14. Ibid., 406; cf. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” 64; Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity,* 129—34; against N. Snaith, “The Sin-Offering and the Guilt-Offering,” *VT* 15 (1965): 76, and A. Geller, “Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch,” *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 106.

15. For the idea that blood could be associated with more than one concept (life/strength and bloodshed/death) in the ancient Near East, including Israel, see D. J. McCarthy, “Further Notes on the Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 205.

16. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus,* 133—34, 217—18; Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature,* 119; cf. J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony,* transl. C. W. Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1996), 1:318.

17. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 258—61; cf. idem, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 396—99.

18. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 8.

19. Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 164.

20. José Luis González-Balado, compiler, *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (New York: Gramercy, 1996), 29.

Leviticus 7:11—38

THESE ARE THE regulations for the fellowship offering a person
may present to the LORD: 12"'If he offers it as an expression of
thankfulness, then along with this thank offering he is to offer cakes of
bread made without yeast and mixed with oil, wafers made without
yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well-kneaded and
mixed with oil. 13Along with his fellowship offering of thanksgiving
he is to present an offering with cakes of bread made with yeast. 14He
is to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the LORD;
it belongs to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the fellowship
offerings. 15The meat of his fellowship offering of thanksgiving must
be eaten on the day it is offered; he must leave none of it till morning.

16"'If, however, his offering is the result of a vow or is a freewill
offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day he offers it, but
anything left over may be eaten on the next day. 17Any meat of the
sacrifice left over till the third day must be burned up. 18If any meat of
the fellowship offering is eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted.
It will not be credited to the one who offered it, for it is impure; the
person who eats any of it will be held responsible.

19"'Meat that touches anything ceremonially unclean must not be
eaten; it must be burned up. As for other meat, anyone ceremonially
clean may eat it. 20But if anyone who is unclean eats any meat of the
fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off
from his people. 21If anyone touches something unclean—whether
human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean, detestable
thing—and then eats any of the meat of the fellowship offering
belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people.'"

22The LORD said to Moses, 23"Say to the Israelites: 'Do not eat any

of the fat of cattle, sheep or goats. [24]The fat of an animal found dead or torn by wild animals may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. [25]Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD must be cut off from his people. [26]And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. [27]If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people.'" [28]The LORD said to Moses, [29]"Say to the Israelites: 'Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the LORD is to bring part of it as his sacrifice to the LORD. [30]With his own hands he is to bring the offering made to the LORD by fire; he is to bring the fat, together with the breast, and wave the breast before the LORD as a wave offering. [31]The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast belongs to Aaron and his sons. [32]You are to give the right thigh of your fellowship offerings to the priest as a contribution. [33]The son of Aaron who offers the blood and the fat of the fellowship offering shall have the right thigh as his share. [34]From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is presented and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their regular share from the Israelites.'"

[35]This is the portion of the offerings made to the LORD by fire that were allotted to Aaron and his sons on the day they were presented to serve the LORD as priests. [36]On the day they were anointed, the LORD commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their regular share for the generations to come.

[37]These, then, are the regulations for the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering and the fellowship offering, [38]which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the Desert of Sinai.

Original Meaning

FOLLOWING SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONS regarding most holy sacrifices, which may only be eaten by priests, 7:11—36 regulates use of other meat by laypersons as well as priests. This section divides itself into several subsections:

> Lay consumption of well-being offerings (vv. 11—21)
> General prohibition against consuming fat or blood (vv. 22—27)
> Priestly portions (vv. 28—36)

We will consider each of these subsections in order.

Lay consumption of well-being offerings. Although 7:11—21 falls within the major block of supplementary instructions addressed to the priests, we can assume that the priests were responsible for sharing such knowledge with the people. In later books, priests were to be custodians and teachers of *torah*, divine instruction (2 Chron. 15:3; cf. Ezek. 7:26; 22:26; Hos. 4:6; Hag. 2:11; Mal. 2:7).

The motivation of thanksgiving affects a well-being offering in a way that is not specified in chapter 3. Along with a "sacrifice of thanksgiving" *(zebah todah,* NASB), a person must offer special grain items (7:12—13), aside from the usual grain and wine accompaniments specified in Numbers 15:1—12. After giving one of each kind of cake or wafer as a "contribution *[terumah*, that which is removed, i.e., set apart] to the LORD" (Lev. 7:14), to be utilized by the officiating priest rather than burned on the altar, the offerer can eat the rest. The text does not specify the total number of cakes or wafers belonging to each kind, which allows for the offerer to share his or her thanksgiving feast with any number of other people.

While thank offerings must be eaten on the day they are offered, the rule for votive and freewill offerings is more flexible in that they can be eaten the next day as well (7:15—16). However, anything left over to the third day must be incinerated (v. 17). The offerer is responsible for making sure that neither he nor she nor anyone else (e.g., a guest) desecrates the meat, which is still holy even though it has reached the limit of its ritual function (cf. 4:7, 11—12, 18, 20; 16:27), by transgressing the time limit through eating it on the third day. Such a violation retroactively invalidates the benefit of the entire sacrifice for the offerer

and brings the person who eats under divine condemnation because it is "impure" meat *(piggul;* v. 18).[1]

Verses 19—21 state additional restrictions on consumption of well-being offering meat for the sake of preserving its sanctity: Meat defiled by contact with impurity is forbidden, and ritually impure persons are not permitted to eat sacrificial flesh. Violation of the latter prohibition is a serious one, judging from repetition of the penalty in verses 20—21 and its severity: "cut off from his people." These are the first instances of the divine penalty of "cutting off" (root krt) in Leviticus. It is a fate that goes beyond death, which explains why a person who is stoned for Molech worship can be "cut off" by God as well (e.g., 20:2—3).[2] Impurity must not defile holiness!

General prohibition against consuming fat or blood. With the earlier directions for well-being offerings came the general rule: "All fat is the LORD'S … you must not eat any fat or any blood" (3:16b-17; NRSV). Leviticus 7:22—27 reiterates and expands this. The prohibition of consuming suet/fat applies to sacrificeable species even if such an animal dies from something other than slaughter by a human being (7:23—25). Because all suet of such animals belongs to God,[3] for a human being to consume it constitutes sacrilege, which is punishable by being cut off (7:25).

The prohibition of eating blood, that is, meat from which the blood is not drained out at the time of slaughter, is not restricted to sacrificeable species. This command has its roots much earlier than the Israelite sacrificial system in the instructions that God gave to Noah when he permitted him and his family to eat meat, but not blood, after the Flood (Gen. 9:3—4). The blood prohibition applies to any bird or land animal (Lev. 7:26—27), but not fish. Notice that neither Leviticus 3 nor 7 says that "all blood is the LORD'S." While sacrificial suet is consumed by the Lord's fire, he does not utilize the blood in this way.[4]

Priestly portions. The priestly portions of a well-being offering consists of (1) the breast, which must be dedicated by means of a ritual gesture— "raised [Hiphil of *nwp,* not 'waved'] as an elevation offering *[tenupah,* from root *nwp]* before the LORD" (v. 30, NRSV; cf. v. 34)—and (2) the right thigh, which is dedicated without a ritual gesture simply by setting it apart as a "contribution" *(terumah,* vv. 32, 34; cf. v. 14).[5]

Verses 37—38 conclude the first major portion of the book of Leviticus: chapters 1—7, which provide prescriptive rules governing performance of sacrifices. This summary lists types of sacrifices in the order of their treatment in 6:8—7:36, but inserts "the ordination offering" *(millu'im)* before the well-being offering (7:37). The ordination offering is part of the complex of rituals through

which the priests are consecrated for their function as the Lord’s special agents (Ex. 29; Lev. 8).

Bridging Contexts

GENEROUS THANKSGIVING. A well-being offering for thanksgiving was special. Unlike votive or freewill offerings, it was to be eaten the same day, and it was accompanied by special grain offerings (7:12—17). Thus, it was similar to the ordination offering of the priests (Ex. 29:2—3, 23—25; Lev. 8:26—28) and the concluding well-being offering of the holy Nazirite (Num. 6:14—15, 17, 19—20).

For the Lord's extravagant goodwill, thanksgiving calls for "generous" tokens of appreciation at times when his people can best afford them. Compare the fact that the Festival of Booths, observed in the autumn at the end of the harvest season (23:39), involved grateful rejoicing before the Lord (22:40) that resulted in far more sacrifices than any other festival (Num. 29:12—38). Similarly, the Pilgrims opulently celebrated the first American Thanksgiving at Plymouth, Massachusetts, when they brought in their harvest.

A thank offering was voluntary, but a person who chose to give it was required to do it up in the correct manner. While the Lord made sacrifices accessible to everyone (1:14—17; 5:7—13), his people were not to treat him shabbily.

Gratitude to God can be contagious because it begets generosity to others, which inspires their gratitude and consequent generosity, and so on (cf. 2 Cor. 9:10—11). An Israelite who offered a thank offering would have more food than he or she could eat in one day, and eating leftovers the next day was not permitted (Lev. 7:15). Since delicacies like this were too valuable to throw away, there was only one thing to do: have a party! In this way, the Lord set up opportunities for generously sharing his blessings and testifying to his goodness. Invitees would be affected by gratitude, at the very least for good food.

There is a sense in which the Christian Lord's Supper/communion service is analogous to a thank offering as an occasion for fostering unity through communal gratitude to God for his incomparable generosity:

> Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Cor. 10:16—17)

Guarding the difference. Outside the context of purification offerings (see comments on 6:27—28), the Israelites were not permitted to bring the categories of holiness and impurity together (e.g., 7:20—21). One of the most important functions of the priests was to guard and teach the people distinctions between things that were holy versus common/profane and pure versus impure (Lev. 10:10—11; Ezek. 22:26), so that they would know and respect the difference between God and themselves. Even though he condescended to dwell among them in a quasi-human dwelling with a table, lampstand, and incense burner, he was not like them. He did not sit on a throne/chair in the Most Holy Place but hovered above and between the cherubim over the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89). He did not consume food in a human manner but received it in the form of smoke at the outer altar (Num. 28:2).

It was crucial for God's people to keep in mind the transcendence of their resident deity because their only hope lay in trusting his superior character, power, and wisdom for guidance, sustenance, and protection. As we will find repeatedly illustrated in the book of Numbers, the moment God's greatness was diminished or forgotten in the people's estimation, they were in serious trouble. When they stopped looking up to him as their standard and support, they would look to themselves, from whence came no help.

Contemporary Significance

JOYFUL LONGING AND DEPENDENCE. Well-being offerings were occasions of joy, but as slain offerings, they pointed beyond themselves to a cost of ultimate joy in the future. Thus they enacted the concept expressed by C. S. Lewis: "All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings."[6] Our joy is faith in greater joy to come. Henri Nouwen poignantly sketches this reality:

> Our life is a short time in expectation, a time in which sadness and joy kiss each other at every moment. There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the most happy moments of our existence we sense a tinge of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success, there is the fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is the knowledge of surrounding darkness…. But this intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to the day when our hears will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us.[7]

Although well-being offerings did not expiate for sinful actions, their blood nevertheless served to ransom the lives of those who offered them (17:11), reminding us that even our ability to effectively express joy in worship is dependent on Christ and his sacrifice. It can be said that through Christ, the Well-Being Offering, "I asked God for all things, that I might enjoy life. God gave life, that I might enjoy all things."[8]

We need Christ for joyful worship because all of our communication with heaven is dependent on him. As the divine "Word" who "became flesh" (John 1:1—5, 14), he serves as "Jacob's ladder," a highway of interaction between heaven and earth (1:51; cf. Gen. 28:12). Without him and the priestly mediation

bought by his sacrifice, we would have no access to God. Even the prayers of the saints (i.e., "holy ones") need the mediation of holy incense to accompany them as they come up before God in his heavenly temple (Rev. 8:3).

Material support for intangible ministry. At the Israelite sanctuary, priests who carried out spiritual transactions for their people received various kinds of "agents' commissions" from God. This system was necessary because only the Aaronic priests were authorized to officiate at the altar and inside the sacred Tent, and they needed a source of livelihood.

In the New Testament, only Christ is qualified by the unique sacrifice of himself for a new kind of Melchizedek ("King of Righteousness") priesthood in God's heavenly temple (Heb. 7, citing Ps. 110). Now instead of praying horizontally toward the place of an altar at the sanctuary/temple in Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Kings 8:30, 35; Dan. 6:10), Christians are invited to pray vertically to the place where Christ, our high priest, is always available to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Our prayers go ballistic to the throne of grace, the control center of the universe (4:14—16; cf. Rev. 4—5).

Christian ministers are not priests who receive portions of sacrifices for which their mediation is necessary to carry out spiritual transactions with God. So in the sense of access to God, the New Testament rules out an earthly Christian priesthood consisting of human priests. Nevertheless, Christian ministers do contribute some vital services that the Israelite priests provided, such as leadership in worship and discipline and teaching people how to live in holiness and purity. Christ affirmed the value of these services: When he instructed his disciples before sending them out to serve others, he told them that they should justly expect to be supported by those who benefited from their ministry (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7). Paul also taught that insofar as ministers of the gospel provide real benefit through their efforts, they deserve material support for their ministry even though it is spiritual and therefore intangible (1 Cor. 9:4—11; cf. 1 Tim. 5:18).

1. See Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie*, 381, 422.

2. Cf. Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth,*" 251—55; Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie*, 457—60; B. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," in D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz, eds., *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 13.

3. Cf. ancient Greek sacrifices to the Olympian gods, in which the

portion for the deity consisted of bones and a little flesh, wrapped in the fat (Durant, *The Life of Greece,* 2:194).

4. Regarding the meaning of blood, see comments on 17:10—12.

5. On the respective meanings of these terms for dedication, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 415—16, 431, 461—81.

6. In M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 537.

7. Henri Nouwen, quoted in P. Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 266.

8. Author unknown, in Water, *The New Encyclopedia*, 607.

Leviticus 8

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Bring Aaron and his sons, their
garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams
and the basket containing bread made without yeast, 3and gather the
entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.” 4Moses did as
the LORD commanded him, and the assembly gathered at the entrance
to the Tent of Meeting.

5Moses said to the assembly, “This is what the LORD has
commanded to be done.” 6Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons
forward and washed them with water. 7He put the tunic on Aaron, tied
the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on
him. He also tied the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband;
so it was fastened on him. 8He placed the breastpiece on him and put
the urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. 9Then he placed the turban
on Aaron’s head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front
of it, as the LORD commanded Moses.

10Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and
everything in it, and so consecrated them. 11He sprinkled some of the
oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and
the basin with its stand, to consecrate them. 12He poured some of the
anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him.
13Then he brought Aaron’s sons forward, put tunics on them, tied
sashes around them and put headbands on them, as the LORD
commanded Moses.

14He then presented the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his
sons laid their hands on its head. 15Moses slaughtered the bull and took
some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the
altar to purify the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base

of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it. [16]Moses also took all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys and their fat, and burned it on the altar. [17]But the bull with its hide and its flesh and its offal he burned up outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[18]He then presented the ram for the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. [19]Then Moses slaughtered the ram and sprinkled the blood against the altar on all sides. [20]He cut the ram into pieces and burned the head, the pieces and the fat. [21]He washed the inner parts and the legs with water and burned the whole ram on the altar as a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[22]He then presented the other ram, the ram for the ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. [23]Moses slaughtered the ram and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [24]Moses also brought Aaron's sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood against the altar on all sides. [25]He took the fat, the fat tail, all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys and their fat and the right thigh. [26]Then from the basket of bread made without yeast, which was before the LORD, he took a cake of bread, and one made with oil, and a wafer; he put these on the fat portions and on the right thigh. [27]He put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and waved them before the LORD as a wave offering. [28]Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering as an ordination offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire. [29]He also took the breast—Moses' share of the ordination ram—and waved it before the LORD as a wave offering, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[30]Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood from the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments and his sons and their garments.

[31]Moses then said to Aaron and his sons, "Cook the meat at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and eat it there with the bread from the

basket of ordination offerings, as i commanded, saying, ‘Aaron and his sons are to eat it.’ 32Then burn up the rest of the meat and the bread. 33Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for your ordination will last seven days. 34What has been done today was commanded by the LORD to make atonement for you. 35You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days and do what the LORD requires, so you will not die; for that is what I have been commanded.” 36So Aaron and his sons did everything the LORD commanded through Moses.

Original Meaning

THE FIRST SEVEN chapters of Leviticus consist of ritual laws placed in a narrative framework as a series of divine speeches.[1] The emphasis is on the content of those speeches, which serve as a "how to" manual by providing instructions for ongoing performance of sacrifices. Rather than *describing* a particular ritual performance, these seven chapters *prescribe* patterns/paradigms of activity that are designed to govern any number of future performances.[2]

The language of a ritual text shows whether it is prescriptive or descriptive. For example, Leviticus 4:22—35 is prescriptive because its laws begin with conditional clauses ("When …" [v. 22]; "If …" [vv. 27, 32]) and continue with clauses governed by perfect consecutive or imperfect verbs that refer to *future* performances of "outer altar" purification offerings. The description of inauguration ceremonies in 9:8—21, by contrast, employs imperfect consecutive or perfect verbs, referring to a sequence of activities that Aaron and his sons did in the *past*.[3]

Beginning of the sanctuary's ritual function. At the end of Leviticus 7 a summary reminds the reader/listener that the laws regarding the various kinds of sacrifices were given "in the Desert of Sinai" (7:37—38). By bringing the narrative context to the foreground, these verses provide a transition to chapters 8—10, which *describe* a complex of ritual events carried out on one occasion in accordance with divine directions (8:5; cf. Ex. 29): installment of the Aaronic (not simply "Levitical") priesthood and commencement of services at the Israelite sanctuary.

The story of special services in Leviticus 8—10 divides itself into three parts, each corresponding to a chapter: consecration (ch. 8), first officiation (ch. 9), and disastrous aftermath (ch. 10). Chapter 8 describes the ceremonies by which the sanctuary and its priesthood were consecrated and the priests ordained. Moses officiated, and the priestly candidates played the role of offerers as they were initiated through "rites of passage" into a new ritual status.[4] In Leviticus 9, Aaron & Sons performed their first sacrifices in their official capacity as priests. To show his approval, the Lord himself completed the sacrifices by sending fire to consume them on the altar. Leviticus 10 rudely shattered the glory. Scarcely

had theophanic miracle fire flashed forth to accept the inaugural sacrifices when two of the priestly sons of Aaron committed a fatal ritual transgression. The divine fire broke forth again, this time to consume Nadab and Abihu.

Consecration ceremony. The description of consecration in chapter 8 fulfills the detailed prescription in Exodus 29, thereby contributing to the linkage between the two books. By the time other prescriptions in Exodus 25—31 concerning the sanctuary are fulfilled in chapters 35—40, the sanctuary is set up and ready to operate. However, presentation of the consecration is delayed until after Leviticus 1—7, which introduces each major type of sacrifice. This enables the reader/listener to understand the complex consecration service, which involves combination of several kinds of sacrifices.

We can outline Leviticus 8, which describes the consecration service, as follows:

Preliminary

God commands Moses to assemble materials, participants, and congregation (vv. 1—5)

Moses carries out the command to get ready for the service (vv. 4—5)

Anointing

Moses washes Aaron and his sons (v. 6)

Moses dresses Aaron in his high priestly regalia (vv. 7—9)

Moses anoints the tabernacle (v. 10)

Moses anoints the altar (v. 11)

Moses anoints Aaron’s head (v. 12)

Moses dresses Aaron’s sons in their priestly vestments (v. 13)

Sacrifices

Moses officiates a purification offering on behalf of the priests (vv. 14—17)

Moses officiates a burnt offering on behalf of the priests (vv. 18—21)

Moses officiates an ordination sacrifice on behalf of the priests (vv. 22—29)

Anointing

Moses sprinkles anointing oil and blood from the altar on the priests (v.

30)

Concluding

Moses instructs the priests to eat ordination meat and to remain seven days (vv. 31—35).

Aaron and his sons fulfill Moses' concluding instructions (v. 36).

Before dressing Aaron's sons, Moses consecrated (Piel of *qds)* three things by anointing them with the sacred anointing oil:[5] the tabernacle, the altar, and Aaron's head. These represented the three major parts of the sanctuary infrastructure, with Aaron standing for the priesthood. While the other priests also received anointing oil later on (v. 30; see also Ex. 28:41; 30:30; 40:15), Aaron's anointing on his head was special (see also Ex. 29:7), so that he and each high priest who succeeded him could be called "the anointed priest" (Lev. 4:3; 6:22; cf. 6:20).

Just as there were three anointings, the third of which was applied to Aaron in order to consecrate him (v. 12), at the heart of the ritual complex were three sacrifices on behalf of the priests: purification offering, burnt offering, and ordination offering. The third of these concentrated most directly on ordination of the priests.

The first sacrifice was an "outer altar" purification offering, which was on behalf of the priests, as shown by the fact that Aaron and his sons leaned their hands (presumably one hand each, as elsewhere in sacrifices) on the head of the bull (8:14). However, this ritual was exceptional in that it had the primary goal of purifying (Piel of *hf)* and consecrating the outer altar (v. 15). Since the altar was in the process of becoming qualified for its function, it was not ready for expiation of specific sins or ritual impurities of the priests or anyone else.[6] So we can assume that as offerers, the priests secondarily benefited from the purification offering in the sense that the altar's qualification made possible their subsequent officiating on it.

The remainder of the "outer altar" purification offering was incinerated outside the camp rather than eaten by Moses as an "agent's commission" (8:17). Although he officiated on this occasion, he was not an Aaronic priest qualified to partake of most holy sacrifices.

Ordination sacrifice to authorize priests for their job. While the first two kinds of sacrifices—purification offering and burnt offering—were to be performed on other occasions as well, the third was unique to the ordination event. The label for the ordination sacrifice is *millu'im* (8:22, 28, 29, 31, 33), an

abstract plural meaning literally “filling.” It derives from the expression for ordination that appears in verse 33: “fill the hand” (Piel of *m’* + yad, “hand”) for the purpose of serving as a priest (cf. Ex. 28:41; Num. 3:3). This expression literally refers to having one’s hand filled with the tool(s) or insignia of one’s job. By extension it signifies authorization to fulfill an official function. Ordination was not simply a badge of honorable status; it was a commission to do a job for the Lord.

A priest’s job description included worship leadership (Lev. 1—7; 9), mediation between God and his people (Ex. 28:36—38; Lev. 1:17; Num. 16:46—47), teaching and judging in accordance with divine instructions (Lev. 10:10—11; chs. 13—14; Deut. 17:8—12; 21:5), religious administration (e.g., Lev. 27), guarding the boundaries of the sacred domain (Num. 3:10; 18:1—7), and serving as an example of holiness to the community (e.g., Lev. 21). Additionally, the high priest was to obtain divine decisions through the Urim and Thummim kept in his breastpiece (Num. 27:21; cf. Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8).

The ordination sacrifice had strong affinities with the holy (not most holy) well-being offering. Aside from the fact that it was a “pleasing aroma,” a food “gift” *(’tiseh)* to the Lord (Lev. 8:28; cf. 3:5, 16), Moses elevated the breast and kept it as his portion for officiating (8:29; cf. 7:30—31). Furthermore, the offerers ate the remaining meat (8:31—32; cf. 7:15—17), and the sacrifice involved special grain items like the thank offering (8:26; cf. 7:12).

Two major aspects of the ordination offering made it unique. (1) Before dashing the blood of the ordination ram on the sides of the outer altar, Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear, on his right thumb, and on his right big toe. Then he did the same to his sons (8:23—24). In this way he connected Aaron and his sons to the Lord and his altar by a bond in blood, as he had linked the Israelites to the Lord through covenant sacrifices by tossing half of the blood on the people after dashing the other half on an altar (Ex. 24:5—8).[7]

(2) Before turning the suet portions, right thigh, and grain items into smoke on the altar, Moses linked them together with each other and with the priests by laying the grain items on the suet portions and right thigh, placing these in the hands of Aaron and his sons, and elevating them to the Lord (8:26—28).

Oil and blood had been separately applied to the priests (8:12, 23—24), but then these elements came together when Moses sprinkled anointing oil and some blood from the altar on Aaron and his sons and their garments (v. 30). The anointing oil consecrated them by virtue of its holy nature. The blood from the altar consecrated them because it was taken from the altar that was earlier consecrated (cf. vv. 11, 15).

Completion of the priests’ “rite of passage” required completion of a seven-

day period (8:33—35). This element of time—seven days, as in the initial process of creation by God (Gen. 1) and as in other ritual transitions, including purification from severe ritual impurities (e.g., Lev. 12; 14—15; Num. 19)—was essential to elevation of status.[8] During the week, a purification offering was to be performed each day to purify the outer altar (Ex. 29:35—37).[9] Because the priests were in a transitional/liminal and therefore vulnerable state, they were not to leave the sacred precincts (Lev. 8:33—35).

Bridging Contexts

ANOINTING OR LAYING HANDS TO ORDAIN OR COMMISSION FOR A TASK. In Old Testament times, priests and kings were anointed with oil as a sign that they were chosen and authorized by the Lord to fill special leadership roles.[10] The term *masiah* ("anointed one") can apply to the high priest (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22) or to a king (1 Sam. 2:10; 2:35; 12:3, 5; 16:6, etc.), including the ideal Davidic ruler whom we know as the Messiah *(masiah,* Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25—26) or even a foreign king divinely chosen for a particular purpose (e.g., Cyrus in Isa. 45:1).

When Moses transferred some of his authority to Joshua, a man of spirit, he did not garb him in special vestments and anoint him with oil; rather, he laid hands on him and commissioned (lit., "commanded/charged") him before Eleazar the high priest and the whole congregation (Num. 27:18—23)." Deuteronomy 34:9 states the result: "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him." Joshua's commissioning enhanced the spiritual gift of an already spiritual man.

Laying on hands is the same gesture used for other purposes in the Old Testament, including condemnation of a blasphemer (Lev. 24:14), symbolic transfer of moral faults to the so-called "scapegoat" (16:2—two hands), and identifying the owner/offerer of an animal victim (1:4—one hand). The common denominator among these cases is identification of a relationship between the one(s) leaning hand(s) and the one on whose head the hand(s) is/are laid.

There is a sense in which Christians are anointed as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). John writes to believers: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth" (1 John 2:20). For John, "anointing" is a metaphor for a divine gift that provides teaching (2:7), which Jesus said would come through the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Paul explicitly connects the spiritual anointing of Christians with the gift of the Holy Spirit: "He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit" (2 Cor. 1:21—22).

In the New Testament, a special anointing for ministry is reserved for the divine Priest-King (Heb. 4:14—16; chs. 7—10), whose title "Christ" (Gk. *christos)* means "Messiah" *(masiah,* "Anointed One"; cf. John 1:41). Near the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 with reference to

himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor …” (Luke 4:18). Since he meant that the Spirit had already anointed him, he apparently referred to what happened at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and a voice from heaven declared, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21—22; cf. John 1:32— 33). Notice the parallel between Christ’s baptism and Spirit-anointing and Leviticus 8, where Aaron and his sons were purified with water and then anointed.

Jesus was literally anointed at his burial by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1). Earlier he had said of the woman who anointed him at Simon’s house: “… she did it to prepare me for burial” (Matt. 26:12—13; cf. Mark 14:8; Luke 7:38, 46; John 12:3, 7). These anointings for burial are significant because it is precisely the sacrificial death of Christ that qualified him for his unique Melchizedek (“King of Righteousness”) priesthood (Heb. 7; 9:11—12; 10:11—14).

Unlike Moses, who anointed Aaron and his sons as priests, and the prophet Samuel, who anointed Saul and David as kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13), the women who anointed Jesus did not grasp the full import of what they were doing, namely, signifying that he was the “Anointed One,” the Messiah/Christ. These providential circumstances, using the agency of individuals who were socially low but high in the estimation of heaven, allowed only for the conclusion that it was God himself who “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38; cf. 4:27; Heb. 1:9). No human being could claim any kind of authority or superiority over the One whom he or she had anointed.

In the New Testament, what we tend to think of as “ordination” of church leaders is similar to the commissioning of Joshua, who was not a priest, by laying hands on him (Num. 27:18—23). In Acts 6 the followers of Christ chose seven men who were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3) to serve as deacons. “They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (6:6). Similarly, the church in Antioch followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit by setting Barnabas and Saul apart for special missionary work: “So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (13:2—3).

In Acts, as in Numbers 27 and Deuteronomy 34 regarding Joshua, the gesture of laying hands on individuals (1) acknowledges that they are persons of Spirit, (2) commissions them for special work as representatives of God’s people, and (3) invokes God’s Holy Spirit to provide them with ongoing gifts of wisdom and empowerment for their tasks.

Laying on hands for commissioning is related to three other uses of the same

gesture in the New Testament: (1) to signify blessing on a child (Matt. 19:13—15; Mark 10:13—16; cf. Gen. 48:14—16), (2) to transfer the Holy Spirit to a person (Acts 8:17; 19:6; cf. Num. 11:17, 24—25), and (3) to invoke holy, divine power for physical healing (Mark 6:5; 8:23; Luke 13:13; Acts 28:8). Anointing the sick can function like laying hands on them: to invoke holy power for healing (Mark 6:13; James 5:14). So in a sense the two procedures are functionally equivalent. The difference is that laying hands transfers holiness from one person to another, but anointing bestows holiness by means of a symbolically holy substance, namely, oil (Lev. 8).

When a person is sick, invoking divine power through anointing or laying hands is for healing. When a person is ordained or commissioned, invoking divine power through anointing or laying hands is for ability to serve.

Like the eternal flame on the altar (6:8—13), the holy gift of the Spirit that enables ministry must be maintained. Paul reminded Timothy "to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6), and to "not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you" (1 Tim. 4:14). The Spirit puts the unction in the function!

Part for all. In the process of consecrating Aaron and his sons as priests, Moses put sacrificial blood "on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot" (8:23). Then he did the same thing to his sons (v. 24). Blood only touched extremities, but it affected a whole priest, "part for all" *(pars pro toto).*[12] Why was blood applied to those particular extremities? The text does not say, but it makes sense that as the Lord's servants, they would be bonded in blood as a life-and-death matter to hear/obey him (cf. Ex. 21:5—6), do his will with their hands, and go with their feet where he would command.

Once the priests were consecrated, they were obliged to wash their hands and feet with water drawn from the sacred basin before entering the sacred tent or officiating sacrifices at the altar (Ex. 30:17—21). Again we see the "part for all" principle: Water on part of a priest purified him as a whole for ritual interaction with the Lord.

"Part for all" worked with animal victims as well. On the Day of Atonement, only purification offering blood was applied to the defiled parts of the sanctuary in order to cleanse it. The bodies of the bull and goat victims never entered the tabernacle. But any assistant who contacted the carcasses by carrying them outside the camp and incinerating them there became impure (16:28). Why? Obviously because he contracted impurity from the carcasses, which were impure. But why were the carcasses impure when they had not been taken to

where the sanctuary's pollution was located? The animals were viewed as units. When their blood was contaminated by contact with the defiled sanctuary, the carcasses outside also became defiled because they belonged to the same animals. An effect on part had an impact on all.

"Part for all" dynamics also affected the tabernacle and its components. For example, the Lord commanded that once a year the high priest should perform purgation *(kipper)* for the altar of incense on its horns with the blood of the purification offering of purgation (Ex. 10:10). This means that on the Day of Atonement, by daubing blood on part of the altar, that is, its horns, the high priest (Aaron) would purify the whole altar.[13] In this way he would reverse the "part for all" process by which the incense altar had become defiled through application of blood to its horns when the high priest or the whole community sinned (Lev. 4:7, 18). Similarly, a sevenfold sprinkling of blood that fell to part of the floor in the outer sanctum on the Day of Atonement (16:16b; cf. v. 14) would remove pollution from that entire area, again reversing an earlier "part for all" process accomplished by corresponding activity (4:6, 17).

Now we can easily recognize other instances of the "part for all" principle. When the high priest sprinkled blood on the ark cover and seven times in front of the ark (16:14—15), he would purge the entire ark and the whole area of the inner sanctum. When he put blood on the horns of the outer altar and sprinkled blood on it seven times, he would cleanse and reconsecrate the entire altar (vv. 18—19), just as it had been sullied by application of purification offering blood to its horns throughout the year (4:25, 30, 34).

Grasping the "part for all" principle can help us to solve some mysteries of the sanctuary. For example, how did physical ritual impurities defile the inner and outer sanctums so that they had to be purged out of those apartments? Sacrifices to remedy such impurities throughout the year (e.g. 12:6—8; 15:13—15) *only* involved application of blood to the outer altar, *never* inside the sacred tent. But cleansing the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement included removing physical ritual impurities and sins from the inner and outer sanctums (16:16) as well as from the outer altar (vv. 18—19). Nobody even entered the inner sanctum before the Day of Atonement, so how did impurities and sins manage to get in there? When the outer altar was polluted, the inner sanctum and outer sanctum were automatically contaminated. In an ordinary house, this would be like having a person's bath make two other bathrooms dirty as well—a housekeeper's nightmare!

Of course, the sanctuary was not an ordinary house. Here we are in the world of ritual, which is not limited by constraints of physical cause and effect that operate in the mundane domain. In the material realm of Planet Earth, something

or someone necessarily moves from point A to point B and then from point B to point C, and so on. Rituals are like miracles in the sense that they are not bound by ordinary limitations.

"Part for all" transcends physical dynamics. Because the sanctuary was a unit, an effect on part of it impacted the entire sanctuary. Although ritual impurity resulted from physical states, it was not a physical substance (see comments on Lev. 12) and did not need to be physically transferred from the outer altar to the outer sanctum and from there to the inner sanctum. Because the outer altar was an integral part of the sanctuary, an effect of sin or ritual impurity on it affected the entire sanctuary.[14] So the mystery is solved.

Contemporary Significance

CO-MISSION. WE HAVE FOUND that priestly ordination by anointing as described in Leviticus 8 finds its New Testament fulfillment in Christ. Nevertheless, Christians of the Spirit are chosen and commissioned by the community to receive ongoing divine empowerment for special service. Even though Christian leaders are not priests per se, their responsibility to represent God and his character in every aspect of their lives is an awesome one (see 1 and 2 Tim. and Titus) and is analogous in some ways to the sacred calling of Aaron and his sons.

It is the Spirit who empowers for leadership and the authority that goes with it, just as he distributes all other spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12). The human role is to seek his will. There is no warrant for manipulation and aggression to grasp religious power. As we will find in the story of Korah & Co. (Num. 16), woe to anyone who presumes to usurp a sacred office when God has not called that person![15]

If Christians had solved their questions of leadership by following God's leading and guidelines (including Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus) during the past couple of millennia, imagine how much trouble and bloodshed would have been avoided. By turning sacred offices into positions of political domination rather than humble spiritual leadership, Christianity has suffered disunity, loss of real spiritual power and divine protection, and disenfranchisement of many believers as God's "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9).

The egalitarian "priesthood of all believers" model in the New Testament is based on God's call for the entire community of ancient Israelites to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), as this privilege is now enhanced by direct access to God for every believer through the sacrifice and priestly mediation of Christ (see 1 Peter 2:5). Peter states the nature and purpose of priestly service by all Christians: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9; emphasis supplied). John expresses: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests *to serve his God and Father"* (Rev. 1:5—6; emphasis supplied; cf. 5:9—10).

In essence, human priests are what they always were: servants of God. But rather than house servants and mediators in the Lord's sanctuary/temple on earth, Christians are called and consecrated to go out into the world to praise God for transformation from darkness to light that has been wrought by Christ. As Jesus said to a man whom he released from demon possession: "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). This may sound too simple and unsophisticated, but it is the most powerful testimony in the universe, which not even angels can utter: God healed *me!*

Even though some Christians are chosen for special positions of religious leadership, in the most basic, crucial sense every member of God's community is a minister to others:

> According to Peter, all Christians belong to the priesthood. In the New Testament, the church does not *have* a priesthood—it *is* a priesthood.
>
> … ministry is not only the right and privilege of every New Testament believer, it is a natural result of being a Christian. The New Testament church could not even imagine a Christian who was not involved in ministry. It was inherent in the theology of the first Christians. It was their right and privilege because of Christ's death for them.[16]

What would happen if every Christian man, woman, and child realized that God has called him or her to a ministry of service empowered by a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12)? A work force of such magnitude, with each individual personally motivated to accomplish God's mission in the world, would have potential that is staggering to contemplate. Andrew Murray appeals to all Christians: "God needs priests who can draw close to Him, live in His presence, and by their intercession draw down the blessings of His grace on others. And the world needs priests who will bear the burden of the perishing ones and intercede on their behalf."[17]

It is important to respect our "ministers" as special agents of God. At the same time, we should affirm the broader sense in which every other believer is also a minister. Otherwise the "lay" members feel that only the "minister" carries the responsibility of ministry. Needless to say, this places a crushing burden on a pastor, particularly when his people assume that by paying their tithes and offerings they are hiring his services to meet their personal needs. A former pastor of a five-thousand-member congregation in southern California told me that the expectations members place on their pastors are "infinite."

A pastor moved to a new church. Right up front he announced to the members

his desire to take the gospel to the three surrounding counties. This meant that he would need to delegate a number of responsibilities, such as visiting. The members were delighted that they had a pastor who was on fire for the Lord and expressed willingness to take over some tasks in order to free him up for wider service. But the first time a member was sick in the hospital and the pastor himself did not personally show up, he was in the "doghouse." So much for that idea.

The pastor's plan was not just an idea; it was Christ's "gospel commission" (Matt. 28:19—20). By assuming that the pastor alone was delegated to do the ministry, the church reduced their gospel work force to one. Then they tied him up with themselves so that they further reduced one to zero! With this paralyzing, selfish attitude, the cause of the gospel could be better served if they did not have a pastor at all! Then at least they would enjoy richer interaction by learning how to serve one another.

If the real case just described were an isolated one, it would be shocking enough, but this relationship between a pastor and the church members is the unchallenged norm for thousands of church congregations. The status quo seems to be perpetuated at least partly by the fact that expectations placed on ministers tend to attract emotionally needy people to enter the ministry as a profession. G. L. Jones illustrates this phenomenon by quoting the assessment of a thirteen-year-old boy to his mother: "You know, Mom, the trouble with our new pastor is that he needs us to love him so much that we can't see God anymore."[18] The result can be a kind of "corporate codependency," in which ministers and their congregations feed each other's self-absorptions without contributing to real spiritual growth.

Eugene H. Peterson hits the nail on the head when he points out implications of the fact that ministry is a profession, not just a job to satisfy a congregation:

> With professions the integrity has to do with the invisibles: for physicians it is health (not merely making people feel good); with lawyers, justice (not helping people get their own way); with professors, learning (not cramming cranial cavities with information on tap for examinations). And with pastors it is God (not relieving anxiety or giving comfort, or running a religious establishment).[19]

Jim Griffith tells of a young man who was allergic to hard work and applied at an employment agency for help finding a new job. So the employment agent phoned his previous employer and asked if he was a steady worker. "Steady?" he replied, "Why, he was not only steady—he was motionless!"[20] Griffith goes on

to observe that “many laypersons want to exercise little more than their authority. They are happy to do anything for the Lord— so long as it is in an advisory capacity.”[21]

While paid ministers suffer when lay members neglect to exercise the function and gumption for which their unction is intended, they often perpetuate the problem by failing to train their people to think otherwise. In some cases, sad to say, they even model a motivationally challenged (politically correct for “lazy”) approach to God’s work. For example, there was a pleasant and well-liked pastor whose philosophy of outreach was phlegmatic. When asked how he was making a difference in his community, he replied with satisfaction that his way to meet new people was simply to wait until they showed up at his church. At the time he was occupied with building a new house, but nothing changed when the project was completed, except that he apparently had an excess of time on his hands. He became a bit too close to a woman other than his wife, his ministry ended, and he moved away to start a new career that suited him better.

Christian congregations need biblical reeducation on a massive scale regarding Christ’s gospel commission, spiritual gifts, relationships between sacred callings, and the privileged role of every individual within the “priesthood of all believers.” They also need their pastors to be “generals” who personally lead them out of the comfortable church service environment of padded pews into church service for the world, as Jesus led his disciples all over hot, dusty, oppressed Palestine. Jesus did plenty of advising, but he did it through action.

> **"Part for all” in interpersonal relations.** James points out in James 2:10—12:
>
> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. [11] For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.
>
> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

Why does James call it “the law that gives freedom"? Isn’t the “part for all” idea that breaking one commandment breaks the whole law the worst form of legalism? No. He is simply drawing attention to the fact that God’s law is relational. The problem with a sin is not simply the evil inherent in that particular fault but the fact that it is an offense against God—the same person who has given every other commandment as well. Disobeying God in any way affects our relationship with him. It is the relationship that is the point. So in this

sense the law that protects the relationship is a unit. Obedience to God's law, by his grace, "gives freedom" to enjoy a healthy relationship with him.

We have found that divine-human interpersonal relations operate according to the "part for all principle." No wonder enactments of this dynamic in terms of positive or negative effects permeated the ancient Israelite ritual system (see Bridging Contexts section), which was all about divine-human relations!

Relations between human beings also work "part for all." Affecting part of a relationship by doing one thing, whether positive or negative, can enhance or damage an entire relationship. For example, an affectionate hug, cleaning up the kitchen without being asked, or remembering flowers on an anniversary are good for a marriage. Shouting obscenities, hitting, neglect, and adultery are bad for it. The whole relationship is affected by any one of these because a relationship is a living unit, all parts of which are connected and interactive. We may successfully compartmentalize other aspects of our lives, but not our interpersonal relationships.

"Part for all" impacts interpersonal relations on any number of corporate levels. Something positive or negative that one member of a family, church, community, or nation experiences can have consequences for everyone in that group. In this sense, an attack on the World Trade Center simultaneously assaulted thousands of families of victims, New York City, and the entire United States. Even worse, when a sinister "serpent" enticed one woman to disobey God and her husband followed suit (Gen. 3), "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). But through "the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ" (12:15), who became part of the human race (John 1:14), God reverses the evil for everyone, "part for all."

As a gift bought by Christ's sacrifice, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5), thereby countering the deadly power of sin in our lives. By putting love into part of us, that is, our hearts, he transforms our whole lives, "part for all." Since love is the basic relational principle that unites the whole of God's revealed will (Matt. 22:36—40), his gift of love enables us to live in harmony with him, whose relational character is love (1 John 4:8).

Just as blood on parts of the Israelite priests showed their total consecration to God (Lev. 8:23—24), so the holiness of God's end-time people is symbolically represented in the book of Revelation as a seal of divine ownership on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3; 9:4; cf. Ezek. 9:4, 6). According to Ephesians 1:13, the way Christians are sealed is by the Holy Spirit. This makes perfect sense because it is the Spirit who brings believers into harmony with God by pouring love into their

hearts.

1. On the division of Leviticus into divine speeches as the foundation of the book's structure, see W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (BIS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 37—63.

2. On the important distinction between prescriptive and descriptive ritual texts, see B. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 307—18; B. Levine and W. W. Hallo, "Offerings to the Temple Gates at Ur," *HUCA* 38 (1967): 17—58.

3. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts," 495.

4. On rites of passage, see A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960).

5. For the ingredients and uses of the anointing oil, see Ex. 30:22—33.

6. Cf. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 42.

7. Cf. O. P. Robertson's definition of the covenant relationship between God and his people as a "bond in blood sovereignly administered" (The *Christ of the Covenants* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980], 4).

8. G. Klingbeil, "Ritual Time in Leviticus 8 with Special Reference to the Seven Day Period in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 109 (1997): 500—13.

9. Compare week-long initiations of Solomon's altar (2 Chron. 7:9) and Ezekiel's altar (Ezek. 43:19—26).

10. Anointing of priests: e.g., Ex. 40:15; Lev. 8:12; anointing of kings: e.g., 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39.

11. For detailed analysis of this ceremony, see K. Mattingly, "The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12—23 and Deuteronomy 34:9" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1997).

12. On the "part for all" principle, see Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity,* 130; J. Milgrom, "The *Modus Operandi* of the *Hatta't-*. A Rejoinder," *JBL* 109 (1990): 112—13; Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 81; Gane, *Altar Call*, 217—22; idem, *Cult and Character,* ch. 8.

13. Compare Milgrom, "The *Modus Operandi,"* 112.

14. Not recognized by Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus,* 142—43 n. 1.

15. Cf. B. Carradine, *The Sanctified Life* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 142.

16. R. Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart

Research Center, 1979), 24—25.

17. A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springdale, Penn.: Whitaker, 1981), 228.

18. G. L. Jones, “Needy Pastors,” *ChrCent* (June 15—22, 1994): 62.

19. E. H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 7.

20. J. N. Griffith, *Looking Up* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1993), 18.

21. Ibid.

Leviticus 9

ON THE EIGHTH day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the
elders of Israel. 2He said to Aaron, “Take a bull calf for your sin
offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and
present them before the LORD. 3Then say to the Israelites: ‘Take a male
goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb—both a year old and without
defect—for a burnt offering, 4and an ox and a ram for a fellowship
offering to sacrifice before the LORD, together with a grain offering
mixed with oil. For today the LORD will appear to you.'"

5They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the Tent of
Meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the LORD.
6Then Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded you to do,
so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you."

7Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin
offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and
the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make
atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded."

8So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering
for himself. 9His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his
finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar, the rest of the
blood he poured out at the base of the altar. 10On the altar he burned
the fat, the kidneys and the covering of the liver from the sin offering,
as the LORD commanded Moses, 11the flesh and the hide he burned up
outside the camp.

12Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. His sons handed him the
blood, and he sprinkled it against the altar on all sides. 13They handed
him the burnt offering piece by piece, including the head, and he
burned them on the altar. 14He washed the inner parts and the legs and

burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar.

15 Aaron then brought the offering that was for the people. He took
the goat for the people's sin offering and slaughtered it and offered it
for a sin offering as he did with the first one.

16 He brought the burnt offering and offered it in the prescribed way.
17 He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it
on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

18 He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for
the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he sprinkled it against
the altar on all sides. 19 But the fat portions of the ox and the ram—the
fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys and the covering of the liver
—20 these they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the
altar. 21 Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the LORD as
a wave offering, as Moses commanded.

22 Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them.
And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the
fellowship offering, he stepped down.

23 Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they
came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared
to all the people. 24 Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and
consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And
when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

Original Meaning

FOR THOSE OF us who have inherited great national and church institutions, it is hard to imagine the excitement that the founding of those institutions must have generated. Our pulses quicken at cyclical celebrations of renewal, such as anniversaries or changes of administration, but what must it have been like to participate with the “founding fathers"?

Leviticus 9 belongs to the founders: It describes the very first sacrificial officiation of the Aaronic priesthood, inaugurating a worship system that lasted for over a millennium. As F. H. Gorman has pointed out, rituals of *founding,* including the consecration and inauguration of the Israelite sanctuary and its priesthood as described in chapters 8—9, established the normative state of the system. Cyclical rituals of *maintenance,* such as the daily, monthly, and yearly sacrifices specified by the ritual calendar in Numbers 28—29, maintained the system once it was set up. Rituals of *restoration,* such as expiatory purification and reparation offerings (e.g., Lev. 4:1—6:7), restored the system to its normative state.[1]

Following the seven days of consecration, the complex of sacrifices that Aaron and his sons performed on their first officiation on the eighth day (9:1) consisted of the following:

Sacrifices on behalf of the priests
Purification offering for the priests: bull calf (vv. 8—11)
Burnt offering for the priests: ram (vv. 12—14)

Sacrifices on behalf of the nonpriestly community
Purification offering for the nonpriestly community: male goat (v. 15)
Burnt offering for the nonpriestly community: calf and lamb (v. 16)
Grain offering mixed with oil for the nonpriestly community (v. 17)
Well-being offering for the community: ox and ram (vv. 18—21)

There were seven animals plus a grain offering, making a total of eight

sacrifices, two pairs of which functioned as units: two victims for the burnt offering and two for the well-being offering on behalf of the nonpriestly community. Every major kind of sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus 1—7 is represented except for the reparation offering, which never appears as a public sacrifice, presumably because its role is specialized to cases involving certain or suspected sacrilege (see comments on 5:14—6:7). The order followed patterns with which we are already familiar: A purification offering pays a debt before the gift of a burnt offering, which is followed by a grain offering. After most holy sacrifices comes the holy well-being offering, of which the offerer enjoys a portion.

After Moses issued preliminary instructions for assembling materials and people (9:1—7), Aaron approached the altar to make his debut as Israel's high priest, assisted by his newly ordained sons. Aaron & Sons officiated all of the inaugural sacrifices, first for themselves and then for the rest of the people. Notice again the order of descending sanctity.

Leviticus 9 describes the core of the sacrificial complex and a postrequisite activity belonging to the initial purification offering: disposal of the remainder outside the camp (9:11) because the priests were not permitted to benefit from their own sacrifice (cf. 6:23). The end of Leviticus 9 records the glorious and miraculous climax of the first Aaronic service (9:22—24).

We are not told what Aaron and Moses said when they blessed the people (cf. Num. 6:24—26), from where Aaron had to step down (from the altar?), or why Moses and Aaron entered the sacred Tent. Comparison with the dedication of Solomon's temple, at which the king prayed (1 Kings 8:22—53) between blessing the people twice (8:14—21, 54—61), suggests that Moses and Aaron entered the tabernacle to pray that God would accept the sanctuary, its priesthood, and their sacrifices.[2]

When the Lord revealed his glory *(kabod)* and his fire flashed forth to vaporize in an instant the animal pieces that ordinarily would have burned for many hours (cf. 6:9), the people were simultaneously jubilant and awestruck. Later witnesses to divine fire consuming sacrifices at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 7:1—3) and on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38—39) reacted similarly with prostration and praise.

The fire that consumed the inaugural sacrifices and thereby legitimized the Aaronic priesthood was henceforth to be kept continually burning on the altar to preserve the miracle of divine acceptance (see comments on 6:8—13). Thus, "every sacrifice offered on the same altar will, with God's grace, also merit his acceptance."[3] While a jar of manna and Aaron's staff that budded were later kept

with the ark of the covenant as reminders of God's covenant miracles for his people (Ex. 16:32—34; Num. 17:8—11; Heb. 9:4), it was the altar fire that the people could experience because it was outside in the courtyard twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They could see, hear, and smell the miracle.

Bridging Contexts

MEDIATION. AT THE ANCIENT SANCTUARY, Israelites worshiped God and received expiation for their faults through sacrificial officiation by human priests, who served as their mediators with God. Although the priests themselves did not grant forgiveness, sinners could not approach God through sacrifice without them.

Before serving in their mediatorial capacity on behalf of their people, Aaron and his sons were obliged to expiate for themselves (9:7—14; cf. 16:11—19, 24). The priests went first not only because of their privileged, consecrated status, but because they were mortals subject to human weakness, who needed their own faults remedied before they could effectively mediate for others.

Purity first is a basic principle of mediation with God. Moses was a powerful intercessor (Ex. 32; Num. 14) because of his pure, selfless humility (Ex. 32:32; Num 12:3). So was Daniel, who humbly identified himself with his people by confessing, “We have sinned and done wrong” (Dan. 9:5).

Forgiveness through expiation mediated by Aaronic priests at the Israelite sanctuary was provisional, contingent on the future sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:9; 10:1—4, 11). When he died, rose from the grave, and ascended to heaven, a lot changed for the better. The book of Hebrews tells us what has changed. (1) We are not required to repeatedly offer animal sacrifices because Christ has been sacrificed once for all (7:27; 9:25—28; cf. 10:12). (2) Christ himself can grant us forgiveness on the basis of expiation for which his sacrifice has already paid (10:11—14). (3) We no longer need human priests in a sanctuary on earth because Christ ministers as our High Priest in God’s heavenly temple (chs. 8—9). (4) Christ is the ultimate Mediator, whose Melchizedek priesthood is superior to that of Aaron & Sons because he is immortal and sinless, which means that his purity is total (7:23—27).

Augustine pointed out that “a mediator between God and man must have something in common with God and something in common with man.”[4] Uniquely divine and human, Christ is the bridge between God and us: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. John 1:51). When he inaugurated his heavenly ministry following his ascension, “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3

NRSV; cf. 8:1; 10:12; Mark 16:19). Thus he was reunited with his Father and resumed the status he possessed before his incarnation (cf. Phil. 2:5—11). At the same time, Christ can sympathetically represent us before God because he became human, one of us (Heb. 4:15).

If God already loved the human race before he sent his beloved Son into the world (John 3:16), why do we need a mediator to interact with him? Christ's sacrifice and priestly mediation are not for the purpose of making God love us; they result *from* his love. As faulty human beings, we need a mediator in order to come to God (Heb. 4:15—16; 10:19—22) because sin has separated us from his holy Presence (e.g., Gen. 3; Ex. 33:20). It is Christ who can bring us to God because his sacrifice uniquely empowers him to separate us from the sin that keeps us from the holy deity (Heb. 9:14—15). Therefore the book of Hebrews invites Christians to approach God through the avenue of access to God that Christ has made available (10:19—22).

Pulling out all the stops. Why did the first Aaronic service include all the basic kinds of sacrifices, except for the reparation offering? It was a first run that "pulled out all the stops," opening up the full worship capability of the sanctuary the way an organist inaugurates a new pipe organ. It displayed a comprehensive range of spiritual power by combining dynamics of cleansing (purification offering), total consumption (burnt offering), gift-giving (grain offering), and a source of life from which believers partake (well-being offering).

According to the New Testament, Christ has "pulled out all the stops" by fulfilling a wide variety of major roles or elements corresponding to those that were basic and essential to the Israelite sanctuary system:

Role/Element	Reference(s)
Victim	John 1:29; Heb. 9:12—14, 26—28; 10:1—10
Priest	Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:11—8:7; 9:11—28; 10:11—18
Law	Christ is God—Col. 2:9; John 8:58; God is love—1 John 4:8; love is the law—Matt. 22:36—40; Rom. 13:10; therefore in a sense Christ embodies God's law, which reflects his character of love
Bread	John 6:48
Light	John 9:5
Veil	Heb. 10:20
Water	John 19:34; 1 John 5:6—8

By culminating these aspects, Christ connects the Israelite sanctuary with God's heavenly temple, where he has gone to continue his work of salvation.

That the two sanctuaries are linked in this way is not surprising because the earthly one was a “copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (Heb. 8:5; cf. Ex. 25:9). This relationship can be called “vertical” correspondence/typology between the sanctuary “down” on earth and the one “up” in heaven.

Another kind of correspondence is “historical” or “horizontal,” that is, along a timeline. From the perspective of the New Testament, the Israelite sanctuary system “prophesied” later and greater realities of salvation history, whether on earth or in heaven.[5] For example, there is a sense in which Christ’s cross serves as the later “altar” for Christians (Heb. 13:10—12). The Passover lamb (Ex. 12:6; Lev. 23:5) pointed forward to Christ (1 Cor. 5:7), who died at Passover (John 19:14). The barley sheaf that a priest dedicated as a “firstfruits” offering on the day after the Sabbath following Passover (Lev. 23:11) also prefigured Christ, who came forth from his tomb on the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1) as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).[6]

The ancient sanctuary system was useful as a working model of salvation to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended: to show human beings how to live with God and respond to his grace. However, it had limitations. By way of analogy, a preliminary prototype of a space vehicle looks and in some ways can function like a spaceship, but it cannot necessarily go into orbit around the earth. It is useful, but you should neither climb into it and try to blast off nor conclude that the final version will fail to fly because the prototype cannot.

Here are some contrasts between the limited, earthbound ritual system officiated by Aaron and his descendants and Christ’s unlimited edition of priestly ministry, by which he “pulled out all the stops” in the additional sense of removing barriers that blocked access to complete salvation.[7]

Aaronic priestly ministry		Christ's priestly ministry	
priests needed sacrifices for sin	Lev. 4:3–12; 16:6, 11–14, 33	needs no sacrifice for sin	Heb. 4:15; 7:26–28
priests had to be shielded from God	Lev. 16:12–13	needs no shielding from God	Mark 16:19; Rev. 4–5
priests did not die as substitutes	e.g., Lev. 1–7	died as substitute	Isa. 53; Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21
repeated sacrifices	e.g., Num. 28–29	one sacrifice	Heb. 7:27; 9:28
no expiation for defiant sinner	Num. 15:30–31	expiation for all who repent	John 3:16; Acts 13:39
ministry for Israel	e.g., Lev. 1–16	global ministry	John 1:29; 3:16

Contemporary Significance

A FRIEND IN the department. Two days after the exhilarating experience of graduating with a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, I found myself back at a temporary construction job digging a posthole and pointedly recalling that Ph.D. can stand for "Post-hole Digger." During that summer, I did construction work, landscape maintenance, and telephone marketing for a utility bill auditing service. As usual, I was grateful for the work because it was a break from intense study and it supported my family. However, I was ready to fill a position for which I would be less "overqualified." Nevertheless, no teaching job was on the horizon.

August came. A new academic year was rapidly approaching. Still no job. I refused to worry because God had always provided in the past, and giving in to anxiety had only made matters worse. But time was running out.

On my birthday, August 31, the chairman of the Religion Department at Pacific Union College called me by phone. A department member had just been appointed senior pastor of the large college church. Autumn quarter would commence in a few weeks and a replacement was urgently needed. The chairman had never met me, but he offered me the job over the phone without an advance interview. How did he know about me? I had a friend in the department, who had urged his colleagues to hire me.

Without my friend to report my existence, qualifications, and availability, it is likely that I would have been digging a lot more postholes. I needed someone who knew me to speak up on my behalf. In short, I needed a mediator.

Now it makes better sense why Christ appears "for us in God's presence" (Heb. 9:24) as our Advocate/Mediator (1 John 2:1). He pleads our case/cause by presenting evidence, as in a department meeting or a court of law. What we need is mercy and "grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16). The evidence is not a CV (Curriculum Vitae) that we have produced, but the fact that we have acknowledged him (Matt. 10:32), thereby accepting his CV (Christus Victor), which he has accomplished by his sacrifice and which proves God's right to justly forgive us (Rom. 3:24—26).

Christ's CV is not printed on paper, recorded on a floppy disk, or burned onto a CD-ROM, but engraved in his flesh (John 20:24—28). John, the beloved

disciple, saw him in heaven symbolically depicted as a Lamb that had just been slaughtered but had not yet crumpled to the ground from loss of blood (Rev. 5:6). The point is that Christ continually carries the altar/cross event with him *as if it were happening right now* in order to drive home the evidence that gives us peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and secures what we need.

Having a friend in the heavenly "Religion Department" with special access to the "Chairman" (cf. Dan. 7:9—10, 13—14) is incredibly reassuring. Even if we have no earthly mediator to speak up for us and nobody here below is praying for our need, we can be certain that Jesus is interceding for us. This reality penetrated my experience when I was twenty years old and struggling with a difficult decision that could affect the course of my life. While reading the Bible, I "happened" to come across Jesus' words of encouragement to Simon Peter just before a time of crisis: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. *But I have prayed for you*, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31—32, emphasis added). These verses had a profound effect on me. Even if nobody in the world knew what was going on, I was not alone because Jesus would surely be praying for me as he prayed for Peter!

Vickie Hess, professor of chemistry at Indiana Wesleyan University, describes her encounter with the same passage during her first year at graduate school:

> Like me, Peter was convinced—until he faltered—that *he* could be faithful. Like me, Peter's overconfidence led him into situations he couldn't handle, and he denied His Lord. I firmly believed that Jesus' words were for me as well as for Peter. He prayed, not that Peter would succeed, but that his *faith* wouldn't fail—and mine hadn't! God's grace *had* been sufficient to accomplish *His* purposes. Jesus told Peter that only *after* he'd experienced failure and reinstatement would he be able to strengthen the brethren. So His word to me was that my experience of *my* failure and His grace was what I would need to "strengthen the brethren."[8]

Hotline. In 1995, while Scott O'Grady was hugging the ground in Bosnia after his F-16 was shot down, he had a small two-way radio with a limited range that could reach a U.S. aircraft only if it was flying in his vicinity. Unfortunately, bad weather kept American planes away for several days. What a pity he didn't have a more powerful communication system!

O'Grady did have a direct hotline to headquarters of another superpower. He later told an interviewer: "I prayed to God and asked him for a lot of things, and he delivered throughout the entire time."[9] Hebrews 4:14—16 describes O'Grady's hotline to heaven:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

"To help us in our time of need." When do you need help? All the time! Even if a person is not cold, hungry, lonely, or divorced; or sick with cancer, AIDS, or heart disease; or hunted and victimized, in some ways our world is like O'Grady's Bosnia. Life can often seem like a game of survival in an alien battleground. Paul explains why: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). But Paul was not afraid: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). When we pray, the Lord is on the other end of the hotline.

O'Grady waited for six days before the Marines took him home. We have been waiting a lot longer. It has been almost two thousand years since Christ ascended to heaven. When is he coming back to take us home as he promised (John 14:1—3)? What has he been doing all this time? In his magnificent book *The Jesus I Never Knew,* Philip Yancey struggles with this question:

> So many times in the course of writing this book I have felt like one of those disciples, peering intently at a blank blue sky. I look for some sign of Jesus, some visual clue…. Like the disciples' eyes, mine ache for a pure glimpse of the One who ascended. Why, I ask again, did he have to leave? … I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles.[10]

Christ's prolonged absence seems mysterious. But the book of Hebrews tells us what he has been doing: continuing the process of saving us by carrying on his priestly mediation in heaven (4:14—16; 7:1—10:25). Even when we feel shot down, we can rest assured that rescue is in progress and that we have a hotline to headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief at his control center of the universe, which throbs with limitless power (Rev. 4—5)![11]

1. F. H. Gorman, “Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status,” in M. Graham, W. Brown, and J. Kuan, eds., *History and Interpretation. Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes* (JSOTSup 173; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 47—64.

2. A. Hurowitz, cited by J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 588.

3. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 591.

4. Augustine, *Confessions,* transl. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), 250.

5. On biblical hermeneutical controls for typology, especially of the horizontal and vertical varieties, see R. M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture. A Study of Hermeneutical*

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Victim	John 1:29; Heb. 9:12–14, 26–28; 10:1–10
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Bread	John 6:48
Light	John 9:5
Veil	Heb. 10:20
Water	John 19:34; 1 John 5:6–8

Structures (AUSDDS 2; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1981).

6. R. Gane, *Altar Call,* 40.

7. See further in ibid., 41—43.

8. V. L. Hess, “Faith in Failure,” in R. Knott, ed., *College Faith* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 2002), 37—38.

9. K. Fedarko and M. Thompson, “All for One,” *Time* (June 19, 1995): 21—26.

10. P. Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 227, 229.

11. See Gane, *Altar Call,* 16—19.

Leviticus 10

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in
them and added incense, and they offered unauthorized fire before the
LORD, contrary to his command. 2So fire came out from the presence of
the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. 3Moses
then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said:

"'Among those who approach me
will show myself holy,
in the sight of all the people
I will be honored.'"

Aaron remained silent.

4Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle
Uzziel, and said to them, "Come here, carry your cousins outside the
camp, away from the front of the sanctuary." 5So they came and
carried them, still in their tunics, outside the camp, as Moses ordered.

6Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do
not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you
will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community. But
your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the LORD
has destroyed by fire. 7Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of
Meeting or you will die, because the LORD's anointing oil is on you."
So they did as Moses said.

8Then the LORD said to Aaron, 9"You and your sons are not to drink
wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of
Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations
to come. 10You must distinguish between the holy and the common,
between the unclean and the clean, 11and you must teach the Israelites

all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses."

12Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering left over from the offerings made to the LORD by fire and eat it prepared without yeast beside the altar, for it is most holy. 13Eat it in a holy place, because it is your share and your sons’ share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire; for so I have been commanded. 14But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place, they have been given to you and your children as your share of the israelites’ fellowship offerings. 15The thigh that was presented and the breast that was waved must be brought with the fat portions of the offerings made by fire, to be waved before the LORD as a wave offering. This will be the regular share for you and your children, as the LORD has commanded."

16When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s remaining sons, and asked, 17“Why didn’t you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy, it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD. 18Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded."

19Aaron replied to Moses, “Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the LORD have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?” 20When Moses heard this, he was satisfied.

Original Meaning

"IT WAS THE best of times, it was the worst of times." So begins Charles Dickens' classic *A Tale of Two Cities*.[1] The same could be said of Leviticus 9—10, chronicling the Lord's spectacular acceptance of the inaugural Aaronic sacrifices by fire, shortly followed by his rejection of two of Aaron's sons, also by fire. Because of this tragedy, it almost looked as though the founding was about to founder!

Leviticus 10:1—2 cryptically records the ritual mistake of Nadab and Abihu and their destruction by divine fire.[2] To the consternation of interpreters, who have imagined a variety of scenarios, the biblical text does not provide details regarding the circumstances or motivation of the two priests.

Just enough is said to make clear that their offense was to burn incense to the Lord with unauthorized ("strange") fire, the use of which he had not commanded for this purpose. This fire must have consisted of live coals from a source other than the authorized sacred fire on the outer altar that God himself had lit (cf. 16:12; Num. 16:46).

Nadab and Abihu may have had what seemed to them to be a good rationale for doing what they did under the circumstances, just as Uzzah later had a good reason to grasp the ark of the covenant in order to steady it when its cart jolted (2 Sam. 6:6—7). In any case, the reasons of these three individuals were not good enough to prevent their sudden death by divine agency. For those who came this close to the "nuclear reactor" of divine Presence, there was no leeway for deviations from protocol.

In response to the death of his nephews, Moses conveyed the Lord's interpretation of the event to Aaron, their father. This potent divine speech with double-edged meaning is cast in poetic parallelism:

> Through those who are near me
> I will show myself holy,
> and before all the people
> I will be glorified. (10:3 NRSV)

By stark contrast with the people's joyful shouting only a short time before

(9:24), Aaron's response was dead silence (10:3).

"Those who are near *[qarob]* me" are the priests, who approach (Qal of *qrb)* the Lord in order to present (Hiphil of qrb) sacrifice *(qorban)* to him.[3] In this kind of context the adjective *carob* designates "an official who can have access to *(qarab)* his sovereign directly, without resorting to an intermediary (Ezek 23:12; Esth 1:14)."[4] The Lord will show himself holy "through" (preposition *b)* the priests, whether by their cooperation with him or, as in the present instance, by punishing them (cf. Num. 20:13; Ezek. 28:22; 38:16).[5] Either way, he shows himself to be awesomely and uniquely holy (Niphal of *qds),* and he glorifies/honors himself (Niphal of *kbd;* lit., "be made heavy/weighty") before all the people. The sanctuary was all about God and his nature. Nothing that blurred the true picture of who he is could be allowed.

The remains of Nadab and Abihu could not be left where they had fallen. So Moses summoned two nonpriestly Levites, who were their first cousins once removed, to approach (Qal of qrb) and carry them from an area in front of ([J]et *peney)* another area[6] called the *qodes* (lit., "holiness") to a location outside the camp (10:4). "Outside the camp" is where sacred ashes from the altar and incinerated remains of sacrifices were disposed of (cf. 4:11—12; 6:11; 9:11).

When the word *qodes* refers to an area, it can signify any part of the sacred precincts, including the inner sanctum (16:2, 3, 16, 17, etc.), the outer sanctum (e.g., Ex. 26:33; 28:29; Lev. 6:30), the tabernacle consisting of both sanctums (Ex. 40:9), or the outside/courtyard area of the sacred compound (Lev. 10:18b; cf. vv. 13, 17). However, there is sufficient evidence to narrow down the location of Nadab and Abihu to the courtyard in front of the outer sanctum *(qodes;* cf. v. 18a) of the tabernacle, which is where we last saw them (9:18—20). Since they were "before the LORD" (9:1—2), they were in the sacred precincts. But they were outside the tabernacle structure, as shown by the fact that Moses did not command Mishael and Elzaphan to go into the sacred Tent (10:4), which only priests were permitted to enter (Ex. 30:17—21; Num. 18:3—5), in order to retrieve their remains.

Aaronic priests were supposed to approach (Qal of *qrb)* the Lord to officiate sacrifices that were burned on his altar (cf. 9:8), so it is ironic that here Mishael and Elzaphan had to approach priests who had offered (Hiphil of qrb) unauthorized fire (10:1) and whom the Lord had burned (10:2), in order to grimly carry them out of the holy area.

To prevent further misrepresentation of God and loss of life, the Lord commanded Aaron and his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to abstain from mourning in the usual ways of disheveling hair and tearing garments (10:6). By

virtue of their consecration, the priests and their vestments belonged to the sacred sphere that was to be dissociated from death and corpse contamination.

Because the divine instructions regarding the Day of Atonement begin with the words "The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD" (Lev. 16:1), Milgrom argues that "it was the death of Nadab and Abihu within the sanctuary precincts that was responsible for the emergency purgation rites prescribed in chap. 16."[7] However, Schwartz points out that the reference to this event in 16:1 only fixes a relative chronological framework to tell when God gave the Day of Atonement legislation. This does not support the hypothesis that the rituals of chapter 16 originally arose out of the events of chapter 10.[8]

Nevertheless, establishment of a yearly (rather than emergency) Day of Atonement to purge the accumulated ritual impurities and moral faults of all Israelites out of the sanctuary, as prescribed in the present form of chapter 16, would presumably take care of residual pollution resulting from the demise of Nadab and Abihu.

In spite of the tragedy, Moses sought to ensure that the surviving priests completed the inaugural sacrifices on behalf of the people by eating their meat portions, which functioned as "agents' commissions" (10:12—18). Life must go on. Even deep personal grief, compounded by horror, must be held in check so that the community can be served.

Even by benefiting from their own portions, the priests are to enact God's fairness in rewarding them for labor on behalf of others. So this eating is mandatory; the meat is not something that can be foregone or thrown away at will. After the traumatizing deaths of Nadab and Abihu, it is hard to imagine a time when Aaron and his surviving sons would be less interested in eating, but eat they must.

When Moses discovered that instead of properly eating the remainder of the purification offering on behalf of the people (cf. 9:15), the priests had incinerated it like the earlier purification offering on behalf of themselves (10:11), he "hit the roof" (10:16). Undoubtedly he suspected that Eleazar and Ithamar were reckless like their dead brothers. What's the matter with this generation? Can't they get anything right?

In the process of upbraiding Aaron's surviving sons, Moses uttered words with profound implications for the meaning of the purification offering.

> "Why did you not eat the purification offering in the sacred precinct? For it is most holy and it was assigned to you
> to bear the culpability of the community,

to expiate on their behalf before the LORD.

Because its blood was not brought into the interior of the sacred precinct, you certainly ought to have eaten it in the sacred precinct, as I commanded." (author's transl.)[9]

Verse 18 simply refers to the rules in 6:24—30, but 10:17 adds a vital element to our understanding of purification offerings: Through eating the meat of such a sacrifice, an officiating priest bears the culpability (NIV "guilt"; often rendered "iniquity," but see below) of the offerer and thereby makes an integral contribution to the process of expiation. No wonder Moses was upset!

Now it was Aaron's turn to speak (10:19—20):

"See, this day they brought their purification offering and burnt offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten the purification offering today, would the LORD have approved?" And when Moses heard this, he approved.[10]

Reversing the roles in verse 3, it was Moses now who had nothing more to say. Aaron's abstaining from the meat was not a careless ritual mistake but a choice based on priestly reflection regarding implications of the sin of Nadab and Abihu for the status of Aaron and his surviving sons before the Lord on this occasion. The priests were unworthy to bear the culpability of others on the very day that their family had fallen under divine condemnation.[11] Moses' approval implies that the sacrifice remained valid despite this departure from the norm.[12]

Bridging Contexts

HUMAN FAILURE AND DIVINE PERSISTENCE. After the death of Nadab and Abihu, the surviving priests were obliged to accept the Lord's punitive action and thereby show solidarity with his holiness (cf. 10:3) without demonstrating conflict of interest by mourning (10:6—7). Mourning would be construed as sympathy for the sinners. In spite of natural emotions for their flesh and blood, the priests belonged to God. According to the divine legislation of 21:1—2, Eleazar and Ithamar ordinarily would have been permitted to participate in the mourning and burial of their brothers. But in the disastrous aftermath of the inauguration, they were held to the more stringent standard of holiness usually reserved only for the high priest (cf. 21:10—12).

At least partly explaining the higher standard in chapter 10 is the fact that here Eleazar and Ithamar were still engaged in the ritual process of inauguration, with some concluding activities yet to be completed (see 10:12—18). The divine command for the priests to remain in the sacred enclosure throughout the seven days of consecration (8:33, 35) also applied to the inauguration on the eighth day (10:7) because the consecration-inauguration constituted a unit. Until this founding complex was brought to successful conclusion, the newborn ritual system was vulnerable.

Exacerbating the vulnerability of the Aaronic priesthood, Nadab and Abihu died under divine judgment. The gravity of their offense was magnified by the loftiness of their privilege. As Aaron's oldest sons (cf. Num. 3:2), their position of religious leadership was just behind Moses and Aaron. If anyone had reason for reverential care toward God and his sancta, it was Nadab and Abihu. Not only had they witnessed the divine glory at Mount Sinai, which "looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (Ex. 24:17; cf. Deut. 5:22), but with an elite group of leaders they also shared the awe-inspiring experience of approaching and seeing the God of Israel (Ex. 24:1, 9—11).

S. Karff points out the inadequacy of Moses as comforter to Aaron in Leviticus 10.[13] However, the story of this highly exceptional and dangerous situation is not the place to talk about meeting people's emotional needs in times of sorrow. Would we criticize a police chief for barking orders rather than offering words of comfort as he tries to save people from a burning skyscraper?

Moses' intense reaction in Leviticus 10 reflects the severity of the situation. The sanctuary system, which was essential for the well-being of the nation that was provided by God's Presence, was threatened when it had barely gotten off the ground.

No sooner had God taken up residence and lit the altar fire (9:23—24), *the very next verse* reports the violation by Nadab and Abihu (10:1). The failure of two charter members of the Aaronic priesthood just after their ministries had begun fits into a disturbing pattern that runs through Scripture. Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3) not long after God had given them a perfect world with an ideal set of relationships. After the great Flood, God graciously established a covenant with Noah (9:1—17). Then the grand old patriarch switched careers from zoology to viticulture, flooded himself with wine, shamed himself, and ended up cursing his grandson (9:20—27). At Mount Sinai, God pledged his pact to the newly freed nation of Abraham's descendants amid petrifying splendor (Ex. 19—20; 24). But when Moses tarried on the mountain to receive instructions for a tabernacle so that the Lord could bless them with his covenant Presence (chs. 25—31), the people disloyally turned to idolatry (32:1—6).

Unfortunately, the pattern continued. For example, in the New Testament we find Christ's disciples abandoning him and Peter denying him just after they celebrated the Last Supper, at which he established the "new covenant" service (Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13—18).

We are not talking about minor events here, but about failure of human parties who participated in the establishment of major covenant phases, which provide the framework of historical salvation that structures the entire Bible, including Old and New Testaments. The message of the Bible is that God persists in pursuing his plan to save human beings in spite of their failures, waiving his indisputably justifiable right to do what appears most logical, namely, to annul his covenant relationship with them. This grace is attributable only to his inherently merciful character, which he proclaimed to Moses on Mount Sinai just after the golden calf episode (Ex. 34:6—7).

While God keeps his covenant going as an ongoing channel of revelation and salvation, individuals may choose to disqualify themselves from enjoying the covenant benefits.[14] Thus, although the Lord did not withdraw his Presence from the sanctuary or invalidate the sacrifices for the community that Nadab and Abihu had helped to officiate, when these priests violated their sacred trust, he summarily removed them from office by "firing" them (Lev. 10:2).

Serving with distinctions. In ancient Near Eastern texts, we find alcoholic drinks included with sacrificial meals for gods.[15] In *Enuma Elish*, the

Babylonian epic of creation, the great gods assemble for a banquet at which they make a well-lubricated decision to exalt Marduk above other gods:

> With sweet liquor they made their gullets run,
> They felt good from drinking the beer.
> Most carefree, their spirits rose,
> To Marduk their champion they ordained destiny.[16]

There is no counterpart to this scenario with regard to the God of Israel.[17] In fact, in 10:9 he strictly prohibits consumption of alcoholic beverages by priests when they enter his tabernacle. The brief account of Nadab and Abihu's offense in verse 1 does not mention that they were intoxicated, and in any case they were not inside the tabernacle.[18] However, this narrative and the ensuing legislation in 10:8—11 are related in that they both have to do with failure to make distinctions between categories, resulting in death. Eschewing inebriation, priests are to keep their minds clear so that they can walk a straight line between crucial categories—holy versus common and impure versus pure—and to teach the Lord's instructions to the people.

By nipping the potential for priestly intoxication in the bud, God sought to prevent the kinds of staggering problems described by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 28:7:

> And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer:
>
> Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine;
>
> they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions.

This kind of religion advertises itself like the menu of one Swiss restaurant: "Our wines leave you nothing to hope for."

At first glance, the Lord's "zero tolerance" prohibition against intoxication in the Israelite tabernacle sounds harsh, but his warning seeks to prevent disasters. Dazed officials in the most powerful facility on earth would be like inebriated engineers in a nuclear power plant. The potential for a "meltdown" is real and could affect a lot of people.

A drunk priest in the tabernacle will simply die. His intention is irrelevant.

There is no opportunity for a plea of forgetfulness or a rationalized "worthy" motive. Compare Uzzah, whose arguably worthy goal of keeping the ark of the covenant from capsizing did not save him from being instantly zapped when he crossed the line by touching the sacred chest (2 Sam. 6:6—7). There is simply no room for this kind of error that threatens to compromise the Lord's transcendence by encroaching on his domain.

Stories of Nadab and Abihu and Uzzah are shocking to Christians who have been raised with "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." But this same Jesus burst into messianic righteous rage and used a whip to drive from the temple those who were profaning it by buying and selling there (John 2:14—17; cf. Matt. 21:12—13; Mark 11:15—17; Luke 19:45—46). Through those who are near him he will show himself holy, and before all the people he will be glorified (Lev. 10:3).

Mediatorial burden bearing. The meaning of Moses' words to Aaron in 10:17 has been the subject of vigorous debate. To begin with, scholars have been divided over the question of whether priestly consumption of a purification offering contributes to expiation or not. But as Milgrom has come to recognize, if the meat were merely a priestly perquisite serving as an "agent's commission," it would be difficult to explain why Moses was so upset with Aaron's sons in 10:16—18 or the fact that 10:17 singles out utilization of the purification offering, but not of other kinds of sacrifices, as mandatory.[19] We could add that it would also be difficult to explain why Aaron and his sons singled out the purification offering for incineration but had no problem eating their portions of the other sacrifices (10:12—15).

Levine accounts for all the evidence when he concludes that the priestly meal of the purification offering meat was an integral part of the ritual and accomplished two things simultaneously: (1) It was priestly enjoyment of compensation for service already rendered, including applying the blood to the altar, and (2) it made some kind of contribution to expiation.[20] It is not necessary to argue for one of these to the exclusion of the other.

In what way did the priestly activity of eating the meat serve the goal of expiation? Three pieces of evidence help us with this. (1) Whether a purification offering to remedy moral fault was to be eaten or not made no difference to the overall goal of the ritual: to expiate *(kipper)* evil from the offerer(s), prerequisite to divine forgiveness (e.g., eaten type: 4:26, 31, 35; incinerated type: 4:20). So what difference did it make whether a priest ate from the sacrifice? He was only permitted to eat a purification offering that he officiated if it was for the benefit of someone else, that is, if he was acting purely in a mediatorial capacity. If he were the offerer or included in a group that constituted a collective offerer, he

could not eat it (4:3—12, 13—21; 9:8—11).

(2) As mediator for another Israelite, the priest received part of that person's purification offering by eating it, just as the Lord received the suet/fat of the same sacrifice on his altar (cf. 4:26, 31, 35). So there is a close parallel between the role of the priest and that of the Lord.

(3) In 10:17 the priests must eat purification offering meat to accomplish the following two goals, which would apply to this kind of sacrifice to remedy moral fault but not physical ritual impurity:[21]

> to bear the culpability of the community
> to expiate on their behalf before the Lord

The parallel syntax here indicates that bearing (n') the peoples' culpability *('wn)* and expiating for them before the Lord mean basically the same thing.[22] So by participating with God in receiving purification offerings, the priests expiated for the people as the Lord does: He bears culpability (ns' 'wn) when he frees wrongdoers from the consequences of their sins (Ex. 34:7), which they would otherwise continue to bear (cf. Lev. 5:1).[23] Thus the priests intimately participated in the process through which God extended mercy to sinners!

A final question is: What happened to the priests as a result of bearing the culpability of the people? Schwartz shows that elsewhere the expression *ns' 'wn* metaphorically refers to legal guilt in terms of bearing or carrying sin, with the offense viewed as an object to be hauled around as a burden.[24] In contexts of persons bearing their own sin, *'wn* (usually translated "iniquity") is "culpability," which means that they deserve and may suffer any consequences.[25]

In some passages people bear the culpability ('wn) of others. A man who nullifies his wife's vow, except when he first hears about it, bears her culpability, that is, the blame she would otherwise bear for breaking her vow (Num. 30:16). In Leviticus 10:17 priests who perform priestly mediation for laypeople through purification offerings bear their culpability. K. Koch explains: "Part of the task of priests and Levites, however, is to remove *'aw ôn* from Israel or from the sanctuary itself, to 'bear' that *'awôn* representatively, and by virtue of their own inherent quality to render it harmless (Ex. 28:38; Lev. 10:17; Nu. 18:1, 23)."[26]

By "their own inherent quality," Koch refers to the divine holiness conferred on the priests at their consecration. So the culpability remains on the priests, who are immune to its consequences. Then Koch suggests that on the Day of Atonement the high priest transfers the culpability borne by the priests to Azazel's goat (Lev. 16:21).[27] This makes good sense because the goat bears all

the culpabilities (nsʾ + plural of *ʾwn)* of the Israelites into the desert (16:22).

We have found that through purification offerings, the mediatorial role of the Israelite priesthood involved bearing the burdens of the people that resulted from their sins. However, although the priests carried this culpability (i.e., punishability), they did not actually suffer the punishment.[28]

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 went the extra, painful step—freeing others by bearing and then dying for their culpability *(ʾwn;* 53:5, 6, 11). In the New Testament this Servant is Christ: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24; cf. Matt. 8:16—17; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32—35).

As evidence for the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement, Christians need look no further than the fact that as Priest he bore human sins and as Victim he died for those sins. This fusion of roles, with Priest becoming Victim, explains the superiority of his priestly mediation (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:5—12—quoting Ps. 40). Not only is he divine and therefore fully identified with God (John 10:30; Col. 1:19; 2:9); he has identified with sinners all the way to the bitter end!

Contemporary Significance

VULNERABILITY OF NEW relationships. New relationships are easily damaged. This applies to covenant relationships between husbands and wives, between God and his people (see above), and all kinds of other individual and corporate relationships, ranging from personal friendships to international alliances. Moreover, a new relationship can bring other relationships with it. For example, a person who marries gains a whole new set of relatives. Needless to say, this can affect the success of the marriage. Similarly, a person who makes the decision to accept God joins the family of fellow believers. If this involves worshiping with a particular group, as it usually does, the "baby Christian" is simultaneously learning to positively interact with the Lord and with other human beings.

If the learning curve for a new Christian were merely an intellectual one, it would be plenty steep. But a faith relationship with the Lord that is expressed and exercised within the context of church involves powerful spiritual, social, and emotional dimensions, all of which affect each other within every individual. Faith is trust, and when trust is young and tender it is easily bruised and slow to heal.

Relating to the Lord, a particular minister, and some other wonderful person can be comparatively simple, but all the rest of those faulty members can be hard to take. In a mobile, market-driven, instant gratification culture like ours, it is easy to just move on. No wonder a church can be like a revolving door, with many people going out soon after they come in!

In Leviticus 8 and 10 we have found that the Lord placed extra safeguards around his new relationship with the Israelites and their priesthood: He kept the priests inside the sacred compound (8:33, 35; 10:7), rapidly disciplined Nadab and Abihu before their folly could damage the whole community (10:1—2), and made sure that his surviving priests would represent him properly before the people (10:6). The burden for protecting the new relationship rested primarily on the religious leaders, whose actions and attitudes would shape the people's perception of God.

Obviously our strategies for safeguarding new Christians must differ from those of Leviticus 8 and 10. However, as in the days of Nadab and Abihu, the

principle remains that those who shape perceptions regarding God should be aware of their influence.

> The effect of a sacred office thus misused and abused, and thus wrongly occupied is to bring the truth, the Bible, the ministry and the ordinances of God into contempt. It produces hardness of heart, and is bound to beget irreverence. Let the man who handles holy things be a holy man, and a man called of God and not by man.[29]

In the church, responsibility toward those who are vulnerable falls not only on the shoulders of those in official positions of leadership; all established members play a role. How do we nurture the Peters, Mary Magdalenes, Nicodemuses, Judases, and Thomases in our midst? Once in awhile it doesn't hurt to reread the Gospels with questions like these in mind, to see how Jesus did it.

Paul admonished: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor. 8:9). Christ agreed, but the strong and vivid way he taught divine accountability for sensitivity toward those who are vulnerable sounds more like Leviticus 10:

> And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matt. 18:5—6; cf. Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1—2)

In a wider sense we are all vulnerable. Jesus gave us an example of sensitivity toward human beings in general by fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 42: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory" (Matt. 12:20; quoting Isa. 42:3). The world and the church are full of "bruised reeds" and "smoldering wicks." If he doesn't break or snuff them out, should we?

Responsibility to preserve clear thinking. By itself intoxication seems to be a rather trivial concern, but because it adversely affects thinking and reactions, it can lead to major damage. This, of course, is why "driving under the influence" is such a grave offense today. Everyone is hurt by the results of intoxication, which include higher insurance premiums, defective products and service, and much worse.

In 1982 a young man who was drunk and high on drugs missed a corner on Highway 580 near San Francisco. His Chevy Nova plowed head-on into a VW

coming the other way, which was hurled airborne onto the hood of a Datsun B-210 coming behind in the next lane. The smashed Datsun shuddered to a halt, and my wife and I tried to get out, but the doors were jammed. A semi-truck bearing down on us ran into an embankment and jack-knifed in order to save us. Narrowly missing death a second time, by the grace of God, we walked away with a concussion (my wife), a cracked rib (me), and whiplash injuries (both of us). The VW driver was not so fortunate. She was killed instantly and her two young daughters suffered massive injuries, including mangled faces and a ruptured spleen. All this carnage resulted from one person acting irresponsibly because he chose to intoxicate himself.

Since the human brain is a complex and sensitive organ, there are various ways to compromise its ability to control reasoning, judgment, and physical reactions. Besides chemicals (such as alcohol, narcotics, or some medicines), there can be factors such as sleep deprivation, poor diet, lack of exercise, stress, music, sex addiction, and so on. Some of these are initiated or perpetuated by choice, others are not. Insofar as we affect others by our choices, we should seek to maintain our clarity of mind as a matter of social fairness, if nothing more.

For spiritual leaders, of course, the stakes are higher. Their actions, decisions, attitudes, words, and personal spiritual lives, all of which require use of brains and nervous systems, can even unintentionally affect the *eternal* destinies of those within their sphere of influence. So optimal service to those under their care calls for implementing positive lifestyle strategies that enhance mental clarity within the context of overall health care.

Carrying one another's burdens. Since priests are to bear the burdens of those whom they serve (10:17) and Christians are called to be "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), it is not surprising that Paul would say: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). We do not carry burdens in the ultimate, substitutionary way that Christ did to obtain forgiveness for us. But all of us, whatever our occupations may be, can participate with him in helping others and relieving suffering. In these ways we can fulfill the law of Christ, which is love (John 13:34—35).

We do not literally bear the names of tribes over our hearts as Aaron did when he ministered before the Lord (Ex. 28:15—21, 29), but we can metaphorically bear on our hearts the names of our family members, work associates, fellow church members, neighborhoods, acquaintances in need, and so on. By serving others and by interceding for them in prayer, we have the privilege of assisting Christ in his priestly ministry.

Like Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar, we must sometimes carry on for the sake of others in spite of private pain. Don and Helen Thomas of South Africa buried

little Margaret, their four-year-old daughter, in the Congo when she died of cerebral malaria, but they kept on working there as missionaries. Like rescue workers trying to evacuate people from burning skyscrapers, they had as their top priority the salvation of others.

Father Damien De Veuster, a Belgian Catholic priest, devoted his ministry to a colony of hopeless, miserable lepers who had been banished to a remote peninsula on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. He was free from leprosy when he became the first resident clergyman and part-time physician for the settlement in 1873. Eventually he succumbed to the disease but stayed on with those to whom he now belonged.[30] It is when other people become our own that we most truly "carry each other's burdens."

1. C. Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Ware, Hertfordshire, U.K.: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), 3.

2. Destructive divine fire also appears in Num. 11:1; 16:35; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Rev. 20:9—10, 14—15 (= hellfire).

3. On several words derived from qrb, see R. Gane and J. Milgrom, *qarab," TDOT,* 13:135—48.

4. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6,* 600.

5. Compare P. Segal, "The Divine Verdict of Leviticus 10:3," *VT* 39 (1989): 91—93.

6. On the meaning of, *'t peney,* see comments on 4:6, 17.

7. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 608.

8. B. Schwartz, "The Literary and Ritual Unity of Leviticus 16," paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver.

9. Modification of Milgrom's translation *(Leviticus i — i6,* 596).

10. Transl. ibid., 596.

11. Cf. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature,* 73, 75—77.

12. Although the sacrifice was not invalidated, this departure from the script was conditioned by exceptional extenuating circumstances: divine execution of Nadab and Abihu when they engaged in ritual activity that "misfired" or "backfired" (literally!). On ritual mistakes and failures, see Grimes, *Ritual Criticism,* 191—209, repr. from "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 103—22.

13. S. Karff, "Silence and Weeping before the Song (Leviticus 10:1—20)," in F. C. Holmgren and H. E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical*

Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 111—12.

14. Cf. J. H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 94—99.

15. See e.g. *ANET,* 338—41, 343 (beer and wine in Mesopotamia).

16. COS, 396 *(Enuma Elish,* 3.135—38).

17. On *sekar* (so-called "strong/fermented drink") offered in the Israelite tabernacle, see comments on Num. 28:7.

18. Ezek. 44:21 does prohibit priests from drinking wine when they enter the inner court of the later temple.

19. Milgrom, cited by Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity,* 133 n. 22; Milgrom, *Leviticus i — is,* 622—25, 635—40. Supporters of the idea that eating the meat contributes in some way to expiation include *Sipra,* Shemini 2:4; Ibn Ezra on Lev. 10:17; B. Baentsch, *Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri* (HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1903), 325, 337, 352—53; D. Hoffmann, *Das Buch Leviticus* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1905—1906), 213, 298.

20. Levine, *Leviticus,* 62; see also idem, *In the Presence of the Lord,* 104, 107.

21. A. Rodriguez, personal communication.

22. Cf. Ibn Ezra on Lev. 10:17; G. Olaffson, "The Use of *ns'* in the Pentateuch and Its Contribution to the Concept of Forgiveness" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1992), 263.

23. Cf. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah,* 326; Hoffmann, *Das Buch Leviticus,* 213—14.

24. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," 8, 15; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament,* transl. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 291; A. von R. Sauer, "The Concept of Sin in the Old Testament," *CTM* 22 (1951): 716—17; K. Koch, *'aw ôn" TDOT,* 10:559.

25. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin," 9—15.

26. Koch, *'aw ôn"* 559.

27. Ibid.

28. For more detailed analysis of Lev. 10:17, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 5.

29. Carradine, *The Sanctified Life,* 142.

30. R. Stewart, *Leper Priest of Molokai: The Father Damien Story* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2000).

Leviticus 11

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron, [2]“Say to the Israelites: ‘Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: [3]You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud.

[4]“"There are some that only chew the cud or only have a split hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. [5]The coney, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. [6]The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. [7]And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. [8]You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

[9]Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales. [10]But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales—whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water—you are to detest. [11]And since you are to detest them, you must not eat their meat and you must detest their carcasses. [12]Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be detestable to you.

[13]“"These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, [14]the red kite, any kind of black kite, [15]any kind of raven, [16]the horned owl, the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, [17]the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, [18]the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, [19]the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe and the bat.

[20]“"All flying insects that walk on all fours are to be detestable to

you. [21]There are, however, some winged creatures that walk on all fours that you may eat: those that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground. [22]Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. [23]But all other winged creatures that have four legs you are to detest.

[24]You will make yourselves unclean by these; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. [25]Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.

[26]“'Every animal that has a split hoof not completely divided or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you; whoever touches [L]the carcass of any of them will be unclean. [27]Of all the animals that walk on all fours, those that walk on their paws are unclean for you; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. [28]Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening. They are unclean for you.

[29]“'Of the animals that move about on the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard, [30]the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon. [31]Of all those that move along the ground, these are unclean for you. Whoever touches them when they are dead will be unclean till evening. [32]When one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use, will be unclean, whether it is made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean. [33]If one of them falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean, and you must break the pot. [34]Any food that could be eaten but has water on it from such a pot is unclean, and any liquid that could be drunk from it is unclean. [35]Anything that one of their carcasses falls on becomes unclean; an oven or cooking pot must be broken up. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean. [36]A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean, but anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean. [37]If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean. [38]But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.

[39]“'If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the carcass will be unclean till evening. [40]Anyone who eats some of the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till

evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.

41“'Every creature that moves about on the ground is detestable, it is not to be eaten. 42You are not to eat any creature that moves about on the ground, whether it moves on its belly or walks on all fours or on many feet; it is detestable. 43Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them. 44I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. 45I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

46“'These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water and every creature that moves about on the ground. 47You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.'"

Original Meaning

PURE AND IMPURE ANIMALS. By learning and observing differences between the sacred and the profane/common, and the pure and impure categories, the Israelites could properly relate to the holy, immortal, and omnipotent deity residing in their midst. Chapters 11—15 of Leviticus provide instructions for avoiding, controlling, and remedying the following kinds of physical ritual impurities:

Purity/impurity of animal sources
Lev. 11 —dietary distinctions

Impurity from human sources
Lev 12—genital flow from childbirth
Lev 13—scale disease diagnosis
Lev 14—scale disease ritual purification
Lev 15—genital flows other than childbirth

The order of human issues following animal issues is that of creation, in which God made animals before creating man (Gen. 1:24—27). It is also logical to begin human impurities with birth. The various impurities of persons in chapters 12—15 may have been ordered according to the decreasing length of their purification: birth (forty to eighty days), scale disease (eight days), genital discharges of male (eight days, one day), of female (seven days, eight days).[1]

Leviticus 11 continues two themes from chapter 10: eating meat and making distinctions. Not surprisingly, the reason for observing the Lord's dietary distinctions is to emulate the Lord's holiness, which is opposed to impurity (11:44—45).

The last verse of chapter 11 summarizes distinctions that apply to the animal kingdom: "You must distinguish between the unclean *[tame']* and the clean ['ahor], between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten" (11:47). These distinctions have to do with two issues. (1) The first is whether an animal defiles a person who eats/ingests it. A *ta hor,* that is, a "clean/pure" animal, does not transmit impurity and is permitted for eating. Two

categories of creatures that do defile by ingestion—*tame'* ("unclean/impure") and *seqes* ("abomination")—are not permitted for eating.

(2) The other is whether the carcass of an animal can also defile a person who merely touches it. The carcass of a *tame'* ("unclean") animal or of a permitted/pure animal that dies by itself contaminates by touch. The defiled individual incurs a light ritual impurity remaining until evening (11:24—40), which has the consequence that contact with holy things is forbidden during this time (cf. 7:20—21). This state of impurity implies that the person must ritually bathe (cf. 17:15).[2] Carrying any part of an "impure" carcass or eating from the carcass of a permitted animal that has died of itself requires laundering of clothes as well (11:25, 28, 40). Within the "unclean" category, eight exceptional species of swarmers additionally contaminate nonhuman objects (11:29—38).

Surprisingly, *seqes* ("abomination") animals carry lighter restrictions than those in the *tame'* ("unclean") class because the former defile only by ingestion. Although an Israelite must "abominate/detest" (Piel of *sqs)* their carcasses, touching them does not incur the need for ritual purification.

Thus, the three categories of creatures and their defilement are as follows:[3]

Category	Defile by Ingestion	Defile by Contact
ṭahor—"pure"	no	no
ṭame'—"impure"	yes	yes
šeqeṣ—"abomination"	yes	no

When the Lord created the animals, he pronounced them all "good" (Gen. 1:21, 25), but Leviticus 11 has to do with the unnatural matter of eating animals that were not created to be eaten. A camel, donkey, or horse may be excellent for something else, such as a means of transportation, but God says that they are not good for eating.

Once the three categories are in place, the next question is how to tell which creature belongs to which category. Some are specified by criteria, others by lists of specific species, and still others by both. Leviticus 11 uses criteria if possible, both for the sake of convenience and economy. However, where adequate criteria are not available, as in the case of birds, a list appears instead.[4] Notice that only prohibited birds are listed, which implies that all other species are permitted. Leviticus is not always as negative as it appears. Deuteronomy 14:3—21, dealing with the same topic of animals permitted and prohibited for food, less economically adds a list of permitted land animals to the criteria that govern them (14:4—6).

Criteria are of several kinds, including especially a creature's physiology of

locomotion (divided hoofs, cleft-footed, paws, jointed legs, fins), as well as outer covering (scales) and manner of digestion (chewing cud). All of the criteria in Leviticus 11, including behavioral characteristics of locomotion and digestion, are apparent to someone who observes a live creature itself, without the need to study external factors such as diet, society, mating behavior, and so on.

Leviticus 11 places species belonging to the domains of land, sea, and air in the three categories ("pure," "impure," and "abomination") by criteria and/or list as follows:

land animals (vv. 2—8)

permitted animals specified by criteria (hoofs, clefts through hoofs, cud; vv. 2—3)

list of *impure (tame')* animals lacking at least one criterion (vv. 4—8)

sea creatures (vv. 9—12)

permitted fish specified by criteria (fins and scales; v. 9)

abominable (seqes) creatures specified by lack of criteria (vv. 10—12)

birds (vv. 13—19)

list of *abominable (seqes)* birds (vv. 13—19)

winged insects (vv. 20—23)

abominable (seqes) insects specified by criterion (walk on all fours; vv. 20, 23) exceptional *permitted* insects specified by criterion (jointed legs) and list (vv. 21—22)

impure *(tame')* carcasses that convey uncleanness by touch (vv. 24—40)

land animals specified by criteria (hoofs, but no clefts or cud; paws; vv. 26—28)

list of exceptional land swarmers *(seqes)* that also defile objects (vv. 29—38)[5] otherwise permitted animals that die by themselves (vv. 39—40)

land swarmers (se*qes)*

abominable (seqes) swarmers specified by criterion (swarm; vv. 41—45)

All land swarmers—with locomotion close to the ground: mainly reptiles, but also some rodents (mouse) and low-slung mammals (weasel)—are prohibited for eating, and carcasses of some of them not only affect human beings directly by touch but also defile a variety of objects, including vessels and their contents (1 1:29—38). This is problematic because they are small and have a penchant for getting into all kinds of places. However, a spring or cistern of water, which is a source of purity, is immune to defilement (v. 36). So is dry seed for sowing, but wet seed can be contaminated (vv. 37—38), presumably because water outside its source carries impurity (cf. v. 34). Many defiled objects can be purified by water (v. 32), but earthen vessels and ovens/stoves must be broken (vv. 33, 35) because they are porous, absorbing impurity that cannot be removed.

Apparently because all land swarmers are prohibited without exception, this class in general is reserved for the end of Leviticus 11 as a potent contrast to holiness (vv. 41—45). The conclusion in verses 43—45 emphasizes the most important point of the chapter: Observing the Lord's dietary regulations has the purpose of emulating the Lord's holiness, which is antithetical to impurity. If God's people make themselves odious by what they eat, they misrepresent him. So living according to the dietary distinctions outlined in chapter 11 is vital for maintaining the health of the divine-human relationship.

Bridging Contexts

HOLINESS VERSUS IMPURITY in diet. It is disturbing to interpreters that Leviticus 11 does not provide an explicit rationale for the division of animals into clean and unclean categories. For the Israelites, this was not an issue because the main point was to do what the Lord said, whether or not he offered an explanation. Modern readers, however, are not satisfied to leave it at that. Thus, a multitude of theories have swarmed forth.

Some have emphasized physical health, insisting that prohibited animals transmit disease or poison.[6] For example, pigs carry trichinosis, scavenger birds pick up diseases from the carrion they eat, and many fish without fins and scales are poisonous.[7] However, the tendency for forbidden animals to be carriers of disease more than permitted animals does not seem to explain everything in Leviticus 11, such as why the camel (a delicacy for Arabs) is prohibited.[8]

M. Douglas, a social anthropologist, has proposed that categories of "pure" and "impure" reflect societal values. "Impurity" signifies disorder— something out of place. Each of the three spheres of water, air, and earth has its particular mode of locomotion. Creatures that cross boundaries between these modes have something out of place, so they are impure. For example, insects that fly like birds but have four legs like land animals are an abomination (11:20).[9] This approach is instructive, but it does not explain everything—for example, why the hoofs of a land animal must be split in order for it to be pure (11:3).[10]

E. Firmage has linked the dietary code to the ritual regulations, arguing that pure/permitted animals are pure because they are sacrificeable or analogous to sacrificeable animals. Thus, God's holy people emulate his sacrificial "diet."[11] This idea places the dietary laws within the holiness framework of Leviticus, but are pure animals pure because they are sacrificeable, or are sacrificeable animals fit to serve as token "food" for God (e.g., Num. 28:2) because they are pure? In other words, which comes first, the "chicken" or the "egg"?

Because Leviticus 11 explicitly identifies the concept of holiness as the reason for its legislation (11:44—45; cf. Deut. 14:21), Milgrom reconstructs a plausible rationale for the biblical dietary system within the context of opposition between holiness-life and impurity-death that is found throughout the Israelite ritual

system:

> Its purpose is to teach the Israelite reverence for life by (1) reducing his choice of flesh to a few animals; (2) limiting the slaughter of even these few permitted animals to the most humane way … and (3) prohibiting the ingestion of blood and mandating its disposal upon the altar or by burial … as acknowledgment that bringing death to living things is a concession of God's grace and not a privilege of man's whim.[12]

Related to Milgrom's thesis, Jiri Moskala argues that impure creatures depart from the creation ideal of life in that they are linked to death for various reasons, including their carnivorous diets, use in war, and negative effects on human health.[13]

Radical obedience. Aside from showing that the Lord is concerned with details of everyday human life, such as diet, Leviticus 11 reminds us that he does not always provide detailed explanations for his commands. The motivation to observe the Lord's dietary distinctions is to be a holy people that eschews (not chews!) impurity because impurity is incompatible with holiness (11:44—45). Beyond this, they are simply expected to obey.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger finds that even for scientific, intellectual, independent people, "although we do gain wisdom from the exercise of analysis and discourse on God's commandments, we gain character from our decision to obey in spite of our limited human capability to understand."[14] "Limited … capability to understand"? This sounds like an honestly humble approach.

The first biblical example of a divine command without detailed explanation is early and also happens to concern eating: "… but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). There was a rationale, all right: to avoid death. Yet the prohibition did not say why death would result from this particular tree, just as Leviticus 11 does not tell why impurity results from a particular animal. Even if the Lord gave Adam and Eve additional information, how could they have understood the concept of evil consequences when they had never experienced sin or suffering?

Adam and Eve flunked their test of obedience. By contrast, when the Lord tested Abraham by inexplicably commanding him to offer his only beloved son on a mountain, he obeyed because he recognized the voice of God, even though it did not make sense (Gen. 22). This was the highest form of obedience: radical submission of human judgment to divine will, humbly accepting God's superior wisdom and strength just as a child implicitly trusts a parent (cf. Luke 18:17).

One morning, May Nelson was walking with her three small children along a dusty road in Australia. Suddenly she commanded, “Children, stand still!” They froze like statues, without knowing why. Then they saw the six-foot-long, deadly brown snake only inches from the shoes of the eldest child. With no motion to startle it, the lethal reptile glided past, slithered under a fence, and disappeared. If the children had asked for an explanation rather than instantly obeying, or if they had run when they saw the snake, the result would have been tragic and perhaps we never would have enjoyed the artistry of Allison Nelson, the concert pianist.[15]

Radical obedience, like that of Abraham and of May Nelson’s children, is based on radical trust. However, a walk of faith rather than sight, even when outward signs seem contrary, is not a blind, agnostic leap in the dark. Abraham heard the Lord’s voice, not just any voice. It is because Job had experience with God’s character that he could leave outcomes to him, affirming: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). If he died, it would be of no eternal consequence as long as his Redeemer lives (19:25; cf. Heb. 11:17—19).

When Daniel began his course of study at the University of Babylon, he made a radical resolution “not to defile himself with the royal food and wine” (Dan. 1:8). Just as the Lord answered Abraham’s willingness to give up his only covenant son by promising him many descendants (Gen. 22:16—17), he gave loyal Daniel and his companions a rich reward that corresponded to their radical obedience. Aside from the fact that their health flourished as a result of their alternate diet (Dan. 1:15), they enjoyed divinely enhanced clarity of mind, and Daniel received special access to the holy sphere of divine knowledge (1:17; 4:8; cf. 4:9, 18). That he was rewarded in terms of holiness makes perfect sense in light of Leviticus 11:44—45, where emulation of God’s holiness is the reason for maintaining purity of diet. Radical obedience to holiness resulted in radical holiness!

Wholistic health. If there is a category of “health laws” in the Pentateuch, it is a modern category based on our understanding of implications for health rather than on motivations for observance of specific laws explicitly supplied by the biblical text. Here is a summary of specific divine commands that can be understood to have health implications and the *stated* reasons for observing them.

Reference(s)	Law	Reason
Lev. 3:16–17; 7:23–25	no eating suet/fat	belongs to God
Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14	no eating meat with blood	respect for life
Lev. 7:15–18	no eating sacrificial meat that is too old	prevent desecration
Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3–21	no eating meat that defiles	ritual purity, holiness
Lev. 12; 15	remedy impure genital fluxes	ritual purity
Lev. 13–14	remedy scaly-skin disease	ritual purity
Lev. 18:19; 20:18	no sex during menstruation	prevent exposing source of blood
Num. 5:2–3	impure persons excluded from camp	ritual purity
Num. 19	remedy corpse contamination	ritual purity
Deut. 23:12–14	dispose of human excrement	prevent indecency

If God commanded the Israelites to do something for the sake of their health, it would make sense for us to observe that law for the same reason because our bodies function the same as theirs. However, the reasons given to the ancient Israelites are not health reasons. Nevertheless, in Deuteronomy 7:11—15 the Lord expresses concern for the health of the Israelites. Here total well-being results from his blessing within the context of the divine-human covenant when his people obey *all* his laws (cf. Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15—20; contrast 28:27, 35, 60—61). So physical health is part of a larger covenant package. Everything God's people do impacts their health one way or another. In this extended sense, all of God's commands are health laws.

Contemporary Significance

THINK AND DO. The Bible encourages people to use their minds by searching it for truth (e.g., Acts 17:11) and to think in order to interpret it properly (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:15). If we want to obey the Lord radically as Abraham and Daniel did (cf. above), it is not enough to read and do. We must read, think, and do.

A pious theology student once simply read and did. He always wore white clothes because Ecclesiastes 9:8 says: "Let your garments always be white" (NRSV). He took it literally as a command. There is certainly nothing wrong with wearing white clothes, but in this biblical context white clothes represent an expression of happiness (cf. 9:7). The same is true of the following words—"do not let oil be lacking on your head" (9:8b)—which the student inconsistently neglected to observe. It is joy that is the point here, not the literal color or oil that the wise author of Ecclesiastes used as examples.

"Knee-jerk" obedience, which short-circuits the intervening step of interpretation, is often harmless, as in the instance just described. However, in other situations this kind of "instant reflex" approach can have disastrous effects. To cite an extreme case for the sake of making the point, what if a married church member were literally to accept the duty of an ancient Israelite brother-in-law, without recognizing that a change of cultures can require different application of a timeless, authoritative principle? The duty is:

> If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. (Deut. 25:5—6)

In ancient Israel this situation of "levirate marriage," which was designed to preserve the name of the dead man by giving him a line of descendants to inherit his ancestral property, was an exception to what would otherwise be incest (Lev. 18:16). Since the law does not exempt a surviving brother who is already married, a faithful brother-in-law could wind up with a second wife. This consequence was no problem in ancient Israel, but today such polygamy would

be classed with adultery in the church even if a second marriage could somehow be legalized by the state.

So far we have been talking about the need for thinking before obeying. But if all we do is read and think without ever getting to the stage of obedience, we also have a problem. Thomas à Kempis recognized this:

> Blessed is that simplicity which rejects obscure inquiry and advances along the sure and open road of God's Commandments. Many have lost their devotion by attempting to pry into matters too high for them. It is faith and a holy life that are required of you, not a lofty intellect or knowledge of the profound mysteries of God. For if you cannot understand or grasp things that are beneath you, how will you comprehend those that are above you? Therefore submit yourself to God, and humble your reason to faith, and the light of knowledge shall be granted you in so far as it be profitable and necessary.[16]

Note that what we are to reject is not inquiry per se, but "obscure inquiry … by attempting to pry into matters too high for them." There is nothing wrong with "a lofty intellect or knowledge of the profound mysteries of God." In fact, a number of biblical writers, such as Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul, possessed these in lavish measure and used them to tremendous advantage for the cause of God. However, as the writer of Ecclesiastes discovered, intellect and knowledge avail nothing if they are not accompanied by simple faith that is lived out in obedience to God's law of love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2).

So how do we know when to stop thinking? Moses said: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Investigating the things that are revealed is profitable. Attempting to go beyond them is idle speculation that causes needless controversy and distracts from what is crucial (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3—8; Titus 3:9—11).

Wholistic health versus "cafeteria style" self-help. Why does the Pentateuch insist on treating health wholistically within the context of the divine covenant rather than pointing out health benefits of specific laws (see Bridging Contexts section)? If the emphasis had been on specific health benefits resulting from physical cause and effect, the Israelites would have been encouraged to do what people do today: pick and choose what benefits they want, foregoing those that interfere too much with their pet desires.

The modern "cafeteria-style" approach to health is unhealthy in several respects. (1) Human beings are "living systems" in which all components of

body, mind, and spirit are interactive. So the "part for all" principle applies: Whatever happens to part affects all. This means that forfeiting one benefit has a negative effect on the whole person. The fact that persons are integral units consisting of mental, emotional, and spiritual as well as physical faculties means that it is impossible to dissociate physical health from mental and spiritual health. Mental stress or spiritual anxiety can contribute to or arise from physical disease. Harm that results from rejecting or neglecting a benefit, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual, can neutralize the other benefits that an individual has acquired. For example, a person who eats organic vegetables, sleeps eight hours per night, jogs ten miles per week, stays cheery, fosters positive relationships, and maintains an active devotional life can easily lose the quality of existence fostered by these practices if he or she ignores the surgeon general's warning by smoking five packs of cigarettes a day for several decades.

(2) Factors involved in overall health, including heredity, are too complex for human beings to safely predict the consequences of the negative factors that they tolerate or cherish. Some people can abuse their health and live to a ripe old age without suffering apparent ill effects. Others end up in a lung cancer ward without taking a single puff of tobacco.

(3) The "cafeteria style" approach tends to be legalistic "self-help," which is self-focused rather than putting oneself in perspective within the framework of a larger picture that includes God and fellow human beings. To ignore God, who holds our very breath in his hands (Dan. 5:23), is not conducive to long-term health. Since the human race is already receiving the wages of sin, namely, death (Rom. 6:23), which is not good for the health, any program for health that overlooks the necessity of divine intervention for life to continue is a strictly temporary solution.

Now the biblical wholistic approach looks more attractive. If we really want to help ourselves, the best way to do it is to follow the comprehensive "manufacturer's handbook," that is, the Bible. It is true that the Bible cannot deal with every detail of our lives, some of which were not known when it was written (e.g., smoking). Yet it covers all the major bases to the extent that we can apply those principles to particulars that crop up. The Bible rightly places our well-being within the context of our covenant connection with God, whose grace alone can give us ultimate health as a gift, not because we earn it.

It does not make sense to reject the scriptural wholistic approach in favor of "self-help" because the former is too prescriptive and therefore legalistic. Any "wholistic" owner's manual in which a manufacturer instructs the consumer how to maintain a product in good operating condition is bound to be prescriptive. That is not legalism. It's just the way things work. "Self-help" is just as

concerned with do's and don'ts. The difference is who does the prescribing: the human "owner" who tries to figure out his or her own rules, or the divine "manufacturer," who really understands the product inside and out.

Should modern Gentile Christians refrain from eating meat prohibited for Israelites in Leviticus 11? Like many other difficult questions, this one has pros and cons, which I will point out without attempting to reach a firm conclusion. We will begin by considering factors that seem to go against the idea that permitted/prohibited distinctions between animals for meat are binding on Gentile Christians.

Leviticus 11 addresses only Israelites (v. 2). Similarly, in Deuteronomy 14 the Israelites are bound to observe the dietary regulations of clean and unclean meats because they are God's chosen, holy people (Deut. 14:3—21; cf. vv. 1—2). However, there is a lower standard for other people: "Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God" (14:21).

In apparent harmony with Noah's standard, the "bottom line" lifestyle restrictions established at the Jerusalem council for Gentile Christians in Acts 15 include abstaining from strangled animals and blood, that is, improperly slaughtered meat from which the blood has not been drained (Acts 15:20, 29). However, clean and unclean meats are not mentioned. Admittedly this is an argument from silence. Perhaps these distinctions were simply not an issue that had to be addressed at the Jerusalem council.

Some New Testament passages could appear at first glance to indicate that distinctions between clean and unclean meats have been abolished for Christians. In Mark 7, Jesus says, "Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile *[koinoo,* make common] him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" (Mark 7:18—19 NKJV).[17] However, Jesus' concern here is moral purity (cf. vv. 21—22), in contrast to the bodily process of digestion and elimination, not with purity/impurity of meats.

In Acts 10, Peter has a vision of various animals and is told to slaughter and eat. "But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common'" (Acts 10:14—15 NKJV). This does not say that God made impure *(akathartos)* animals clean (against the NIV), but rather that he did not acknowledge the postbiblical category of common/profane *(koinos)* animals, which were clean according to Leviticus 11 but were thought to be downgraded by association with unclean animals (see also Rom. 14:14,

20).[18] Similarly, in Mark 7:18—19 (see above) Jesus rejects downgrading from pure to common (verb *koinoo*, "make common"); he does not eliminate the "impure" category.[19]

Peter's vision is symbolic, teaching that association of Jewish Christians with Gentiles is permissible (cf. Acts 10:34—35). The metaphor of meat is particularly appropriate because table fellowship is basic to social interaction.[20]

Paul writes in Colossians 2:16—17: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." These verses have to do with ritual observances that foreshadowed later realities. There is no biblical evidence that simple dietary distinctions between clean and unclean meats served as "a shadow of the things that were to come."

There are several factors that can be taken to favor observance by Gentile Christians. (1) According to Genesis, some kind of distinction between clean and unclean animals existed even before the Flood (Gen. 7:2, 8), which agrees with the close connection between the taxonomy of Leviticus 11 and the creation order. This distinction was relevant to Noah's sacrifice after the Flood: He offered the Lord only pure animals and birds (8:20). Even though God did not prohibit Noah from eating certain animals (9:3), the ideal of inherent animal purity versus impurity preexisted and therefore did not depend on the Israelite ritual system.[21]

(2) Peter calls Christians to a holy life by quoting Leviticus 11:44: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15—16). Thus, the objective of holiness for God's people is the same as it has always been (cf. Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21). Of course, aspects of ritual purity/impurity relevant for interaction with the holiness of an earthly sanctuary/temple, which no longer functions, can no longer apply.

(3) To the extent that unclean animals tend to carry disease, a Christian would want to avoid them in order to safeguard his or her body, which is holy since it belongs to God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19—20 with regard to sexual immorality). In fact, because "clean" animals are increasingly fraught with danger to health that results from agricultural and environmental factors such as pollution, overcrowded pens, and use of hormones and excessive antibiotics, in addition to maladies such as "mad cow" disease and cancer in chickens, a Christian may choose to be vegetarian.[22]

A source of purity. Leviticus 1 1:29—38 lists eight crawlies and creepies, including several kinds of lizards, and then proceeds to describe how their

carcasses defile all kinds of nonhuman objects. Of all the beasties in this chapter, their impurity packs the most potent punch. Many of us aren't thrilled about these kinds of critters even when they're alive, let alone dead. How can we get a blessing out of this passage?

Don't underestimate the Word of God! Jacob said to the One with whom he was wrestling: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Can we not say the same thing to a passage of Scripture—"I will not let you go unless you bless me"? Paul said: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16—17). He said "*all* Scripture," not "some New Testament Scripture," or "some Scripture that immediately jumps out and grabs you."

So where is the blessing in Leviticus 11:29—38? We will get to it, but first we should emphasize that the contamination carried by unclean animals is not simply a problem of physical dirt. There was once a farmer who didn't understand this. He joined a Christian church that observed distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" animals contained in Leviticus 11. Right after his baptism, he treated the members of his new church to a meal. On the menu was pork. Aghast, the pastor asked the farmer: "Didn't we talk about clean and unclean meats?"

"Yessir," he replied, "so I scrubbed my hogs real good before I slaughtered 'em!" The farmer didn't grasp that the "uncleanness" of impure animals means that they permanently belong to a controlled category. It is impossible to scrub a critter from one category to another.

Some of the problematic animals in Leviticus 11:29—38, such as mice, are good at getting into things and places where people don't want them to be. They destroy things by chewing, stealing and contaminating food, leaving droppings, dying in walls and ceilings where their inaccessible carcasses reek for weeks, and sometimes frightening us when they show up where we don't expect them. What if such an intrusive creature contaminates a source of drinking water so that it is unusable? In places where water sources are few and far between, such as some parts of Palestine, this could be a serious or even life-threatening calamity. No fear, for as Leviticus 11:36 says: "A spring … or a cistern for collecting water remains clean." Thus, as a striking exception, a water source is immune, even though water away from its source conveys impurity (11:34, 38).

Why is a spring or cistern not affected by the carcass of an impure creature? From such a source embedded in the ground comes water for cleansing things that are contaminated (11:32). Since a spring or cistern is a source of purity, it cannot be defiled.

In other words, we are enlightened regarding an obscure rule from an ancient culture. But we have also identified a valuable principle: *A source of purity cannot be defiled.* Did you ever wonder how Jesus could touch lepers in order to heal them without becoming impure himself (e.g., Matt. 8:2—3)? And why did a woman with a hemorrhage only touch the hem of his garment (Luke 8:43—48; cf. Mark 5:25—34)? The Greek terminology for her "bleeding" in Luke 8:43 is the same as that which appears in the LXX of Leviticus 15:25: "When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period." Since the rules of menstruation applied, "anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening" (Lev. 15:19).

The woman with the hemorrhage was caught in a dilemma. She wanted to touch Jesus so she could be healed, but by touching him she would make him ritually impure. This would create a problem for him if he came in contact with anything holy. Her solution was to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" she came trembling to confess because she undoubtedly expected a rebuke for making Jesus impure (Luke 8:44—47).

Instead of a rebuke, he gave her a blessing: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace" (Luke 8:48). She hadn't made him impure at all. There was a one-way flow of healing power from him to her (v. 46), but no defilement came back to him in return. Why not? Because Jesus, like the spring or cistern in Leviticus 11:36, is a source of purity!

The message is that we can come to Jesus, contaminated as we are by all kinds of faults that creep and crawl into every corner of our lives like rodents and reptiles. When he has touched us with his healing power and cleansed us with his "living water" of life (cf. John 4:10, 13—14; Rev. 7:17; 21:6, 17), he has just as much purity and power to give as he had before.

Human sources of purity. We have found that Christ is a source of purity that cannot be defiled (Matt. 8:2—3; Luke 8:43—48; cf. Lev. 11:36). Not only does he heal, he actually said to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "… but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). In John 7:38 he went a step further: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Although God is the ultimate Source, Christ makes his followers into secondary sources of life so that they emulate him. This is why his disciples performed miracles of healing, deliverance, and resurrection as he did (Matt. 10:1, 8, Luke 10:9, 17; Acts 3:1—10; 9:36—42; 16:16—18; 19:11—12).

As a harbinger of Christ's ministry, God had made Elisha into a source so that he healed a leper (2 Kings 5) and even raised a dead boy to life (chap. 4). But the most astounding miracle happened after Elisha's death:

> Elisha died and was buried.
>
> Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. (2 Kings 13:20—21)

In spite of the fact that dead bodies carried a high degree of ritual impurity (Num. 19; cf. 2 Kings 23:13—14), Elisha's bones were a source of life and therefore purity.

Jesus' promise that "streams of living water will flow from within him" is for "whoever" believes in him. We might not do anything that is paradigm-shattering to the extent of the miracles wrought by Elisha and Jesus' disciples. Yet by God's grace we too can be one-way channels of blessing to the world without becoming defiled ourselves. The Lord invites us to serve by inviting others to him, the Source of all.

> Charles Spurgeon drew out the message of Matthew 9:10—12:
>
> Where should a physician be but among the sick? Who should come to a doctor's house but those who are diseased? Thus our Lord was more than justified in being the center to which the morally sick gather for their spiritual healing. Lord, grant that if ever I am found in the company of sinners, it may be with the design of healing them, and may I never become myself infected with their disease![23]

Philip Yancey describes a visit with Sadan, a former leprosy patient of Dr. Paul Brand, a missionary surgeon and leprosy specialist who worked in India. Because of his disease, his school classmates had made fun of him, a driver had literally kicked him off a public bus, employers would not hire him, and hospitals would not treat him.

> "When I got to Vellore, I spent the night on the Brands' verandah, because I had nowhere else to go," said Sadan. "That was unheard of for a person with leprosy back then. I can still remember when Dr. Brand took my infected, ulcerated feet in his hands. I had been to many doctors. A few

had examined my hands and feet from a distance, but Dr. Brand and his wife were the first medical workers who dared to touch me. I had nearly forgotten what human touch felt like."[24]

Perhaps this explains, at least in part, why Jesus touched a leper when he healed him (Matt. 8:3; Mark 1:41; Luke 5:13). Aside from the ministry of physical healing, it is hard for us who have never suffered from a dreaded disease like leprosy or AIDS to imagine the psychological effect of such a touch.

Sadan recovered from leprosy, but he gained even more from the healing touch of Dr. Brand. Yancey continues:

> … Sadan made this astonishing statement: "Still, I must say that I am now happy that I had this disease." "Happy?" I asked, incredulous.
>
> "Yes," replied Sadan. "Apart from leprosy, I would have been a normal man with a normal family, chasing wealth and a higher position in society. I would never have known such wonderful people as Dr. Paul and Dr. Margaret, and I would never have known the God who lives in them."[25]

A God-given source of light and love in a world of darkness and hate remains pure because it is tough. It may seem soft, but it overcomes hate just as surely as a mountain stream overcomes the sharp edges of the rocks that fall into it.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, a Jewish cantor and his wife received racist, obscene phone calls from a wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Investigating, they learned that he was crippled and had difficulty getting out of the house to buy food. To his utter amazement, they showed up at his door with a fine meal. They kept coming back, and the wizard warmly accepted their friendship. Rather than allowing his toxic attitude to poison them, their outgoing love softened and purified him. They were sources.

1. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 743.
2. Ibid., 667.
3. See ibid., 648, 656—57.
4. Some of the creatures listed in Lev. 11, especially the various birds, are notoriously difficult to identify by the Heb. terms for them. For details regarding animals known to peoples of the ancient Near East, including those mentioned in here, see E. Firmage, "Zoology," ABD, 6:1109—67. On the animals of Lev. 11 in particular, see also Milgrom, *Leviticus i—is,* 645—72.

5. Rodents and reptiles, but including the weasel, which is a mammal.

6. See, e.g., Maimonides, *Guidefor the Perplexed,* 3.48; Ramban on Lev. 11:9.

7. On poisonous fish, see B. W. Halstead, *Dangerous Marine Animals* (Cambridge, Md.: Cornell Maritime Press, 1959), 107—31.

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 719.

9. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Rout-ledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 41—57, esp. 54—57.

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 726—27.

11. E. Firmage, "The Biblical Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness," in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Studies in the Pentateuch* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 177—208; cf. M. Douglas, "The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus," *MT* 15 (1999): 211—12.

12. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 735.

13. J. Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (an Intertextual Study)* (ATSDDS 4; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000).

14. L. Schlessinger and S. Vogel, *The Ten Commandments: The Significance of God's Laws in Everyday Life* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1998), xxv.

15. H. L. Neal, *Wave As You Pass,* 2d ed. (Paris, Tenn.: Manorhouse, 1966), 17—18.

16. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* transl. L. Sherley-Price, 1993 ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952), 216.

17. The common translation "Thus he declared all foods clean" (NRSV; cf. NASB, NIV, NJB) does not accurately reflect the Greek original, in which the participle of *katharizo* ("to purify") continues Jesus' sentence in direct speech rather than beginning a new sentence explaining what he taught. There is no Greek behind the English translation "declared." See Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,* 374—75.

18. C. House, "Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of κοινός/κοινόω in Acts 10 and 11," *AUSS* 21 (1983): 143—53.

19. Ibid., 152—53.

20. Cf. the fact that in Mark 7, Jesus' discourse regarding what makes a person unclean (Mark 7:14—23) is immediately followed by the incident of the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24—30), who humbly requested Christ's help with the words, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's

crumbs” (Robert Johnston, Andrews University, private communication).

21. Cf. Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,* 351—69.

22. From the standpoint of health, Winston Craig of the Andrews University Department of Nutrition declares regarding the creatures in Lev. 11: “They’re all unclean."

23. C. H. Spurgeon, *A Popular Exposition to the Gospel According to Matthew* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 102.

24. Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places,* 58.

25. Ibid., 59.1. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 743.

Leviticus 12

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Say to the Israelites: ‘A woman who
becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially
unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly
period. 3On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. 4Then the
woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding.
she must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the
days of her purification are over. 5If she gives birth to a daughter, for
two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she
must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

6‘When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over,
she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a
year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a
sin offering. 7He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement
for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of
blood.

"'These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy
or a girl. 8If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two
young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.
In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be
clean.'"

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 12 IS the shortest chapter in Leviticus. It provides instructions regarding a mother's period of physical ritual impurity following childbirth and her ritual purification at the end of this time. References to her flow of blood in verses 4, 5, 7 show that the impurity results from a normal discharge that normally lasts for two to six weeks after a woman gives birth. Since this is a pelvic/genital discharge that begins bright red, the first week or two, depending on the sex of the child, are treated like the regular ritual impurity of a menstrual period (vv. 2, 5). Therefore this impurity is communicable to persons by touch (15:19), and whatever she lies or sits on conveys impurity to those who contact them (15:20—23).

During the following period of thirty-three or sixty-six days of postnatal blood purification (lit., "bloods of purification"), the mother's impurity is not communicable by touch, and she is only restricted from contacting anything sacred or entering the sanctuary compound (12:4). She is free to contact anything in the common sphere, including her husband by resuming sexual relations.[1]

When the period of impurity is over, the mother must bring a pair of sacrifices to the sanctuary: a young (year-old) sheep for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a purification offering (12:6). This is the administrative order. We know by now that in the actual ritual procedure the purification offering would be performed first (cf. 9:8—16). We also know that such a pair of sacrifices carries the function of a purification offering, with the burnt offering supplementing its quantity (cf. 5:6—10; Num. 15:24, 27).

If the mother cannot afford a sheep for a burnt offering, she can offer a bird instead (Lev. 12:8; cf. Luke 2:24). While the officiating priest would slaughter a bird at the altar because of its small size (Lev. 1:15; 5:8), there is no indication in 12:6 that the offerer is not permitted to slaughter a sheep, as usual (cf. 1:4—5, 11).[2] In this case the offerer happens to be a woman, which shows that women could participate in sacrifices as offerers.

By translating *hattet* as "sin offering" in 12:6, 8, English versions of the Bible raise the question: How has the mother sinned? This problem also disturbed the

disciples of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai, who asked him why the Torah stipulated that a woman should offer a sacrifice after she gave birth. His answer was that when she kneels in bearing the child, that is, in terrible labor pain, she impetuously swears that she will not have intercourse with her husband, obviously because she doesn't want to go through this again![3]

Closer examination shows that the question of how the mother has sinned is invalid, arising from misunderstanding of the text rather than from the text itself. She has not sinned, as shown by the fact that the goal of her pair of sacrifices is to expiate *(kipper)* for her so that "she will be ceremonially clean from (privative min) her flow of blood" (12:7; cf. v. 8). The goal/meaning of the ritual procedure is to remove physical ritual impurity from the woman so that she is ritually pure, not to remove moral fault from her in preparation for divine forgiveness (contrast 4:20, 26, 31, 35). So her *ha tta,* is a "purification offering."

Not only has the mother not sinned; she is not sick. Childbirth and regular menstruation are healthy processes in spite of a sign at the office of a doctor in Rome, Italy: "Specialist in Women and Other Diseases." So why does a genital flow of blood cause ritual impurity? Although it is no longer necessary to practice the rituals of Leviticus 12 since the earthly sancta that must be protected from contact with impurity and the sacrificial system of remedies are gone and have been superseded by Christ's heavenly ministry (Heb. 7—10), this chapter of Leviticus teaches something profound about the nature of human beings in relation to God: Ever since the human race fell into sin (Gen. 3), which results in death (Rom. 6:23), every human life begins under a cloud of mortality (Rom. 5:12).

Now we run into a longstanding crux of interpretation. Postnatal purification of a mother is affected by the sex of her child. If it is a boy, she is impure for seven days as during her menstruation, plus thirty-three days of blood purification, for a total of forty days (12:2, 4). This forty-day period covers the normal time of up to six weeks, during which a mother's genital bleeding continues following childbirth. But if the baby is a girl, the mother is impure for two weeks (fourteen days) as during her menstruation, plus sixty-six days of blood purification, for a total of eighty days (12:5). Since Leviticus supplies no explicit rationale for the difference, we are left with the question: Why does a mother's ritual impurity last twice as long if she has a girl?

Interpreters have suggested a variety of answers. Here are a few of the less wild ones.[4] (1) The postpartum discharge of a woman who gives birth to a girl lasts longer than if she has a boy. This notion has no basis in gynecological fact.[5]

(2) Leviticus 12 reflects disparity between the sexes that also appears in 27:2

—7, where the redemption price of a female is significantly less than that of a male, down to half for ages five to twenty (27:5). But such monetary equivalents of persons for purposes of dedication to the sanctuary are based on their work capability, as shown by the fact that the most valuable persons are those in the prime of their adulthood. Granted that there is disparity between the sexes, as in chapter 12, but what does work capability have to do with relative ritual purity?

(3) Immediately after 12:2 specifies a seven-day impurity accompanying birth of a boy, verse 3 reminds the Israelites that the boy must be circumcised when he is eight days old (cf. Gen. 17:12; 21:4; Luke 1:59; 2:21). So the mother's initial period of communicable impurity ends just before the day of her son's circumcision. Perhaps his circumcision, which involves blood, somehow has a purifying effect on her. However, there is no evidence that circumcision ritually purifies an infant, let alone his mother.[6]

J. Magonet has come up with a better possibility. Since some vaginal bleeding can occur on the part of a newborn girl, the doubled time of the mother's purification could be based on the actual and potential genital discharge of both females. "Since this uncleanness has to be ritually dealt with and the baby cannot do so, the mother with whom the child was formerly united and from whom she has emerged, symbolically bears the uncleanness so that the period is doubled."[7]

Bridging Contexts

IMPURITY WITH GENITAL discharges. Association of impurity with genital discharges, including those of menstruation and childbirth, is found in many cultures around the world.[8] In fact, according to a Hittite birth ritual text, a sacrifice is offered on the seventh day after birth, and whereas a boy is pure at the age of three months, a girl must wait until she is four months old.[9] While this differs from that of Leviticus 12 in that it concerns impurity of the child rather than of the mother, it is similar to the Israelite regulations in that the first week constitutes an initial period of impurity and completion of purification takes longer in the case of a girl.

The intercultural scope of impurities connected with reproduction, and also with death, indicates that their basis goes deeper than any uniquely Israelite factors, such as infant circumcision. J. Milgrom concludes, "Thus their origin cannot be traced to a creed or a ritual but must reside in some universal human condition that has evoked the same response all over the globe."[10]

Whatever the rationale for the time periods in Leviticus 12 may be, they concern ritual impurity, not the relative worth of the sexes. Although a female naturally incurs more involuntary physical ritual impurity than a male during her lifetime,[11] greater susceptibility to impurity does not indicate lower social standing.[12] For example, human corpses carry more serious impurity than carcasses of unclean animals (cf. Num. 19 with Lev. 11).[13]

> Said Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai, "And do we have against the Pharisees only this matter alone?" Lo, they say, "The bones of an ass are clean, but the bones of Yohanan, high priest, are unclean." They said to him, "According to their preciousness is their uncleanness."[14]

Physical ritual impurity as a conceptual category. In the Bible, such impurity was the state of belonging to a conceptual category that was disqualified from contact with the sacred domain, which consisted of the intrinsically holy deity and things that had a special connection to him. For example, a ritually impure person was prohibited from eating the holy meat of a

well-being offering (7:20—21). The purpose of the biblical laws regulating impurities was to keep these physical (not moral) evils separate from holiness in order to avoid danger and to maintain the Lord's Presence in the midst of the Israelites, in spite of all their impurities (cf. 16:16).

To understand how ritual impurity works as a conceptual category, it is helpful to recall a childhood term: "cooties." The word literally denotes "lice." But young boys who don't know that try to stay away from girls or things associated with them because they are supposed to carry contagious "cooties." To such boys the word metaphorically connotes "femininity," from which they feel constrained to protect their maleness. Although this use of the term "cooties" is an immature expression that does not survive the onslaught of puberty, it is analogous to biblical ritual impurity in that it places people and things in a conceptual category.[15]

Although ritual impurity mainly resulted from physical states of human beings, some of which involved disease or death, the impurity itself was not the same as literal disease.[16] An Israelite could enter the "impure" category by having a physical condition, such as a healthy or unhealthy genital discharge (chs. 12, 15) or scaly skin disease (chs. 13—14), or by coming in contact with someone or something carrying impurity that acted like sickness in that it was contagious (e.g., 11:24—28; 15). Even when the defiling physical condition ceased, a person remained impure until he or she was purified by an appropriate ritual (e.g., bathing, laundering clothes, sacrifice) and until any applicable durations of impurity expired (e.g., "until evening").

Even when an impure state resulted from a diseased condition, the purpose of rituals was not to heal the sickness but rather to move a person back to the "pure" category. For instance, only a person who was *already* healed from scaly skin disease was eligible for ritual purification in order to be reinstated in the Israelite camp (ch. 14; cf. Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14).

Ritual impurity was not the same as ordinary dirt,[17] as shown by the following examples: (1) You could scrub a corpse for hours and it would still be impure because it remained a corpse. (2) "Going to the bathroom" did not result in ritual impurity. (3) Purification from minor ritual impurities included waiting until evening (e.g., 11:24—25, 15:5—8), which could not contribute to ordinary cleanliness.

The relationship between sin and physical ritual impurity. Only violations of divine commands were sins for which *forgiveness* was needed (e.g., Lev. 4—5). Contracting a bodily impurity, for which *purification* was needed, did not by itself constitute a sin or moral fault.[18] Note the following factors. (1) The

Hebrew text does not use terms for moral faults (e.g., *hatta't* ["sin"], *pesa'* ["transgression"], *'awon* ["iniquity/culpability"]) or forgiveness (e.g., verb *slh* ["forgive"]) with reference to physical ritual impurities.

(2) Some impurities, such as scaly skin disease (chs. 13—14) and genital discharges (ch. 15), were contracted involuntarily and therefore unavoidably. Since no choice was involved in such a situation, not even an ignorant choice, becoming impure could not be regarded as disobedience to God's law in any sense.

(3) Fabrics and houses defiled by "scaly skin disease" (chs. 13—14) could hardly be accountable for moral violations.[19]

(4) Some voluntary impurities were necessary. Sexual intercourse, which carried a light impurity (15:18), was necessary for childbirth, which generated severe impurity (ch. 12). This process of reproduction, which was created and blessed by God (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1), was essential for the survival of human society.[20]

Deliberately contracting impurity could be permitted, as was the case with sexual intercourse (Lev. 15:18) and coming in contact with corpses (Num. 19:11). However, God forbade some defilements (e.g., Lev. 11:43; 18:19; 20:18; 21:1—4, 11; Num. 6:6—7, 9—12). Contracting such a forbidden impurity, neglecting timely purification for a permitted impurity (Lev. 5:2—3; Num. 19:13, 20), or contacting something holy while in a state of impurity (Lev. 7:20—21; 22:3—7) constituted punishable moral fault—not because ritual impurity was sin, but because God's command concerning ritual impurity was violated.[21]

Sin regarding ritual impurity was expiable by sacrifice in some cases, such as forgetting to undergo purification for a permitted impurity (5:2—3, 5—6) or accidentally having impurity and holiness come together (Num. 6:9—12). However, a person who deliberately contracted a forbidden impurity (Lev. 20:18), neglected purification for a permitted impurity (Num. 19:13, 20), or brought impurity in contact with holiness (Lev. 7:20—21) was ineligible for expiation.

While sins and physical ritual impurities were clearly distinct, they had a lot in common. Both were defined in relation to the Lord's holiness, which includes his holy moral character as expressed by his commandments. Sinning could be unintentional (4:2) or deliberate (19:20—21). Becoming ritually impure could also be unintentional (Num. 6:9) or deliberate (Lev. 11:40).

Wright points out that the two types of evil (i.e., sins and ritual impurities) were more closely linked than we would expect.[22] (1) Like permitted impurities contracted involuntarily, inadvertent "sins" did not involve conscious

commission. Although an inadvertent sin was not involuntary in the sense that physical functions can happen without any thought at all, it was committed with some kind of ignorance. (2) The same kind of sacrifice (i.e., the "outer altar" purification offering) remedied both sins and some permitted impurities. (3) Moral faults generated a kind of (nonphysical) ritual impurity. For example, on the Day of Atonement the person who led Azazel's goat (the so-called "scapegoat"), which carried only moral faults (Lev. 16:21—22), was subsequently required to undergo ritual purification (16:26).

In the various kinds of moral and ritual evils, Wright finds a unified spectrum of impurity: "If all these conditions or actions are not sins, they all are at least a threat to what is holy and hence must either be, when serious, avoided, or when less grave, controlled. For the Priestly writer, *all the defilement-creating conditions were of the same conceptual family.*"[23]

It appears that the common denominator between the various physical ritual impurities—corpse contamination, degeneration of skin by scaly skin disease, and loss of fluids from the reproductive organs—has to do with death.[24] However, this is not death in general. Maccoby points out that life-threatening loss of blood from a wound was not ritually impure, as we would expect if all death were in view. By contrast, genital discharges that were not physically dangerous caused defilement (Lev. 15). So Maccoby convincingly narrows the death focus of physical ritual impurity to "an expression of the birth-death cycle that comprises mortality."[25] *This impurity/mortality is diametrically opposed to holiness/life.*

Like physical ritual impurities, sins are related to death, but in a different way. Inexpiable sins result in destruction: the death of the sinner and/or the terminal divine penalty of *krt* ("cutting off"; e.g., Lev. 20:2—3; Num. 15:30—31). "Whereas moral faults cause death (cf. Rom. 6:23), physical ritual impurities arise from an existing state of mortality, which, according to Gen 3, has burdened the human race as a consequence of the moral fault of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve (cf. Rom. 5:12, 14)."[26]

By treating both moral and physical aspects of restoration, the purification offering enacted a double bridge between human imperfection and divine holiness. This bridge demonstrated the inseparable connection between (1) "legal" obligation for wrongful action that needed forgiveness and (2) a mortal state that needed healing. The double remedy was for whole human beings, who were in need of physical and moral healing along with freedom from obligation resulting from moral and physical faultiness. In this way the purification offering maintained theological balance that simultaneously served as an antidote to

legalism and antinomianism.[27]

Contemporary Significance

TOTAL HEALING. From Leviticus 12 we learn that it is appropriate to acknowledge human mortality and dependence on God at the same time as we celebrate new life. A Jewish circumcision ceremony does this well. The baby sheds a little blood as he is initiated into the covenant by which he is subject to and dependent on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. The little fellow cries and is bandaged. While he is still whimpering, all the family, friends, and neighbors enjoy a big party with lots of food. It is a quintessentially human occasion: bittersweet.

At Christian infant dedications, we tend to remember that even before our little ones know enough to commit sins for which they can be held morally accountable, they are children of Adam and Eve. Through us they inescapably inherit the effluents of mortality and evil propensities that flow from sin (Ps. 51:5; 58:3). Like us, they need divine redemption to live as God created them to. Like Christ's disciples, we need him to remind us: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matt. 19:14).

The fact that the effects of sin are already present at birth shows that they pervade our being. But Augustine said to God: "Rightly do I place in him my firm hope that you will cure all my ills through him who sits at your right hand and pleads for us: otherwise I should despair. For my ills are many and great, many and great indeed; but your medicine is greater still."[28] Several aspects of this speech are striking. (1) Augustine views his state as characterized by all kinds of sickness. (2) He wants total healing, not a partial fix.(3) He identifies God's agent of healing by describing Christ in his priestly role. For Augustine, the Great Physician kept up his "medical license" when he became the heavenly Mediator.

Augustine's hope for healing through Christ was well founded. Before going to heaven, Christ showed his concern for treating whole human beings. In Mark 2 he demonstrates the close connection between forgiveness from sin and healing from the physical state caused by sin:

> "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son

> of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins….” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:9—12; cf. Matt. 9:5—8; Luke 5:23—26).

Jesus knows that the paralyzed man needs physical healing. That is why his four friends transport him on a mat (Mark 2:3—4). But Jesus also perceives that the man needs peace with God. When one is tortured of body and soul, why relieve one agony but leave the other to perpetuate suffering? Will everyone praise God as jubilantly for a job half done?

It is no accident that Christ gave forgiveness with healing during his earthly ministry. This is a foretaste of the gift provided by his sacrifice, the ultimate Purification Offering. We think of this as a sacrifice for sin, and so it was (John 1:29). However, by overlooking the fact that purification offerings addressed not only *acts* of sin but also the state of *mortality* that results from sin, Christians have missed a magnificent fact:

> Through Christ’s sacrifice, He not only forgives us from our sins (1 Jn 1:9), He heals us from our disease of *mortality* and gives us eternal *life* (Jn 3:16)! Psalm 103 refers to the two aspects of our restoration: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who *forgives* all your iniquity, who *heals* all your diseases” (Ps 103:2—3).[29]

Romans 6:23 begins: “For the wages of sin is death.” So disobedient action has led to a state of mortality. But God doesn’t just wipe out the disobedience. The verse continues: “… but the gift of God is eternal *life* in Christ Jesus our Lord” (emphasis supplied).

Christian worship is focused toward God’s heavenly temple, where Christ has gone to minister as our High Priest (Heb. 7—10). We no longer have God’s glorious Presence visibly residing at one particular location on earth. So there is no Christian “Holy Place” in this special sense. Thus, Christians are no longer obliged to observe the Pentateuchal laws of ritual purification, which governed interactions between the Israelites and the Lord while he dwelt among them in his sanctuary. While we dedicate our churches to God and invite Christ to meet with us (Matt. 18:20), they are not temples with resident Shekinahs hovering above them in glory clouds. Therefore we do not need to station deacons and deaconesses at the doors of our churches to make sure that participants in the Lord’s Supper/communion have not recently incurred ritual impurity, which

could be of a very personal nature.

Although for us the biblical purity laws are relics in the sense that we are not bound to keep them, they apply to us in some deeper ways by teaching us some crucial aspects of sin and salvation. (1) Sinful action has resulted in our mortality. (2) Our fallen state has estranged us from God and his holiness. (3) Through Christ, God gives us the total healing of wholeness, purity, and life in place of brokenness, defilement, and death.

Through these concepts we learn that total healing, by accepting the "medicine" and perhaps even the "scalpel" of the divine Physician, provides the only lasting solution to the core problems of our morality and mortality. No legalistic, list-making, compartmentalizing approach will do. Weakened by "myocardial infractions" (sins of the heart) and riddled with metastasizing moral cancer, we have hope through God's total care. He will not rest until the job is done.

> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:3—4)

"For my ills are many and great, many and great indeed; but your medicine is greater still."[30] "If for being delivered from slavery to freedom we chant a hymn of praise, should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life?"[31]

1. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — ie,* 746, 749.

2. On 1:5, Milgrom maintains that anyone could perform the slaughter (ibid., 154).

3. *b. Niddah* 31b.

4. For surveys including other proposals, see Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 750—51; R. M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: A Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 246.

5. Daniel C. Oliver, M.D., Ob.Gyn., personal communication.

6. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 744.

7. J. Magonet, "'But If It Is a Girl She Is Unclean for Twice Seven Days …': The Riddle of Leviticus 12.5," in J. Sawyer, ed., *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (JSOTSup 227; Sheffield: Sheffield

Academic Press, 1996), 152.

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus i—ie,* 763—65; G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals,* 2d ed. (StBoT 29; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), esp. 251; M. F. Small, "A Woman's Curse? From Taboo to Time Bomb: Rethinking Menstruation," *The Sciences* (January/February, 1999): 24—29.

9. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals,* 135, 137, 143, 219.

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — ie,* 765.

11. While a sexually mature male can occasionally become impure for one day by having a nocturnal emission (Lev. 15:16—17; Deut. 23:10—11), a woman's menstrual period makes her impure for seven days each month (Lev. 15:19—23) until menopause.

12. Against, e.g., Hartley, *Leviticus,* 168.

13. M. Gruber, "Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," 43 n. 13.

14. *m. Yadayim* 4:6. Transl. J. Neusner, *TheMishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), 1130.

15. Gane, *Altar Call,* 115—17.

16. L. Grabbe, *Leviticus* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 52.

17. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality,* 154.

18. Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament,* 416—17, 420; R. Rendtorff, *Leviticus,* 176, 216—17.

19. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality,* 121.

20. T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 403—4.

21. On tolerated versus prohibited impurities, see D. P. Wright, "Two Types of Impurity in the Priestly Writings of the Bible," *Koroth* 9 (1988): 180—93; idem, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,"150—81.

22. Wright, "Two Types," 191; idem, "The Spectrum," 152, 165.

23. Wright, "Two Types," 191; cf. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature,* 64—66. Similarly, J. R. Porter recognized: "In the priestly theology, sin is an objective, quasi-physical thing—hence, even if committed inadvertently, its consequences cannot be avoided—and so not sharply distinguished from defilement or uncleanness" *(Leviticus* [CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976], 37).

24. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 767—68, 1002—3; idem, "The Rationale for Biblical Impurity," *JANES* 22 (1993): 107—11.

25. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality,* 49; cf. 31—32, 48, 50, 207—8.

26. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 9.
27. Cf. Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement,* xxv-xxx.
28. Augustine, *Confessions,* 251.
29. Gane, *Altar Call*, 118.
30. Augustine, *Confessions,* 251.
31. Rabbi Hiyya b. Abin said in the name of R. Joshua b. Korha: *b. Megillah* 14a, transl. in *The Soncino Talmud* (The CD-ROM Judaic Classics Library; Davka Corporation, 1991—1995).

Leviticus 13

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron, 2“When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest. 3The priest is to examine the sore on his skin, and if the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be more than skin deep, it is an infectious skin disease. When the priest examines him, he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. 4If the spot on his skin is white but does not appear to be more than skin deep and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest is to put the infected person in isolation for seven days. 5On the seventh day the priest is to examine him, and if he sees that the sore is unchanged and has not spread in the skin, he is to keep him in isolation another seven days. 6On the seventh day the priest is to examine him again, and if the sore has faded and has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a rash. The man must wash his clothes, and he will be clean. 7But if the rash does spread in his skin after he has shown himself to the priest to be pronounced clean, he must appear before the priest again. 8The priest is to examine him, and if the rash has spread in the skin, he shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infectious disease.

9“When anyone has an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to the priest. 10The priest is to examine him, and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white and if there is raw flesh in the swelling, 11it is a chronic skin disease and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He is not to put him in isolation, because he is already unclean.

12“If the disease breaks out all over his skin and, so far as the priest can see, it covers all the skin of the infected person from head to foot,

13the priest is to examine him, and if the disease has covered his whole
body, he shall pronounce that person clean. Since it has all turned
white, he is clean. 14But whenever raw flesh appears on him, he will
be unclean. 15When the priest sees the raw flesh, he shall pronounce
him unclean. The raw flesh is unclean; he has an infectious disease.

16Should the raw flesh change and turn white, he must go to the
priest. 17The priest is to examine him, and if the sores have turned
white, the priest shall pronounce the infected person clean; then he will
be clean.

18“When someone has a boil on his skin and it heals, 19and in the
place where the boil was, a white swelling or reddish-white spot
appears, he must present himself to the priest. 20The priest is to
examine it, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it
has turned white, the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It is an
infectious skin disease that has broken out where the boil was. 21But if,
when the priest examines it, there is no white hair in it and it is not
more than skin deep and has faded, then the priest is to put him in
isolation for seven days. 22If it is spreading in the skin, the priest shall
pronounce him unclean, it is infectious. 23But if the spot is unchanged
and has not spread, it is only a scar from the boil, and the priest shall
pronounce him clean.

24“When someone has a burn on his skin and a reddish-white or
white spot appears in the raw flesh of the burn, 25the priest is to
examine the spot, and if the hair in it has turned white, and it appears
to be more than skin deep, it is an infectious disease that has broken
out in the burn. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an
infectious skin disease. 26But if the priest examines it and there is no
white hair in the spot and if it is not more than skin deep and has
faded, then the priest is to put him in isolation for seven days. 27On the
seventh day the priest is to examine him, and if it is spreading in the
skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean, it is an infectious skin
disease. 28If, however, the spot is unchanged and has not spread in the
skin but has faded, it is a swelling from the burn, and the priest shall
pronounce him clean, it is only a scar from the burn.

29“If a man or woman has a sore on the head or on the chin, 30the
priest is to examine the sore, and if it appears to be more than skin
deep and the hair in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce

that person unclean, it is an itch, an infectious disease of the head or chin. 31But if, when the priest examines this kind of sore, it does not seem to be more than skin deep and there is no black hair in it, then the priest is to put the infected person in isolation for seven days. 32On the seventh day the priest is to examine the sore, and if the itch has not spread and there is no yellow hair in it and it does not appear to be more than skin deep, 33he must be shaved except for the diseased area, and the priest is to keep him in isolation another seven days. 34On the seventh day the priest is to examine the itch, and if it has not spread in the skin and appears to be no more than skin deep, the priest shall pronounce him clean. He must wash his clothes, and he will be clean. 35But if the itch does spread in the skin after he is pronounced clean, 36the priest is to examine him, and if the itch has spread in the skin, the priest does not need to look for yellow hair; the person is unclean. 37If, however, in his judgment it is unchanged and black hair has grown in it, the itch is healed. He is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

38“When a man or woman has white spots on the skin, 39the priest is to examine them, and if the spots are dull white, it is a harmless rash that has broken out on the skin, that person is clean.

40“When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is clean. 41If he has lost his hair from the front of his scalp and has a bald forehead, he is clean. 42But if he has a reddish-white sore on his bald head or forehead, it is an infectious disease breaking out on his head or forehead. 43The priest is to examine him, and if the swollen sore on his head or forehead is reddish-white like an infectious skin disease, 44the man is diseased and is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean because of the sore on his head.

45“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ 46As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone, he must live outside the camp.

47“If any clothing is contaminated with mildew—any woolen or linen clothing, 48any woven or knitted material of linen or wool, any leather or anything made of leather—49and if the contamination in the clothing, or leather, or woven or knitted material, or any leather article,

is greenish or reddish, it is a spreading mildew and must be shown to the priest. [50]The priest is to examine the mildew and isolate the affected article for seven days. [51]On the seventh day he is to examine it, and if the mildew has spread in the clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather, whatever its use, it is a destructive mildew; the article is unclean. [52]He must burn up the clothing, or the woven or knitted material of wool or linen, or any leather article that has the contamination in it, because the mildew is destructive, the article must be burned up.

[53]“But if, when the priest examines it, the mildew has not spread in the clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather article, [54]he shall order that the contaminated article be washed. Then he is to isolate it for another seven days. [55]After the affected article has been washed, the priest is to examine it, and if the mildew has not changed its appearance, even though it has not spread, it is unclean. Burn it with fire, whether the mildew has affected one side or the other. [56]If, when the priest examines it, the mildew has faded after the article has been washed, he is to tear the contaminated part out of the clothing, or the leather, or the woven or knitted material. [57]But if it reappears in the clothing, or in the woven or knitted material, or in the leather article, it is spreading, and whatever has the mildew must be burned with fire. [58]The clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or any leather article that has been washed and is rid of the mildew, must be washed again, and it will be clean."

[59]These are the regulations concerning contamination by mildew in woolen or linen clothing, woven or knitted material, or any leather article, for pronouncing them clean or unclean.

Original Meaning

WHEREAS LEVITICUS 12 regulates ritual impurity resulting from a mother's healthy postpartum condition, chapters 13—14 have to do with abnormal conditions involving deterioration of the skin or surface of a human being, article of clothing, or house. That these chapters comprise a unit is confirmed by the conclusion at the end of chap. 14 (vv. 54—57), which summarizes the legislation in both chapters. The instructions here are addressed to Moses and Aaron (13:1) alone, not including the Israelites, apparently because the people were supposed to rely on the Aaronic priests as experts for diagnoses of skin disease or certification of healing. By contrast, diagnosis of genital discharges was left to the Israelites themselves (15:2) because they are private rather than externally visible.[1]

Since the symptoms of skin disease in chap. 13 are rather complicated and potentially ambiguous, it is no wonder their interpretation was left for priestly experts. This chapter contains a number of obscure Hebrew medical terms, the most important of which is the overall designation for ritually impure skin conditions: *sara'at.* While scholars have not managed to pin down a definitive etymology, the fact that scaling of the skin is the common denominator suggests that the malady is a repulsive scaly skin disease.[2]

The common translation "leprosy" has arisen from the LXX translation of *sara'at* as *lepra*, the word that also appears in the New Testament (Matt. 8:3; Mark 1:42; Luke 5:12—13). Just as Hippocrates appears to have used Greek *lepra* with reference to several skin diseases,[3] Hebrew *sara'at* applies to a complex of conditions, including some that resemble psoriasis and vitiligo.

Some scholars have contended that Hebrew *sara'at* and Greek *lepra* do not refer to modern "leprosy," now known as Hansen's disease, for which Greek could use another term: *elephantiasis.*[4] In fact, dermatologist Marvin Engel has concluded that "the symptoms described in Leviticus 13 do not correspond to any known skin disease."[5] By contrast, R. K. Harrison has put forth a detailed medical argument that although the etymology of *sara'at* is uncertain, and although diseases can change over time and *sara'at* in Leviticus 13—14 applies to a variety of conditions that can even affect fabrics and houses, some key

symptoms of the chronic form of human *sara'at* in Leviticus 13 correspond to those of Hansen's disease. Therefore, it appears that biblical *sara'at* could have at least included an ancient form of the loathsome disease we now label "leprosy."[6]

The fact that *sara'at* applies to a broad range of human and non-human phenomena points to the key for understanding Leviticus 13—14: The concerns of these chapters for diagnosis and quarantine are not with one or more medical conditions per se, but with recognizing outward appearances that place persons or things in the ritually impure category, which must be kept separate from the sacred sphere. Because we are dealing here with the world of religious ritual rather than medicine, scientific identification of "scale disease" is not crucial for understanding the biblical message.

These considerations point to the key for understanding Leviticus 13—14. The concerns here for diagnosis and quarantine are not with one or more medical conditions per se, but with recognizing outward appearances that place persons or things in the ritually impure category, which must be kept separate from the sacred sphere. Because we are dealing here with the world of religious ritual rather than medicine, scientific identification of "scale disease" is not crucial for understanding the biblical message.

Aside from misidentification of *sara'at* as leprosy, the common interpretation of Leviticus 13—14 and Numbers 5:1—4, where persons afflicted by the disease are banished from the Israelite camp, is fraught with additional misconceptions: (1) that the purpose of quarantine or banishment is to keep the disease from spreading, and (2) the purification rituals of chapter 14 serve the goal of healing the disease. A quick reading of the biblical text dispels such notions. In Numbers 5:3 the Lord states the reason for banishment, which also applies to persons with abnormal genital discharges or who have been contaminated by corpses: "so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them." The concern is not contagion that would make other people unwell, but rather protection of the Lord's holy domain from association with impurities that represent heightened states of mortality.

Buttressing the idea that the topic is ritual influence rather than medical contagion is the fact that an individual whom a priest certifies as healed from scale disease is not immediately free to reenter the camp but must undergo extensive ritual purification to transfer him or her back to the "pure" category (ch. 14). Obviously the rituals have nothing to do with medical healing; they can begin only when the person is already healed.

Here is a reader's digested outline of the diagnoses and other instructions in

Leviticus 13, following the introduction to divine speech in verse 1:[7]

Impure scale disease on persons (vv. 2—44)

general diagnosis (vv. 2—17)

hair turns white, affected area appears deeper than skin (vv. 2—8) white discoloration, white hair, raw flesh (vv. 9—17)

special cases (vv. 18—44)

in place of boil: white discoloration or reddish-white shiny spot, deeper than skin, white hair (vv. 18—23)

in place of burn: reddish-white or white shiny spot, white hair, deeper than skin (vv. 24—28)

on head or beard: deeper than skin, yellow or thin hair (vv. 29—37) not impure scale disease: numerous dull-white shiny spots (vv. 38—39) on bald head or forehead: reddish-white affected area (vv. 40—44)

Prescribed behavior of skin diseased persons (vv. 45—46)

clothes rent, hair disheveled, cover moustache, cry “impure,” dwell apart (vv. 45—46)

Impure “scale disease” = mold in fabrics (vv. 47—59)

bright green or bright red affected area (vv. 47—59)

In Leviticus 13:2—44 the diagnostic procedure is logical. A person suspected of having scale disease is brought to a priest, who inspects the affected area. If he observes a clear manifestation of the disease according to the criteria listed above, he pronounces the person ritually impure. If there is a question, however,

the priest quarantines the person for a week, after which he examines the affected area again. If it betrays signs of scale disease, it is pronounced as such, but if the case is still ambiguous, there is another week of quarantine. If no changes for the worse identify the condition as scale disease, the priest declares the individual “pure,” that is, free from that serious impurity. However, apparently as a result of a two-week quarantine for suspected scale disease, the person has incurred minor impurity that requires laundering his or her clothes (vv. 6, 34).

In vv. 47—59 a parallel procedure of priestly examination at one-week intervals is applied to fabrics affected by mold or mildew, with the following differences:

1. The priest does not pronounce a fabric impure without quarantining it for at least a week.

2. The affected material is washed before a second week of quarantine, if this is necessary.

3. If the abnormal condition fades after the fabric has been washed and quarantined for a second week, the priest tears/cuts out the affected area.

4. An impure fabric is destroyed by fire.

Bridging Contexts

BLIGHT OF THE living dead. A person afflicted with the appearance of "scale disease" was ritually impure to a high degree, as shown by the facts that he or she was banished from the camp, and the ritual process following healing was a long and complex one (ch. 14). The severity of the impurity can be explained by the close connection between scale disease and death, the concept on which the Israelite impurity system appears to be based (see ch. 12).

Several pieces of evidence link scale disease to death, indicating that it could be characterized as the "blight of the living dead." (1) Miriam was temporarily smitten with scale disease because she and Aaron jealously spoke against Moses and his divinely appointed authority (Num. 12). Aaron vividly described the horror of her condition when he confessed to Moses and begged for mercy on Miriam: "Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away" (Num. 12:12 NJPS). Thus, persons whose flesh was rotting away with scale disease looked like living dead persons![8]

(2) Aside from being socially marginalized by living apart from others for the duration of the scale disease (Lev. 13:46; cf. Num. 5:1—4), the sufferer had to adopt a self-stigmatizing appearance and behavior by wearing torn clothes, letting his hair be disheveled, covering the lower part of his face,[9] and calling out, "Impure! Impure!" (Lev. 13:45; NIV "Unclean! Unclean!"). Calling out like this warned people to avoid contamination by contact with him. However, the condition of his clothes and hair were like that of one mourning for the dead *(Targum Pseudo-Jonathan;* cf. Lev. 10:6; 21:10). For whom was he mourning? Himself! Perhaps his funerary appearance intensified his need to call out while covering part of his face in order to clarify the nature of his mourning so that others would not approach to comfort him.

(3) The first-day purification ritual for a person healed of scale disease (14:4—7) resembled that of one who had been contaminated by a corpse (Num. 19): Both had to be sprinkled with a liquid mixture that included blood and fresh (lit., "living") water that either included or had contacted cedar, scarlet thread, and hyssop.

Scale disease as divine punishment. Although the lifestyle of a person

afflicted with scale disease was pitiful, there is no indication in Leviticus 13—14 that the condition served as punishment for sinful action. However, in 14:34 the Lord began the law of scale disease/fungus in houses: "when you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you as a possession, *and I inflict a fungous infection upon a house* in the land you possess…."[10] This does not say that the Lord used fungus to punish the occupants for their sin, but it does acknowledge that he could cause scale disease.

In biblical narratives there are some striking instances in which God smote sinners with scale disease as severe punishment. We have already mentioned Miriam. When Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, deceitfully gained a reward from Naaman for what God had done to heal Naaman of his scale disease, the Syrian's loathsome malady came back on Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20—27). The Lord smote King Uzziah with scale disease when he angrily refused to accept the warning of priests not to encroach on their divinely authorized, exclusive prerogative of burning incense. Even though he was king, he had to live out the rest of his days in separate quarters (2 Chron. 26:16—21; cf. 2 Kings 15:5). It is no coincidence that the prophet Isaiah experienced his temple vision of the Lord and his royal glory "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1). The earthly and heavenly monarchs presented the greatest possible contrast: the mortal, impure, sinful, unholy impotentate versus the immortal, pure, sinless, holy Potentate of time and eternity.

Notice that Uzziah's sin was sacrilege (verb m'l), a trespass against God (2 Chron. 26:16, 18). Similarly, Gehazi's offense can be construed as sacrilege in the sense that through greed and lying, he robbed God of credit for healing Naaman, implying that Elisha had performed the cure himself. The punishment exquisitely matched the crime: Having dishonestly taken Naa-man's belongings, he inherited his scale disease along with them.[11]

Scale disease as a severe form of divine punishment is well attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, particularly in Mesopotamian curses.[12] So it is not startling that confirmation of the Lord's treaty with the Israelite nation was reinforced by a curse that threatened violators with divinely induced Egyptian boils and incurable scabs and itches (Deut. 28:27). Nor should our eyebrows rise too high when we read that when Joab murdered Abner, David cursed Joab by wishing on his house a continuous supply of individuals afflicted with genital discharge and scale disease (2 Sam. 3:29).

Contemporary Significance

AN ECOLOGY OF DECAY. Like the other biblical laws regulating ritual impurities, the instructions in Leviticus 13—14 are obsolete in terms of our obligation to observe them. However, from "scale disease" we learn about the human condition in relation to God. This impure affliction is a powerful metaphor for the human state induced by sin. Since the Fall (Gen. 3), our state of mortality progressively and inexorably moves us in the direction of decay and death (Rom. 5:12; 6:23).

Although our "healthy" mortality is not as ugly and its trajectory is not as precipitous as the heightened state of mortality represented by leprosy, it is all a matter of degree. Even if a priest should declare us "clean," this is only relative. Still mortal, we remain unable to bask in the full glory of God's presence. Still longing for immortality like the legendary Gilgamesh or a fountain of youth like Ponce de León, the Spanish explorer, we must await the divinely appointed day when "this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53 NRSV).

At first it appears strange to us that Leviticus 13—14 lumps blights on persons, garments, and houses, which cause their surfaces to deteriorate, in the same category of impure "scale disease." Treating these phenomena as a unified problem is a remarkably wholistic approach to dynamic evil. But of course, I am almost as afraid that the computer on which I am typing will be infected with a "virus" (electronic, not even biological) as I am that my body will catch a disease from a malicious microbe.

The broad range of scale disease heightens its potency as a metaphor for our sin-induced state: Not only are human beings affected, so is our environment. In Romans 8, Paul expresses the hope "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom. 8:21—22).

We are the ultimate ecological disaster, the opposite of Midas, whose mythical touch turned everything to gold. But with us lies the choice to accept the solution from God, who alone can put us and everything around us back together again. Meanwhile, it is right and in our best interest to nurture our environment to the

best of our imperfect ability. It is the only home we have!

Sickness and stigma. Identification of biblical "scale disease" with modern leprosy (Hansen's disease) has compounded the suffering of lepers, who are rejected and ostracized partly on this basis. However, there is not the slightest hint in Leviticus 13—14 that this dermatological condition was invariably a punishment from God for moral failure. Because the cases of Miriam, Gehazi, and King Uzziah were dramatic, they are easily embedded in the foreground of our memory, but these were exceptional situations.

There is no warrant for assuming that a leper must necessarily have offended God. 2 Kings 5 does not mention that Naaman the Syrian needed forgiveness from Israel's God along with his healing. Similarly, the Gospels do not record that Jesus forgave scale-diseased persons when he healed them (Matt. 8:2—4; Mark 1:40—44; Luke 5:12—14; 17:12—19). So we can leave behind the toxic moral stigma that some have attached to this disease.

D. P. Wright issues a worthy challenge regarding modern attitudes to other diseases that some have stigmatized, such as cancer and AIDS:

> Apart from the effect of a particular translation or the identification of the disease, the case of biblical *sara'at* provides a springboard for ethical thought about other diseases which are more in the public mind today, such as cancer or AIDS. There are many parallels between the Bible's view about those suffering from *sara'at* and unscientific popular views about those suffering from the serious diseases of modern concern. These popular views grow out of society's fears and attempts to explain evil, and out of its social context. These explanations, while turning chaos to order for some, are sometimes injurious, psychologically if not physically, to the sick Knowledge about the ancients' symbolic understanding of biblical *sara'at* and the effects it had upon sufferers in antiquity can serve as an avenue for critiquing our own thinking (or mis-thinking) about modern disease.[13]

Wright does not pursue the way in which our understanding of biblical scale disease can enhance reflection on modern disease, but we can begin to do this here. The biblical stigma of scale disease was that of physical ritual impurity, not morality, necessitated by the requirement to protect the holy domain of the Lord's earthly residence. The conceptual category of impurity was a symbolic system that belonged to the larger symbolic system of ancient Israelite ritual worship. This impurity represented mortality, the state resulting from the Fall that is shared by all human beings on Planet Earth. It did not represent the sinful action of a particular human being. If biblical scale disease, which carried severe

ritual impurity within the Old Testament religious system, did not represent sinful action, even less should we attach moral stigma to modern diseases that the Bible has not labeled as ritually impure.

If an ancient Israelite could be quarantined by a priest and banished from the Lord's camp for a condition that was not necessarily caused by his or her moral fault, how can we assume that a modern sufferer, who is neither quarantined nor banished in those ways, has "asked for it" by sinning? As recorded by Luke the physician, Jesus said: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37).

When Jesus' disciples saw a man who had been born blind, they assumed that he or his parents must have sinned (John 9:1—2). But Jesus absolved the man and his parents of moral responsibility: "'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life'" (John 9:3). Indeed, Christ could have said the same about Job, and especially about himself as he suffered crucifixion. The cross is the ultimate argument against the assumption that a person's affliction must have been caused by sin committed by that person.

It is true that a disease, such as syphilis or AIDS, can directly result from specific sinful behavior, such as sexual promiscuity. When this happens, the result functions as a penalty. Compare Romans 1:27: "In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." However, while we should accept Paul's warning for our own lives, there are several points to keep in mind.

(1) We cannot automatically extrapolate a sinful cause from a diseased result, assuming that a person with a particular disease must have committed a certain kind of moral fault. For example, babies can be born with syphilis or AIDS that they contract from their mothers, and AIDS can be transmitted by blood transfusions. We can take our cue for restraining "effect to cause" assumptions regarding sexually transmitted diseases from the Bible. While abnormal genital discharges can be caused by venereal disease, in Leviticus 15 there is no moral condemnation of a person with such a problem.

(2) Only God knows a person's heart, so only God is judge. Even if we know that a person is unwell because of sin, our role is not to condemn or stigmatize but to comfort and relieve suffering as Jesus did, allowing him to make us sources of healing and purity (see comments on Lev. 11).

(3) God can both forgive and heal. The fact that Jesus forgave and healed a paralyzed man at the same time (Mark 2) shows that he was in need of both. Perhaps his suffering was due to his sin, but if so, Jesus didn't bother to ask or tell. The paralytic didn't need to be reminded that he was a suffering sinner, and

whatever he had done was between him and God. As an example to us, Jesus gave him what he needed: healing grace, not moralizing.[14]

1. Ramban on Lev. 13:1.

2. E. V. Hulse, “The Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy’ and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible,” *PEQ* 107 (1975): 103; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — ie* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 774—5.

3. Hulse, “The Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy,'” 88.

4. But John of Damascus (A.D. 777—857), an Arab physician, later used *lepra* for what we know as “leprosy” (ibid., 89).

5. See Milgrom, *Leviticus i — ie*, 817.

6. R. K. Harrison, “Leper; Leprosy,” *ISBE*, 3:103—6; cf. idem, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 136—45, 241—46.

7. For interpretation of terminology, I am following Milgrom (ibid., 768—826).

8. Cf. Job 18:13, where a description of Job’s skin as eaten away by malignant boils is paralleled by the words: “Death’s firstborn devours his limbs.” In Lev. 13:18—23, scale disease can arise from the place of a boil that has healed.

9. Probably “moustache"; cf. 2 Sam. 19:24; Ezek. 24:17, 22.

10. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 828; emphasis supplied.

11. Cf. K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (SSN 22; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 74.

12. See, e.g., J. Nougayrol, “*Sirrimu* (non **purtmu)* ‘âne sauvage,'” *JCS* 2 (1948): 207 n. 12. For other citations of scale disease as divine punishment, including in Mesopotamia, among the Greeks, in Persia, and among the Nuer people in Africa, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 820—21.

13. D. P. Wright note in J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 824. Regarding injurious effects of popular views on those who are sick, cf. S. Sontag, *Illness As Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

14. On the problem of pain and suffering, see P. Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

Leviticus 14

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: 3The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, 4the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. 5Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. 6He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. 7Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields.

8“The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. 9On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair, he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean.

10“On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, each without defect, along with three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil. 11The priest who pronounces him clean shall present both the one to be cleansed and his offerings before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

12“Then the priest is to take one of the male lambs and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log of oil, he shall wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. 13He is to slaughter the lamb in the holy place

where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the guilt offering belongs to the priest, it is most holy. [l4]The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [15]The priest shall then take some of the log of oil, pour it in the palm of his own left hand, [16]dip his right forefinger into the oil in his palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of it before the LORD seven times. [17]The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. [18]The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed and make atonement for him before the LORD.

[19]"Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering [20]and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, and make atonement for him, and he will be clean.

[21]"If, however, he is poor and cannot afford these, he must take one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for him, together with a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, a log of oil, [22]and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

[23]"On the eighth day he must bring them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD. [24]The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering, together with the log of oil, and wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. [25]He shall slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [26]The priest is to pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, [27]and with his right forefinger sprinkle some of the oil from his palm seven times before the LORD. [28]Some of the oil in his palm he is to put on the same places he put the blood of the guilt offering—on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [29]The rest of the oil in his

palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before the LORD. 30Then he shall sacrifice the doves or the young pigeons, which the person can afford, 31one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed."

32These are the regulations for anyone who has an infectious skin disease and who cannot afford the regular offerings for his cleansing.

33The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 34"When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your possession, and I put a spreading mildew in a house in that land, 35the owner of the house must go and tell the priest, 'I have seen something that looks like mildew in my house.' 36The priest is to order the house to be emptied before he goes in to examine the mildew, so that nothing in the house will be pronounced unclean. After this the priest is to go in and inspect the house. 37He is to examine the mildew on the walls, and if it has greenish or reddish depressions that appear to be deeper than the surface of the wall, 38the priest shall go out the doorway of the house and close it up for seven days. 39On the seventh day the priest shall return to inspect the house. If the mildew has spread on the walls, 40he is to order that the contaminated stones be torn out and thrown into an unclean place outside the town. 4lHe must have all the inside walls of the house scraped and the material that is scraped off dumped into an unclean place outside the town. 42Then they are to take other stones to replace these and take new clay and plaster the house.

43"If the mildew reappears in the house after the stones have been torn out and the house scraped and plastered, 44the priest is to go and examine it and, if the mildew has spread in the house, it is a destructive mildew, the house is unclean. 45It must be torn down—its stones, timbers and all the plaster— and taken out of the town to an unclean place.

46"Anyone who goes into the house while it is closed up will be unclean till evening. 47Anyone who sleeps or eats in the house must wash his clothes.

48"But if the priest comes to examine it and the mildew has not spread after the house has been plastered, he shall pronounce the house

clean, because the mildew is gone. [49]To purify the house he is to take two birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. [50]He shall kill one of the birds over fresh water in a clay pot. [5l]Then he is to take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet yarn and the live bird, dip them into the blood of the dead bird and the fresh water, and sprinkle the house seven times. [52]He shall purify the house with the bird’s blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop and the scarlet yarn. [53]Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields outside the town. In this way he will make atonement for the house, and it will be clean."

[54]These are the regulations for any infectious skin disease, for an itch, [55]for mildew in clothing or in a house, [56]and for a swelling, a rash or a bright spot, [57]to determine when something is clean or unclean.

These are the regulations for infectious skin diseases and mildew.

Original Meaning

THE GOOD NEWS about "scale disease" is that it can come to an end. Leviticus 14 tells about the ritual restoration of a person or house if the malignant physical condition ceases. The biblical text does not explain why the disease would stop. Its concern is with how to move persons and things from the "impure" category to the "pure" category so that they will no longer threaten the sacred realm.

Purification After Healing from Skin Disease (14:1—32)

A SEVERE PROBLEM demands a weighty solution. Thus a person healed from scaly skin disease undergoes an elaborate purification process in phases that occur on the first, seventh, and eighth days. Each of these phases progressively moves the individual toward full purity status so that he or she can be reinstated into the society of the Lord's people, who dwell within the bounds of the camp where God's sanctuary is located.

First-day procedures (Lev. 14:4—8)
Bird ritual (vv. 4—7)
Shaving and ablutions (v. 8)
Seventh-day shaving and ablutions (v. 9)
Eighth-day sacrifices (vv. 10—20)

When a person banished outside the camp because of scale disease believes that the condition has gone away, he or she calls for a priest to come out and make an inspection. The priest must come out because the person is not permitted to come inside the camp to him. If the priest confirms that the scale disease is gone, he presides over a nonsacrificial elimination ritual employing two birds (14:4—7).

One bird is slaughtered over "live" water, i.e. water from a flowing source such as a spring (see further below). The priest takes the other bird, still alive, along with cedar wood, crimson yarn, and hyssop, and dips them all in the blood of the slain bird that has mixed with the water. Then the priest sprinkles the blood-water mixture seven times on the person undergoing purification and sets the living bird free into open country. In this way the ritual impurity is transferred from the person to the living bird via the blood of the slain bird, and the living bird carries the impurity away into oblivion.[1]

Both here and in the parallel ritual for purifying a house (14:49—53), sending a living bird away shows some similarity to the way Azazel's goat (the so-called "scapegoat") is sent off into the desert on the Day of Atonement after the

completion of the purgation of the Lord's earthly dwelling (16:10, 20—22) by means of blood from a slain bull and goat (16:14—19). Unlike Azazel's goat, the live bird receives blood from a slain creature within the same individual ritual as an integral part of the same purification (of a person or dwelling), not as a subsequent phase.

Following the bird ritual, the candidate for cleansing must launder his/her clothes, shave off all hair, bathe in water, and at that point becomes ritually "pure" (Qal of *thr,* Lev. 14:8). In this context "pure" means "pure enough for this stage," which allows for entry into the camp. However, because some impurity remains, the person must stay outside his or her tent. Becoming a completely happy camper requires waiting a week, followed by additional rituals.

On the seventh day there is another shaving (including even eyebrows), laundering, and bath, after which the person is "pure" *(tíor)* again (14:9). It is obvious by now that "pure" is a relative term. As another layer of impurity is stripped away, the Israelite advances to a higher degree of purity.[2]

Once the firs; and seventh-day procedures have restored the healed person's level of purity to the point that coming to the sanctuary is permissible, the final stage on the eighth day requires the Israelite to offer a group of sacrifices at the sanctuary (14:10—20). Because the reparation offering is unusual, it is outlined in considerable detail (14:12—18). Before slaughtering the lamb, the officiating priest presents it and a lo'[3] of oil and elevates them as an elevation offering *(tenupah)* to formally dedicate them to the Lord. Then he slaughters the victim. Rather than simply taking the blood and dashing it on the sides of the altar, as prescribed for the reparation offering in 7:2, the priest takes some of the blood and puts it on the right extremities of the offerer who is undergoing purification: lobe of the right ear, thumb of the right hand, and big toe of the right foot. These are the same body parts to which Moses applied blood from the ram of ordination during the consecration of the priests (8:23—24).

Next the priest sprinkles some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord, apparently to enhance the dedication already accomplished by the elevation.[4] Then he applies some of the oil to the same right extremities of the Israelite, on top of the blood. Lastly the priest puts the remaining oil on the head of the Israelite and completes the rest of the sacrifice (cf. 7:3—5), thereby finishing the reparation offering phase of expiation *(kipper)* for the offerer (14:18).

The next sacrifice is the purification offering to "expiate for the one being purified from [privative min] his impurity" (14:19, author's transl.). Performance of the burnt and grain offerings bring the expiatory complex to successful

conclusion and finally, for the last time, the Israelite is “pure” *(thrq* 14: 20)! Restoration is done.

Since the eighth-day sacrificial process involves three animals—two male lambs and a yearling ewe—it is expensive. Thus, for those who cannot afford it, 14:21—32 outline a parallel procedure with two birds substituted for the purification and burnt offering animals. There is no substitute for the male lamb of the reparation offering, which is the first and most important sacrifice on this occasion.

Fungus in Houses (14:33—53)

VERSES 33—53 switch the topic to "scale disease" *(sara'at)* resulting from fungus in houses. This law is to apply after the Israelites settle in Canaan and live in houses rather than tents. It includes both diagnosis, as in chapter 13, and remedies, as earlier in chapter 14. The section is well placed here at the end of chapter 14 because a house restored from impure malignancy requires an elimination ritual with two birds (14:49—53), which is modeled on the first-day ritual for purification of a healed person (14:4—7).

The diagnostic procedure for a house (14:35—45) largely resembles that of chapter 13 with regard to persons and garments. The priest examines the house according to criteria, which in this case affect the walls. If he finds "bright green or bright red eruptions, which appear deeper than the wall" (14:37),[5] he places it under quarantine and examines it again after seven days to see whether it has spread. If it has, the material of the affected area is replaced (cf. 13:56).

A quarantined house makes any person who even enters it unclean until evening, and the residential activities of lying down or eating there require laundering of clothes as well (14:46—7). These rules are fascinating in two ways. (1) The house conveys its severe impurity by "overhang," contaminating everything within its enclosed space, even without direct contact (cf. Num. 19:14—15). (2) Because the priest is the one who places the house under quarantine, he is also the one who determines when its impurity begins. This explains why the priest orders that the house be emptied before he inspects it so that movable belongings do not become impure when he commences the quarantine (Lev. 14:36). Clearing out the house also facilitates total inspection of its walls.

Here is additional evidence that Leviticus 14 is concerned with legal-religious categories. Just as a city ordinance condemning a house and forbidding anyone to enter takes effect when it is announced and posted, so the Israelite priest's declaration of quarantine carries legal force that determines when the house begins to defile by "overhang." Obviously this is not the way medical science works. If you come in contact with an individual carrying a contagious disease before examination by a physician, you are no less at risk than if your contact was after the exam.

If after its repair the house suffers a relapse of fungous infection, it is

“impure” and must be demolished (cf. 13:52, 55, 57). By contrast, if priestly inspection reveals that replacement of the infected material has solved the problem, he pronounces the house “pure” because the infection has “healed” (14:48). To decontaminate (Piel of *h?*, 14:49) the healed house, the priest performs an elimination ritual with two birds like the first-day procedure for a person, but in this case he sprinkles on the house. By doing this he expiates *(kipper)* for the house, that is, purges it from ritual impurity, so that it is “pure” (14:53). Here *kipper* is a removal of something offensive to God. It cannot refer to “atonement” in the sense of reconciliation between the house and God.

Bridging Contexts

RESTORATION IN STAGES. Why is the procedure for purifying a person healed from scale disease so drawn out and complicated, including reintegration of the person into the community in stages? When the Lord purifies a person, why doesn't he do the job once and for all, as when he created whole categories of living things just by speaking (Gen. 1)?

Compare the description in Mark 8:22—25 of a healing miracle that Jesus performed:

> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"
>
> He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."
>
> Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

On other occasions Jesus completely healed people all at once, but this time he did it in two stages, with the first stage accomplishing partial healing and the second finishing the job. It was not that Jesus didn't have the power to do it all in one step (cf. John 1 1:43—44, raising Lazarus). By allowing the blind "patient" to experience healing as a process, Jesus demonstrated the magnitude of the change he accomplished.

So it was with purification from scale disease. The complex, phased process that returned a person to normality taught that it was a long way back, implying the enormity of the fall from purity that had occurred.

Having lost Paradise as a result of sin, our journey home to immortality is a long one because we have departed so far from God. Our healing and reintegration into the community of God's holy universe is a vast process that has already spanned millennia and has required the tragic death of God's Son. It is abundantly apparent that the Lord wants total healing, not a quick fix. The magnitude of the solution teaches us how far we have fallen.

Unlike ritual purification or healing a blind man, our redemption involves moral purification, including restoration of our ability to make right choices. Growth in this area requires our cooperation with God, and like Jesus' disciples, we are slow learners. In fact, this may be at least part of the reason why Jesus decided to heal the blind man in phases. D. E. Garland comments on Mark 8:22—26:

> The miracle shows Jesus' power to heal even the most difficult cases. The Markan context, which portrays Jesus' struggle to get his disciples to see anything, gives this unusual two-stage healing added significance. The blind man's healing occurs between two examples of the disciples' blindness (8:14—21; 8:31—33). This physical healing of blindness serves as a paradigm for the spiritual healing of the disciples' sight, which also comes gradually and with difficulty.[6]

The length and pain of our restoration process is not because God has simply decided to let us keep suffering in order to teach us the depth of our badness and the height of his grace. He cannot heal our moral nature in one mighty flash without destroying our free choice, the element of human nature that makes it possible for us to love him. If he were to transform all of us instantly into obedient robots who automatically go to church on time, give offerings and tithes, treat others well, abstain from harmful substances, and say, "God, we love you," he would thereby annihilate the human race because we would no longer be human. He might just as well turn us into cuddly stuffed animals!

Just as it was the impurity of a scale-diseased person that necessitated multiple stages to bring a person back into a new life of fellowship with his or her community and communion with God through worship, so it is our condition that requires a major process. We should not blame God for the delay. He is merciful for giving us time. If he were to bring us up too quickly to face his holiness, we would die (Ex. 33:20), just as a scuba diver who descends deep into the ocean will die if he or she comes up too fast.

Blood and water. The bird ritual for purification from scale disease (14:4—7, 49—53) counteracts the living "death" of scale disease (cf. Num. 12:12), not only by eliminating impurity that represents mortality, but also by positively emphasizing the theme of "life" with "live" water and blood that represents life (cf. Lev. 17:11). As in the "red cow" ritual for purification from corpse contamination, crimson yarn and cedar wood, which are also red, enhance the life-giving symbolism of blood (cf. Num. 19:6).[7] Hyssop, a small plant (1 Kings 4:33), is used for dipping in the liquid and then sprinkling it (cf. Ex. 12:22; Num.

19:18; Ps. 51:7; Heb. 9:19).

Water is a common instrument of ritual purification (cf. Lev. 11:32; 15:5—8, 10—13). In the bird ritual it must be "live" water (14:5—6), such as that which gushed from the well of spring water discovered by Isaac's servants (Gen. 26:19). This kind of water is "live" in the sense that it continually moves as it flows from its source (cf. 2 Kings 5:10—Jordan River). Not surprisingly, "live" water is also required to remove other severe impurities for which an Israelite would be banished from the camp (cf. Num. 5:1—4): a genital flow (Lev. 15:13) and corpse contamination (Num. 19:17).

Water and blood cleanse and provide life. This is true in our bodies from the time of our birth, which is accompanied by water and blood. So it is striking that when Christ died and a soldier pierced the side of his dead body with a spear, there was "a sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34). Undoubtedly the blood and water bear medical testimony to the extreme internal stress that Christ had suffered, but John attached additional significance: The liquid elements identify Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah of prophecy. Later he wrote: "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5:5—6).

Water and blood are the most prominent purifying elements of the Israelite ritual system. Unlike other dead persons, whose bodies caused ritual impurity based on mortality, Christ's death made him the Source of purification and life through "new birth" (cf. John 3:3—8). Christ fulfills the Israelite system of ritual purification, providing us with the elements we need to be victorious over the mortal state that characterizes our present sinful world so we can have eternal life that transcends the present era.

Christian rituals employ the powerful symbolism of blood and water. At the Lord's Supper/communion service, the wine represents Christ's blood, as he said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Baptism with water, which arose from Israelite bathing for purification from ritual defilement (e.g., Lev. 15:5—8), enacts moral purification (Mark 1:4—5). This purification is not simply freedom from legal condemnation. It is freedom from slavery to committing sin (Rom. 6:1—3, 6—7, 11—14) and hope of eternal life through faith in Christ's sacrifice, symbolizing this faith by ritual burial under water (6:4—5; cf. Acts 8:38—39).

Around the year 1900, a Norwegian sailor by the name of Gulbrandson was crossing the Atlantic, but became ill to the point that he was unable to move or respond in any way. Taking him to be dead, his shipmates conducted his funeral, sewed his body into a bag with weights, and slid him into the Atlantic Ocean.

But when he hit the cold water, his responses awoke and he prayed for God to save him. Frantically groping for a way out of the descending body bag, he found a knife that had accidentally been left in it. He slashed the bag and popped to the surface, to the astonishment of the mourners on deck, who quickly pulled him back onboard. Also revived spiritually, Gulbrandson accepted the Lord and devoted his new life to service for him. His literal water burial triggered the kind of change that baptism symbolizes![8]

Unlike ancient Israelites, Christians who are baptized do not need to wait until the end of daylight before they are pure (e.g., Lev. 15:5—8). Perhaps this limitation met its fulfillment when Christ died at the end of the ritual day, about the time of the regular evening (or late afternoon) sacrifice (Matt. 27:46—51; cf. Num. 28:4).

Contemporary Significance

THE VALUE OF STEPS. In our age of instant gratification, we want leaps rather than steps. But most human progress happens in steps—for example, a baby's first steps, Neil Armstrong's "one small step" onto the moon in 1969, and software upgrades. Even a leap that is possible can be undesirable. Severe illness can make people so weak that rapid progress through surgery can be injurious or even fatal. First it is necessary to stabilize and raise the vital signs a few notches.

Another reason for steps is to understand and/or teach how a process is accomplished. Seeing a polished PowerPoint presentation can be enlightening and enjoyable, but witnessing a demonstration of the steps that have gone into the final product raises the level of appreciation and the possibility that others can learn to make contributions by using this tool.

As a pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff was so gifted and intuitive that magnificent playing came easily and naturally to him. Consequently, when he taught piano at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he had difficulty explaining to students how they could achieve the kinds of results he did. So he had to send them to his colleague, Theodor Leschetizky, who broke things down into steps that they could follow.

In addition to providing comprehension, steps are encouraging because they show measurable progress that would not even register on a scale of leaps. This is part of the phenomenal success of the "twelve-step" program of Alcoholics Anonymous for overcoming alcohol addiction.[9] Another part is the fact that the program treats afflicted individuals as whole persons, including the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. The "twelve-step" approach can be briefly summarized:

> You admit you are licked; you get honest with yourself; you talk it out with somebody else; you make restitution to the people you have harmed; you try to give of yourself without stint, with no demand for reward; and you pray to whatever God you think there is, even as an experiment.[10]

This is remarkably similar to God's wholistic, stepwise approach to the human condition, as revealed in Leviticus. As in the Bible, the prerequisite for hope

through God is a realization of utter helplessness to be restored on one's own. One of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous learned from

William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* regarding transforming spiritual experiences:

> Some were sudden brilliant illuminations, others came on very gradually. Some flowed out of religious channels, others did not. But nearly all had the great common denominators of pain, suffering, calamity. Complete hopelessness and deflation at depth were almost always required to make the recipient ready.[11]

Free to love. In his spine-chilling novel titled *1984*, George Orwell describes what it could be like to "live" under the oppressive power of a totalitarian superpower determined to control every aspect of existence. Despite the familial ring of its epithet, "Big Brother" keeps its citizens under invasive surveillance to stamp out individual freedom of choice by harshly enforcing absolute compliance with its iron rule.

Unfortunately, Orwell's nightmare has been all too true to life for millions of people. One of them was the Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich. During the Stalin era, he came under dangerous criticism from the authorities for some works that did not conform to the prevailing ideological mold. So he explained his new Fifth Symphony in an official publication as "the stabilization of the personality." In this way he satisfied the communist watchdogs and was "rehabilitated" in 1937.

A different story surfaced when the memoirs of Shostakovich appeared after he died in 1975. Near the end of his life, when he was ailing and disillusioned, the composer revealed the bitter intention that he had veiled in the last movement of his Fifth Symphony:

> "The rejoicing is forced, created under threat It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off muttering, 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.'"
>
> While the boisterous trumpets and drums could be taken to evoke a festival or peasant dance, Shostakovich envisioned a forced death march.[12]

A regime that denied its people the choice to reject it simultaneously denied them the choice to accept and love it. This is powerfully and sarcastically illustrated by a Russian story:

> A foreign journalist wanted to find out how the Soviets really felt about Stalin. But his query was consistently met by looks of fear or blank stares as people would hurry away. Finally one day a man reacted differently: He looked around to make sure nobody was watching, and muttered that the reporter should follow him. They took a tortuous route through Moscow, entering and leaving buildings, going in and out of streets while constantly changing directions. All this time the man's eyes darted around to see if they were being followed. They took a taxi and wandered through the city until they came to Gorky Park. The Russian led the correspondent to a lake, where he rented a rowboat and rowed them to the middle of the lake. Then he looked around once more, leaned over to the journalist, and whispered in his ear: "I like him."[13]

This is the kind of scenario that God is seeking to avoid. Omnipotent as he is, he is not interested in traumatizing his creatures to the point that they are even afraid to praise him. He knows that the only kind of warm devotion and exuberant joy that is worth anything at all comes from a heart that is won over rather than coerced.

Winning us over is not easy. It means building our understanding and trust, which takes time and shared experience. It includes waiting, like the father of the prodigal son, until we figure out that we are in a mess and need help. It involves various phases of restoration from death to life, as enacted by the purification of a scale-diseased person in Leviticus 14. However, at the end of the long and tortuous route is not a frightened whisper of affirmation but a hearty shout:

> Praise the LORD.
>
> Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
>
> Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
>
> Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,
>
> praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,

> praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.
>
> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
>
> Praise the LORD. (Ps. 150)

When the Father's wait is over, he cannot help celebrating too because his child "was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32).

1. On Israelite, Mesopotamian, and Hittite ritual use of birds to carry away evil, see D. P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 75—86.
2. According to Milgrom, that person can now enter his tent because he no longer defiles sacred things by overhang, i.e., by simply being in the same enclosed space *(Leviticus 1—16,* 844, 993).
3. This is the smallest biblical unit for measuring capacity. S. Rattray calculates it as about a cup ("The Biblical Measures of Capacity," referred to in ibid., 898).
4. Cf. T. Vriezen, "The Term *Hizza:* Lustration and Consecration," *OtSt* 7 (1950): 208.
5. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 829.
6. D. E. Garland, *Mark* (NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 312—13.
7. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 832, 835.
8. Story courtesy of Dwain Ford, emeritus professor of biology, Andrews University, to whom Gulbrandson recounted this experience years later.
9. See *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952, 1953), 5—9.
10. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1985), 62—63.
11. Ibid., 64.
12. Concert program notes by Richard E. Rodda.
13. A. Ruksenas, *The World's Best Russian Jokes* (North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1986).

Leviticus 15

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron, [2]“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any man has a bodily discharge, the discharge is unclean. [3]Whether it continues flowing from his body or is blocked, it will make him unclean. This is how his discharge will bring about uncleanness:

[4]“"Any bed the man with a discharge lies on will be unclean, and anything he sits on will be unclean. [5]Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. [6]Whoever sits on anything that the man with a discharge sat on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[7]“"Whoever touches the man who has a discharge must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[8]“"If the man with the discharge spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[9]"'Everything the man sits on when riding will be unclean, [10]and whoever touches any of the things that were under him will be unclean till evening; whoever picks up those things must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[11]"'Anyone the man with a discharge touches without rinsing his hands with water must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[12]“"A clay pot that the man touches must be broken, and any wooden article is to be rinsed with water.

[13]“ ‘When a man is cleansed from his discharge, he is to count off seven days for his ceremonial cleansing; he must wash his clothes and bathe himself with fresh water, and he will be clean. [14]On the eighth

day he must take two doves or two young pigeons and come before the LORD to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and give them to the priest. 15The priest is to sacrifice them, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement before the LORD for the man because of his discharge.

16‘When a man has an emission of semen, he must bathe his whole body with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 17Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be unclean till evening. 18When a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

19“'When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening.

20‘Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. 21Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. “Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 23Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening.

24“'If a man lies with her and her monthly flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; any bed he lies on will be unclean.

25“'When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. 26Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. 27Who-ever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

28“'When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. 29On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 30The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement for her before the LORD for the

uncleanness of her discharge.

31“'You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.'"

32These are the regulations for a man with a discharge, for anyone made unclean by an emission of semen, 33for a woman in her monthly period, for a man or a woman with a discharge, and for a man who lies with a woman who is ceremonially unclean.

Original Meaning

DISCHARGES FROM GENITAL ORGANS are private matters. Thus, in Leviticus 15, determination of ritual impurities from these sources requires no examination by priests (contrast chs. 13—14). Individuals are responsible and accountable before the Lord to take proper precautions, notify each other as necessary, and avail themselves of any required ritual remedies.

Another difference from the outwardly visible "scale disease" of chapters 13—14 is the fact that some impure genital fluxes (i.e., nocturnal emission, ejaculation during intercourse, and menstruation) are healthy rather than abnormal. Of these, intercourse is voluntary. Male emissions of semen are not regular like menstruation and are not described by the root *zwb* ("flow"), which applies to the other less-sudden discharges in Leviticus 15.

In this chapter the abnormal impurity of a male is caused by a urethral discharge, such as pus or an excessive secretion of mucus. It can be caused mainly, but not exclusively, by gonorrhea: *Blennorrhea urethrae* or *Gonorrhoea benigna*, but not the venereal *Gonorrhoea virulenta* of more recent origin.[1] The abnormal condition of a female involves a chronic vaginal discharge of blood resulting from a uterine disorder.[2]

Two patterns characterize the order in which chapter 15 treats genital discharges: Male precedes female, and the abnormal and normal categories create a chiasm:

a abnormal male (vv. 2—15)
b normal male (vv. 16—18)
b' normal female (vv. 18—24)
a' abnormal female (vv. 25—30)

Since verse 18 deals with the ritual impurity of sexual intercourse, which involves both genders, it provides a smooth transition from male to female discharges.

Because seminal emissions are of short duration, they give rise to light impurities that only require a man to bathe, launder any fabric or leather with semen on it, and wait until evening (vv. 16—18) for restoration to purity that

allows contact with holy things. In the case of intercourse, these rules also apply to the woman (v. 18).

The slower *zwb* flows are more serious. For normal menstruation, impurity lasts seven days. If a flux is abnormal, a period of impurity persists as long as the symptoms continue, plus seven days beyond their cessation. As sources of impurity, the nonseminal fluxes communicate impurity to other objects and persons in a variety of ways. Objects are secondarily affected when the impure Israelite lies or sits on them. Persons are contaminated by contacting the impure individual or anything that has been under him or her.

A man with an abnormal discharge defiles anyone on whom he spits (v. 8) or anyone he touches (unless the man with the discharge has recently rinsed his hands, v. 11).[3] He also contaminates some objects by touch, including an earthen vessel or wooden implement (v. 12).

Except when contact is by sexual intercourse, secondarily affected persons incur light impurities that require laundering clothes and bathing and waiting until evening. Sexual intercourse is a more intimate form of contact. So just as a woman shares equally in the light impurity of a man with whom she has intercourse (v.18), a man who has intercourse with a menstruating woman shares her seven-day impurity.

Menstruation is a fairly severe impurity, lasting seven days. But because it is normal and regular, purification calls for no sacrifices. The text does not mention bathing either, but it can be assumed from the fact that purification with water is necessary even for the more minor impurities (e.g., v. 16; cf. 2 Sam. 11:2, 4). Since the regulations for a woman who has given birth and one who has a chronic discharge follow those of menstruation (Lev. 12:2; 15:25), we can assume that these women must also bathe.[4]

While monthly menstruation was undoubtedly inconvenient, an ancient Israelite woman was not ritually impure and therefore barred from participation in worship at the sanctuary as often as we might suppose. Women married young and generally had as many children as they could. There would not have been a market for contraceptives even if they had been invented. In other words, during much of her childbearing phase of life, a woman was in a state of pregnancy, which interrupts menstruation, or breast-feeding, which can suppress it. Furthermore, it appears that the onset of menstruation at puberty was later and its termination at menopause earlier than in modern times, when the menstruating years have expanded because of a richer diet.[5]

When an Israelite with an abnormal discharge is “pure” (Qal of thr, 15:13, 28) in the sense of physically “healed,” he or she must wait seven days. At the end of

this week the person must launder, bathe in “live” (i.e., flowing water/spring water, 15:13), and at that point becomes ritually “pure” (also Qal of thr, 15:13, 28). In this context the meaning is: “pure enough for this stage” (cf. 14:8—9). There is more to the process.

On the eighth day the individual undergoing ritual cleansing must offer two birds as a purification offering supplemented by a burnt offering (15:14—15, 29—30). This pair is the same as the poor mother’s postpartum offering (12:8). The goal is to expiate *(kipper)* for (i.e., purge) the person from (privative *min)* his or her discharge (15:15, 30).[6] This means that the sacrifice removes the remaining ritual impurity from the offerer.[7]

Leviticus 15:32—33 summarizes by simply listing the various kinds of cases covered in chapter 15, but verse 31 puts serious teeth into the legislation. Here at the end of the section of the book regulating physical ritual impurities, the Lord warns Moses and Aaron (cf. v. 1) to “set apart the Israelites from their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by polluting my Tabernacle which is among them.”[8]

In chapter 15 the Lord does not forbid the Israelites to incur the genital impurities. Indeed, it would be useless to do so because most of them are involuntary, and voluntary sexual intercourse is essential to continue the nation. However, God does demand that the Israelites limit effects of impurities to prevent their encroachment on the holy realm centered at the sanctuary. The people are to do this by taking precautions to avoid contact between impurity and holiness and by carrying out the appropriate ritual remedies that he has provided.

In 15:31 the words “by polluting my Tabernacle” do not limit the possibility of the sanctuary’s defilement to an impure person physically entering the sacred precincts. The implication is that anyone in the camp could defile the sanctuary simply by being illegitimately impure, that is, without undergoing proper purification (cf. Num. 19:13, 20). If it seems strange that impurity could travel through space in this way, keep in mind that we are dealing with dynamic conceptual categories rather than contagious transmission of physical entities (e.g., microorganisms). Remember that a person could become impure simply by entering a “scale-diseased” house (Lev. 14:36, 46—47). More to the point, a corpse in a tent contaminated persons and objects within that defined space (Num. 19:14—15). The Israelite camp was simply a larger unit of defined space, within which severe enough impurity defiled that which was most sensitive to it: the sacred domain of the sanctuary (cf. Num. 5:1—4).

Bridging Contexts

SEXUALITY AND IMPURITY/MORTALITY. In Leviticus 11 we read that the Lord wanted the Israelites to take into their bodies only "pure" food that was compatible with their holiness as his chosen people. In chapters 13—14 he was concerned that an outward appearance of decay not be associated with him and thereby misrepresent his holiness, which is characterized by life. In chapters 12 and 15, God pays attention to the private area of sexuality, marking a difference between himself and human beings, whose birth-death cycle is fraught with mortality. "The human cycle of procreation and death must be excluded from the realm of the eternal God, who creates life without suffering death."[9]

Human sexuality and reproduction are not intrinsically impure. The Lord created this facet of life for perfect human beings in a perfect world (Gen. 1:27—28; 2:23—25). Made in the image of the holy God (1:26—27), they were designed to continue and participate in the divine process of creation, thereby emulating their Creator. So God intended sexuality to be a vital component of holy living (cf. the Song of Songs).

It is mortality resulting from the Fall (Gen. 3) that has sullied human sexuality in the sense that various aspects of the physical processes involved in our procreation, even the normal ones, underscore our mortal nature. With female reproductive potential or fulfillment comes loss of blood, which represents life. Accompanying male fertility is loss of semen, another "life liquid."[10] These healthy discharges are parodied by diseased fluxes that proceed from the same genital areas but do not contribute to reproduction.

Other rationales for the impurity of genital discharges could be suggested, but they are weak. (1) Menstruation eliminates ova (eggs) that die rather than coming to fruition. Similarly, each male ejaculation results in the deaths of millions of sperm, even if one of them manages to fertilize an ovum, thereby conceiving a new human being. However, with this theory we would be hard pressed to explain how taboos concerning sexuality, especially including restriction of contact with menstruants, are so widespread among other human cultures lacking microscopic knowledge.[11] It is much easier to account for intercultural connotations of blood and semen, which are easily visible with the

naked eye. Apparently ancient people did not know about ova, thinking instead that a woman's role was basically to incubate the seed of life from the male.[12]

(2) Human procreation produces infants who are mortal. However, if the basis of impurity is the infant, why don't we find evidence in Leviticus 12 that the newborn is impure, as we do in Hittite birth ritual texts?[13]

(3) Menstruation and diseased genital discharges interrupt fertility. But intercourse, which also incurs impurity, by no means interrupts fertility. Conversely, menopause terminates fertility but causes no impurity.

We have found that divine regulation of human sexuality had the purpose of protecting God's holiness from association with human mortality by carefully delineating the impure/mortal category and separating it from the sacred category. Otherwise the Lord's unique, inherent immortality (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16) would be devalued. At first glance it is depressing that God would emphasize the difference between himself and fallen human beings. On second thought, it is precisely this difference that gives us hope. Because he possesses such awesome, life-giving power, he can recreate us into much more than we are. Anything that diminishes his greatness simultaneously erodes our hope for receiving the amazing transformation that only he can give.

While distancing himself from human mortality, God did not attach any moral stigma to bodily sexual functions per se. All of the impure genital discharges in Leviticus 15 are involuntary except for sexual intercourse, which he established and blessed for continuation of the race (Gen. 1:28). Marriage is still honorable and the marriage bed remains morally pure (Heb. 13:4). Obviously people can and do abuse their sexuality by using it for immoral behavior, but all of this is outside the scope of Leviticus 15.

Evidence that this chapter retains the creation ideal of marital relations appears in its literary structure, which has verse 18 as its center. This verse deals with an emission of semen during intercourse as the last of the male genital discharges. However, because the act involves a woman, it serves as a transition to the female discharges covered in the rest of the chapter, which are formally introduced with *ki* ("when") in verse 19. The transitional nature of verse 18 is heightened by its internal structure, in which the woman rather than the man appears first as the grammatical subject in Hebrew: "[This applies to] a woman, with whom a man has sexual relations; they shall bathe in water and remain impure until evening."[14]

By reversing the expected order, verse 18 serves as an "inverted hinge" that anticipates the following topic and refers back to the earlier topic:

male (vv. 2—18)
female-male (v. 18)
female (vv. 19—30)

Thus, verse 18 binds male and female together rather than simply putting them beside each other. This structure reflects the creation ideal of equal responsibility in the sexual act and represents “in literary form the unification of man and wife as ‘one flesh’ (Gen 2:24).”[15]

Contemporary Significance

CONTAGION AND EPIDEMIC. Paul recognized that mortality is dynamic rather than static: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—” (Rom. 5:12 NKJV). But in Leviticus, physical ritual impurity that represents mortality is conceptual rather than pathological or malformed in a medical or genetic sense. So how can it be communicable, as presented in chapter 15?

In his fascinating book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* Malcolm Gladwell points out that contagion occurs in many non-medical areas of life:

> … the best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, or, for that matter, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.[16]

Similarly, in ancient Israel the concept of mortality could spread like a virus through the influence of physical contact or location within a defined space. It was crucial that this contagious influence not reach and infect sacred things. The sphere of holiness/life was so opposed to that of impurity/mortality that the Lord could not even allow indirect contact between the two. It was not that death itself could actually make God mortal in the same way that it spread to all humankind. Rather, such contact would misrepresent the nature of God to the Israelites, starting a trend somewhat analogous to the “God is dead” movement of the 1960s.

Erosion of respect for God’s immortal nature, which contrasts with human mortality, inevitably leads human beings to underestimate their accountability to him. They lose the healthy fear of God that Christ encapsulated: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). As the immortal Source and Sustainer of life, God holds absolute power over human beings, who

can and do die. He allows sinners to die so that they will not immortalize sin and all the infectious misery that goes with it (Gen. 3:22—24).

Ezekiel 22:26—29 describes what happened to the people of Judah when they lost their respect for God's holiness:

> Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things, they do not distinguish between the holy and the common, they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean, and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey, they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain. Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says'—when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery, they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.

Notice that blurring ritual distinctions was accompanied by ethical sins. When the Lord was "profaned among them" (Ezek. 22:26) through disrespect for his holy things and holy time (Sabbaths), there was nothing to restrain stronger members of society from preying on those who were weaker. When God was lowered to the common level through a false priestly presentation, the people were ready to accept a deceptive prophetic "vision" that supported rather than opposed social injustice. Thus, the moral "immune system" of Judah was destroyed.

The Lord was unbelievably patient with his people, but their contagion of disrespect for divine holiness became an epidemic that took the nation beyond the point of no return "until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16). Physical destruction and exile soon followed (2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36; Ezek. 33:21—22).

How does contagion transform itself into an epidemic that is out of control? Gladwell explains:

> These three characteristics—one, contagiousness; two, the fact that little causes can have big effects; and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment—are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade-school classroom or the flu attacks every winter. Of the three, the third trait—the idea that epidemics can rise or fall in one dramatic moment—is the most important, because it is the principle that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into

> why modern change happens the way it does. The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point.[17]

The more virulent and dangerous an infectious disease, the more careful we must be to contain it at the outset in order to prevent its contagion from becoming an epidemic. If influenza killed millions of people in the pandemic of 1918, what could Ebola and SARS do? The same principles appear in the Bible. Leviticus provides guidelines for containing various impurities, the more severe of which carry higher degrees of communicability. Ezekiel reports the calamitous effects of disrespect for the sacred that the regulations of Leviticus were designed to prevent.

While we are no longer required to literally observe the rules of Leviticus governing ritual impurities, reverence for God's holiness is as important as ever. How do we portray God's nature and character? Are we close to Leviticus or moving toward the stage described by Ezekiel? This question applies on a number of levels, including our individual and family lives, our church communities, and our nation. One attitude or act of reverence or irreverence leads to another. We influence ourselves as well as others. "Tipping Points" can occur on any level.

This is not a plea for legalism or judgmentalism. It is a call to examine ourselves for an accurate assessment of our faith relationship to God (2 Cor. 13:5), just as the Israelites were responsible for diagnosing their own private conditions of physical purity or impurity.

Leviticus encourages us by teaching that contagious evil can be contained and come to an end through water and blood. Romans encourages us that just as death spread to the entire human race because of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12), "how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (5:15). Because Christ became human and allowed our mortality to spread to him, paradoxically bringing our toxic impurity in contact with his holiness as our purification offering (see comments on Lev. 6:27), he reverses the contagion from evil to good.

Prominent religious philosophies teach that life and death, good and evil have always been and will always be with us. In ancient Egypt every tomb was a temple because death was holy, opening the way to the afterlife realm of the gods. But the ritual system of Leviticus, in which impurity that represents mortality is the mortal enemy of holiness, diametrically opposes the idea that death is holy and good or that we must accept evil and simply get used to it. Mortality is an intruder on Planet Earth, where God originally created human

beings to be holy and to live.

In order to save human beings from mortality and thereby achieve his undying ideal for them, Christ strode into the seething masses of the world's need, with evils of all kinds pressing on him from every side (e.g., Luke 8:45). He did not come to teach proper balance between a Yin and Yang of good and evil, but to give us abundant life (John 10:10). Sin, death, and mortality were not always here, and the Lord will have nothing to do with them except to help us escape their clutches and finally to destroy them (1 Cor. 15:51—55, Rev. 20:10, 14).

John Wesley caught the vision:

> We see the general, the almost universal contagion, and yet it cannot approach to hurt us! Thanks be unto Him "who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth still deliver!" And have we not farther ground for thankfulness, yea, and strong consolation, in the blessed hope which God hath given us, that the time is at hand, when righteousness shall be as universal as unrighteousness is now? Allowing that "the whole creation now groaneth together" under the sin of man, our comfort is, it will not always groan: God will arise and maintain his own cause, and the whole creation shall then be delivered both from moral and natural corruption. Sin, and its consequence, pain, shall be no more: Holiness and happiness will cover the earth. Then shall all the ends of the world see the salvation of our God; and the whole race of mankind shall know, and love, and serve God, and reign with him forever and ever![18]

1. M. M. Kalisch, *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament, with a New Translation: Leviticus* (London: Longman, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872), 2:155, cf. J. V. Kinnier-Wilson, who suggests infectious urinary Bilharzia ("Medicine in the Land and Times of the Old Testament," in T. Ishida, ed., *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1982], 358).

2. See B. Levine, *Numbers 1—20* (AB 4, New York: Doubleday, 1993), 185.

3. Milgrom *(Leviticus 1 — 16*, 920) draws the implication that if the impure person takes the precaution of rinsing his hands, he can live at home. Regarding a stricter rule, according to which males and females with genital flows must stay outside the war camp, see comments on Num. 5:1—4 (cf. Levine, *Numbers 1—20*, 185).

4. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 934—35.

5. Gruber, "Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," 47—48 n. 40.

6. Against Milgrom's "for his discharge" and "for her impure discharge" *(Leviticus 1—16*, a902—3).

7. Cf. S. Hills, "A Semantic and Conceptual Study of the Root KPR in the Hebrew Old Testament with Special Reference to the Accadian *Kuppuru"* (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1954), 209.

8. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 903.

9. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 60; cf. 31—32, 48—50, 207—8.

10. Cf. G. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15:18)?" *ZAW* 95 (1983): 433—34.

11. Cf. M. F. Small, "A Woman's Curse? From Taboo to Time Bomb: Rethinking Menstruation," *The Sciences* (January/February 1999), 24—29.

12. John H. Walton, personal communication.

13. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals*, 135, 137, 143, 219.

14. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 903.

15. J. Randolph, cited in Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*, 930—31.

16. M. Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 7.

17. Ibid., 9.

18. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CDROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 6:286.

Leviticus 16

THE LORD SPOKE to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. 2The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

3“This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. 5From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

6“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. 7Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. 9Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

11"Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. 12He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. 13He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will

conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. [l4]He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

[15]"He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. [16]In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. [17]No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

[18]"Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. [19]He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

[20]"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. [21]He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. "The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

[23]"Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place, and he is to leave them there. [24]He shall bathe himself with water in a holy place and put on his regular garments. Then he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people. [25]He shall also burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

[26]"The man who releases the goat as a scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the

camp. [27]The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up. [28]The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.

[29]“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you—[30]because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins. [31]It is a sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. [32]The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments [33]and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community.

[34]“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

And it was done, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 16 CAN BE DESCRIBED as the "inner sanctum" of the Torah.[1] Here at the heart of Leviticus, the central book of the Pentateuch, are a few small steps for a man (the high priest), but a giant leap for humanity toward the heart of God.

Throughout the year, sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary removed sins and severe physical ritual impurities from those who offered them there. All this contact with human faults and faultiness meant that the sanctuary itself needed periodic cleansing so that the holy Lord could continue to reside there. If it became excessively polluted, he would abandon it (cf. Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18—19; 11:22—23). As a result, once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the high priest performed a special complex of rituals to purify the entire sanctuary (Lev. 16). Since this purgation involved the high priest approaching the Presence of God in the Most Holy Place, which he could enter only on this day (16:2, 12—16), it was the most awesome, climactic day of the year. Its biblical name is *yom hakkippurim* (23:27—28), "the Day of Purgation," known today as Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16 prescribes the ceremonies that were unique to the Day of Purgation. Verse 1 places the time when the Lord gave the legislation of this chapter within a narrative framework: "after the death of the two sons of Aaron" (cf. 10:1—2). This reminder reinforces the Lord's warning to Aaron through Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die" (16:2).

The high priest ritually cleansed the sanctuary by means of two special purification offerings: a bull on behalf of the priests (16:11—14) and a goat for the nonpriestly community (16:15—19). Whereas "outer sanctum" purification offerings took blood into the outer apartment of the sacred Tent (4:6—7, 17—18), the Day of Purgation sacrifices extended blood manipulations all the way into the inner sanctum and further expanded the significance of blood with additional applications in the outer sanctum and on the outer altar. Each of these purification offerings was supplemented by a burnt offering: a ram each for the priests and for the laity (16:3, 5, 24).

Purging moral faults and ritual impurities out of the sanctuary was not enough. The sins had to be permanently banished from the Israelite camp in which the Lord dwelt. So the high priest used a live goat, the so-called “scapegoat,” as a ritual “garbage truck” to haul the moral faults of all Israelites, both priests and laity, into the desert and leave them there (16:10, 20—22).

While the high priest was cleansing the sanctuary and camp on their behalf, the rest of the Israelites were to participate and thereby show loyalty to God by practicing self-denial through fasting and by resting from work (16:29, 31, 23:28—32). Through the purification of the sanctuary, the people themselves were morally purified from all their sins (16:30).

Preparatory Activities (16:1—10)

LET'S LOOK AT THE EVENTS of the Day of Purgation more closely. To prepare for special interaction with God in the inner sanctum, the high priest did not merely rinse his hands and feet with water drawn from the holy basin, as he was required to do before entering the outer sanctum or officiating at the altar in the court (cf. Ex. 30:18—21). Rather, he bathed his entire body. Then he donned sacred linen garments reserved for this occasion (Lev. 16:4). Designation of these clothes as holy agrees with the fact that elsewhere, heavenly angels are described as clad in linen (Ezek. 9:2—3, 11, 10:2, Dan. 10:5, 12:6—7). Once the high priest was ready and the required animals were assembled in the courtyard of the sanctuary, he performed a unique preparatory casting of lots to determine the respective ritual roles of two goats provided by the people.

Purification Offerings (16:11—19)

THECOREof the ritual procedure begins in verse 11. After slaughtering the purification offering bull for himself and his priestly household, the high priest was to deposit a censer in the inner sanctum ("the Most Holy Place") to provide a cloud of incense smoke (vv. 12—13). This cloud was to shield him from God's lethally glorious Presence by covering the *kapporet*, the golden slab covering the top surface of the ark of the covenant (the so-called "mercy seat" or "atonement cover"), over which the Lord's Presence hovered (cf. Ex. 25:17, 21, 22, Num. 7:89). Then he was to bring the bull's blood into the inner sanctum, where he would sprinkle some of it once on the *kapporet* and seven times in front of this most sacred object (Lev. 16:14). Notice that by sprinkling he would avoid touching it.

Before applying the bull's blood to other parts of the sanctuary, the high priest was to slaughter the Lord's goat (16:6—9) on behalf of the lay community and similarly sprinkle once on and seven times before the *kapporet* (16:15). In this way he would begin the purification offering of the goat before completing that of the bull.

The first part of verse 16 states what the high priest would accomplish by sprinkling the blood of the bull and of the goat in the inner sanctum: "Thus he shall purge *[kipper]* the [most] holy place from [privative min] the impurities of the Israelites and from their transgressions as well as all their sins" (author's transl.). In other words, by sprinkling on and in front of the ark, the high priest was to remove ritual impurities and two kinds of moral faults— transgressions and sins—that had belonged to the priestly and lay communities from the area of the inner sanctum, including the ark located there.

Having cleansed the inner sanctum, the high priest was to purify the outer sanctum, which is referred to here as the "Tent of Meeting" (16:16b), that is, the rest of the tabernacle. At this point the text abbreviates by referring to the procedural pattern followed in the inner sanctum: "He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting."[2] This must mean that the priest was to purge the area and its contents by applying the blood of the bull and of the goat once to a central object —in this case, the incense altar (cf. Ex. 30:10)— and seven times in front of that

object.[3]

Exiting to the courtyard, the high priest was to daub the mixed bloods of the bull and goat on the horns of the outer altar in order to purge it (16:18). Rather than directing a subsequent sevenfold sprinkling in front of the altar to purge the court, he was to sprinkle seven times on the altar itself to reconsecrate it (16:19b, cf. Ex. 29:36—37). The court needed no purgation because it had not been consecrated with anointing oil like the altar and Tent (Lev. 8:10—11), but the altar itself needed an extra dose of restoration because the Israelites had brought their sins and impurities to it throughout the year.[4]

Live Goat (16:20—22)

BY THIS POINT the high priest had finished taking the impurities and faults of the priests and laity from the three components of the sanctuary: inner sanctum, outer sanctum, and outer altar (16:20a). Next on the agenda was removal of the moral faults, but not the impurities, away from the community and its camp by means of the live goat. Apparently the ritual impurities were safely contained in the carcasses of the slain bull and goat and then destroyed with them by incineration outside the camp (16:27).[5] Impurity/mortality is a physical state that God can undo in a moment, but it is harder to get rid of sins because they are events that can live on in collective memory, like computer viruses, and continue to cause damage. P. Bovati observes, "When a crime has been committed, it becomes part of history, inscribed forever on reality."[6]

The high priest, representing his nation, was to lean both his hands on the head of the live goat (16:21). While in this position, he would confess over the animal "all the culpabilities of the Israelites and all their transgressions, as well as all their sins" (author's transl.), thereby transferring them to the goat. Presumably he confessed to the Lord, whose commands had been violated *(m. Yoma* 6:2).

The live goat ritual was unique in two ways. (1) It was the only time when hand-leaning on an animal was performed with two hands. In all other animal rituals, the Israelites, including the high priest, used only one hand for this gesture (e.g., 1:4; 4:4, 15, 24, 29). (2) Only in the live goat ritual was confession required simultaneously with hand-leaning. Throughout the year confession was required before some purification and reparation offerings were brought to the sanctuary (Lev. 5:5; Num. 5:7).

> Confession plus double hand-leaning appears to be the means by which the sins of the entire nation are transformed from abstraction, as if out of the air, into a concentrated, quasi-spatially containable form, gathered to the high priest, and channeled through his hands to the goat. Although he is immune to this evil, no wonder he leans his hands *before* commencing the confession, so that the toxic flow will immediately pass from him![7]

Why would the high priest use two hands rather than one? Perhaps to signify that the goat bears numerous sins of all Israelites[8] and/or to identify a different kind of relationship between the goat and the Israelites (see Bridging Contexts section). In any case, double hand-leaning plus confession cannot carry the same meaning as leaning one hand on the head of a sacrificial animal to identify its owner as the offerer.[9] For one thing, the high priest has already identified its new owner as "Azazel" by casting lots (16:8). For another, because he does not offer the live goat to the Lord for his utilization, this is not a sacrifice. "It is not conceived, then, as an offering but as a vehicle for carrying off sin. What the community sends to Azazel is not so much the goat as the sin it bears."[10]

The nonsacrificial procedure with the live goat is an elimination ritual that transfers evils away from people and disposes of them by abandonment, as in a number of Hittite, Mesopotamian, and possibly also Ugaritic rituals.[11] The fact that confession was needed along with hand-leaning reflects the fact that the high priest did not simply transfer to the live goat all of the same evils that he purged out of the sanctuary. From the sanctuary he removed *physical ritual impurities*, inexpiable rebellious sins, and expiable sins (16:16), but on the live goat he placed *culpabilities*, inexpiable rebellious sins, and expiable sins (16:21).

A (presumably lay) man described as *'itti*, which seems to mean something like "timely/ready/waiting,"[12] was to lead what we can call the "tote goat," bearing the moral evils of the Israelites, away into the desert (16:21) to/for "Azazel" (cf. 16:10, 26, on "Azazel," see below). Once in a "cutoff land," an inaccessible place from which the goat could not return to the camp, the assistant leading the goat would turn it loose (16:22). The goat was not killed, perhaps to prevent the Israelites from mistakenly identifying it as a sacrifice to someone other than the Lord (see below). However, according to rabbinic tradition, in Second Temple times the hapless beast was shoved over a cliff to ensure that it could not bring the nation's sins back to haunt the people (m. *Yoma* 6:6).

Concluding Activities of the High Priest (16:23—25)

HAVING COMPLETED THE DANGEROUS PROCESS of expelling moral evil from the sanctuary and camp, the high priest next took off the plain but holy linen "cleaning clothes" that were required for this process, which included his passage into the inner sanctum. He was to bathe again before arraying himself in his ornate vestments and performing the supplementary burnt offerings for the priests and laity at the outer altar (16:23—24).

Scholars have speculated that the high priest's second bathing was to purify him from defilement contracted by contact with the live goat or super-holiness with which he was imbued because of his entrance into the Most Holy Place.[13] However, there is no clear evidence for such contagious super-holiness, and he appears immune to the evils that he removed. Otherwise, how could he have continued to officiate in order to purge all three areas of the sanctuary?[14]

There is a simpler and more satisfactory explanation. Because the high priest's sacrificial officiation is interrupted by the nonsacrificial elimination ritual with the live goat, he must repeat his preparatory bathing (cf. 16:4) before resuming sacrificial officiation (16:24b-25), which includes completion of the special purification offerings by turning their suet/fat into smoke on the altar. Rather than washing *after* sacrifice, this is prerequisite cleansing *before* sacrifice (cf. Ex. 30:20—washing before each sacrificial officiation). Compare the fact that if a physician takes a break from surgery, he must scrub again before resuming surgery.

Leviticus 16:25 speaks of "the purification offering" in the singular even though the high priest burned the suet of both purification offerings. This singular refers to "the purification offering [also singular] of purgation" *(hatta, hakkippurim*, Ex. 30:10; Num. 29:11), which was a ritual complex consisting of the combination of two sacrifices, one on behalf of the priests and the other for the lay community (cf. use of the singular "burnt offering" in Num. 28:11, 19, 27; 29:2, 8, 13).

The two sacrifices belonging to "the purification offering of purgation" complex were interwoven into a functional unity as the high priest alternated between the blood of the bull and that of the goat when he manipulated them in

the inner and outer sanctums (Lev. 16:14—16). Then he fused the two rituals at the outer altar by daubing and sprinkling the mixed bloods of both animals on the outer altar (16:18—19). Because "the purification offering of purgation" was the unique procedure through which the sanctuary was to be purged once per year, it may have given its name to the day: "the Day of Purgation" (yom *hakkippurim*, 23:27—28).

The grammatically plural noun *kippurim* ("expiations/purgations") appears to represent the abstract idea of "expiation/purgation" or an intensified form of it (cf. Ex. 29:36, 30:16, Num. 5:8).[15] However, in the context of *hatta't hakkippurim* on *yom hakkippurim*, there is also real plurality as several purgations restore the three major parts of the sanctuary (Lev. 16:16, 18, 20, 30, 33, 34).[16]

The core of the "Day of Purgation" ritual procedure began with the purification offerings (16:11—19) and ended with them (16:25). In between were the live goat ritual (16:20—22), the high priest's transition (change of garments and resumptive purification, 16:23—24a), and the burnt offerings (16:24b). So the purification offerings form a structural "frame" around the other rituals to hold them together as a unified group that coordinate to remove from the sanctuary and camp all Israelite ritual impurities and moral faults accumulated at the sanctuary throughout the year.[17]

Postrequisite Tasks of Assistants (16:26—28)

LEVITICUS 16:26—28 PRESCRIBES some required "cleanup" activities that are ritual in nature but follow the procedural core and are performed by assistants, who are not required to be priests. The man who contacted the live goat by leading it into the desert contracted a light ritual impurity, which required him to purify himself by laundering his clothes and bathing, but then he was permitted to reenter the camp (v. 26), without remaining impure until evening. It is striking that he incurred *physical* ritual impurity even though the goat carried only *moral* faults. This case shows the close connection between the two categories of evil:[18] Sin produces death (Rom. 6:23), which is represented by physical impurity.

One or more assistants disposed of the purification offering carcasses by incinerating them outside the camp (Lev. 16:27), as in the "outer sanctum" purification offerings of the community and high priest (4:11—12, 21). There are two likely reasons why the high priest was not permitted to eat "the purification offering of purgation." (1) He could not benefit from his own sacrifice. It is true that he was not the offerer of the lay community's sacrifice, but because the two purification offerings were bound together into a unit as ritual "Siamese twins," he could not do something with one without affecting the other. (2) The victims utilized in this complex functioned as ritual "sponges" to absorb evils from the sanctuary (cf. 16:27—28).

Unlike the disposal of carcasses in chapter 4, contact with these dead victims defiles each person involved in carrying them outside the camp and incinerating them. Although only the blood of the victims reached the ritual impurities and moral faults inside the sanctuary, these evils were absorbed into the carcasses outside in the court because they belonged to the same animals, "part for all" (see Bridging Contexts section of ch. 8). Purification of an assistant is like that of the live goat's handler: laundering and bathing (16:28). Notice that although rabbinic tradition assumes similar ablutions in chapter 4 on the basis of 16:28, this assumption is invalid because 4:11—12 is not abbreviating. Rather, these verses contain the initial full set of instructions regarding disposal, to which 16:28 refers.

Concluding Wrap-Up (16:29—34)

HAVING OUTLINED THE RITUAL PROCEDURES to be performed at the sanctuary (16:1—28), this chapter wraps up instructions for "the Day of Purgation" in two ways: (1) by commanding the Israelites to practice self-denial and refrain from work on this tenth day of the seventh month (vv. 29—31; see further below), and (2) by summarizing the main performer (high priest) and beneficiaries (three parts of the sanctuary on behalf of priests and laity) of the yearly purgation (vv. 32—34).

Bridging Contexts

REVERSAL. THE ISRAELITE SYSTEM of purification offerings has presented us with three pieces of a puzzle. (1) "Outer altar" and "outer sanctum" purification offerings throughout the year had the goal of expiating/removing *(kipper)* sins and severe ritual impurities from (privative *min)* those who offered them at the sanctuary so that they could be forgiven (Niphal of slh) by the Lord (see comments on Lev. 4).

(2) Purification offerings throughout the year were already carrying the contamination from their offerers when the animal blood was applied to the outer altar or outer sanctum and the suet/fat was put on the outer altar (see comments on 6:27—28).

(3) Once a year the high priest expiates/purges *(kipper)* out the ritual impurities, transgressions, and all *(kol)* the sins that are in the sanctuary (16:16), and expels all (kol) of the Israelites' moral faults into the desert (16:21—22).

As a result of the sanctuary's purgation, Israelites are purified (verb *thr)* from their sins (16:30; cf. v. 34). Thus, uniquely for purification offerings, the goal of such sacrifices for the people on the Day of Purgation is *moral purification beyond forgiveness,* not moral expiation prior to forgiveness or physical ritual purification.[19]

Contrary to widespread misconception dating as early as the Second Temple period, *none of the rituals unique to the Day of Purgation lead to forgiveness at all.*[20] The root *slh* ("forgive") does not appear once in Leviticus 16 or any other passage that has to do with the Day of Purgation (cf. 23:26—32; 25:9—10; Num. 29:7—11).[21] Thus, unlike the purification offerings that remedy moral faults throughout the year (Lev. 4—5, etc.), the special sacrifices on the Day of Purgation that primarily accomplish purification of the sanctuary and secondarily achieve the moral cleansing of God's people are not prerequisite to direct divine forgiveness.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to fit the pieces of the puzzle together in their proper places. Each expiable evil was treated in two major stages of ritual expiation/purgation *(kipper).*

Stage 1: Throughout the year purification offerings removed evils from their

offerers and left those evils at the sanctuary, where they accumulated. Thus, the evils were moving *into the sanctuary.* This stage resulted in *forgiveness (slh)* or *physical cleansing (thr)* for the offerer.

Stage 2: On the yearly "Day of Purgation," special purification offerings removed *from the sanctuary* and camp the evils that had accumulated in the sanctuary throughout the year. This stage resulted in *moral cleansing (thr)* for the Israelites.

The overall contour is a dramatic reversal in the flow of evil. What goes in must come out! Whereas the Lord uniquely and paradoxically frees human beings from impurities and sins by allowing these evils to penetrate his holy domain through purification offerings, he then turns the evils around by "the purification offering of purgation," sends them away, and gets rid of them forever.

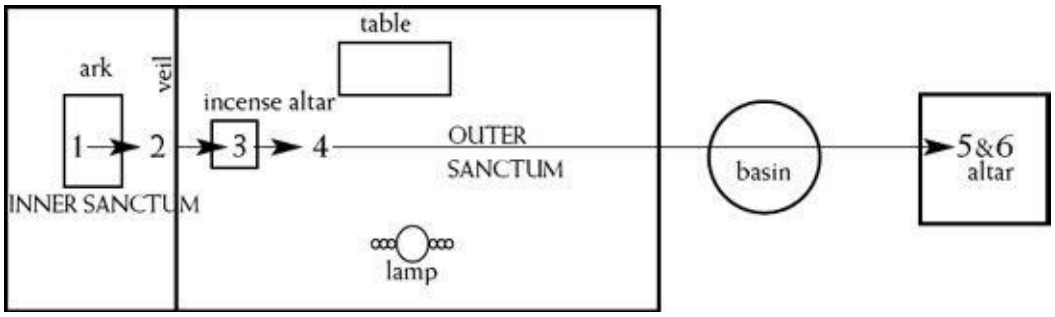
The reversal of evil experienced by God is necessitated by his provision for the much smaller reversals in the lives of his individual people. Sin and death, represented by ritual impurity, have spread *to* each person (cf. Rom. 5:12). However, most holy purification offerings absorbed sins and impurities *from* them. These rituals found fulfillment in our most holy Purification Offering (John 1:29), who paradoxically allowed sin and death to penetrate him (2 Cor. 5:21) so that he can cleanse these evils *out* of those who accept his sacrifice: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will *forgive* us our sins and *purify* us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, emphasis added).

Reversal in two stages of expiation/purgation *(kipper)* into and then out of the sanctuary is confirmed by comparing the order of activities in "outer sanctum" purification offerings (Lev. 4:3—21) with that of the yearly "purification offering of purgation" (16:1 1—19, 25, 27—28).[22] During the "outer sanctum" sacrifices of the high priest (4:3—12) and the whole community (4:13—21), the high priest was to apply blood to the sanctuary as follows: (1) Sprinkle blood seven times in front of the veil (4:6, 17), that is, within the main area of the outer sanctum and in front of the incense altar (see comments on ch. 4), (2) daub blood on the horns of the incense altar (4:7, 18). Thus, the order of blood applications required the high priest to move *toward the ark,* above which the divine Presence was located (see diagram and comments in ch. 4). Such purification offerings throughout the year carried sin from their offerers and *into* the sanctuary.

In contrast to the direction of "outer sanctum" sacrifices, the yearly "purification offering of purgation" on the Day of Purgation/Atonement was designed to purge the sanctuary from the inside out: inner sanctum → outer sanctum → outer altar. Within each of these three areas, the high priest was to apply blood in places that progressively moved *away from the ark* (16:14—16,

18—19):

1. Ark cover (sprinkling 1x).
2. In front of ark cover (sprinkling 7x).
3. Incense altar (daubing 1x on horns).
4. In front of incense altar (sprinkling 7x).
5. Outer altar (daubing 1x on horns).
6. Outer altar (sprinkling 7x).



This outward direction makes perfect sense for the "housecleaning job" that it is.[23] Anyone who has swept a room knows that you clean from the inside out.

The idea that evils were moving into the sanctuary throughout the year and then out of it on the Day of Purgation explains why assistants who incinerated carcasses of "outer sanctum" purification offerings needed no ablutions (4:11—12, 21), but one who performed the same task with "the purification offering of purgation" had to launder his clothes and bathe (16:27—28). Only in the latter case did the carcasses function as "ritual sponges" for removing evil from the sanctuary. By contrast, "outer sanctum" sacrifices moved sin from the offerer and into the sanctuary.

Tracking. The two stages of expiation/purgation *(kipper)* affected several evils. Because these evils possessed different properties, they followed different trajectories in relation to the two stages. By tracking their movements, as radar tracks the courses of various kinds of aircraft, we can learn more about these evils and the stages of expiation/purgation that influence their paths.[24]

Leviticus 16:16, 21 use four terms for evil: *tume'ah* ("impurity"), *Pesa'* ("transgression), *hatta*, ("sin"), and *'awon* ("iniquity/culpability"). The last three of these terms, which denote moral faults, can be used synonymously or at least with overlapping meaning elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ex. 34:7, Ps. 32:1—2, 5, Dan. 9:24). Therefore, interpreters of Leviticus 16:16, 21 have generally regarded these terms as lumped together to emphasize comprehensive treatment of sin, with at least two of them overlapping in meaning.[25] However,

by tracking the terms through Leviticus, we find that their usage is more precise in this book. Each term refers to a distinct category of evil:

- *tume'ah* ("impurity") is removed from offerers by purification offerings throughout the year (14:19, 15:30, cf. 12:7—8, 15:15) and then purged from the sanctuary on the Day of Purgation (16:16).
- *Pesa'* ("transgression) is purged from the sanctuary and camp on the Day of Purgation (16:16, 21).
- *hatta't* ("sin") is removed from offerers by purification offerings throughout the year (e.g., 4:26, 5:6, 10) and then purged from the sanctuary and camp on the Day of Purgation (16:16, 21), as a result of which it is secondarily purged from the people (16:30, 34).
- *'awon* ("iniquity") is removed from offerers by purification offerings throughout the year (5:1, 6), borne by priests (10:17), and then purged from the camp on the Day of Purgation (16:21).

Term for evil	Stage1: Throughout year		Stage 2: Day of Purgation		
	Expiated from offerer (Lev. 4–5, 12, 14, 15)	Borne by priests (10:17)	Purged from sanctuary (16:16)	Purged from camp (16:21)	Purged from people (16:30, 34)
ṭume'ah ("impurity")	x		x		
peša' ("transgression")		x	x	x	
ḥaṭṭa't ("sin")	x		x	x	x
'awon ("iniquity")	x			x	

Here is what our "radar screen" looks like: We can see at a glance that each term for evil follows a different trajectory according to its nature. (1) While *tume'ah* ("impurity") is removed at the sanctuary by purification offerings and therefore must be purged from the sanctuary on the Day of Purgation, it does not need to be borne by the priests or purged from the camp and people on the Day of Purgation because it is not moral fault. In Pentateuchal law, *tume'ah* is only physical ritual impurity.[26]

(2) *Pesa'* ("transgression) is moral fault that somehow gets into the sanctuary so that it must be purged from it and from the camp on the Day of Purgation, but it does not reach the sanctuary via purification offerings throughout the year. We have not seen and will not see this term in connection with any kind of expiation throughout the year. In fact, *Pesa'* appears only in Leviticus 16:16, 21 in all of Pentateuchal ritual law. Because this kind of sin is not expiated from the

transgressor at Stage 1, it cannot be purged from the people who committed such sins at Stage 2 on the Day of Purgation, just as you can't get a Ph.D. without a prerequisite Master's degree or its equivalent. The transgression remains on the sinner, who must suffer the consequences.

The trajectory of *Pesa'* matches the grave offenses of Molech worship (Lev. 20:3) and wanton neglect to have oneself purified from corpse contamination (Num. 19:13, 20), which automatically defile the sanctuary when they are committed, but for which the sinners are "cut off" without eligibility for expiation through sacrifice (see comments on 20:3).[27]

The seriousness of these offenses in breaking the divine/human relationship agrees with the fact that the verb from the same root *ps'* means "rebel," that is, cast off allegiance, whether against God (Isa. 1:2, 43:27, Jer. 2:8, 33:8) or an earthly overlord (1 Kings 12:19, 2 Kings 1:1, 3:5, 7, 8:20, 22). Outside the Israelite sacrificial system the Lord could save people from their *Pesa'* sins if they repented (e.g., Ex. 34:7, Num. 14:18),[28] but this mercy was granted directly by God and transcended the possibilities for reconciliation that he offered through rituals.[29]

(3) Elsewhere in the Bible *hatta,* ("sin") can describe grave sins for which no sacrificial expiation would be available if the ritual system were operating (Gen. 4:7, 18:20, 50:17, Ex. 32:30, 32, 34). However, in Pentateuchal ritual law (not including Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28), this term is restricted to moral faults for which the sinners can receive the benefit of expiation through sacrifice. These include inadvertent sins (e.g., 4:3, 14, 23, 26, 28), forgetting to perform a duty to the Lord (5:2—4, 6), and some deliberate sins (5:1, 6, Num. 5:6—7, cf. Lev. 6:2—4), but exclude sins committed "high-handedly," that is, defiantly (Num. 15:30—31, cf. vv. 22—29). The fact that in Leviticus 1—16 *hatta,* means "expiable sin" is in harmony with the fact that it is removed from the offerer in Stage 1 and from the sanctuary, camp, and people in Stage 2. However, it is not borne by the priests, it only affects the sanctuary in the form of defilement.

(4) In the Hebrew Bible, *'awon* ("iniquity") can refer to any part of the process of wrongful act → blame → punishment, whether the act is intentional or not.[30] However, in Leviticus 1—16 its usage is restricted to blame in the sense of "culpability," that is, liability to punishment that the sinner must bear (Qal of *ns'*, 5:1, 17, 7:18) unless/until it is transferred to an officiating priest through a purification offering, who bears (ns') it (10:17),[31] presumably until it is borne (ns') out of the camp by the live goat on the Day of Purgation (16:21—22).[32] It is important to recognize that in Leviticus 1—16 *'awon* ("iniquity/culpability") arises from an act of *hatta,* ("expiable sin"), rather than from a separate wrongful

act. This is clear in 5:1, 5—6, where a witness who commits a sin (verb and noun from the root *hf*) bears his *'awon* as a consequence until he or she receives expiation (cf. 5:17, Ps. 32:5).

By following the movements of the four terms for evil, we have arrived at a more precise understanding of them: *tume'ah* ("physical ritual impurity"), *Pesa'* ("inexpiable rebellious sin"), *hatta't* ("expiable sin"), and *'awon* ("culpability"). In the process we have found that the two-stage system of expiation/purgation highlights several important distinctions:

- physical ritual impurities ⟷ moral faults
- expiable sin ⟷ inexpiable rebellious sin
- wrongful act ⟷ resulting culpability
- defilement of sanctuary ⟷ culpability borne by priests

Implications of these distinctions are profound. (1) God is concerned about redemption of human beings not only from morally faulty acts, but also from the human state of mortality, represented by ritual impurity, that has resulted from sin (see comments on Lev. 12—15).

(2) Expiation is a privilege, not a right, and the line between expiable and inexpiable sins is drawn between wrongs that are rebellious in the sense of casting off allegiance to the Lord and those that are not. So the bottom line for God is the relational question of loyalty to him (see further below).

(3) The fact that resulting culpability can be separated from a wrongful act means that one person can bear culpability for an offense committed by another. This happens in society and in families when somebody mistakenly and unfairly "takes the rap" for what someone else has done. My brother will never let me forget that on one occasion during our childhood he was blamed and punished for something I did. In the sanctuary, the act or culpability distinction allows the priests to intentionally and voluntarily bear culpability for the people while the sanctuary bears the defilement caused by the people's sins.

(4) The priests bear (ns^J) the culpability rather than the sanctuary because priests are persons who can be liable to punishment. Together the priests and sanctuary represent the administration of God, who is "bearing (n') culpability and inexpiable rebellious sin and expiable sin" (Ex. 34:7; author's transl.).

Our investigation supports P. Jenson's observation regarding Leviticus 16 (Stage 2):

> The comprehensive phraseology suggests that the scope of the ceremony was intended to include every kind of sin. This could include even those

> which may already have been dealt with, from the human side by the civil law, or from the divine side by direct action. What happens outside the sanctuary affects in some way what goes on inside, since it is the same God who dwells in the sanctuary and who is sovereign over all that Israel does. It would be appropriate to have some sort of cultic ritual which acknowledges the implications for God of human sin.[33]

The cost of mercy with justice. Why would the ritual system enact the idea that forgiven sin defiled the Lord's sanctuary? What kind of real-life rationale lies behind this? Once a person is forgiven, what need for a second stage of expiation/purgation could possibly remain?

S. Geller points out a dimension of reconciliation that goes beyond forgiveness:

> … the logic of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel requires that sins be more than merely "forgiven." It is a known fact that, despite the proverbial expression, it is impossible really to "forget" offenses one has supposedly "forgiven." The memory of the crime remains as a shadow on future relations. When two people begin to quarrel, each soon resurrects the full inventory of "sins" the other has committed in the past. For the covenant to remain effective, God must wipe out completely this residual effect of sin … and so renew the pristine nature of the bond. For this process an expression like "purgation of impurity" would then be a priestly metaphor.[34]

There is biblical support for Geller's insight. To begin with, in the "new covenant" promise to Jeremiah, the Lord promises to forgive the people's iniquity "and remember their sin no more" (31:34 NRSV). The point of this anthropomorphic expression is not that God will come down with a case of amnesia. Rather, he will do something beyond forgiveness. Until sin/debt is forgotten, forgiveness can be revoked (Matt. 18:23—35), but the Lord "will make sin irrevocably irrelevant to the future of the relationship, just as a grievance between two human beings loses its potential for revival if it is forgotten."[35]

The story in 2 Samuel 14 about King David and the woman of Tekoa can illuminate our understanding of the relational/legal dynamics that result from forgiveness by the divine king.[36] This woman cried out to David for help, telling him that she was a widow and that one of her sons had murdered his brother (2 Sam. 14:4—6). Her clan was eager to fulfill its duty by inflicting capital

punishment on the murderer. Justice demanded that the murderer should die. But because he was the only surviving son, the effect would be like "cutting off" her family (v. 7).

As the "chief justice of the supreme court," King David had the power to extend mercy. But forgiving a guilty murderer who was supposed to die (cf. Num. 35:31) would compromise his reputation for social justice, which he and other ancient Near Eastern kings were responsible for maintaining.[37] So David's reputation was not simply a matter of personal ego; it was a key factor in holding the fabric of his nation together. Since the case was a difficult and risky one, he told the woman to go home and he would send the verdict later (2 Sam. 14:8).

The Tekoite woman wanted an immediate answer, not a diplomatic brush-off. So she offered: "The culpability *[-awon]* is on me, my lord the king, and on my father's house, but the king and his throne are clean" (2 Sam. 9; author's transl.), that is, free from blame (cf. Ex. 23:7) with regard to the case.

What kind of culpability would rest on the king and his administration, represented by his throne, unless she bore it for him? David had not been involved in the murder. But he would become involved if he pardoned the guilty man, whom God's law condemned to capital punishment (Ex. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; cf. Gen. 9:6), and thereby failed to carry out his judicial responsibility to uphold justice (cf. 1 Kings 2:5—6, 31—33). As the judge, he was morally responsible for his judgment.[38] However, the woman of Tekoa was willing to take the cost of mercy on herself and her family so that the king could be "clean," that is, free from blame. On this basis David granted her request (2 Sam. 14:10).

At the heart of the interaction between David and the Tekoite woman was tension between mercy and justice. It is true that she was an able actress set up by General Joab to rearrange David's thinking toward his own son Absalom, and her story was a fictitious juridical parable (2 Sam. 14:1—3).[39] But David did not yet know that, and her pathetic plea was successful with him because it was true to life, reflecting realities of mercy and justice that applied to real situations, including Absalom's murder of his brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:28—39). In fact, it was David's failure to uphold justice by punishing Amnon for raping Tamar, Absalom's full sister, that had triggered Absalom's desire to take the law into his own hands by lynching Amnon (13:1—22).

Lest we doubt the damage to society that a king/judge can cause by compromising justice in order to extend mercy, we need look no further than the rest of David's story. Recognizing the implications of his exchange with the Tekoite for his relationship to Absalom, David granted him amnesty and allowed him to return to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 14:21—24). But the cost of mercy that David

took on himself was high, and he paid it in full. Ironically, it was Absalom himself who made David pay by running for office on the platform of judicial reform, seizing the throne and even David's concubines and forcing David into humiliating exile (chs. 15—16). The ensuing civil war tore national unity apart before David managed to restore order (chs. 18—20).

As great and wise as he was, David was faced with tensions between justice and mercy, the two sides of love, that he was unable to resolve successfully. These are precisely the kinds of dynamics that the Lord must balance when he provides for forgiveness of human beings who are truly guilty.

> As David was to Absalom, God is to us: our parent, king, and judge. Like Absalom, we have sinned. Like David, God forgives us because He loves us (Ps 103:3—4) As judge, God is like David in that He is morally responsible for his judgments, including His forgiveness of guilty people.
>
> God must deal with the cost of mercy and there is nobody to bear it but Himself. He has borne it in His sanctuary and through the sacrifice of Christ, who endured far greater suffering and humiliation than David did when he fled from Absalom.
>
> Having paid the ransom for our condemned lives (Matt 20:28) that we could never pay (compare Ps 49:7—8), God is just when He justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). By paying the terrible full cost of mercy, the sacrifice of Christ provides a lasting solution to human sin by maintaining full justice at the same time as providing for full mercy. Righteousness and salvation are intertwined, reflecting harmonious balance between mercy and justice in the character of God. Through Christ, "Lovingkindness and truth have met together, Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps 85:10, NASB).[40]

Returning to our opening question, now we are in a better position to comprehend why the ritual system would enact the idea that forgiven sin defiled the Lord's sanctuary. We have found that David and his throne, representing his administration, would incur culpability *('awon)* if he forgave a guilty person without someone to take this blame for him (2 Sam. 14:9). Things work similarly for the divine king of Israel and his administration, represented in Leviticus by the sanctuary headquarters where he was enthroned (e.g., Ex. 25:22, Num. 7:89, 1 Sam. 4:4, cf. Jer. 17:12). As with David, the place of God's enthronement stood for the authority and character of his government: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne" (Ps. 97:2).

To be true to his own paradigmatic, exemplary ideals, the Lord must achieve

harmonious balance between justice and mercy, the two sides of his character (Ex. 20:5—6; 34:6—7; Ps. 85:10).[41] Mercy at the expense of justice would encourage unmerciful moral chaos and unbridled iniquity.[42] Oppressive justice without mercy would destroy his faulty people.

Just as the full authority of an absolute human monarch entails responsibility for upholding justice in society (e.g., 2 Sam 15:2—4), in the Pentateuch "the self-characterization of YHWH takes the guise of the just king, who must not only promulgate and interpret law, but enforce it as well."[43] As the epitome of an ideal ruler who seeks social stability among his subjects, the Lord promulgates and abides by internationally recognized principles of justice.[44]

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, grasped the importance of justice: "How great a thing justice is can be gathered from the fact that there is no place, nor person, nor time, with which it has nothing to do. It must even be preserved in all dealings with enemies."[45]

God commanded Israelite judicial administrators to be fair, clearing the innocent and condemning the guilty (e.g., Ex. 23:6—8; Deut. 1:16—17). In King Solomon's temple dedication prayer, he understood that the Lord would practice what he preaches: "Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty and bringing down on his own head what he has done. Declare the innocent not guilty, and so establish his innocence" (1 Kings 8:32 NJPS).

A judge who lets a guilty individual off the hook is responsible for his ruling, but this is precisely what the Lord must do in order to save guilty people: He forgives them and therefore incurs judicial responsibility, a cost of mercy that he voluntarily bears.[46] However, by this he does not commit a moral fault. Unlike David, the Lord can and does fully justify what he is doing through a second stage of the redemptive process, although at the initial stage he needs to emphasize mercy at the expense of justice.

At Stage 1 throughout the year, the Lord's responsibility was shared between the sanctuary, which was metaphorically sullied by expiable sin (ha*it'* see Lev. 16:16), and the priests, who bore culpability *('awon)* resulting from the same sin (10:17, cf. Ex. 34:7). We will find that purgation of the Lord's sanctuary system at Stage 2 enacted restoration of the balance between justice and mercy. This equilibrium could only be achieved by vindicating the justice of the mercy that had already been given (see comments on Lev. 23:26—32).

The mysterious "Azazel." We already know that the live goat for Azazel serves as a ritual "garbage truck" to haul nonmaterial moral faults away as if they were material refuse. We also know that this ritual is not a sacrifice, not because of the absence of slaughter, but because the animal is not offered to the

Lord for his utilization. To the contrary, it goes away from him. It is true that 16:5 speaks of the slain and live goats as *hatta*, animals, but with reference to the latter this term simply means (nonsacrificial) "purification ritual" rather than the usual (sacrificial) "purification offering."[47] This usage reflects the fact that both goats play roles in purification from evil, one through sacrifice and the other through an elimination process.

The live goat is owned by "Azazel." In 16:8—10 the syntax of *lyhwh* ("to/for the LORD") and *la'aza'zel* ("to/for Azazel") is: preposition *l* + proper name, as on ancient Israelite seals that identify objects as belonging to individuals. In *lyhwh* the preposition clearly carries a possessive meaning: The sacrificial goat offered to God "belongs to the LORD." So the parallel *la'aza'zel* must mean "belongs to Azazel."[48] Since "Azazel" is capable of ownership and his name is placed alongside that of the Lord, he must be a supernatural being other than the Lord.[49] Since the Lord allows sacrifices only to himself (e.g., 17:7), he would not permit the Israelites to send a goat to Azazel as a sacrifice.

Already we can cut through the fat of mistaken theories. Once we know that *la'aza'zel* is the proper name "Azazel," referring to a personal being other than the Lord, we automatically rule out the notion that it is a place.

Because Azazel is the owner of the goat, we also rule out the traditional mistranslation of *'aia'iel* as "scapegoat," that is, the goat that goes away or escapes.[50] Another argument against "scapegoat" is the fact that the live goat is sent *la'aia'iel* (16:10). While several English versions render this preposition *l* by "for/as" (i.e., "for/as a/the scapegoat," KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV), the simplest plain sense of *l* in this context is "to": The goat is sent "to 'aza'zel." Plug "scapegoat" in here and you get nonsense: The live goat is sent "to the scapegoat."[51] There is no such problem if you read "to/for Azazel" (NJPS, NJB, NRSV).

In early Christian tradition (Barnabas, Tertullian), the live goat symbolized Christ.[52] Similarly, John Calvin viewed it as a bloodless sacrifice that was paired with the slain goat to represent another means of making atonement "when Christ, 'being made a curse for us,' transferred to Himself the sins which alienated men from God."[53] However, we already know that the ritual was not a sacrifice, so it could not have typified the sacrifice of Christ. Moreover, as the slain sacrifice, Christ was the Victim "of *God*, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; emphasis supplied). So if the live goat also pointed forward to Christ, even in a nonsacrificial function, why would it belong to someone other than the Lord? If Azazel himself were Christ, why would his identity always be separate from that of the Lord, to the extent that he was off in the desert rather than at the sanctuary (16:8—10)? Why would he be the end

recipient of the accumulated sins of Israel, a permanent moral “septic tank"?

It is true that the live goat goes outside the camp, bearing reproach, as Christ does in Hebrews 13:11—13. However, in this passage Christ is identified with the carcasses of purification offerings, the blood of which was applied by the high priest inside the sacred Tent, whether throughout the year in the outer sanctum (Lev. 4:6—7, 17—18) or in the inner and outer sanctums on the Day of Purgation (16:14—16). Hebrews 13:11—13 is not talking about Azazel’s goat at all.

So who is the mysterious Azazel, who is not mentioned by this name anywhere in the Bible outside Leviticus 16? Proposed etymologies of *la’aia‘iel* —including reference to a place, a personal being such as a demon or deity, or an abstraction signifying removal—are legion, but a definitive solution regarding the derivation and meaning of this name continues to elude scholars.[54] So we must rely on other factors.

> The dynamics of the live goat ritual imply that Azazel is the Lord’s enemy:
>
> The Lord directed the Israelites to transport their sins on a goat to Azazel, who ended up with this noxious load. This would be like sending someone a truck full of chemical waste or dumping a load of reeking, maggot infested chicken manure all over his front lawn—not a friendly gesture. Here, Azazel, get a load of this![55]

If Azazel was the Lord’s enemy and the goat belonged to him, it is clear why the high priest would use a lot ritual so that chance (i.e., the Lord, cf. 1 Sam. 10:19—24) would designate the goat for its ritual role (Lev. 16:7—8). “Otherwise, if the high priest chose the animals, it would appear that he and the people he represented were offering an animal to Azazel.”[56]

If Azazel was the Lord’s enemy, what was the meaning of expiation/purgation *(kipper)* on (preposition ’al) the goat, which was accomplished by sending it to him in the desert (16:10)? Here nonsacrificial purgation was made on the animal itself in the sense that it functioned as a vehicle to purge moral faults from the Israelite camp. This purgation was not substitutionary. It was *kipper* in the basic sense of restoring the relationship between the Lord and his people by getting rid of evil that had come between them (cf. Num. 25:13).

The Lord’s goat belonged to the Lord and was offered to the Lord, but it also represented the one who died for human sin: Christ (Heb. 13:11—13), who is the Lord (John 8:58, 10:30). If there is this tight a connection between the Lord and his goat, we must consider the possibility that the goat belonging to Azazel and

sent to him also represents him. If so, this enemy of God and his people would be the final bearer and recipient of the Israelites' culpabilities, inexpiable rebellious sins, and expiable sins (Lev. 16:21—22). Yet he does not bear them as the substitute for the Israelites, who committed them.

What has Azazel done to deserve this kind of treatment? Leviticus simply does not say. But early Jewish interpretation (l *Enoch* 9:6, 10:4—5, 8, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, rabbinic literature), with which Revelation 20 has important connections, identifies Azazel as a demonic source of evil, to whom the Lord has his people return their sins.[57] This makes good sense in light of biblical data outside Leviticus 16. (1) Human sin was instigated by a nonhuman tempter (Gen. 3), that is, the devil (cf. Matt. 4; Luke 4).

(2) Both the Lord's goat and Azazel's goat were *se'irim* ("[hairy] male goats," 16:5, 8—10, 20—22). Desert areas, such as that to which the live goat was sent to Azazel (16:10), could be inhabited by wild *se'irim* ("[hairy] male goats," Isa. 13:21; 34:14). In Leviticus 17:7 the Lord prohibits the Israelites from offering illegitimate sacrifices away from the sanctuary to *se'irim*, which in this context must refer to "goat demons" (NASB, NJPS, NRSV; cf. KJV ["devils"]; NKJV ["demons"]). It was appropriate to banish Azazel's goat as far from God's presence as possible[58] to the deserted domain of its wild relatives, which represented demons (cf. Luke 11:24; Rev. 18:2).

(3) It is a biblical principle that results of evils come back on those who cause them, as expressed in the proverb: "If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him" (Prov. 26:27). Today we say: "Chickens come home to roost," or, "What goes around comes around." The Lord sees to it that justice is meted out in this way by putting wrongful actions on the head(s) of their perpetrator(s) (e.g., Ezek. 9:10; 11:21; 16:43; 22:31). This helps to explain why the Lord directed that witnesses to blasphemy should lean their hands on the head of the blasphemer before he was put to death, thereby identifying him as the one who bore his own culpability (Lev. 24:14—15). Compare the ritual of Azazel's goat: The high priest leans his hands on the head of the animal, loading culpability onto him through confession (16:21—22).[59]

It is true that culpability on the live goat was that of the Israelites (16:21), but if Azazel was the source of Israel's sin, the high priest's confession implicitly testified against Azazel. Confession of a crime by an accomplice implicates the mastermind who instigated it. Thus the high priest, representing the community of Israelites (who were already forgiven), placed responsibility for instigation of evil where it belonged and banished it from the camp. In this way the priest severed any residual, nominal ties to the nefarious Azazel and thereby cemented

the security of Israel’s relationship with the Lord.

Contemporary Significance

"IT AIN'T OVER UNTIL it's over!" So Yogi Berra, the legendary catcher of the New York Yankees baseball team, famously observed. This truism applies to many areas of life. For example, don't call the results of a baseball game, a business competition, or an international altercation too soon because the "underdog" may still have a chance to come back and win. When you wash the dishes, don't forget to clean out the sink and wipe the decks. A marriage may still be salvaged if the divorce is not yet finalized.

The same principle holds true in Leviticus. A sacrifice isn't over when the victim has been slaughtered. The priest must also apply its blood to the outer altar or inside the tabernacle and turn its suet/fat into smoke on the altar. Only after completing this priestly mediation is the goal of the ritual achieved. If the goal is forgiveness through a prerequisite expiatory sacrifice, this is the first stage in a process of reconciliation with God. The process isn't over until the purging of the sanctuary, demonstration of loyalty, and moral cleansing of the Day of Purgation is accomplished.

For someone with a legalistic orientation, who tries to earn the promised Paradise rather than receive it as a gift because he or she values it more than the Giver, the multistage process of reconciliation is long and burdensome. By contrast, for those who want nothing more than oneness with God, every step by which he brings his people closer to himself is an occasion for rejoicing (Phil. 1:3—6). As love grows (Phil. 1:9—11), reconciliation and reintegration progressively reverse the "Big Bang" of Adam and Eve's sin, which blew relationships apart (Gen. 3).

Paul confronts us with an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, he wrote that through Christ's death, God had already reconciled human beings to himself (Rom. 5:10, 2 Cor. 5:18—19, Col. 1:22, cf. Rom. 5:1). On the other hand, he appealed: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Why would the Corinthians need reconciliation to God when they had already been reconciled to God through Christ? The answer must be that, as in Leviticus, there are *stages of reconciliation.* Christ's one and only sacrificial death (Heb. 9:26, 28) has made complete provision for the salvation of anyone who accepts him (John 3:16—18). "It is finished" (19:30)! In this sense our reconciliation/at-one-ment was

complete at the cross. All reconciliation/atonement flows from Christ on the cross.

Yet the story did not end on a gruesome hill two thousand years ago, or even at the empty tomb or the Mount of Olives. The story continues as Christ and the Holy Spirit bring reconciliation and moral restoration to each of us (e.g., Titus 3:4—7). As long as our relationship with God is being healed, he is reconciling us to himself.

Ongoing reconciliation is a gift from God through Christ. Having obtained eternal redemption for us by his blood (Heb. 9:12), Christ metaphorically applies his blood as our High Priest to "cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God" (9:13—14). So after making provision for everyone on Planet Earth, Christ fulfills the mediatorial role of distributing the transforming benefit to all who believe (cf. Rom. 8:34). Just as priestly mediation was an essential component of an Israelite sacrifice, Christ's "intercession is an intense reality—a work that is absolutely necessary—and without which the continued application of redemption cannot take place."[60]

Provision and distribution are inseparable. A scholarship initiative for needy students needs money in the bank. Without this provision, there is nothing to give. But if the funds are to accomplish their intended purpose, they cannot simply sit in the bank drawing interest. Somebody must distribute the money by writing checks to students. There is no river without a source, but a source that does not flow out is not a source.

Continuation of relational healing is to be fostered, not taken for granted. In Colossians 1, Paul addresses those who were alienated from God (Col. 1:21), whom God has reconciled through Christ's death "to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—*if* you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel" (1:22—23, emphasis supplied). Similarly, Romans 3:26 says that Christ's sacrifice was to demonstrate God's "justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." God is just when he justifies those who have (present tense, not "had") faith, but he would not be just if he were to justify those who do not have faith. So it was with the ancient Israelites, for whom it was essential to keep on being faithful to God rather than throwing everything away by failing to show loyalty on the Day of Purgation (Lev. 23:29—30).

The bottom line is that we have the awesome privilege of participating in God's grand process of reconciliation/atonement by receiving, cherishing, and sharing all of the healing gifts that he lavishes on us through Christ. "It ain't over until it's over!" As bumper stickers affirm, "Jesus isn't finished with me yet."

Reputation. The press refers to the White House as if it were a person: "The White House denies recent speculation that …", “The White House confirms reports that …", “An independent investigation has cleared the White House from charges that….” These are examples of metonymy, by which “the meaning of a word is extended to include things closely related to it. When the White House makes a statement, it is understood that the building is not talking but its chief resident, the president.”[61]

As the headquarters of ancient Israel’s Chief Executive, the sanctuary was God’s White House, which represented his character, authority, and reputation. Emphasizing this, the Lord promised to put his “name” at the permanent location he designated for the sanctuary (Deut. 12:5, 11). His “name” involves his reputation, as we see in Ezekiel 20:9: “But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations."

The concept that a name involves the reputation of the one it identifies is alive and thriving in the modern world, especially in the areas of business and politics. A good name is worth votes and/or dollars. In California a radio advertisement for “The Good Guys,” a chain of retail electronics outlets, concluded: “We’re the Good Guys. We’ve *gotta* be good!” Making and keeping a good “name” requires living up to one’s reputation.

God’s reputation is worth a lot more than votes or dollars. Our level of trust in him or lack thereof has a lot to do with whether or not we desire a relationship with him. Our level of respect for his authority and justice has a lot to do with our sense of accountability for the way we treat others. We want to know if God is a hypocrite with “skeletons in his closet,” a “spin doctor” who is manipulating “smoke and mirrors” to keep his image intact in spite of the truth, or the perfectly loving, fair, merciful, and omnipotent Creator he says he is.

Christ’s sacrifice did wonders for God’s reputation, vindicating his justice, law, and government as nothing else could have:

> Have you ever understood how God can be just to the full, not remitting penalty nor blunting the edge of the sword, and yet can be infinitely merciful, and can justify the ungodly who turn to Him? It was because the Son of God, supremely glorious in His matchless person, undertook to vindicate the law by bearing the sentence due to me, that therefore God is able to pass by my sin. The law of God was more vindicated by the death of Christ than it would have been had all transgressors been sent to Hell. For the Son of God to suffer for sin was a more glorious establishment of the government of God, than for the whole race to suffer.[62]

We have found that purging the ancient Israelite sanctuary once a year signified the clearing of God's reputation with regard to his treatment of people who had made different kinds of choices regarding him. Since Christ's ministry in God's heavenly temple has superseded the Aaronic services (Heb. 7—10) at the earthly "copy and shadow" (8:5), the possibility arises that Christ as Victim-Priest may address a burden of God's reputation that is borne at his headquarters in the temple.

This possibility is strengthened by the fact that "heavenly things" had to be purified by Christ's sacrifice at the beginning of his priestly ministry in God's temple (Heb. 9:23), just as part of the earthly sanctuary received purging blood when Aaron and his sons were consecrated (9:21, cf. Lev. 8:15— outer altar). Thus, "the New Testament does not limit the application of Christ's death to cleansing the person, it also affirms that the sanctuary has been purified by the blood of Christ so that we now have access into the heavenly court."[63] If Christ's better sacrifice has this function at the beginning of his priestly ministry, perhaps it also cleanses the heavenly sanctuary later on in some way that is analogous to the purgation accomplished by the Israelite high priest on the Day of Purgation (see comments on Lev. 23:26—32).

God's temple in heaven would be affected by spiritual rather than ritual transactions. We pray to confess our sins rather than physically leaning our hands on Christ's head, and he forgives and cleanses us (1 John 1:9). He purifies our consciences with his blood (Heb. 9:14), but it is not literal, physical blood that he took with him in a container when he ascended to heaven. Rather, Christ has carried the "cross event" with him to heaven in his own person (Rev. 5:6).

Archenemy. We see evil of many kinds all around us, but the Bible tells us that it was not always here and that it has a source. Leviticus apparently refers to that source as "Azazel." This revelation did not open the nature of Azazel's personality to the Israelites, perhaps to avoid the danger that some of them would be tempted to worship him.[64] However, his adversarial relation to God is clear, and there is only one being in the Bible who fits it: Satan, whose name is Hebrew for "Adversary."

In the Bible, God's archenemy is "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9, cf. Gen. 3). As Christ's nemesis (Matt. 4:1—11), he is "a murderer from the beginning … and the father of lies" (John 8:44). As the tempter, Satan is heavily involved with human sinning (1 Chron. 21:1, 1 Cor. 7:5). He tries to deceive people (2 Cor. 2:11, 11:14), and if they let him, he can enter them (John 13:27) and fill their hearts (Acts 5:3).

Flip Wilson, the comedian, got barrels of laughs with his excuse: “The devil made me do it!” But though Satan is behind our sins, our own evil desires also play a role in tempting us (James 1:14—15), and his temptation cannot force us to do wrong because God “will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13; cf. James 4:7). If we do sin, we bear responsibility for that offense (cf. Lev. 5:1) along with Satan. When we receive forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice, God takes away our culpability (Ex. 34:7; Rom. 8:1—3), but Satan shoulders his own blame for his part as the tempter.

The idea that two or more persons/beings can share responsibility for the same offense is easy to illustrate. When several men rob a bank, they are each responsible in various ways for the same crime. Planning the operation, holding up the tellers, opening the vault, and driving the getaway car are all part of the process. Similarly, when we sin, we cooperate with Satan as if we were members of his “gang."

Of the five animals used in the rituals unique to the Day of Purgation (Lev. 16), “the LORD’S goat” for the lay community carried the primary meaning of what Christ does for us, and the goat for Azazel had to do with the role of Satan. So the drama of that great annual event boils down to “a tale of two goats.”[65] The animals were indistinguishable—just Billy the Goat and Billy the Goat—until the Lord determined their respective functions through a lot ritual (Lev. 16:8). Just as the Israelites had to rely on the Lord’s identification of the goat for Azazel, we need to rely on his identification of Satan in the Bible, “for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). If we try to follow our own wisdom, we lay ourselves wide open to deception, as Eve did (Gen. 3).

Satan not only tempts us; when he lures us into sins, he then turns around and accuses us (Zech. 3:1—2). This is “entrapment.” He tells the truth when he says that we have sinned. He knows because it was he who tempted us. But he doesn’t stop accusing us when we are forgiven. He is “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10) in his slanderous attempt to make God’s people share his fate.

By obsessively accusing us, Satan implicates himself. He is like the mugger who attacked a computer science student as he was walking home after a late-night study session at the University of California library in Berkeley. As he approached his apartment, George heard a sound in the bushes and realized that someone was there. Panicking, he warned the man to go away or he would call the police. The intruder did go away, but first he beat up George. Badly shaken, George got himself inside and called the police, who rounded up suspects. The next day, George went to the police station to identify the culprit in a lineup. Unfortunately the attack was in the middle of the night, so poor George couldn’t

distinguish one suspect from another. Nevertheless, the puzzle was solved when one suspect pointed at George and angrily protested to the police: “He threatened me!"

When Satan accuses forgiven people of being unforgiven, he identifies himself not only as a liar but also as a malicious, false witness. Deuteronomy 19:18—19 states the serious consequences that an Israelite would bring on himself if he tried to destroy someone through the judicial process by means of false testimony: “The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you."

Years ago while earning money for school, I was coating a masonry block wall with another worker. We passed the time discussing the Bible. All went quite well until I mentioned the role of Satan in causing trouble, to which he indignantly replied: “To hell with the devil!"

I heartily agree that the devil belongs in hell and the sooner the better. However, if the Bible takes the trouble to warn us about him, it does not seem wise to simply ignore his influence. While we are fighting the good fight (1 Tim. 6:12; cf. 1:18), we are better able to cooperate with God when we know who the enemy is. We also have incentive to rely on the Lord’s power and wisdom rather than our own when we grasp the sobering reality that Satan is far stronger and smarter than we are. It is naive to dismiss him when he is roaring around seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8) and is “filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Rev 12:12). To ignore Satan would be like ignoring Hitler in Europe in 1944.[66] However, our focus should be on “the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” from whom “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons … will be able to separate us” (Rom. 8:38—39).

1. Geller, “Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch,” 97—124.

2. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature,* 128.

3. Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament,* 392—93.

4. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 1036—37, 1040; A. Bonar, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus, Expository and Practical,* 5th ed. (London: Nisbet, 1875), 310.

5. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord,* 103.

6. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice,* 159.

7. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 11.

8. A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 2:56.

9. E.g., R. Péter, "L'imposition des mains dans l'Ancien Testament," *VT* 27 (1977): 48—55, D. P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *JAOS* 106 (1986): 433—46.

10. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, transl. and abridg. M. Greenberg (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), 114.

11. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 45—72, J. C. Moyer, "Hittite and Israelite Cultic Practices: A Selected Comparison," in W. W. Hallo, J. C. Moyer, and L. G. Perdue, eds., *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 33—35, K. Aartun, "Eine weitere Parallele aus Ugarit zur kultischen Praxis in Israels Religion," *BO* 33 (1976): 288.

12. E.g., BDB, 774, LXX, Targums.

13. E.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 1048; Porter, *Leviticus*, 131; E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, transl. D. Stott (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 223.

14. Contrast the high priest of the Babylonian Ekua temple, who becomes impure even if he merely views purification of the temple of Marduk (= Bel) on the fifth day of the New Year festival *(ANET*, 333, lines 364—5).

15. BDB, 49, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, 2022. On the plural of intensification, see GKC, §124e.

16. J. Milgrom, Advanced Biblical Hebrew Texts seminar, University of California at Berkeley, 1982, I. Schur, *Versöhnungstag und Sündenbock* (CHL 6/3, Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1933), 13, 31.

17. Gane, *Altar Call*, 197—98, 202.

18. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 19, D. P. Wright, "Day of Atonement," *ABD*, 2:73.

19. A. Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (LBS; New York: KTAV, 1967), 263; Shea, "Literary Form," 166.

20. E.g. Temple Scroll 26.9—10, transl. Y. Yadin, *The Temple Scroll* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 2:117; *m. Yoma* 8:8—9; *b. Yoma* 86a; A. Médebielle, *L'expiation dans L'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament*, 85; S. Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe* (New York: Schocken, 1948), 211—14; A. Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne* (BibB 15; Freiburg: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 112, 114—15; W. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," in NIB, 999, 1113—14; F. Crüsemann, *The*

Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law, transl. A. W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 318.

21. Compare L. Morris, "The Day of Atonement and the Work of Christ," *RTR* 14 (1955): 12; R. Rendtorff, *Leviticus,* 180; Shea, "Literary Form," 166; Geller, "Blood Cult," 107.

22. See Gane, *Altar Call,* 203—9, idem, *Cult and Character,* ch. 12.

23. Shea, "Literary Form," 155.

24. For more detail, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 13.

25. E.g., Elliger, *Leviticus,* 200—201, 205—7, 209, G. Andre, "tfQf *tam*?," in *TOOT,* 5:333, A. Noordtzij, *Leviticus,* transl. R. Togtman (BSC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 166, R. Peter-Contesse and J. Ellington, *A Handbook on Leviticus* (UBSHS, New York: United Bible Societies, 1990), 250, 253.

26. Lev. 5:3; 7:20, 21; 14:19; 15:3, 25, 26, 30, 31; 18:19; 22:3, 5; Num. 5:19; 19:13.

27. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16,* 257; idem, "Israel's Sanctuary," 393.

28. See also Ps. 32:1, 51:3, 65:3, 103:12, Isa. 43:25, Ezek. 18:22, Mic. 7:18.

29. Cf. A. R. von Sauer, "The Concept of Sin in the Old Testament," *CTM* 22 (1951): 711.

30. R. Knierim, perversity," *TLOT,* 2:864. For unintentional *'awon,* Knierim cites Gen. 15:16, 19:15, Lev. 22:16, Num. 18:1, 23.

31. B. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," 10—15.

32. K. Koch, *'awon,*" *TDOT,* 10:559.

33. Jenson, *Graded Holiness,* 208.

34. Geller, "Blood Cult," 108.

35. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 14.

36. Ibid., ch. 16; Gane, *Altar Call,* 232—37.

37. M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem/Minneapolis: Magnes/Fortress, 1995), 45—56.

38. This is the usual plain sense interpretation of 2 Sam. 14:9; against the unconvincing alternatives offered by J. Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," *VT* 20 (1970): 424—28; P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 347—48. For detailed discussion, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 16.

39. U. Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Bib* 48 (1967): 220—21.

40. Gane, *Altar Call,* 237.

41. On the unity of love and justice in the character of God, see H. Cohen, “The Day of Atonement II,” *Judaism* 18 (1969): 84.

42. J. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 63—64, 68—69. Cf. Mesopotamian advice to a king: “If a king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos, and his land will be devastated. If he does not heed the justice of his land, Ea, king of destinies, will alter his destiny and will not cease from hostilely pursuing him” (transl. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1960], 113, lines 1—3).

43. J. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (BSem 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 107; cf. 89—106, 108—9, 129.

44. Ibid., 96—98. On the international attraction of the Lord’s reputation as a just judge in Isa. 2:1—4, see B. Schwartz, “Torah from Zion: Isaiah’s Temple Vision (Isaiah 2:1—4),” in A. Houtman, M. Poorthuis, and J. Schwartz, eds., *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 21—22.

45. P. Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), series 2, 10:80.

46. Cf. W. Carson, “What It Costs God to Forgive Sin,” *Int* 4 (1950): 168—75.

47. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 1018, A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), 576. For more detailed discussion on this topic, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, ch. 11.

48. For the *l* of possession, cf. Ps. 3:1, Isa. 38:9, Hab. 3:1, see BDB, 513, Levine, *Leviticus*, 102—on seals.

49. H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 88—89.

50. See Driver and White, *The Book of Leviticus*, 81.

51. C. D. Ginsburg and C. J. Ellicott, *Leviticus* (LHC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 151.

52. L. Grabbe, “The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” *JSJ* 18 (1987): 152—67.

53. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, 1:320; cf. 1:316—17, 319.

54. See, e.g., C. L. Feinberg, “The Scapegoat of Leviticus Sixteen,” *BSac* 115 (1958): 324—33, Levine, *Leviticus*, 250—53, H. Tawil, “’Azazel, The Prince of the Steepe: A Comparative Study,” *ZAW* 92 (1980): 43—59, Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 21—22, Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 — 16*,

1020—21, A. Treiyer, *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment from the Pentateuch to Revelation* (Siloam Springs, Ark.: Creation Enterprises International, 1992), 231—58.

55. Gane, *Altar Call*, 248—49, cf. Zech. 5:5—11.

56. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 1020.

57. P. D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6—11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 220—27; Levine, *Leviticus*, 252; R. de Vaux, *Les sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament* (CahRB 1; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1964), 87; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 1020—21. Following Origen *(Contra Celsum* 6:43), Keil and Delitzsch thought Azazel must refer to Satan himself *(Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:398).

58. Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 203.

59. I am grateful to Moise Isaac, my student, for drawing attention to this parallel.

60. A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springdale, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1981), 194.

61. Walton, *Genesis*, 79.

62. C. H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 21—22.

63. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 136.

64. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 22—25, D. P. Wright, "Azazel," ABD, 1:536—37, cf. G. A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 83.

65. Gane, *Altar Call*, 250—53.

66. Ibid., 253—55.

Leviticus 17

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: ‘This is what the LORD has commanded: 3Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 4instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD—that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people. 5This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. 6The priest is to sprinkle the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. 7They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.'

8“Say to them: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice 9and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD—that man must be cut off from his people.

10“'Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood —I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. 11For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. ‘’Therefore I say to the Israelites, “None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."

13“'"Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any

animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, [14]because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, “You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

[15]“'Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean. [16]But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible.'"

Original Meaning

REGULATING THE LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE both at the sanctuary and away from it, Leviticus 17 is like Janus, simultaneously looking back to the ritual laws in chapters 1—16 and forward to the instructions for holy living in chapters 18—27. Whereas chapters 1—16 focus on remedies for sin and ritual impurity, the remainder of the book concentrates on divine commands that carry terminal penalties—without remedy—if they are violated.[1]

Addressed to all Israelites, both priests and laity, chapter 17 issues three sharp warnings against violation of divine commands recorded earlier in Leviticus. These commands concern offering sacrifices at the sanctuary (nowhere else) to the Lord (not to anyone else) throughout the year and related matters of diet: (1) not eating blood with meat, and (2) ritual purification when eating meat from animals not slaughtered by human beings. In this chapter the warnings are formulated according to the casuistic pattern: "Anyone who … [does a certain offense] is condemned to … [receive a corresponding penalty]."

Bringing All Sacrifices to the Lord (17:1—9)

THIS FIRST WARNING puts teeth into the rule that the Israelites must bring all sacrifices to the sanctuary for officiation there by the Aaronic priests. This rule explicitly and implicitly appears throughout the sacrificial prescriptions and descriptions of chapters 1—10; 12; 14—16 (cf., e.g., 1:3; 3:1—2). A violator is guilty of bloodshed and condemned to suffer the divine penalty of being "cut off," that is, probably extirpation of his or her line of descendants (17:4, 9).[2] The reason for the warning is to stop the Israelites from offering sacrifices out in the open country (lit., "on the surface of the field," 17:5) to "goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves" (17:7 NRSV). Committing such (spiritual) promiscuity to/with (lit., "after") beings other than the Lord through illicit worship (Ex. 34:15—16; Lev. 20:5; Deut. 31:16; Judg. 2:17; 8:27, 33) violates the first of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3).

The word for "goat-demons" (NIV, "goat idols") here literally means "male goats" *(se'irim)*—the same word that appears in chapter 16 with reference to the male goats used in the Day of Purgation service (16:8). The fact that in chapter 17 some Israelites were sacrificing to male goats in the open country, away from the sanctuary and its altar (17:5, 7), indicates that they regarded these "male goats" as supernatural beings. However, the beings they honored were not the Lord, to whom the "LORD'S goat" was offered (16:9, 11—19). Rather, they offered these sacrifices in uninhabited country, such as the desert into which Azazel's goat was sent (16:10, 21—22).

We have seen that "Azazel," the personal being to whom the live goat was sent, most likely represents a demon (see Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 16, note how later Scriptures identify desert areas as haunts of the devil and demons, Matt. 4:1, Luke 4:1—2, 11:24, Rev. 18:2). The idea that male goats in uninhabited regions could represent demons is reinforced by a parallel between Isaiah 13:21, where the desolated city of Babylon becomes the habitat of wild male goats *(se'irim)*, and the allusion to this passage in Revelation 18:2, describing the demise of a later "Babylon": "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird."

The Israelites may not have known they were sacrificing to demons. But even

if they viewed them as gods with whom they thought it beneficial to be on friendly terms, these gods were of the kind that pagans worshiped. Elsewhere in the Bible, the objects of pagan worship are real, but they are not really gods (Deut. 32:17, Ps. 106:37, 1 Cor. 10:20). Interacting with such beings is much more dangerous than simply substituting nonliving idols for the living God.

From a strictly human point of view, polytheistic worship is prudent and reasonable. Even if you know that two superpowers don't like each other, it is good politics for a lesser party to avoid antagonizing either side. But for the Lord, polytheism was anathema because it expressed disloyalty to his exclusive sovereignty and distrust of his total power and commitment to protect his people from other powers.

The fact that the Lord did not immediately strike dead the Israelites sacrificing to goat-demons implies that he mercifully recognized that they did not understand the full implications of what they were doing. However, his warning in Leviticus 17 puts an end to any such ignorance. Henceforth, they would be fully accountable for doing what they should have known all along: They must sacrifice only to him at the location and in the manner he specifies.

Warning Against Eating Fat or Blood (17:10—14)

THIS SECOND WARNING puts teeth into the Lord's prohibition against eating any fat or blood (3:17; cf. 7:26 regarding blood). Here he provides the reason: The life is in the blood, which is why he has assigned it the function of ransoming the lives of offerers on the altar (17:11). Again the penalty for violation is to be "cut off" (17:10, 14).

Warning Against Neglect to Purify Oneself (17:15—16)

VERSES 15—16 ISSUE THE THIRD WARNING, this time against neglect to purify oneself in violation of 11:39—40:

> If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the carcass will be unclean till evening. Anyone who eats some of the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.

This case has to do with a "pure"/permitted animal dying of a cause other than slaughter by a human being. In 17:15 we read of the two main ways that such an animal could die: naturally by itself, violently by the agency of one or more wild animals. (Presumably modern "road kill" by Cougars, Mustangs, and so on would belong with the latter.) Unlike the earlier warnings, this one (17:15—16) provides no rationale and the penalty for violation is stated differently: "He shall bear his culpability" (author's transl. of v. 16). The law applies only to nonpriests. A later law holds priests to a higher standard of purity, as befits their holiness, by prohibiting them from eating such animals altogether (22:8).

The most intense scholarly debate regarding Leviticus 17 has swirled around three main questions. (1) What is the relationship between this chapter and the preceding (chs. 1—16) and following (chs. 18—27) blocks of material in Leviticus? Some see chapter 17 as an appendix to chapters 1—16, with chapter 18 commencing the next major section, which emphasizes holiness for all Israelites. More common is the view that chapter 17 begins a so-called "holiness" section that follows chapters 1—16. In any case, because there are affinities of content and terminology between chapters 17 and both the preceding and following materials in Leviticus, this chapter is clearly transitional.

(2) Chapter 17 requires an Israelite who wishes to eat a sacrificeable animal to slaughter it at the sanctuary as a well-being offering (vv. 3—9). Deuteronomy 12:15—16, 20—25, by contrast, allows nonsacrificial "profane/common slaughter" of sacrificeable animals, provided that the blood is drained out on the

ground as with nonsacrificial game animals (cf. Lev. 17:13). Why this difference? This apparent legal contradiction has long been seen as major support for the hypothetical existence of documentary sources of the Pentateuch that disagree with each other: “P” (= priestly source) and “D” (Deuteronomic source).[3]

However, the contradiction vanishes if we take seriously the difference in life situation (German *Sitz im Leben)* indicated by the two passages. Whereas Leviticus 17 applied to the desert camp, when the Israelites lived close to the sanctuary, Deuteronomy 12 regulated settled life in the land of Canaan, when they spread out and many of them lived too far from the sanctuary to come there every time they wanted meat of domestic animals (Deut. 12:20—21). As a concession to this change in practical circumstances, the law of Deuteronomy allows nonsacrificial slaughter.

(3) In Leviticus 17:11 the Lord states that he has assigned sacrificial blood on the altar to effect *kipper* for the lives (plural of *nepes)* of the people (i.e., to “ransom” them). To which sacrifice(s) does this function of blood apply? If it applies primarily or solely to the well-being offering, which is primarily in view in chapter 17 because this is the sacrifice from which the offerer is permitted to eat, what is the expiatory role of blood in the well-being offering? We will address this difficult question in the Bridging Contexts section.

Bridging Contexts

RANSoM FoR LIFE. Sandwiched between two statements that the Israelites and resident aliens are forbidden to eat blood (i.e., meat from which the blood has not been drained out at the time of slaughter, 17:10, 12), verse 11 expresses the reason: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you on the altar to ransom your lives, for it is the blood that ransoms by means of life."[4] Blood is an apt and powerfully mysterious symbol for life. "There is something horribly unnatural, even nauseating, about watching the fluid of life pour uncontrollably from a living body. Little wonder religions throughout history have honored blood as a sacral substance."[5]

In verse 11 the Lord explains that he has given to sacrificial blood, which represents sacral life and is especially consecrated by contact with the altar, the function of ransoming human life. Thus, he does not follow a judicial constraint that he lays on human courts: The life of a person convicted of a capital crime may not be ransomed (Num. 35:31—34).[6]

In 17:11, ransom is life for life. On one hand this represents the talionic demand (cf. 24:18), but on the other hand,

> it is a rejection, or at least an alleviation, of the very same talionic demand, since the **V3]** that man offers here is not his own, nor even actually that of an animal, but merely … a substitute, an exchange which God is willing to receive in place of the real thing. It is merely the symbolic representation of the life of an animal, a bit of its blood— an appropriate symbol, to be sure, since blood embodies life, but a symbol nonetheless.[7]

In our study of Leviticus 1—16, we found that *kipper* can refer to expiating/purging a person or part of the sanctuary from (privative min) a moral fault or ritual impurity (e.g., 4:26; 12:7; 16:16). However, a specialized usage of *kipper* appears in 17:11, where it is closely followed by *nepes* ("life"). Some scholars have associated such *kipper* for life *(kipper 'al nepes)* with the idea of giving a ransom or legal compository payment *(koper)*, which avoids the death penalty and serves as the cost of reconciliation between the culpable and injured

parties (cf. Ex. 21:30).[8]

Although such a payment is prerequisite to pardon, pardon is not automatic because it is a gift that can be withheld, including by God.[9] So it is the acceptance of ransom/composition by the aggrieved party rather than the mere giving of it that ensures peaceful reconciliation. Backing up a plea for pardon by giving something of value represents both "a kind of compensation for the wrong caused" and "a sort of request for a peaceful solution."[10]

Exodus 30 nails down the connection between *kipper* for life and "ransom." God stipulates that when the Israelites take a census, "each one must pay the LORD a ransom *[koper]* for his life *[nepes]* at the time he is counted.

Then no plague will come on them when you number them" (Ex. 30:12). Here the word for "ransom" is the noun from the root *kpr.* Verses 15 and 16 use the Piel verb from the same root to describe the function of the same ransom: "to ransom *[kipper]* your lives [pl. of *nepes]"* (cf. Num. 31:50).

Leviticus 17:11 is unique in the Hebrew Bible in that it *explicitly* assigns sacrificial blood the function of ransoming human life. Some scholars contend that *kipper* always carries the idea of "ransoming," whether it is accompanied by *nepes* or not.[11] However, what sense would it make to "ransom" a nonhuman object, such as part of the sanctuary (16:16, 18)? In contexts where objects or persons receive *kipper* "from" (privative min) evils (e.g., 4:26, 12:7), the operative idea seems to be that of removing evil rather than ransom per se.

Ransom by which sacrifice(s)? In Leviticus 17 the warning against offering well-being *(zebah)* offerings to goat-demons (vv. 5—7) and the subsequent emphasis on dietary regulations (vv. 10—16) indicate that the primary focus of this chapter is on well-being offerings, the only class of sacrifices from which the offerer is permitted to eat the meat (cf. 7:15—21).[12] Although Pentateuchal law does not mention a *kipper* ("expiation/purgation/ransom") function of well-being offerings anywhere else,[13] these sacrifices must be brought to the sanctuary (17:5), where priests dash their blood against the Lord's altar and turn their suet/fat into smoke as a pleasing aroma for the Lord (17:6).

The rationale in verse 11—blood carries life and (consequently) the Lord has assigned it to ransom the lives of the people—stands behind the prohibition against eating blood in general (vv. 10, 12, cf. vv. 13—14, 3:17, 7:26—27), not only the blood of well-being offerings. The same rationale is also logically behind the command to bring offerings in general to the Lord's altar in the sanctuary (17:3—9).[14] It is true that the matter of offerers eating (meat with) blood is irrelevant to sacrifices other than well-being offerings, especially burnt offerings (v. 8), from which nothing at all is eaten, not even by officiating

priests. However, bringing these sacrifices to the sanctuary is of crucial importance (cf. 1:3, 5, 1 1, 15, 4:4, 14, 29, 33, 7:2).

The "ransom" effect of blood in Leviticus 17:11 applies to all Israelite blood sacrifices.[15] Although such sacrifices do not save criminals from capital punishment, ultimately every offense against the Lord has life-and-death implications. For one thing, while God provides for sacrificial remedies in cases of nondefiant moral faults and severe physical ritual impurities, one who wantonly neglects these remedies incurs a terminal penalty (e.g., Num. 19:13, 20—extirpation).

The fact that expiatory sacrifices deal with lesser, noncapital offenses shows that the goal of these rituals is not remission of punishment on this level. Rather, there is a higher, more stringent standard: the demand of God's life-giving holiness, from which the offender is estranged. Ransom for life could be regarded as "a restoration of those who have fallen, a healing of the terminally ill."[16] In this sense *kipper* as ransom can also apply to sacrificial purification from ritual impurities, which are most likely based on the concept of death (see comments on Lev. 12), and also to well-being offerings, which emphasize the positive end of the process of restoration to a healthy relationship with God.

In the New Testament it is Christ who came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; cf. 1 Tim. 2:6). Hebrews 9:14—15 makes it clear that this was blood ransom to set people free from sin that leads to death. Just as Leviticus 17:3—9, 11 called Israelites to the one true altar of the Lord, the only place of ransom, Hebrews 13:10—13 calls Christians to the "altar" of Christ:

> We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

Contemporary Significance

MODERN APPLICABILITY OF biblical laws. How do biblical laws, including those of Leviticus 17, speak to us today? They do not comprehensively specify every detail of the ways we should act and think. Rather, they provide illustrations that reveal the character and values of the divine Lawgiver, thereby establishing the constitution/charter of covenant life with him.[17]

Are Christians expected to keep any of the biblical laws, or are there any from which we would gain benefit by voluntarily observing them? We are not talking about a legalistic, works-oriented approach to salvation, but about people who are already saved enjoying fuller "new covenant" life and service by following divine guidance and thereby revealing God's character to others.

> For many centuries, Christians have followed a simplistic approach: The early Church Fathers dealt with Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and chunks of Exodus very simply: We keep the Ten Commandments, and the rest of the Law and Commandments do not apply to Christians. One might ask how they squared that with what Jesus himself had to say about Torah, that he did not come to change a single "jot or tittle" of it; further, when asked what were the greatest of the commandments, Jesus gives two, neither of which comes from the ten. Rather, one is from Deuteronomy, and the other from Leviticus. Nevertheless, the Church Fathers deemed those extra 603 laws to be superfluous. There were those who thought they should be removed from the Christian canon entirely, but fortunately they did not prevail.[18]

For the purpose of determining whether or how various kinds of Old Testament laws apply today, Christians have traditionally divided them into categories, such as the following:

1. *moral laws,* consisting of the Ten Commandments, which express timeless and universal principles governing relationships with God and other human beings
2. *ritual laws,* which served as "types" or "shadows" until they met their

fulfillment at the cross
3. *civil laws,* which were applicable only under Israel's theocratic government
4. *health laws,* which have ongoing value because human bodies function the same today as they did in ancient times

While such categories have some validity and usefulness, understanding them as just summarized needs major nuancing and qualification. Careful examination leads to a paradigm shift and opens up a treasure trove of practical guidance for daily living.

To begin with, we should recognize that the Bible does *not* delineate categories such as those stated above. They are more recent analytical constructs. Biblical law does not even make the sharp distinction between religious and secular categories to which we are so accustomed. Since every aspect of life as the people of God came under his jurisdiction, laws belonging to what we would classify as the religious and secular domains often appear together. For example, the "religious" laws of Exodus 22:20, 28a-30, 23:10—19a appear in contexts primarily relating to secular life. The remarkably diverse mixture of laws in Leviticus 19 gives the impression that distinctions between "religious" and "secular" are largely irrelevant, what is important is that God's people keep all of his commandments.

In the ancient Near East, this wholistic approach to life under God was unique to Israel. Only in biblical law collections "are moral exhortations and religious injunctions combined with legal prescriptions, elsewhere … these three distinct spheres are found in separate independent collections."[19]

Let us now consider each of the four categories mentioned above. (1) *Moral law* expresses principles that modern people would regard either as religious (e.g., the first four of the Ten Commandments regarding responsibilities primarily to God, Ex. 20:3—11) or secular (e.g., the last six of the Ten Commandments covering responsibilities primarily to human beings, 20:12—17).

Two points should be clarified regarding moral law. (a) Any command that God requires a given group of people to obey can be viewed as a "moral law" for them in the broad sense that it is relevant to their divine-human relationship. (b) While the Ten Commandments are towering expressions of timeless, universal moral law, they are not the only moral laws in the Bible. Exodus 23:9, for example, contains another one: "Do not oppress an alien." This works out part of the overarching principle of love for fellow human beings (cf. Lev. 19:18, John 15:12), on which the last six of the Ten Commandments are also based (Matt. 22:39—40, Rom. 13:9). Another example is Leviticus 19:11, where the

comprehensive commandment against lying is found (rather than in Ex. 20:16).

(2) *Ritual law* regulates a ritual system, by means of which human beings interact with entities that are ordinarily inaccessible to the material domain, such as God (e.g., by offering sacrifices) and ritual impurity (by removing it through purification). The Old Testament ritual laws that were required to be carried out at the Israelite sanctuary/temple, where the Aaronic priests officiated (see, e.g., 17:3—9), can no longer apply because this institution is gone. Laws having to do with regulation and treatment of ritual impurities to keep them from contacting the holy sphere of the earthly sanctuary with its resident divine Presence (e.g., 17:15—16) are also obsolete for the same reason: The sanctuary no longer exists. Since the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Christian worship is focused toward God's temple in heaven, where Christ has been ministering (Heb. 7—10). Nevertheless, the Old Testament ritual laws teach us much about the nature and character of God and humankind, the dynamics of divine-human interaction, and God's plan of salvation through Christ.

As a unique law, the ritual of circumcision originated long before the Israelite sanctuary was constructed and was never dependent on its function (Gen. 17). However, this requirement was specifically removed for Gentile Christians when the "new covenant" was transformed from a covenant of Israelite election, as Jeremiah originally prophesied (31:31—34), to a universal covenant without ethnic boundaries (Acts 15; Gal. 3:26—29).

(3) *Civil law* can embody and exemplify timeless moral/ethical principles within the ancient Israelite context. Consider, for example, the following civil law from the "Covenant Code" of Exodus 21—23: "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:12). This contextualizes the sixth of the Ten Commandments, which reads: "You shall not murder" (20:13).

There are two basic differences between the two laws. (a) The civil law is narrower in scope, limited to striking that results in death. But this is still a timeless principle. (b) The civil law attaches a penalty (i.e., capital punishment) to be administered by the Israelite system of jurisprudence within the theocratic covenant community. We can no longer count on this court system to enforce the law in this way because that system no longer exists. Thus, we have found that so-called civil law contains both ongoing and temporary elements. If we simplistically dismiss it as a civil/Mosaic law and therefore no longer applicable, we miss the timeless moral element: You must not hit a person in such a way that he or she dies. A modern court in any country would undoubtedly agree that such striking is a crime, although it may not impose the same penalty.

In civil laws, timeless principles come to us in various layers of cultural garb. When we get below the specifics to the underlying dynamics, we can find

helpful guidelines to clothe in modern dress. For example: “If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his” (Ex. 21:33—34). Although this could literally apply today, most of us do not have oxen or donkeys. What we have are cars and trucks, with regard to which the principle applies: We are liable for damage to the property of other people resulting from our neglect.

Some civil laws no longer apply simply because we lack the social institutions they were designed to regulate—for instance, servitude (Ex. 21:2—11, 20—21, 26—27) and ancestral land tenure (Lev. 25:8—55). However, by studying these laws in light of their cultural context, we can still learn valuable principles of justice and mercy to protect those who are socially and economically disadvantaged. For example, even when your workers are completely dependent on you and under your control, “do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God” (25:43).

(4) Regarding *health laws,* in connection with Leviticus 11 we found that Pentateuchal laws for which we recognize health implications are consistently formulated with motivations other than health. God was concerned for the health of his people, but he bestowed this benefit wholistically as a blessing that would come from observing all of his commands.

Now we are in a better position to grapple with the question of whether the prohibition in Leviticus 17:10—14 against eating meat with blood (cf. 3:17, 7:26—27) still applies. Is it a moral, ritual, civil, or health law? The fact that eating meat with blood has to do with diet implies that health could be involved, and modern science confirms that blood carries disease. This could be reason enough to abstain from meat with blood. However, in 17:11 the Lord’s reason for the prohibition is: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you on the altar to ransom your lives, for it is the blood that ransoms by means of life.”[20] Mention of the altar indicates a ritual element in the law. Indeed, because God assigned the blood of sacrificeable animals for application on his altar, the Israelites were not permitted either to offer their sacrifices anywhere else or to eat the blood of well-being offerings. But does this mean that the law has no application now that the ritual system is gone?

In 17:11 the most basic reason for the prohibition is that the blood represents life. This is why God selected the blood of sacrificeable animals for the function of ransom. Even where ransom through animal sacrifice did not apply, as in the case of a nonsacrificeable game animal, the Israelites were forbidden to eat meat with blood because the blood of any animal represented its life (17:13—14). That this was the basic reason is confirmed by Genesis 9:3—4, where the Lord

first allowed human beings to eat meat just after the Flood (9:3) but withheld permission to eat meat with its lifeblood still in it (9:4). Genesis 9:5—6 reads:

> And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man.

The prohibitions of blood and of murder are both based on the timeless moral principle of respect for God-given life that is expressed in the sixth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13). Thus, although the blood prohibition in Leviticus 17:10—14 has health and ritual implications, it is more fundamentally a moral law. This explains several pieces of biblical data. (1) In Genesis 9 God gave the prohibition to Noah for the entire human race before the Israelite nation and its ritual worship system existed.

(2) In Ezekiel 33:25—26 eating meat with blood is listed with moral faults such as murder, idolatry, and adultery.

(3) Although the early Christian council in Jerusalem recognized that the ceremonial requirement of circumcision was nonbinding on Gentile Christians, the prohibition of eating meat with blood was included in the "bottom-line" lifestyle requirements laid on Gentile Christians among other tests of fellowship (Acts 15:20, 29). Notice that Acts 15 refers to the Old Testament, where the only biblical requirement for preventing ingestion of blood along with meat is to drain it out at the time of slaughter (Lev. 17:13; Deut. 12:24; 1 Sam. 14:32—34). Although one cannot remove every bit of blood in this manner (just as draining the oil out of a car leaves a small amount of oil lining parts of the engine), basic drainage fulfills the divine command. If this is done, as is often the case in modern butchering, it is not necessary for Christians to follow additional traditional practices of salting and roasting to get more blood out.[21]

Can we reduce the above discussion into a single, simple rule of thumb to determine whether the Bible intends for Christians to keep a given Old Testament law? Here is an attempt: *A law should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application.* Thus I am in basic agreement with Wenham when he concludes that "the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be."[22]

Legalism and the purpose of God's law. If we overcome our neglect of biblical law, won't this lead to legalism? Not if we understand the purpose of

God's law. It is a standard of acting and thinking in harmony with God's character of love. It is not, cannot be, and never was intended to be a means to salvation. Doing right can never redeem us from our mortality or past sins. Only God's grace through Christ's sacrifice, received by faith, can do that. God's commandments are for people who are *already* delivered, as demonstrated by the fact that he gave Noah covenant stipulations *after* bringing him through the Flood (Gen. 9:4—6) and he proclaimed the Ten Commandments to the Israelites *after* delivering them from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 20).

A venerable Christian fallacy is the idea that the more Christian we want to become, the less Jewish our religion must be. This anti-Semitic notion, which has wreaked havoc on Jewish-Christian relations for more than a millennium and a half, is not supported by Scripture. Rather, the more Jews and Christians absorb and live up to the essential ideals of our respective biblical holy books, the more common ground we will discover.

God's law is a precious gift to protect human beings for our own good. Moses explicitly stated this:

> And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD'S commands and decrees that I am giving you today *for your own good?* (Deut. 10:12—13, emphasis supplied, cf. 32:46—47).

Jesus agreed, saying of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

In teaching his barber how to pray through the Ten Commandments, Martin Luther emphasized their positive protective function. For example, on "You shall not bear false witness," he commented, "Thus a wall has been built around our good reputation and integrity to protect it against malicious gossip and deceitful tongues."[23]

In their profound and practical book *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God,* H. T. Blackaby and C. V. King speak of the gift of God's law:

> God loves you deeply and profoundly. Because He loves you, He has given you guidelines for living lest you miss the full dimensions of the love relationship. Life also has some "land mines" that can destroy you or wreck your life. God does not want to see you miss out on His best, and He does not want to see your life wrecked.

> Suppose you had to cross a field full of land mines. A person who knew exactly where everyone of them was buried offered to take you through it. Would you say to him, “I don’t want you to tell me what to do. I don’t want you to impose your ways on me"?[24]

In 1987, when my wife and I were studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, we spent a vacation backpacking around northern Israel. In one place we were walking on the side of a road and noticed a sign on the edge of a field that we thought of entering. It had only one word in Hebrew, which neither of us knew. I pulled a pocket dictionary out of my backpack and discovered to my horror that the word meant “land mines.” Needless to say, we were grateful for the sign and for the dictionary that helped us to understand it. It has never occurred to us that heeding the warning, which blocked us from going where we wanted to go, was “legalism.” We could have asserted our “freedom” by going ahead and having a blast, but this approach would have resulted in much greater confinement—to oblong boxes six feet under the ground!

Properly viewed within a covenant framework of love and grace,[25] God’s law is not “legalistic” and obedience to it is not “legalism.” *People* are legalistic when they put his law in place of his grace as a means of salvation, as in Jesus’ story of a Pharisee who despised a tax collector (Luke 18:9—14). He failed to discern God’s free grace or, as Dale Patrick points out, that law is much bigger than the external bottom line:

> Law is the order of justice and right to which individuals and groups should conform and which judicial authority should enforce. Rules will necessarily play some role in this order, but there also will be principles and values which form a consistent system, cover all possible situations, and belong to the collective conscience of the community. By this definition, explicit rules—laws—are only the tip of the iceberg of the phenomenon of Law.[26]

Patrick does not deal with the reasons for “justice,” “right,” and “order,” but the “possible situations” covered by law are involved in relationships. Relationships can only be harmonious if the respective parties show proper respect for each other’s well-being. Thus the orderly, just, right principles of law are based on the foundational principle of love (cf. Matt. 22:36—40), which is also the basis of God’s grace (see John 3:16). Without love, external law-keeping is meaningless (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

Absolute moral compass versus postmodern subjectivity. Comparison

between biblical and other ancient Near Eastern laws has led John Walton to the conclusion that the laws given to Israel were not, for the most part, presented as a new mode of conduct:

> Israel had laws before to insure the smooth functioning of society, and it is logical to believe that they would have been heavily dependent on other cultures of their day for those guidelines. The revelation, though, had to do with providing a foundation for those norms (the covenant) and establishing YHWH as the source of those norms. One does not refrain from adultery merely because adultery disrupts society. Rather, adultery is prohibited because it goes against *an absolute standard of morality by which YHWH himself is characterized.*[27]

We need absolute standards. Can you imagine listening to an orchestra in which the players have not agreed that A = 440 vibrations per second?[28] What about transforming plans into a building if the construction workers interpret the basic units of measure differently? So why shouldn't we enjoy the security of absolute moral standards, which help us to get along with each other smoothly rather than having our harmony disintegrate into a cacophony of chaos?

If standards were continuously left up to agreement between people, they would suffer from variability and circularity, as when a man who blew the noon whistle at a factory regularly set his watch to a clock in the window of a shop, only to learn that the shopkeeper set his clock every day by that whistle.[29] This is why we have Greenwich Mean Time and a Bureau of Standards. It is also why we have the Bible. Only God is big, wise, and good enough to set our moral standards.

In addition to the attempt to make God's law into a means of salvation, another misuse is to use it as a political tool by making artificial human interpretations into the standards to which others must adhere. There is no question that setting standards can generate power and/or wealth (e.g., Bill Gates and Microsoft computer operating systems). But putting subjective human authority in place of God's absolute authority is nothing short of blasphemy (cf. John 10:33), and it is even worse to do this for gain by preying on people's legalistic fears that they will be eternally damned unless they measure up to the dictates of a human voice that they mistake for the voice of God.

If we disregard the Bible, our moral compass may appear logical and self-consistent, but it lacks an external reference point. It would be like a lady who was travelling by plane over a large body of water at night. To calm her apprehension, she asked the pilot how he could navigate in the dark. "You see

that green light on that wingtip?" he replied. Yes, she saw it. "You see that red light on the other wingtip?" he continued. "Yes" again. "I just steer the plane straight between them," he assured her.

Absolute moral standards are out of vogue in our postmodern world. We are supposed to listen to whatever voices we feel comfortable with, as long as they do not claim to be absolute. Respect for others demands that we recognize anyone else's source of moral guidance (or lack thereof) as equal to our own. Value judgments are strictly forbidden.

Respect for others is crucial. But must we purchase it by relinquishing our right to absolute moral standards and assenting to a polytheistic moral culture that puts anything claiming divine authority (including human beings) in place of God? Masquerading as enlightenment, moral subjectivity is not only inconvenient and irritating; it is also terribly dangerous, as Rabbi Stewart Vogel points out with startling passion:

> If each of us creates his own meaning, we also create our own morality. I cannot believe this. For if so, what the Nazis did was not immoral because German society had accepted it. Likewise, the subjective morality of every majority culture throughout the world could validate their heinous behavior. It comes down to a very simple matter: Without God there is no *objective meaning* to life, nor is there an *objective morality.* I do not want to live in a world where right and wrong are subjective.[30]

Postmodernism refuses to recognize the possibility that a person sincerely following his or her "religious" or cultural norms, whatever they may be, could perpetrate something that should be characterized as "evil." So what was it that stared us in the face on September 11, 2001 through the eyes of Mohammed Atta?

1. Compare J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1326.

2. Regarding *krt* ("cut off"), see comments on 7:20—21.

3. E.g. J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994 [repr. of 1885]), 50—51.

4. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1295.

5. P. Brand and P. Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 61.

6. B. Schwartz, "The Prohibitions Concerning the 'Eating' of Blood in Leviticus 17," in G. A. Anderson and S. M. Olyan, eds., *Priesthood and*

Cult in Ancient Israel (JSOTSup 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 57—58.

7. Ibid., 56—57.

8. Ibid., 55—56; Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord,* 61, 67—69; H. C. Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement," 26—28; Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," 1:1012. For an alternative idea that expiation *(koper)* is not ransom in the sense of the price of a life, but the cost of reconciliation that a faulty party gives to placate and make peace with an injured party, who is free to accept or reject it, see A. Schenker, "kop*er* et expiation," *Bib* 63 (1982): 32—46, esp. 45.

9. Ibid.; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice,* 156—58.

10. Ibid., 137.

11. E.g., L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1955), 143—52, R. L. Harris, **"?23** *kapar," TWOT,* 1:452—53.

12. Cf. Milgrom, "A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17:11," *JBL* 90 (1971): 152—53.

13. However, cf. 1 Sam. 3:14, Ezek. 45:15, 17.

14. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual,* 186—89, A. Schenker, "Das Zeichen des Blutes und die Gewissheit der Vergebung im Alten Testament," *MTZ* 34 (1983): 203, 213.

15. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering,* 107.

16. H. Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* (transl. K. Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 96; cf. Kalisch, *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament: Leviticus,* 1:172, 309, 318.

17. See J. H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 158—61.

18. Minnie Warburton, "Letting the Voice of Leviticus Speak," *STR* 37 (1994): 164.

19. S. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (VTSup 18, Leiden: Brill, 1970), 43.

20. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1295.

21. On postbiblical requirements for koshering meat, see, e.g., EJ, 6:28, 39.

22. G. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 35.

23. M. Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 54.

24. H. T. Blackaby, and C. V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the*

Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 13.

25. Cf. B. Greenberg, "Hear, O Israel: Law and Love in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 1—34)," in F. C. Holmgren and H. E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 150—53.

26. Patrick, *Old Testament Law,* 4.

27. J. H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (LBI, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 90 (emphasis supplied).

28. Cf. Griffith, *Looking Up,* 41.

29. Ibid., 105.

30. Schlessinger and Vogel, *The Ten Commandments,* xxix.

Leviticus 18

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the LORD your God. 3You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

6“'No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD.

7“'Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.

8“'Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father.

9“'Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.

10“'Do not have sexual relations with your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, that would dishonor you.

11“'Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father, she is your sister.

12“'Do not have sexual relations with your father’s sister, she is your father’s close relative.

13“'Do not have sexual relations with your mother’s sister, because she is your mother’s close relative.

14“'Do not dishonor your father’s brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations, she is your aunt.

15“'Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is

your son’s wife, do not have relations with her.

16“'Do not have sexual relations with your brother’s wife, that would dishonor your brother.

17“'Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter, they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.

18“'Do not take your wife’s sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

19“'Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.

20“'Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor’s wife and defile yourself with her.

21“'Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

22“'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

23“'Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it, that is a perversion.

24“'Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that i am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25Even the land was defiled, so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, 27for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. 28And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

29“'Everyone who does any of these detestable things— such persons must be cut off from their people. 30Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God.'"

Original Meaning

MOVING FROM RITUAL MATTERS (Lev. 17) to a focus on moral holiness (see the introduction), Leviticus 18 begins with an exhortation to obey the Lord's laws rather than to follow the practices of Egypt or Canaan (18:1—5). The Lord contrasts his approach to sexuality with that of Egypt, where incest was common, and Canaan, which was a hotbed of promiscuity.

Incest. The main area of legislation in chapter 18 is incest. At first glance verse 6 appears to be simply a heading for the following list of cases. However, S. Rattray has shown that subsequent verses specify additional forbidden sexual relationships, which verse 6 does not directly cover:

> The key lies in the opening verse to the incest prohibitions (Lev 18:6): one may not marry close kin *(seYrbesard).* Who are they? In Lev 21:2 we have the expression *seYr haqqarOb ',* which is spelled out as follows: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and maiden sister (sister who has never married). Hence mother, sister and daughter, as close kin, are automatically forbidden by Lev 18:6. The purpose of the list of Leviticus 18 is to indicate *who else* is forbidden by extension from these basic relationships.[1]

Rattray has solved a major problem: The daughter and full sister, whom we would expect in any treatment of incest, do not appear in the remainder of Leviticus 18 or in chapter 20.[2] Notice that although Rattray refers to marrying relatives, the forbidden sexual unions in chapter 18 are not restricted to those that are formalized by marriage.

Verse 6 reads: "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations [lit., to uncover nakedness]. I am the LORD." Elsewhere the verb "approach" (qrb) by itself can be a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Isa. 8:3). In Leviticus 18 the combination of "approach" with "to uncover nakedness" unambiguously refers to sexual activity. This is not the same as Genesis 9:22, where "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness." Ham "saw" rather than "approached" Noah. In Leviticus 20:17, seeing nakedness does occur in the context of sexual relations, but this context is indicated by the verb *lqh*

(“take,” i.e., marry), which does not apply to Ham and Noah.

Although Genesis does not indicate that Ham indulged in homosexual activity with his father, his disrespect led Noah to curse Canaan, Ham’s son (Gen. 9:25).[3] So this story appears to have a thematic connection with Leviticus 18:3, where the Lord commands his people: “You must not do as they do in the land of Canaan."

In Leviticus 18:7—18 each case occupies only one verse in apodictic (“You shall not” = “Do not”) formulation, expressing an absolute principle. The end of the chapter states penalties that apply to all the cases. In a comment on 18:22, which concerns homosexual activity, Milgrom formulates an overarching rationale behind the cases in this chapter:

> The common denominator of all the prohibitions, I submit, is that they involve the emission of semen for the purpose of copulation, resulting in either incest and illicit progeny or, as in this case, lack of progeny (or its destruction in the case of Molek worship, v. 21). In a word, the theme (with Ramban) is procreation.[4]

Along the same line, J. E. Miller suggests that the nonincest laws of 18:19—23 are unified by the concept that semen is a controlled substance, which must not be improperly placed.[5]

Verse 7 reads: “The nakedness of your father, that is [explicative waw], the nakedness of your mother, you shall not uncover; she is your mother—you shall not uncover her nakedness”[6] (cf. NASB; NJPS; NRSV). Although in one sense this verse is redundant because its prohibition against sexual relations with one’s mother is already covered by verse 6 (see above), verse 7 transitions to the following cases by establishing a pattern: The nakedness of a female who has been married belongs to her husband, with whom she has become “one flesh” (cf. Gen. 2:24), even after the marriage ends by divorce or his death. So uncovering her nakedness is tantamount to shaming him by exposing his nakedness (see NIV of Lev. 18:7; cf. Deut. 22:30).

In Leviticus 18, incest is defined more broadly than our modern understanding in that relatives by marriage, to whom a man would have easy access within the household, are off limits in addition to blood relatives.[7] Forbidden relatives who marry into one’s family include a wife of one’s father (18:8; i.e., stepmother or additional wife), aunt by marriage (v. 14), daughter-in-law (v. 15), and sister-in-law (v. 16; cf. Matt. 14:3—4). Each of these laws would have independent force only after the end of the marriage that has created the relationship, before which

the law of adultery (Lev. 18:20; cf. 20:10; Gen. 35:22; 49:4; Ex. 20:14; Deut. 22:22) would apply. So their intent is to prohibit marriages of widowed or divorced women to men who are related to them by marriage. However, Deuteronomy 25:5—6 recognizes the notable exception of "levirate" marriage to a brother-in-law in order to maintain the identity of a dead man by providing him with a line of posterity (cf. Gen. 38; Ruth 4).

With relatives who marry into one's family come some of their relatives, who are also forbidden: a stepdaughter or daughter of a stepchild (18:17). In verse 11 a stepsister who comes from the extended family *(moledet,* "clan") of one's father (not "born/begotten to/by your father"; NASB; NKJV; NIV; NRSV; NJB) is prohibited, but by implication it is permissible to marry a stepsister who is not a blood relative.[8]

Leviticus 18:17—18 prohibits a man from sexual unions with two women who are blood relatives of each other: a woman and her daughter or granddaughter (18:17) or a woman and her sister while the first is alive (v. 18). Only in this last case is the prohibition limited to bigamy. Whereas it is forbidden to marry a woman and her daughter or granddaughter at all, whether sequentially or simultaneously, it is only forbidden to take (i.e., marry) a sister-in-law while one's wife is still alive, thereby producing rivalry between the two sisters (cf. Leah and Rachel in Gen. 29—30).

A few years ago an American polygamist was interviewed on TV along with five of his nine wives. He justified the arrangement as emulating "the patriarchal ideal." However, even a casual reading of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis (cf. Judg. 8—9) shows that polygamy was anything but ideal for the patriarchs and their families.

Some have interpreted (lit.) "a woman to her sister" in 18:18 broadly as any woman in addition to a first wife, in accord with idiomatic use of the same expression elsewhere to mean "one [feminine] in addition to another [feminine]" (Ex. 26:3, 5, 6, 17; Ezek. 1:9, 23; 3:13).[9] A. Tosato has found further support for the idea that the women are not literally sisters by identifying the formulation of Leviticus 18:18 with the style of the following 18:19—20, the prohibitions of which are not limited to kin, rather than with the preceding laws of incest in 18: 6—17.[10] If this interpretation is correct, verse 18 is a blanket prohibition of all polygamy.[11]

Against Tosato's interpretation, because verse 18 immediately follows laws regulating sexual relations between literal kin, including sisters (vv. 9, 11, 12, 13), it is difficult to avoid the impression that the women in verse 18 are related to each other.[12] The literary affinity with the following verses could be due to the

fact that by contrast to the previous cases, the prohibitions of verses 18—20 are limited to conditions that can end: the lifetime of one's wife (v. 18), menstruation (v. 19), and the marriage of a woman to another man (v. 20). So verse 18 could be regarded as transitional, simultaneously (Janus-like) looking backward to incest laws and forward to time-limited laws. Notice that verses 18—19 are paralleled in chapter 20, where an unambiguous prohibition of marriage to a literal sister (20:17) is immediately followed by prohibition of sex during menstruation (20:18).

Why does 18:18 include "as a rival" (Qal infinitive of *srr),* which introduces a social dynamic over and above the objective kinship relation between the two women? Would this not apply to any polygamous situation? Indeed, 1 Samuel 1:6 refers to Peninnah as the "rival" (noun *sarah)* of Hannah, and there is no inkling that the two were sisters.[13] It appears that the law of Leviticus 18:18, like other laws in the Torah, was capable of expansion by logical extension.[14] So while Leviticus 18:18 in association with incest laws would refer to a literal sister as a rival, the placement and formulation of the law lend themselves to the conclusion that the social dynamic principle applies more broadly to any other woman. In this way a single law economically met people where they were and led them to a higher level as their experience and reflection matured.

Misuse of "seed." In Leviticus 18:19—23 are five laws that come under the topic of the Lord's statutes, by contrast to those of Egypt and Canaan (18:2— 5), but not under the heading of incest laws (18:6). Nevertheless, four out of five of them also have to do with sexuality.

Intercourse with a menstruating woman is absolutely forbidden in verse 19, and in verse 29 the consequence of this and other offenses is the divine penalty of being "cut off," that is, extirpation (cf. 20:18). So how do we explain the fact that in 15:24 a man having sexual relations with a menstruant only incurs a seven-day impurity? Since 15:24 deals with ritual consequences irrespective of intention, it covers situations of accidental violation in which a couple has intercourse without knowing that the woman is menstruating, but they learn this after the fact. In chapters 18 and 20, by contrast, the divine penalty is for deliberate violation; it would be pointless to forbid an accident.

The prohibition of adultery, involving the consent of both parties, is already part of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14), but the broader scope of Leviticus 18:20 also includes rape.[15] Here an Israelite who (lit.) gives/puts his "lying" (i.e., penis[16]) for "seed" to the wife of his fellow man becomes impure by means of her. While becoming impure (Qal of *tin')* through intercourse with another man's wife is generated by the physical act, this is not merely the ritual pollution that

we know from chapters 11—15. Rather, it involves permanent moral defilement, for which no ritual remedy is provided.

At the center of the final group of five laws is a prohibition against sacrificing children to the god Molech (18:21), who was worshiped especially by the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kings 23:13; Jer. 49:1, 3), a Transjordanian people whose ancestor (or "incestor") was Lot through his youngest daughter (Gen. 19:34—38). This law has to do with idolatrous worship of another deity rather than sexual relations, but the close parallel between the wording of Leviticus 18:21 and the previous verse forges a link for us. Just as you shall not give (Qal of *ntn)* your penis for seed *(zera';* i.e., sperm) to the wife of another (18:20), you shall not give (Qal of ntn) any of your seed *(zera';* i.e., posterity/children) to pass through for Molech (18:21). "Pass through" in this context means pass through fire (cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 23:10). Molech worship parallels adultery: Both violate covenant relationships by disloyally giving precious "seed" to parties forbidden to receive it (Ezek. 23:37).

Verse 22 reads: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity. Leviticus 20:13 reiterates, but with a penalty directly attached: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." This condemnation of homosexual practice as offensive to God is not "politically correct" today, but our task here is to understand what the Bible says, not to rewrite it. Whether we like it or not, the Bible is simply not bound by modern Western constraints of political correctness. Notice, however, that Leviticus does not condemn persons who have homosexual tendencies as long as they do not act on them.

The last law in chapter 18 prohibits the defiling (Qal of tm^J) perversion of bestiality, whether by a man or a woman. For a man the terminology is almost the same as in verse 20 (see above), but slightly more specific and therefore graphic: (lit.) "You shall not put your penis in any animal to become impure by means of it" (see also 20:15; cf. Num. 5:20). The language is different for a woman, who is forbidden to initiate mating with an animal by presenting her body to it for this purpose. Again, Leviticus 20 mandates capital punishment for both the human and animal parties (20:15—16).

The conclusion of Leviticus 18 provides powerful incentives to follow the Lord's directives (18:24—30). If the Israelites defile the Lord's land by morally polluting themselves, they will be expelled like the Canaanites, as vividly described by the metaphor of vomiting (vv. 24—28). The second incentive is to avoid the divine penalty of being "cut off" (vv. 29—30).

Bridging Contexts

LIFE THROUGH OBEDIENCE? The Lord commanded the Israelites: "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them" (18:5). Does this mean that the ancient Israelites were saved by doing works of the law? The answer depends on whether "will live" refers to the present life or to eternal life. In this context, exile is opposite life in the Promised Land during the present era (18:24—28, cf. v. 3). When exile did come, Ezekiel repeatedly quoted Leviticus 18:5 to explain what had gone wrong (Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21, cf. Neh. 9:29).

Leviticus 18:5 expresses the same idea as Deuteronomy 5:33: "Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess" (cf. Deut. 8:1, 32:46—47). The fifth of the Ten Commandments promises long life in the land for those who honor their fathers and mothers (Ex. 20:12). Since respect for parents and other family members, which is essential for healthy society, is the topic of Leviticus 18, it is not surprising to find the stakes of obedience versus disobedience presented in terms of life in the land.

Thus, Leviticus 18:5 has to do with life in the Promised Land rather than eternal salvation. The Israelites did not save themselves by doing works of the law as an alternate route to eternal life that God gives by grace through faith.[17] Obedience was predicated on preexisting grace. The Lord had already saved his people from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 20:2) and was about to give them the land of Canaan (Lev. 18:3, 24, 20:24, 23:10, 25:2, 38). They could not earn it. However, he could not bless his people with life and prosperity in that land if they violated laws of cause and effect and severed their covenant connection with him by acting abominably.

God's laws are not theological abstractions that are separate from dynamics of cause and effect operating in real life. For example:

> Suppose the Lord says, "I have a gift for you—a beautiful, wonderful expression of what love is. I will provide you with a spouse—a husband or a wife. Your relationship with this person will bring out the very best in you
>
> But then He says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Matt. 5:27). Is that command to limit or restrict you? No! It is to protect and free you to

> experience love at its human best. What happens if you break the command and commit adultery? The love relationship is ruptured between husband and wife. Trust is gone. Hurt sets in. Guilt and bitterness creep in. Even the children begin to respond differently. Scars may severely limit the future dimensions of love you could have experienced together.[18]

When the Israelites repeatedly apostatized, it was God's compassion that saved them from their enemies (Judg. 2:15—16, 18; 3:9, 15). While their return to obedience demonstrated their sincerity (10:15—16), it did not pay for past sins so that they could merit deliverance. No amount of law-keeping can make up for past failure. Even today, a murderer can behave well on death row but then be put to death for a crime committed in the past. The only thing that can save a sinner is unmerited mercy. While keeping God's law is beneficial to those who are obedient (Lev. 18:5), it cannot help those who are disobedient (Gal. 3:11—13, quoting Lev. 18:5).

Departures from God's ideal for human sexuality. According to Genesis 2, God created man and woman for each other. When the Lord presented Eve to Adam, Adam exclaimed: "'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:23—24).

In this first marriage, before the Fall, we find God's ideal for human sexuality: an indissoluble union between one man and one woman, represented by the metaphor "one flesh." This was to be a (1) permanent, (2) monogamous, (3) heterosexual relationship (4) between human beings. The Lord did not need to encase these aspects in legal formulations; he simply created marriage the way it was supposed to be.[19]

In the Bible, deviations from God's ideal carry varying degrees of offensiveness to him. Remarriage after the death of one's spouse receives no negative assessment in the Bible. Divorce, which violates permanence until death, is another matter. God tolerates it as a concession to human weakness only under certain circumstances (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5—9), regulates it in order to mitigate its worst effects (Deut. 24:1—4; cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9),[20]and sternly warns against divorcing without justification (Mal. 2:13—16).[21]

Biblical law penalizes those who engage in heterosexual practices that not only violate permanence but also occur outside marriage, such as adultery, premarital or promiscuous sex, and rape. Violation of a woman's existing marriage (including betrothal) always results in the death of each consenting

individual (see comments on Lev. 20).

Polygamy transgresses the principle of monogamy. As with divorce, while the Old Testament tolerates polygamy, it regulates this arrangement in order to mitigate some of its evil effects (Ex. 21:10—11, Lev. 18:18, Deut. 21:15—17). In the New Testament Paul upholds the ideal of monogamy by barring polygamous individuals from positions of church leadership (1 Tim. 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6).

Homosexuality violates God's heterosexual ideal. Biblical law categorically condemns homosexual activity as an abomination that carries the death penalty (Lev. 18:22, 20:13). The same is true of bestiality, which violates the principle that human sexuality is to be shared only with other human beings (18:23, 20:15—16). Bestiality existed in the ancient world along with incest and sodomy[22], unfortunately, it survives to the present. If only Leviticus were *not* so relevant to modern life!

By itself an incestuous marriage does not violate the fourfold standard of permanent, monogamous, heterosexual relationships between human beings. In the generation of Adam and Eve's children, it would have been impossible for the human race to continue without what we regard as incestuous marriage: Cain and Seth had nobody to marry but their sisters. Marriage between some kinds of close relatives was accepted long after it was necessary. In fact, Miriam, Moses, and Aaron were the product of such a marriage (Ex. 6:20). However, Leviticus 18 (cf. ch. 20) established a fifth aspect of the standard for sexual relations, which was introduced in the course of human genetic and moral degeneration: Close relatives must not be sexual partners.

Contemporary Significance

DOES THE BIBLICAL PROHIBITION AGAINST SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A MENSTRUATING WOMAN APPLY TO CHRISTIANS TODAY? The penalty for deliberate violation of the ban on sex with a woman during her period is a grave one: divinely administered "cutting off," with no ritual remedy available (Lev. 20:18, cf. 18:19, 29). This absolute nature of the prohibition indicates that its applicability does not depend on the ritual system and continues after it has passed away. Reinforcing this conclusion, Leviticus 18 and 20 place the ban on sex with a menstruant among moral laws (cf. Ezek. 18:5—6, 22:10).

It is true that ceremonial law provided a remedy for physical ritual impurity incurred through *inadvertent* violation of the prohibition (15:24). Now that the ritual system is gone, there is no ceremonial impact or need for such a remedy. However, this does not negate a timeless moral aspect that forbids a man from *deliberately* having intercourse with a menstruating woman, knowing that this is her condition.

Perhaps a moral rationale for the prohibition can be found in 20:18, which describes a woman with any genital flow as *dawah* ("faint," i.e., in a state of malaise, see also 12:2, cf. Lam. 1:13, 5:17). If so, this is a women's rights issue: The law protects "the woman from unwanted advances by her husband during her period of weakness (R. Gane)."[23]

Do the biblical prohibitions against homosexuality and incest apply to Christians today? Some defenders of homosexuality tie this question to the preceding one as follows: Since Christians generally do not observe the law of Leviticus that bans marital intercourse during menstruation but treat it as culturally relative, they should be consistent and admit that the law of Leviticus against homosexual practice is also culturally relative. W. J. Webb concurs that the laws are related to the extent that they both involve sexual taboos, and he thinks the menstrual intercourse prohibition does not apply today because the New Testament has repealed the laws of physical ritual impurity. However, he argues that the ban on homosexual intercourse is not intrinsically or logically connected to the menstrual intercourse law. Rather, the former remains applicable because it is not linked to ceremonial impurity, which explains the severe penalty of death for homosexual activity (Lev. 20:13) and the fact that the

New Testament retained the prohibition against it.[24]

Webb is right that the homosexuality law is not limited by belonging to regulations concerning physical ritual impurity. But we have found that the law against *deliberate* intercourse during menstruation is not merely a ceremonial law and carries the terminal divine penalty of being "cut off," although there is a remedy of ritual purification if the act is inadvertent. Webb does not take into account the possibility that a law can involve more than one category. So although it is true that the menstrual intercourse and homosexuality laws stand independently under the heading of "sexual taboos," it appears that their applicability is similar.

Milgrom defends homosexual activity from another angle. Because God gave the legislation of Leviticus 18 (cf. ch. 20) to the ancient Israelites and their descendants for life in the land of Israel, Milgrom argues, "the ban on homosexuality and the other illicit unions applied solely to the residents of the holy land."[25] Moreover, because lesbianism does not appear in Leviticus 18 or 20, he further restricts the prohibition to males. Among males in Israel he further narrows the circle: "Both occurrences of the prohibition (18:22; 20:13) contain the phrase *mishkeve 'isha*, an idiom used for only *illicit* heterosexual unions. Thus carnal relations are forbidden only with males who are of the equivalent degree of the females prohibited in these lists."[26] Milgrom summarizes his compassionate approach to homosexuality:

> I am not for homosexuality, but I am for homosexuals. I grieve for their plight—their pariah status and their discrimination in the workplace and the military. But when the Bible is distorted to make God their enemy, I must speak out to set the record straight. I return to my contention that there is only one deduction to be derived from Lev 18 and 20: The ban on homosexuality is limited to male Jews and inhabitants of the holy land. The basis for the ban, as I have submitted, is the need for procreation, which opposes, in biblical times, the wasting of seed.[27]

Against the objection that God ejected non-Israelites from Canaan because of their immorality, including homosexuality (18:24—30), Milgrom responds that these peoples came under the scope of the legislation because they resided in the holy land. Although 18:3 recognizes that the Egyptians were committing violations of the laws in this chapter, they were not accountable to God for these because they did not live in the holy land. As for the question of why the Lord incinerated the Sodomites (Gen. 19), Milgrom contends it was their inhumane

brutality rather than consensual homosexuality that brought divine fire down on their heads.[28]

Milgrom's narrow interpretation certainly does make life easier for the gay community. For him, even the tiny percentage of males who are restricted may practice their lifestyle if they fulfill the spirit of the biblical law by raising adopted children to compensate for their loss of "seed."[29]

While much of the argumentation in defense of the moral status of homosexuality these days is based on social, psychological, and biological factors rather than serious biblical interpretation, anyone who wants to know what the Bible says on the matter must pay careful attention to Milgrom because he is a world-class exegete. Alas, his view on this matter is fraught with several significant problems.

(1) Leviticus knows how to limit the scope of a law to the Promised Land: "When you enter the land of Canaan …" (14:34, fungus in houses); "When you enter the land …" (19:23, fruit trees); "When you enter the land I am going to give you …" (23:10, sheaf of grain); "When you enter the land I am going to give you …" (25:2, sabbatical fallow year). The Israelites could not practice these laws in the desert because there they lived in tents rather than houses and had no agricultural land to harvest. Since the laws of sexual conduct in chapters 18 and 20 lack such constraints and the corresponding formula "When you enter the land," they were in force as soon as they were promulgated. Within the Pentateuchal narrative framework, this was in the desert, before the Israelites entered the holy land. Thus, these sexual laws are not limited to that land.

(2) While the punishment of exile only applies to inhabitants of the Promised Land and the infliction of capital punishment (20:13) is dependent on the Israelite judicial system, the *divine* penalty of being "cut off" (18:29) can be in force anywhere at any time.

(3) While the Egyptians were allowed to stay in Egypt, this does not necessarily mean that God held the Canaanites morally responsible but not the Egyptians. It was Canaan that God gave to Israel, not Egypt. So the Canaanites had to go.

(4) How could God justly hold the Canaanites culpable for transgressing a standard of sexual propriety of which they were not even aware? Leviticus 18 gives the impression that the Canaanites and Egyptians were violating the basics of universal rightness, which they should have known and followed (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1).[30]

(5) One of Milgrom's arguments is that both instances of the ban on homosexuality contain the phrase "lyings [plural of *miskab]* of a woman"

(18:22; 20:13), which he claims is "used for only *illicit* heterosexual unions" (see above). However, by itself this idiom is morally neutral. If the plural of *miskab* automatically signaled illegitimacy, we would be stuck with the absurdity that by referring to the place of his "lyings," Jacob condemned his own enjoyment of conjugal rights there (Gen. 49:4). "Lyings" are illicit when one party usurps the customary sexual activity (hence the plural, apparently) that rightfully belongs to another. In Genesis 49:4 the one who usurped Jacob's "lyings" is Reuben (cf. 35:22). In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 the one who usurps a woman's "lyings" is any male.

(6) In Leviticus 18 and 20 the prohibition of homosexual activity (18:22, 20:13) appears within the same legal framework that also covers incest, adultery, and bestiality. Adultery is independently excluded by the seventh of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14, Deut. 5:18), all of which, according to the New Testament, have ongoing application for Christians, whether they are Jewish or Gentile and live inside or outside the holy land (Rom. 7:7, 12, 13:9, James 2:11, cf. Matt. 19:18—19). If these moral laws given to the Israelites are universal and timeless, why would the moral laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 not be the same?[31]

(7) Acts 15 records lifestyle requirements established at the Jerusalem council for Gentile Christians: "to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29, cf. v. 20). This list follows the scope of laws in Leviticus 17—18:

> 17:3—9: well-being offerings, of which the offerer eats, sacrificed to goat-demons
>
> 17:10—14: blood in improperly slaughtered meat
>
> chapter 18: sexual immorality in general, including but not limited to adultery

In Acts 15:20, 29 the Greek word for sexual immorality in general (the range covered in Lev. 18) is *porneia*, which is broader than *moicheia*, the word for "adultery." In the New Testament *porneia* includes incest (1 Cor. 5:1) and the related verb *ekporneuo* includes homosexuality (Judg. 17, cf. Gen. 19:4—5). The New Testament explicitly condemns incest (1 Cor. 5:1), male homosexuality (Rom. 1:27, 1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10), and lesbianism (Rom. 1:26) practiced by any human beings.

If we accept the biblical evidence, Christians everywhere are just as

accountable to God for avoiding the practices listed in Leviticus 18 as the ancient Israelites were when the legislation was first given. The divine penalty for Israelites was to be "cut off" (18:29), which goes beyond death, and according to 1 Corinthians 6:9—10 the penalty for Christians also goes beyond death:

> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The answer for people enslaved by sexual perversion is not to tell them that they are OK. They are not. The solution is found in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." There is hope for redemption from destructive lifestyles. Jesus was given his name because he came to save people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins (Matt. 1:21).

These days it is common for psychologists to regard homosexuality as an innate tendency that cannot be overcome. If one is homosexual through no fault of his or her own and cannot escape this basic drive, how can God condemn such a person? This popular line of reasoning overlooks several factors. (1) According to the Bible, homosexuality did not always exist, and it radically departs from God's universal and timeless creation ideal for human sexuality (see above). Notwithstanding the notion that sexual fulfillment between consenting adults is an "inalienable right," we should not impose this attitude on the Bible, which offers rehabilitation from rather than vindication of sinful life.[32]

(2) Through no fault of their own, whether a result of heredity or environmental factors, people are also afflicted with overpowering tendencies to heterosexual promiscuity, alcoholism, gluttony, violence, and suicide. Just because a person has an innate drive that may need to be treated in some ways as a disease does not mean that acting on it is not a moral violation. No decent citizen would think of allowing rapists and pedophiliacs to carry out their obsessions. Is it unfair that some people can find fulfillment but others are not permitted to? Perhaps, but who said life in a fallen world is fair?

The fact that psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors cannot figure out how to help a homosexual become heterosexual simply means that conversion calls for a miracle. That is exactly what God promises to those who want it (1

Cor. 6:11). It is arrogant and faithless for human experts to claim that because they cannot solve a problem, nobody in the universe can.

Can conversion happen today? Of course. I have talked with a committed Christian, married with children, who experienced transformation from a highly promiscuous homosexual lifestyle that involved about a thousand sexual partners. He has had some bumps along the road to recovery, as people often do when they are overcoming addictions, but by God's grace he has become a different kind of man.

Some regard the biblical approach to homosexuality as "gay bashing." However, according to the Bible, God loves sinners and wants to save individuals who are now gay by transforming them. If God loves them, should we be afraid to love them too? Ultimately it is far more compassionate for God and for us to warn them of danger and to hold out hope for the divine gift of conversion than to say "Peace, peace," when there is no peace (cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11), by condoning gay "marriage."[33]

Philip Yancey finds that in dealing with issues such as homosexuality, Christians need to follow Christ's example more closely by (1) improving our ability to distinguish between sinners and sin and (2) being consistent in the way we define sin:

> I view with amazement Jesus' uncompromising blend of graciousness toward sinners and hostility toward sin, because in much of church history I see virtually the opposite. We give lip service to "hate the sin while loving the sinner," but how well do we practice this principle? …
>
> Nowadays many of the same Christians who hotly condemn homosexuality, which Jesus did not mention, disregard his straightforward commands against divorce. We keep redefining sin and changing the emphasis.[34]

While the church has no biblical license to sanction the practice of homosexuality in any form, Christ's approach demands that it be a haven of support to help precious people—including gays, lesbians, and bisexuals—in their often painful and traumatic journeys of recovery from all kinds of lifestyles. To restore the church as the trusted friend rather than the enemy of sinners requires a major shift of attitude on our part.

Sexual abuse of children. By forbidding sexual relations not only between blood relatives but also between persons related by marriage, Leviticus 18 simultaneously accomplishes several things. (1) It rules out genetic impairment that can result from inbreeding. (2) It prevents a woman who joins a family by

marriage from being treated as a “hand-me-down” who goes from one male family member to another. (3) It provides a serious deterrent by condemning abuse of females, including children, by the males who have access to them. A stepsister who is not a blood relative (Lev. 18:11) is protected by sanctions against rape (Deut. 22:25—29).

The third point shows that Leviticus 18 indirectly covers pedophilia, which in modern times is an increasing problem, including among people who regard themselves as Christians. Homosexual abuse of male children is automatically prohibited by the law against sexual relations with another male *(zakar* in v. 22 means “male,” not just “grown man”). Because God himself enforces the laws of Leviticus 18 with the penalty of being “cut off” (v. 29), a violator cannot escape punishment even if his crime is never discovered by other human beings.

For those of us who have been spared sexual abuse, it is impossible to comprehend the full impact of Leviticus 18 and 20. So let’s listen to Minnie Warburton as she searingly describes her surprising reaction to these laws in Leviticus, which have brought her healing:

> I remember very clearly the moment. Sunlight coming in the window onto my desk … and the words leaping out at me … “You shall not have intercourse with …” Incest taboos. One after another. I slammed the book shut. I was shocked. I had no idea *that* was in the Bible. I never imagined it might be mentioned there. I was reeling….
>
> It didn’t matter that my father by now was six years dead. Nor did it matter that long before he’d died, I’d confronted him on all the things he’d done to me. Nor did it even matter that he’d continued to deny them until the day he did die…. I never knew that what he did was condemned by *his* God before he ever did it. I never knew he was breaking God’s law. But there it was, clear as anything….
>
> I will never be able to explain what that moment was like, that discovery of Leviticus 18. I wanted to call up everyone I knew and say, “It was wrong. What he did was wrong. It says so right here, in the Bible.” Therapists had told me, my own instincts told me, everything had told me—yet *nothing* told me the way Leviticus told me. Wrong. Condemned. Hateful in the eyes of God. Even as I wanted to yell out, I was struck dumb, speechless. It was wrong, truly truly wrong. And for the first time I felt utterly and absolutely vindicated. For the first time, I felt clean. For the first time I felt that what had happened was between him and his God and he’d have to make his expiation however he did it. I felt absolved. I felt released.

What is striking to me now, even as I write this, is that what I am describing is precisely the effect that scripture should and can have. That if scripture is in any way the word of God, then it is an awesomely powerful agent. We need to be judicious when reading scripture, we need to edit, to select, but we also need to remain open to hearing, because the voice of scripture can indeed heal, can absolve, can cleanse and purify.[35]

1. S. Rattray, "Marriage Rules, Kinship Terms and Family Structure in the Bible," *SBLSP* 26 (1998): 542.

2. For less convincing alternative explanations, see T. Meacham, "The Missing Daughter: Leviticus 18 and 20," *ZAW* 109 (1997): 254—59. However, Meacham is right that a father who deflowered his daughter could lose the bride price he would receive if she were a virgin (257).

3. Cf. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh,* 142—45.

4. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1567.

5. J. E. Miller, "Notes on Leviticus 18," *ZAW* 112 (2000): 401—3.

6. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1296.

7. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3.49.

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1540, 1542.

9. For the masculine equivalent expression, meaning "one [masculine] to another [masculine]" or "to one another," see Gen. 37:19; 42:21, 28; Ex. 16:15; 25:20; 37:9; Num. 14:4, etc.

10. A. Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 202—8.

11. *Temple Scroll,* 57.17—18, transl. Yadin, *The Temple Scroll,* 2:407; *Damascus Document* (CD) 4.21, transl. G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1997), 130; Aaron ben Elijah (14th century Karaite), *Keter Torah,* on Lev. 18:18; R. du Preez, "Polygamy in the Bible with Implications for Seventh-Day Adventist Missiology" (D.Min. diss., Andrews University, 1993), 62—78.

12. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1549.

13. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh,* 197.

14. Cf. Patrick, *Ola Testament Law,* 49, on the third commandment of the Decalogue.

15. S. Rattray, cited in Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1551.

16. H. Orlinsky, "The Hebrew Root *skb,*" *JBL* 63 (1944): 40.

17. W. Kaiser, "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *JETS* 14 (1971): 28.

18. Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God,* 14. Compare biblical and practical answers to the contemporary culture that promotes adultery in Schlessinger and Vogel, *The Ten Commandments,* 207—34.

19. For comprehensive discussion of sexuality in the Hebrew Bible, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh.*

20. R. Gane, "Old Testament Principles Relating to Divorce and Remarriage," *JATS* 12 (2001): 35—61.

21. On the idea of unjustifiable divorce in Mal. 2:16, see R. Westbrook, "The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in Deuteronomy 24:1—4," in S. Japhet, ed., *Studies in Bible* (ScrHier 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 402—3.

22. See H. Hoffner, "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East," in H. Hoffner, ed., *Orient and Occident* (Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchener, 1973), 81—90.

23. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1755.

24. W. J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 168—70.

25. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1788.

26. Ibid., 1786; cf. 1569, citing David Stewart.

27. Ibid., 1790.

28. Ibid., 1788—89.

29. Ibid., 1787—88.

30. J. R. White and J. D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible's Message About Homosexuality* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2002), 66.

31. Compare D. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 130.

32. See, e.g., Wold, *Out of Order,* esp. 207—18, J. B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 59—62, 163, R. A. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 487—89, against, e.g., A. O. Bellis and T. L. Hufford, *Science, Scripture, and Homosexuality* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 121—22. For recent collections of essays on various sides of the homosexuality question, see, e.g., D. L. Balch, ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), R. L. Brawley, ed., *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), T.

Sample and A. E. DeLong, eds., *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

33. Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice,* 489.

34. P. Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 259.

35. Minnie Warburton, “Letting the Voice of Leviticus Speak,” 166—67.

Leviticus 19

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. 3“"Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.

4“"Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

5‘When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 6It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day must be burned up. 7If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and will not be accepted. 8Whoever eats it will be held responsible because he has desecrated what is holy to the LORD? that person must be cut off from his people.

9”‘When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

11“"Do not steal.

“"Do not lie.

"'Do not deceive one another.

12“"Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

13“""Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

"'Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

14“"Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.

15“"Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or

favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16“'Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

'"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

17“'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

l8“'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

l9“'Keep my decrees.

'"Do not mate different kinds of animals.

'"Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

'"Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

20“'If a man sleeps with a woman who is a slave girl promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. 2lThe man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for a guilt offering to the LORD. “With the ram of the guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the LORD for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.

23“'When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden. For three years you are to consider it forbidden; it must not be eaten. 24In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. 25But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the LORD your God.

26“'Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.

'"Do not practice divination or sorcery.

27“'Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

28“'Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.

29“'Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

30“'Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.

3l“'Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be

defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.

32“'Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

33“'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. 34The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

35“'Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

37“'Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD.'”

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 19 is a remarkably diverse miscellany of apodictic and casuistic laws that exemplify a wide range of ritual and moral/social legislation and reiterate principles of most of the Ten Commandments. The unifying, organizing principle here is a comprehensively holy life that answers God's call to emulate his holiness (19:2).

It is easy for us to look back with 20/20 hindsight and underestimate the magnitude of the contribution made by Leviticus 19, in which relationships among human beings are to be based on love (v. 18)—not power, greed, a self-serving desire to have a good image, or even self-preservation, but love. Yet love is ultimately the best path to self-preservation because without it, mutual assured destruction (MAD) comes sooner or later.

Bases of holiness in the Decalogue. Following the overall command to be holy because the Lord is holy, verses 3—4 reiterate several of the Ten Commandments: respect for parents, observing Sabbaths (v. 3, cf. Ex. 20:8—12), and not turning to idols or casting metal gods (Lev. 19:4, cf. Ex. 20:3—6). The end of each verse is punctuated with the motivational refrain, "I am the LORD your God," with which we are familiar from Leviticus 18:2, 4, 30, this phrase recurs frequently throughout chapter 19. Interestingly, in the command to (lit.) "fear [i.e., revere/respect] [one's] mother and father" (v. 3), the order of parents reverses that of Exodus 20:12, indicating an intertextual chiasm linking Leviticus 19 to the Decalogue.

Ritual holiness. Leviticus 19:5—8 repeats the ritual instructions governing acceptable consumption of the offerer's portion of the well-being offering (7:16—18), with the clarification that eating it on the third day profanes the Lord's holy things and the culpability incurred leads to being "cut off."

Social and ethical holiness. Verses 9—10 move to a social matter: Do not be too thorough when you harvest, but leave some agricultural produce for the poor and resident aliens to glean (cf. Deut. 24:21). In the story of Ruth the Moabitess and Naomi, a poor Israelite (cf. Ruth 2), we see the life-sustaining value of this directive for socially and economically challenged persons (cf. the sabbatical year in Ex. 23:11).

Leviticus 19:11 prohibits stealing (cf. Ex. 20:15), as well as deceiving and

lying. While these laws exemplify the same underlying principle of honesty as the Decalogue's prohibition against bearing false witness (Ex. 20:16), the formulation of Leviticus 19 is not limited to the judicial process. Rather, it is a more comprehensive injunction against lying.

Continuing the theme of honesty, verse 12 forbids falsely swearing by and thereby profaning the Lord's name (cf. Ex. 20:7). It is not surprising that this law comes between commands against stealing and dishonesty in Leviticus 19:11 and against oppression/fraud and robbery in verse 13. Recall that in 6:1—7, reparation offerings are required for the kinds of ethical wrongs disallowed in 19:11—13, including misuse of God's name in fraudulent oaths.

Alongside fraud and robbery, verse 13b prohibits withholding the wages of a hired man, who depends on them, as if they were a deposit or pledge (cf. 6:2). Those of us who have been day-laborers living a hand-to-mouth existence know what happens if an employer finds it inconvenient to provide pay at the expected time.

Continuing the idea of protection for disadvantaged members of society, verse 14 prohibits treating a physically challenged individual disrespectfully or harmfully by taking advantage of that person's weakness. To compensate for the fact that such people are ill equipped to defend themselves, the motivation for eschewing mischief is pointedly expressed: "… but fear your God. I am the LORD." Further upholding social justice, verse 15 addresses the judicial system, prohibiting unfairness in either direction (cf. Deut. 1:17), whether by reverse discrimination (partiality to the poor; cf. Ex. 23:3) or discrimination (deference to the great).

God is powerful to defend the weak, and all are accountable to him: "The LORD watches over the stranger; He gives courage to the orphan and widow, but makes the path of the wicked tortuous" (Ps. 146:9 NJPS; see also Ps. 82). In the ancient Near East such protection of the socially marginalized was a hallmark of justice from early times. For example, the Sumerian Nanshe Hymn (c. 2100 B.C.) describes the goddess Nanshe: "Waif and widow she delivered not up. She took note of men who used force against men, was mother to the waif, Nanshe was the widow's guardian, finding (justly) in cases in the millhouse. The queen carried fugitives on the hip" (lines 20—24).[1]

Holiness in the heart. Leviticus 19:16—18 addresses damaging behaviors and the underlying attitudes toward other people that cause or prevent them. Verse 16 speaks against spreading slander and profiting by (lit., "standing upon") the blood of a fellow person. The link between these is all too common: By starting malicious rumors, it is possible to hurt or even destroy a person and in the process gain advantage, whether simply to improve the relative status of

one's image at the expense of someone else or even to remove the victim in order to take something that belongs to him or her (cf. the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21).

Verse 17 strikes at the root of antagonistic behavior. The proper outlet for a grievance against a "brother" (i.e., a fellow Israelite) is not hatred, but reproof. By rebuking rather than hating, a person avoids bearing blame/culpability with regard to someone else in two ways: (1) by preempting one's own sinful action that could result from hatred, and (2) by fulfilling the responsibility to warn the other person (cf. the "watchman" in Ezek. 33:6).

Here is a simple, effective, and practical approach to feelings of hatred and anger, with which we are routinely tempted. Don't bottle them up and let them fester, as Cain did with his brother Abel (Gen. 4). Rather, communicate the cause of frustration so that the problem can be resolved in a positive way. "Rebuke" involves rational discourse that conveys constructive criticism. This shifts the focus from self-centered massaging of our own grievances to concern for the well-being of the other person.

Remarkably, this law controls an *internal attitude* that is "in your heart." No human legislative body would dream of formulating such a decree because not even the FBI, with the latest surveillance technology, can enforce it. The Lord can hold people responsible to love (19:18) rather than hate (v. 17) or covet (Ex. 20:17) because his perception penetrates human thought.[2]

Just as you should "not hate your brother in your heart" (19:17), you should "not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people" (v. 18). Just as you should rebuke your neighbor (v. 17), you should "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 18). In this contrast between love and hatred at the heart of Leviticus 19, the divine legislation reaches behind superficial action to its cognitive and emotional driving forces (cf. Matt. 5:21—22).

Holiness of mixtures. Leviticus 19:19 prohibits mixtures in breeding cattle,[3] sowing seed in the same field, and manufacturing garments. Deuteronomy 22:9—11 provides another version of the law, although it speaks of sowing a vineyard rather than a field and plowing with an ox and ass together rather than breeding cattle, and it specifies mixed cloth as combining wool and linen.

These laws do not state their rationale and appear strange to modern readers, who wear clothes made of all kinds of mixtures of cotton, wool, dacron, rayon, polyester, and so on. The key is in Deuteronomy 22:9, where produce from a mixed vineyard "may not be used" (NJPS); that is, it is "forfei**t(**ed)" (NRSV; NJB). Forfeited to whom? English versions fail to tell us, but the Hebrew behind these translations literally means "will become holy" (Qal of *qdš)*. In other words, a

mixture was holy, and any mixtures were to be forfeited to the holy realm of the sanctuary, where mixtures were appropriately found in some of its fabrics and priestly garments (Ex. 26; 28; 39:29), as well as in the cherubim guarding the ark (Ex. 25:18—20; cf. Ezek. 1:5—11).[4] The cherubim remind us that in ancient Near Eastern art and literature, mixed beings, including composite guardian creatures, belong to the supernatural realm of the gods.

In other words, the laws regarding mixtures seem intended to protect the distinction between the ordinary domain of laypersons and the sacred sphere of the sanctuary. For this reason Israelites were also prohibited from manufacturing or using oil or incense like the sacred anointing oil and incense of the sanctuary (Ex. 30:32, 37, 38). Today there is no earthly ritual system with reference to which we can make distinctions in this way, so the applicability of these laws has ceased to exist.

Sexual holiness. Leviticus 19:20—22 deals with an unusual case of sexual misconduct. As implied in Deuteronomy 22:24—29, ancient Israelite betrothal was a legal contract stronger than our engagement, so that a betrothed (Pual of ʾ) maiden belonged to her fiancé. Thus, any other man who had intercourse with her committed the equivalent of adultery and was to be put to death (22:23—27).[5] If she consented rather than being raped, she would also suffer capital punishment (22:24). In Leviticus 19:20—22, however, the young woman is a slave assigned for another man in advance (Niphal of ʾrp) of her redemption or manumission,[6] that is, while she is still a slave. Because of her nonfree status, she is not betrothed in the same sense, and therefore another man who has sexual relations with her does not commit the equivalent of the capital crime of adultery. Consequently, there is an inquest (noun *biqqoret*, cf. the Piel of *bqr* in 13:36; 27:33) "to determine the exact status of the woman and to determine the exact compensation due her owner."[7] If her slave status is confirmed, the sexual partners are not put to death.

Although violation of a designated slave woman is not a capital offense, it is immoral activity offensive to God, violating the spirit of the seventh commandment of the Decalogue, which prohibits adultery (Ex. 20:14). Thus, a man who commits this wrong must sacrifice a reparation offering *(ʾasam*, the so-called "guilt offering") to the Lord.[8]

Why a reparation offering? Specification of this sacrifice implies that before offering it, the offending man must pay reparation to the wronged party, who has lost property through a deliberate ethical offense (6:4—5). To whom should he pay this? It could be argued that the reparation would go to the owner of the woman, who has suffered economic loss because her value is reduced (cf. Ex.

22:16—17). Wenham, however, maintains that the woman was regarded as betrothed, and therefore "the damages went to her fiancé, who had already paid over the bride-money to her owner."[9] The fact that the biblical text does not specify the one entitled to receive compensation seems to imply that the legal inquiry *(biqqoret)* was to sort out such details.

For Milgrom, the reparation offering in general covers cases of sacrilege *(ma'al)*, and in 6:1—7 misappropriation of someone else's property falls under the scope of this sacrifice because the wrong is accomplished through sacrilegious misuse of the Lord's holy name in a false oath.[10] But a man who had sexual relations with a designated slave woman did not violate an oath that he had personally taken. So where is the sacrilege in this case? In this context it appears that the reparation offering upholds the sanctity of the marriage covenant. *Even* the marriage of a slave woman carries a sacred dimension, even before it is consummated, so that violating this holiness constitutes sacrilege. By combining themes of ethical holiness and concern for the socially disadvantaged (see further below) with that of sexuality, this law tightens the connection between Leviticus 19 and the surrounding chapters (chs. 18 and 20).

As a result of his required reparation offering, the offending man is forgiven from (privative min) his sin (19:22). At first glance, the fact that this reparation offering formula has privative *min* to express removal of evil from the offerer, as in formulae for purification offerings (e.g., 4:26, 5:6, 10), seems to wipe out the uniqueness of the purification offering. However, in 19:22 *min* expresses removal of evil accomplished by forgiveness granted directly by God, not expiation achieved by the prerequisite sacrificial procedure itself. So the fact remains that only purification offerings expiate evils from (*min)* their offerers.

Holiness of horticulture in the holy land. In 19:23—25 the Lord commands the Israelites to regard the fruit of trees that they plant for food as "uncircumcised" (see NIV text note; i.e., "forbidden" to eat) for the first three years. The metaphor of uncircumcision may have been chosen for at least three reasons. (1) The immature fruit still enclosed in its bud is analogous to a foreskin in that it is removed and discarded.[11] (2) By referring to immature fruit in this way, God encourages compliance by memorably stigmatizing its unfitness to eat. Who would want to eat something referred to as a "foreskin"? (3) The basic rationale for the law seems to be that the Lord claims the Promised Land and the trees on it, just as he claims sons, whose connection to him is shown by their circumcision.

In the fourth year the first fruit considered edible is holy, which means that it, like other required firstfruits (cf. Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Lev. 2:14; 23:17, 20; Num.

18:13; Deut. 18:4; 26:1—11) belongs to the sacred domain and presumably must be given to the priests to eat—in this case, for the purpose of offering rejoicing *(hillulim)* to the Lord (Lev. 19:24; cf. Deut. 26:11). Only in the fifth year are the people permitted to freely eat the fruit.[12] Encouraging obedience is the promise that the yield of the tree would be increased (Lev. 19:25), abundantly compensating for the first four years. This implies God's blessing, but it is also beneficial horticultural practice to remove the buds of an immature tree.[13]

Does the law apply to our orchards today? No, not as a religious requirement. For one thing, since its religious rationale is tied to the special holiness of the Promised Land, it would not be applicable elsewhere. Furthermore, it is now impossible to turn fourth-year fruit over to the domain of the sanctuary/temple, which no longer exists. Nevertheless, modern horticulture identifies an ongoing and universal practical benefit (see above).

Holiness versus divination and death. Leviticus 19:26 seems simply to reiterate the command to abstain from eating blood (17:10—14). However, here "blood" is not the direct object. Rather, Israelites are prohibited from eating *on/over (ʻal)* the blood. Some propose that the meaning is integrally connected to the context, where the remainder of verse 26 forbids divination (consulting omens, etc., to tell the future), and verses 27—28 prohibit pagan mourning practices involved in ancestor worship (cf. Deut. 14:1—2; Jer. 48:37).

Divination and ancestor worship were major components of life outside Israel. In fact, cuneiform tablets preserved from ancient Babylonia include more omen texts than any other genre of literature.

In this context, and because we know that in some parts of the ancient world blood was poured into the ground to netherworld deities, it has been suggested that eating over the blood (returning to 19:26a) may involve occult consultation of ancestral spirits (cf. Ezek. 33:25).[14]

Holiness in various areas of ethical and religious conduct. Leviticus 19:29—36 wraps up the chapter by revisiting various areas of ethical or religious life touched on by the earlier laws: sexuality and protection of subordinate females (v. 29), respect for divinely appointed authority and Sabbaths (v. 30), avoiding consultation of pagan/occult sources of information regarding the future (v. 31), treatment of the physically and socially weak (vv. 32—34), and honesty (vv. 35—36).

Verse 29 prohibits profaning (Piel of *ʼll)* a daughter by making her serve as a prostitute. To an ancient Israelite listening to a reading of the Torah, the word for "profane" could simultaneously evoke another verb *ʼll* ("bore, pierce"), of which the Piel means "wound." If fathers treat their daughters, who are under their

authority but also belong to the holy people, with this little respect or protection for the sake of economic advantage, the evil would spread and affect the land, which would "become prostituted and full of depravity" (NRSV).

Verse 30 repeats the reminder to keep the Lord's Sabbaths (see v. 3). Observe the chiastic relationship between these two verses:

> **respect** (yr‘) mother and father
> **keepz** (smr) the Lord's Sabbaths (v. 3).
> **keep** (smr) the Lord's Sabbaths
> respect (yr^{J}) the Lord's sanctuary (v. 30).

In this pattern, the structural equivalence between mother and father (v. 3) and the Lord's sanctuary (v. 30), representing his worship system officiated by Aaronic priests, suggests a tight conceptual linkage between them. They represent divine and human authority that derives from Creation, which is continued through human reproduction. Keeping Sabbaths encapsulates the core message of the chapter: The holy Creator makes his people holy (cf. Ex. 31:12—17) by teaching them how to emulate him.

The Lord granted the Israelites access to divine wisdom, including knowledge regarding the future, through dreams, prophets, and priestly inquiry by means of the Urim and Thummim (cf. Ex. 28:30; Num. 27:21). Relying on alternate sources of divination, with which he had nothing to do, was dangerous and showed faithless disloyalty to him. Having already condemned divination and mourning practices involved in ancestor worship (Lev. 19:26—28), this chapter now prohibits turning to necromancy: divination through interaction with the purported spirits of the dead (v. 31). This kind of contact with the sphere of death will result in defilement (verb *tm*^{J}), but unlike ordinary corpse contamination (Num. 19), there is no ritual remedy because incurring this moral impurity is strictly forbidden.

The first word for necromancy here is *'ob*, which is also known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures as a "ritual hole in the ground dug to give infernal deities or spirits of the deceased access to the upper world for a brief interval of time."[15] By extension, the word in Hebrew can also refer to a necromancer or the spirit that she or he contacts. The so-called "witch" of Endor, to whom King Saul resorted when "the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets" (1 Sam. 28:6), is called a *ba‘alat 'ob* ("owner of an occult hole in the ground," 28:7). Through this pipeline to the habitation of the dead she brought up a spirit that claimed to be that of the dead prophet Samuel (28:8, 11—14).

The tragic story of Saul's séance at Endor highlights the reason behind the Lord's prohibition: Reliance on occult power and communication are mutually exclusive with faith in God.

Leviticus 19:32 requires respect for the elderly. As with the deaf and blind (v. 14), the motivation is to fear God, who holds people accountable for the way they treat those who are physically weak. Verses 33—34 prohibit taking advantage of the resident alien, who is to be treated as a citizen rather than oppressed. Verse 34b ("Love him as yourself) echoes verse 18. The command to love someone else as yourself transcends national boundaries.

Whereas verse 15 has to do with justice *(mišpat)* in the setting of a law court, verses 35—36 command justice in business dealings through use of right measures. Today we don't think much about the importance of honest measures of weight and capacity because we take our Bureau of Standards for granted. Nonetheless, even with our modern technology, it is sometimes hard to know if a used car has driven 85,000 or 185,000 miles. Other forms of fuzziness in business include fine print clauses in agreements with longdistance phone carriers. Right measures are not simply the product of honesty. They can also require carefulness and expertise, even in something as mundane as measuring a "cord" of firewood.

Bridging Contexts

GROWTH IN HOLINESS means growth in love. Leviticus 11:45 chiastically encapsulates the framework of chap. 19:

"I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God, therefore be holy, because I am holy" (11:45) "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (19:2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt" (19:36b) How can faulty human beings become holy as God is holy (Lev. 11:44—45, 19:2), a challenge that also applies to Christians (1 Peter 1:16)? To begin with, we must acknowledge the only source of holiness: God, who alone is intrinsically holy. So whatever holiness we enjoy is derived from him. Derived holiness is a special connection with God that is established and maintained by separation to him from the common sphere that lacks this special connection.[16] Thus, the personnel, objects, and defined space of the Israelite worship system were consecrated. Similarly, the Israelites themselves became a holy people through entering into a covenant with the Lord, who had delivered and thereby separated them from Egypt in order to belong to him (Ex. 19:4—6). Dr. Laura Schlessinger describes her reaction to this passage:

> Reading this virtually took my breath away. I had spent my whole life trying to find *meaning*—in being the "good kid," in doing well in school, in being intelligent, in being successful. Though it was all important, it didn't fill some special empty space, where meaning needed to be. Realizing that I had a God-mandated responsibility to represent His character, love, and ethical will was the meaning I'd been searching for.[17]

So what, ultimately, is holiness? The "LORD our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9). Holiness is "the distinctive mark and signature of the divine…. It is therefore to be understood, not as one attribute among other attributes, but as the innermost reality to which all others are related."[18] God *is* holy. Because holiness is what God is, if we are to become holy, we must reflect what he is like. Obviously this does not mean that we have all of his mysterious and tremendous glory and power.[19] Even Adam and Eve, who were perfect and created in God's image

(Gen. 1:26—27), were similar to him only in a limited sense. Yet in Leviticus 19 the Lord tells human beings what aspect of his holiness they must emulate: his active, righteous, just character as expressed in the way they conduct their lives within the framework of their relationships.

Just as God's holy moral character is revealed by his righteous acts of deliverance in human history (Judg. 5:11; 1 Sam. 12:7), so the derived moral/ethical holiness of his people is shown by what they do for him and for other human beings. This righteous holiness (or holy righteousness), modeled on and motivated by God's character, is relational rather than abstract or legalistic.[20] The dynamic, relational nature of holiness largely explains why there is so much narrative in the Bible: We comprehend God's holiness by seeing what he does in our world and how human beings do or do not reflect his character.

Like the Israelites, the Christians of Corinth were "sanctified" when they were converted to a "new covenant" relationship with God (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. 1:2, 30). Although the Israelites and the Corinthians were holy in the basic sense that they belonged to the holy God, the books of Numbers and 1 Corinthians provide ample witness that these people were far from perfect and needed growth in holiness/sanctification to become more like God in character.

The Thessalonians also needed growth in holiness. Paul wrote to them: "… and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:12—13 NASB). Here growth in love yields growth in holiness. This connection is basic and profound. Growth in holiness is growth in love, because the character of our holy God and his law is love (1 John 4:8).

If we want to know what God requires of us, our basic question is not, "How do I keep the external requirements of the law?" but, "How do I become a loving person?" As we become more like God in character by becoming more loving, we thereby become more holy. So it is no surprise that we find love at the heart of Leviticus 19 (v. 18), and we hear Jesus quoting this verse, along with Deuteronomy 6:5, to express the foundational principles of all of God's revealed will as recorded in Scripture: love for God and for humanity (Matt. 22:36—40; Mark 12:28—31; cf. Luke 10:25—28).

> Abbot Chaeremon described Christian growth:
>
> You see then that there are different stages of perfection, and that we are called by the Lord from high things to still higher in such a way that he who has become blessed and perfect in the fear of God; going as it is written

> "from strength to strength," and from one perfection to another, i.e., mounting with keenness of soul from fear to hope, is summoned in the end to that still more blessed stage, which, is love.[21]

Chaeremon rightly discerned a positive process, but he did not realize that love is not merely a final stage, growth in love is the entire process.

Having come this far into Leviticus, we should not be surprised that there are degrees of holiness in relation to God. The ancient Israelite sanctuary illustrated this concept in material and spatial terms. The inner sanctum was the "Most Holy Place" because that is where the Lord's Presence was enthroned above the ark of the covenant. The outer sanctum or "Holy Place" was somewhat less sacred because it was not as close to God. Moving outside to the court, there was another step down in sanctity. In other words, the closer you came to the Presence of the Lord, the holier things became. This gradation was reflected in the materials of the sanctuary, the garments of the priests, and access of persons to the various parts of the sanctuary.

(1) The closer an item was to the ark, the costlier its *materials*. Inside the sacred Tent, furniture was overlaid with or entirely made of gold (Ex. 25, 30). Outside, the altar and basin/laver were only of bronze (chs. 27, 30). Close to the ark, fabrics were intricately woven from colored wool and linen. Further away, fabrics were simpler (chs. 26—27). (2) The elaborateness of a *priest's garments* was proportional to his degree of sanctity. The high priest had a much more ornate and expensive set of vestments than ordinary priests (Ex. 28, 39:1—31). (3) Limitation of *access* to an area was proportional to its holiness. Only the high priest was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place (Lev. 16:2, 29—30, 34). Only priests could enter the Holy Place (e.g., Ex. 30:19—21), but any Israelite was allowed in the courtyard.

Defining and receiving love. God's holiness is unique, but in our lives he increasingly shares the love portion of it with us as we draw closer to him. God's kind of love is characterized by justice and unselfish kindness. It does not include all kinds of "love" embraced by this popular English word, which denotes a feeling of affection or expression thereof (e.g., "make love") that can range from unselfish devotion to sentimental slush saturated with self-gratification—the form of love so aggressively and profitably promoted by the entertainment industry. Our gullible populace wastes vast amounts of money on the latter kind of cheap "love." As P. T. Barnum is reputed to have said, "There's a sucker born every minute."

The Hollywood view of "love" was unselfconsciously encapsulated by a young actor who had found a sexy new girlfriend and drooled: "She has the best

body I've ever seen. We're very much in love." Aside from shallowing instead of hallowing the connotation of the word "love," this approach is boring compared with the God-given sensual raptures of the Song of Songs, where total intimacy of heart, body, and mind enjoys the freedom of security within a holy marriage covenant.

Whereas we tend to think of "love" as a feeling, in the Bible it is also a principle. The verb *'hb* ("love") in Leviticus 19:18 includes the idea of affection,[22] but the fact that God can command his people to love shows that love is something they can choose to do rather than passively waiting for a certain feeling. If love were only something to fall in, how could the Lord hold anyone accountable for having it? Whether we naturally like another person or not, God requires us to treat him or her according to the principle of love, which rules out harboring a grudge.

Why is love so crucial? Someone has said: "Love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service and from solitude to kinship with all mankind."[23] Thomas à Kempis wrote: "Love is a mighty power, a great and complete good; Love alone lightens every burden, and makes the rough places smooth. It bears every hardship as though it were nothing, and renders all bitterness sweet and acceptable."[24] According to Hans Küng, love provides law with a moral foundation:

> For one thing is certain: human beings cannot be improved by more and more laws and regulations, nor can they be improved simply by psychology and sociology. In matters great and small people are confronted with the same situation: knowing about things is not the same as knowing about meanings; regulations are not in themselves orientations, nor are laws morals. Even the law needs a moral foundation! … *Quid leges sine moribus* runs a Roman saying: What is the use of laws without morals?[25]

There is more: True, unselfish love is the only principle on the basis of which intelligent beings with free choice can peacefully coexist with each other rather than destroy each other. Thus, love is crucial for the survival of the human race.[26] Robert Browning said: "Take away love and earth is a tomb."[27]

As sinful human beings, we are so far from true love that we cannot even grasp what it is and how it works without God's help. We need the example of Christ, the influence of God's Holy Spirit, divine Providence, the witness of natural creation, and the entire Bible to teach us the meaning of love! God's kind of love is lofty and beyond our grasp.

Philip Yancey wrote to God:

> So how do I act as if you're alive? How do the cells of my body, the same ones that sweat and urinate and get depressed and toss and turn in bed at night—how do these cells carry around the splendor of the God of the universe in a way that leaks out for others to notice? How do I love even one person with the love you came to bring?[28]

We cannot acquire love by excavating into the secret chambers of our subconscious minds. We cannot conjure it up by transcendental meditation or medication. "Love is the only service that power cannot command and money cannot buy."[29] We can only get it from the Source: God, who *is* love (1 John 4:8) and who offers it freely.

> Have you ever found yourself short of love? I have. Some years ago there was someone I needed to love, but I did not have love for this person. I scraped around in the bottom of my heart, but there was no love there. Love is not natural for sinful people like me. I need help from outside myself, from the Source of love.
>
> When I had no love I prayed for God to give me His love as a gift through His Spirit, claiming the promise of Romans 5:5: "and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."
>
> God answered my prayer and that love is still growing and flourishing today. It is a miracle. God created love in my heart where there was no love, just as He created Planet Earth where there was only an empty void in the universe.[30]

God's transforming gift of love through the unconditional promise of his Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) has awesome results. This is the way we receive sanctification, which is growth in holy love. It is simultaneously the way we receive obedience to his law by coming in harmony with its underlying attitudes. When God bestows on us the gifts of repentance (Acts 5:31) and justification/forgiveness (Rom. 3:24), he does not then expect us to pull ourselves up to obedience by our own bootstraps. By freely giving us the love that empowers obedience, he provides us with *obedience as a gift of grace received through faith!* As John Wesley put it, "In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer."[31]

Our task is to accept the gift of love, from which come any good works that

we do. So why do we struggle so much (cf. Rom. 7)? To a large extent because our desire for control and self-reliance makes it difficult for us to accept the gift. We need to say "yes" to God as Mary did. She recognized that it was humanly impossible for her to conceive without a man, but Gabriel said: "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Mary replied: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (1:38 NRSV). If God could implant Christ in Mary's womb through his Holy Spirit (1:35), he can put the love of Christ within us through the same Spirit (cf. Gal. 2:20).

Taking possession of a gift, such as a car, house, or land, can involve effort on our part. Similarly, receiving God's empowerment requires our effort (compare Phil. 2:12—13). But it is crucial to remember that this effort comes *after* the gift is already ours to use, not before so that we can earn it.

The more we receive God's love and emulate his character by bearing the burdens of others (Gal. 6:2), the more we become like the Israelite high priest, who carried the names of his people over his heart (Ex. 28:29), and the more we follow the example of our heavenly High Priest, who is qualified to intercede for us because he has borne our burdens and carried our sorrows (Heb. 7; 9; 10; cf. Isa. 53:4—5). We also become like Moses, whose unparalleled access to God's holy Presence (Deut. 34:10) corresponded to his unmatched humility and self-sacrificing intercession for his people (Ex. 32:32; Num. 12:3). As Jesus put it, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Holiness everywhere. The Israelite sanctuary was the headquarters of holiness, but God's people were to be holy wherever they were. David recognized a kind of holiness that could flourish anywhere: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes" (Ps. 133:1—2). The oil to which David refers here was the anointing oil that consecrated the first high priest (Lev. 8:12). The point is that unity is holy like that oil, so that whoever and wherever God's people are, they can enjoy the holiness of unity.

Just before Jesus was crucified, he prayed for his disciples and all those who would later believe. In this magnificent intercession, he tied together the concepts that God sanctifies his people, gives them unity with him and each other, and restores them to full access to his glory (John 17:17—24). He petitioned his Father: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (17:23). This kind of unity among God's people is the greatest evidence to the world that the miracle of God's love has touched them through Christ. Faith in God and loyal obedience to him attracts rather than repels when it comes

packaged in deep unity, concern for the well-being of others, and the kind of peace that only Christ can give (14:27).

Because sanctification is growth in love that affects the little events of life on a day-to-day basis as we interact with the Lord, our fellow human beings, and the rest of God's creation, it is a practical rather than an abstract theological concept. Those who belong to the Lord will manifest their holy connection with him not only with eloquent exhortations and public prayers, but also by honoring their parents (Lev. 19:3), helping the poor and the alien (vv. 9—10, 33—34), dealing honestly (vv. 1 1—13, 35—36), treating physically challenged individuals with respect (vv. 14, 32), abstaining from malicious gossip (v. 16), rebuking in love rather than hating (vv. 17—18), feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting those in prison (Matt. 25:31—46).

What is the scope of the command to love? That is, who is "your neighbor/fellow," whom Leviticus 19:18 commands you to love? Although the word for "neighbor" can have a broader sense elsewhere (e.g., Ex. 11:2), in Leviticus 19:18 the neighbor is one of "your people," that is, a fellow Israelite, against whom you are not to take revenge or bear a grudge. The requirement to love a non-Israelite resident alien as yourself appears separately (19:34).

A legal expert asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Faced with a choice between denying his own universalism or bringing the wrath of his chauvinistic countrymen down on his head (cf. Luke 4:24—30), Jesus told a story about a man who was robbed and beaten, a priest, a Levite, and a compassionate "Samaritan" (Luke 10:30—35). Then Jesus posed a multiple choice question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (v. 36). Not comfortable saying "the Samaritan," the lawyer was nevertheless constrained to respond, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37).

How did Jesus get away with expanding the interpretation of "neighbor/fellow" in Leviticus 19:18 from "Israelite" to "anyone," including even a Samaritan, so convincingly that a skilled exegete was left without a logical objection? The expert's question, "Who is my neighbor?" meant: Assuming that I have healthy concern for my own well-being, whom does God expect me to love in the same way? Jesus turned the question on its head: Who loves you as he loves himself? How can you call anyone with whom you can have this kind of reciprocal relationship anything but your "neighbor"?

Jesus' extension of the law of love beyond the boundaries of the Israelites is in harmony with 19:34, where God commanded his people to treat a nonIsraelite living in their land as if he were a citizen and to "love him as yourself, for you

were aliens in Egypt." This principle of empathy reinforcing love was encapsulated in Hillel's famous summary of the entire Torah— "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it"[32]—and positively formulated in Jesus' "Golden Rule"—"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31).

The story of the "good Samaritan" reminds us that opportunities to show compassion are tests of love and therefore tests of whether or not we are living as God's holy people. In Leviticus 19:18, 34, love is not toward humanity in an abstract sense.

> Rather, the person to which this teaching refers is the one we *meet* daily at work, in the neighborhood, or on the street—who emerges from the blur of humankind and confronts us as an individual with special facial features, voice, and character. *This* person is not an It to be used and abused but is a Thou who, "just like you," is created by God and wants to live, feel secure, receive help, and find fulfillment."[33]

Do we care, even if we are busy health-care professionals who treat dozens of strangers every day with sophisticated technology? Or do we treat human beings as machines or numbers that are merely sources of income to be processed as efficiently as possible in order to fund our lifestyles? Are we willing to put ourselves out in order to benefit another person or creature, or even a tree (cf. Lev. 19:23, 25)?

So how can God's busy people, wherever they are, remember that the Lord has made them holy? One important way is by pausing to observe the Lord's holy Sabbaths (19:3, 30). Just as the sanctuary was to be the physical *place* of special interaction between the Lord and his people (Ex. 25:1—30:11), Sabbath was to serve as a temple/palace of *time*,[34] signifying that God made holy the people whom he had created and redeemed (Ex. 31:12—17, Deut. 5:15). Even when God's people could not be present at the sanctuary/temple, or even if it would be destroyed, they could enjoy the privilege of regularly remembering, reaffirming, and celebrating their holy connection with him in the dimension of time, which recognizes no boundaries on Planet Earth.

Christians are prone to think of Sabbath-keeping as joyless legalism. For example, there is a story that a devout member of a strictly conservative church woke up one Sunday to discover that he was snowed in. Pondering his options, he concluded that the only way he could get to church was to put on his ice skates and skate down the river. When he arrived and was removing his skates,

the elders asked him only one question: “Did you enjoy it?” Applying to Sunday the Sabbath text of Isaiah 58:13 (“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day,” KJV), the elders thought it was wrong to enjoy activity on the day of rest and worship, not realizing “doing thy pleasure” means “doing as you please” (NIV), that is, breaking the Sabbath by working (cf. v. 3). Verses 13—14 go on to speak of treating the Sabbath as a “delight” and finding joy in the Lord by honoring his holy day.

When God’s people keep his Sabbath in spirit and truth, they are not being legalistic. Rather, they are showing that because he has created and redeemed them, they accept his gift of sanctification, which is to become like the holy God of love (see above). True Sabbath celebrates love the way it is meant to be.

Contemporary Significance

GLOBAL ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY. We have found that Leviticus 19 calls God's people to responsible, holy living in all facets of life, whether these areas are what we would tend to call "sacred" or "secular." Nothing could be more relevant to our twenty-first-century culture of exponential integration and globalization. Communications, travel, business, and geopolitics link continents in a worldwide web. On individual and corporate levels we experience, exploit, and suffer from intertwining and cascading consequences as everything we do affects something or someone else. Rather than presenting an unbearably messy miscellany, Leviticus 19 targets life the way it really is.

P. Tillich recognized the danger of alienation between the religious and secular realms:

> Religion opens up the depth of man's spiritual life which is usually covered by the dust of our daily life and the noise of our secular work. It gives us the experience of the Holy, of something which is untouchable, awe-inspiring, an ultimate meaning, the source of ultimate courage. This is the glory of what we call religion. But beside its glory lies its shame. It makes itself the ultimate and despises the secular realm. It makes its myths and doctrines, its rites and laws into ultimates and persecutes those who do not subject themselves to it. It forgets that its own existence is a result of man's tragic estrangement from his true being. It forgets its own emergency character.
>
> This is the reason for the passionate reaction of the secular world against religion, a reaction which has tragic consequences for the secular realm itself. For the religious and the secular realm are in the same predicament. Neither of them should be in separation from the other, and both should realize that their very existence as separated is an emergency, that both of them are rooted in religion in the larger sense of the word, in the experience of ultimate concern.[35]

When religion does not sufficiently interact with "secular" needs, it becomes arrogant and irrelevant. Conversely, when the "secular" world recognizes no

accountability to a higher, unifying authority, society starts coming apart at the seams, violent conflict rears its ugly head, the fragile environment of Planet Earth is rapidly compromised, and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board testifies to Congress regarding declining investor confidence that is bringing down the stock market: "An infectious greed seemed to grip much of our business community."[36] In response to the modern global situation, H. Küng strongly argues "that ethics, which in modern times has increasingly been regarded as a private matter, must again become a public concern of prime importance in postmodernity—for human well-being and for the survival of humankind."[37]

> It should not be forgotten that economic thought and action, too, are not value-free or value-neutral…. Just as the social and ecological responsibility of business cannot simply be foisted on to politicians, so moral and ethical responsibility cannot simply be foisted on to religion…. No, ethical action should not be just a private addition to marketing plans, sales strategies, ecological bookkeeping and social balance-sheets, but should form the natural framework for human social action.[38]

To budge a grudge. The nature of the love in view in Leviticus 19:18 is clarified by its antithesis: taking revenge or bearing a grudge. This is not romantic or easy love, but tough love that faces a challenge and is linked to action. In an imperfect world and society, people inevitably have differences among themselves, but they must get along in spite of those differences. Everyone is tempted to unlove, but what God forbids is to cherish and nurse a grievance, which can become a seething volcano that erupts into a Vesuvian explosion of violence.

Do we need any modern illustrations? Daily newscasts reek with them. An enraged father beats another dad to death at their children's hockey match. A mother drowns her five children. A bomb explodes on Ben Yehuda Street in downtown Jerusalem. From New York to India, from Serbia to Afghanistan, from Northern Ireland to North Korea, grudges ancient or young are a major roadblock to peace.

So how do we wage war against war, whether between individuals or groups? Sigmund Freud echoed Leviticus 19:18 when he wrote:

> Anything that encourages the growth of emotional ties between men must operate against war. These ties may be of two kinds. In the first place they may be relations resembling those towards a loved object, though

> without having a sexual aim. There is no need for psychoanalysis to be ashamed to speak of love in this connection, for religion itself uses the same words: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This, however, is more easily said than done. The second kind of emotional tie is by means of identification. Whatever leads men to share important interests produces this community of feeling, these identifications. And the structure of human society is to a large extent based on them.[39]

If anything can destroy prejudice that breeds conflict, selfless compassion can. When George Wallace, the racist governor of Alabama, was ailing toward the end of his life after a gunshot wound ended his presidential aspirations, a man who happened to be black took care of him with such tenderness that Wallace renounced his racism.

The idea that you are to love your fellow human beings as you love yourself assumes, of course, that you love yourself—that is, that you have a basic desire for self-preservation in a state of well-being. Modern psychologists point out that sociopathic individuals have difficulty loving others because they do not love themselves.

Vengeance is an urgent human imperative. If you don't make sure justice happens, who will? If not now, when? But a person who allows God to lift the burden of responsibility for taking vengeance (Deut. 32:35; Prov. 20:22; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30) does not waive his or her right to justice. Rather, this is how to claim justice in the only way that it can adequately be carried out in an ultimate sense.[40]

> Revenge is irreverent. When we strike back we are saying, "I know vengeance is yours, God, but I just didn't think you'd punish enough. I thought I'd better take this situation into my own hands. You have a tendency to be a little soft."[41]

By contrast, "to forgive someone is to display reverence. Forgiveness is not saying the one who hurt you was right. Forgiveness is stating that God is fair and he will do what is right."[42]

Sexual harassment. When a slave woman pledged to a man has sex with someone else, the fact that only her status of servitude prevents her from being executed (Lev. 19:20) indicates that she is not a victim of rape. Execution would be out of the question even for a free rape victim (Deut. 22:25—26). The law in Leviticus 19:20—22 protects a female of inferior legal status by recognizing that her ability to withhold consent is seriously compromised. She suffers no

punishment, whether she offers consent or gives in to sexual harassment. Vulnerable as she is, her consent is not even an issue.

Biblical narratives show that social inequality could be a major factor in a situation involving illicit sex or its potential. The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife illustrates how vulnerable a slave could be to sexual harassment (Gen. 39).[43] Although Bathsheba was free, the drastic inequality between her and her absolute monarch, which was even greater than the difference between a U.S. President and a White House intern, weakened the relevance of her consent (2 Sam. 11).

Although our society does not have slavery, subordinates can still be vulnerable to sexual advances. A boss can pressure an employee, a teacher can become too friendly with a student, or an adult can take advantage of a child or adolescent. This is unfair, but thanks to enhanced social awareness, protection against abuse of power through unwanted sexual advances has increased. Subordinates should be treated with respect.

Sex slavery. It is distressing that there was a need for God to prohibit parents from making their daughters become prostitutes (19:29). How could anyone imagine doing such a thing? But desperate poverty can be hard on decency, as illustrated in *My Fair Lady.* Watching an exchange between Prof. Henry Higgins and Alfred P. Doolittle concerning a potential financial arrangement with regard to the latter's daughter, Eliza, Colonel Pickering incredulously queries: "Have you no morals, man?"

Doolittle replies: "Naw, naw, can't afford 'em, Governor."

Doolittle's response is funny in the context of entertainment, but in Asia the same attitude in real life is breeding tragedy.

> According to the International Labor Organization, at least 1 million children are working as prostitutes in Asia. Sexual slavery feeds on destitution, and Asia, home to two-thirds of the world's extreme poor, offers plenty The ILO estimates that the flesh trade has mush-roomed into a major regional industry, accounting for 2% to 14% of GDP in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.[44]

Moral wickedness is not the only evil spreading around. With HIV on the rise, compelling one's child to become a sex slave can be a death sentence.

Surely it is only men who sell their daughters! Wrong. After journalists investigating a brothel in Thailand purchased Tip and Lek, two fourteen-year-old Burmese girls, in order to set them free, they learned that "the mothers of both girls were in on the deal from the start and had received regular payments from

the brothel."[45]

So what can we do? Not much as individuals, but as a group we can raise awareness, work through international organizations, support the kinds of economic aid to developing countries that benefit the lower strata of society, and push for some kind of effective restraint on people from our developed countries who foster the sex trade by flying into places like Bangkok to exploit children.

Modern occult. The Lord's motivation in keeping the Israelites from occult practices (19:26, 31, 20:27) was not to withhold beneficial knowledge or power from them. When King Saul desperately resorted to a spiritualist séance to find out what the future held (1 Sam. 28), he gained only paralyzing dread because he had turned from the Lord, who holds the future (cf. 1 Chron. 10:13—14). The occult still lures people who want success without the moral strings attached to following the Lord's guidance. *Reader's Digest* reports a trend to TV shows that feature clairvoyants, of which there were five in the fall of 2002.

> "The paranormal is very seductive. It explains those things that science can't," says Bob Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Center for the Study of Popular Television. In fact, 60% of us believe that some people possess psychic powers, and we blow an estimated $1.4 billion a year on psychic hotline calls.[46]

It is logical for those who are "trying to locate the Big Deal of the Day apart from any concern for moral guidance"[47] to seek information from any source they think might help them, including psychic hotlines and horoscopes. "It only makes sense to ask God for guidance in the context of a life committed to 'seeking first the kingdom.'"[48]

Isaiah 8:21—22 describes the results of turning to occult sources of guidance:

> Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

Occult's reign of terror was well known outside Israel. Will Durant writes of ancient Greek culture:

> Between these upper and nether poles of Greek religion, the Olympian and the subterranean, surged an ocean of magic, superstition, and sorcery;

> behind and below the geniuses whom we shall celebrate were masses of people poor and simple, to whom religion was a mesh of fears rather than a ladder of hope.[49]

In the Bible there is no such thing as good occult. To the contrary, within the context of ancient Israel, Leviticus 20:27 condemned mediums and spiritists to death, and Deuteronomy 18:10—12 forbade a wide range of occult practices:

> Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.

The New Testament confirms the ongoing and universal applicability of separation between occult and worship of the true God. When practitioners of occult in Ephesus accepted the gospel of Christ, they publicly burned their valuable manuals (Acts 19:19). The Ephesians understood what Paul meant when he wrote to them in Ephesians 6:10—12:

> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Here is the reason why God forbade any contact with occult: to protect his people from deception and destruction (cf. Rev. 16:13—16). No occult power can prevail against God's people as long as they trust in him and his infallible "missile defense shield" (Num. 23:23, Rom. 8:38—39). So there is no reason for them to concern themselves with occult.

If only the Bible were not so relevant today! Increasingly we smell the foul breath of occult in what we thought was our "civilized" culture. According to Leviticus 19:31, occult is spiritual defilement, and like all defilement, it has a tendency to spread. All sorts of divination (astrology, palm-reading, tarot cards, etc.), magic (Ouija boards), and witchcraft have become popular and lucrative in modern culture. Through the entertainment industry (including movies, television, and video games for children), as well as the publishing and music

industries, occult now enjoys a high profile, high-tech, glossy image, portraying itself as exciting and "user-friendly." But who is using whom?

In the Bible, Christians read about Jesus and his disciples casting out demons, but they fail to see the inconsistency of inviting demons into their homes! Things that promote the kingdom of darkness are not harmless, and the forms of occult that they market are not new even if they are packaged for the twenty-first century. Various revolting aspects of modern witchcraft, including ritual murder and fornication, strikingly parallel pagan practices of the ancient world.

Rock music performers, from the "Black Sabbath" and "KISS" groups to Marilyn Manson, have been hell-bent on parading their allegiance to the powers of darkness. Manson is a (male) minister of the church of Satan who attempts to look like his diabolical master and succeeds quite well at it. Do we worry that these kinds of nauseatingly degraded individuals are the heroes of many of our young people? Are we surprised that Manson was a favorite of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the teenage boys who perpetrated the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado?[50]

Are we seeing the impact of moral terrorism on our culture when many kids prefer ugliness and evil to beauty and good? The prophet Isaiah saw this kind of twisted worldview as a sign of moral bankruptcy: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20).

What can we do?

- Keep the miasma of occult influences out of our homes and away from our children.
- Warn as many people as possible about the danger.
- Let our elementary school teachers, principals, and boards know that we regard materials that promote occult as media of religious cult proselytization rather than entertainment. If educators insist that the Bible has no place in public education, concerned parents have every reason to insist that books promoting other religious viewpoints also be banned from the classroom.
- Boycott entertainment providers, game producers, and stores that market occult to children, and let them know what we are doing and why, thereby appealing to their financial "consciences." Since we are up against massive industries, only well-organized, vigorous action by large numbers of people will make a dent.

Am I arguing against personal freedom? On the contrary. We cannot take

away a person's decision to imbibe occult and convert to this sinister religion. But we have the right to demand that we be free to raise our children without them being subjected to invasive proselytization by a cult that is opposed to everything we hold dear before they reach an age at which they are capable of making mature and informed choices.

1. Transl. T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once…: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven, Conn: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), 128.

2. For the idea of divine perception in the Bible, cf. 1 Kings 8:39, Ps. 1:6, 44:20—21, 94:11.

3. Mules were not likely included in the scope of this verse because the Pentateuch does not include horses among livestock bred by Israelites (S. Rattray, cited by Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1658).

4. See ibid., 1657—65.

5. Cf. Laws of Eshnunna, law 26; Laws of Hammurabi, law 130. For translations, see *ANET,* 162, 171; M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 63, 106.

6. Levine, *Leviticus,* 130.

7. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1671. For detailed discussion of the four main interpretations (indemnity, punishment, inquest, distinction) of *biqqoret,* which only appears here, see 1668—71.

8. Ibid., 1672, 1674—75, J. Milgrom, "The Betrothed Slave-girl, Lev 19:20—22," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 43—50.

9. Wenham, *Leviticus,* 271.

10. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience,* 16—25, 84—117, idem, *Leviticus 1—16,* 345—56, 365—73.

11. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1679.

12. Compare Laws of Hammurabi, law 60, where the owner of a Babylonian orchard and the gardener who develops it begin to utilize the fruit in the fifth year. For translations, see *ANET,* 169; Roth, *Law Collections,* 93.

13. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1679, 1684.

14. J. Grintz, "Do Not Eat on the Blood," *ASTI* 8 (1972): 78—105, cf. Ramban on Lev. 19:26.

15. See H. Hoffner, "Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew ʲôb," *JBL* 86 (1967): 401.

16. Cf. W. M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical*

Theology of Holiness (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1998), 17.

17. Schlessinger and Vogel, *The Ten Commandments,* xxii.

18. J. Muilenberg, "Holiness," ÍDB, 2:616.

19. Cf. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* transl. J. W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958).

20. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ,* 23, 25; W. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," NÍB, 1:1131.

21. P. Schaff, ed., *The Micene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* series 2, 11:853.

22. See J. Bergman, A. O. Haldar, and Gerhard Wallis, *TDOT,* 1:103.

23. Author unknown, in Water, *The New Encyclopedia,* 632.

24. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* transl. L. Sherley-Price, 1993 ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952), 97.

25. Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 34.

26. Gane, *Altar Call,* 88.

27. In Water, *The New Encyclopedia,* 633.

28. P. Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 17—18.

29. Author unknown, in Water. *The New Encyclopedia,* 632.

30. Gane, *Altar Call,* 137—38.

31. J. Wesley, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Chicago: Christian Witness, 1921), 99.

32. *b. Sabb.* 31a, transl. H. Freedman, *Shabbath,* ed. I. Epstein, *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1972).

33. F. Holmgren, "The Way of Torah: Escape from Egypt (Leviticus 19:1—37)," in F. C. Holmgren and H. E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 127.

34. Cf. A. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), 8—24.

35. P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture,* ed. R. C. Kimball (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), 9.

36. Alan Greenspan, quoted in *Time* (July 29, 2002), 14.

37. Küng, *Global Responsibility,* 32—33.

38. Ibid., 33; see also 30.

39. S. Freud, *Collected Papers,* ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 5:284.

40. Cf. K. Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love: 1QS X, 17—20

and Rom 12:19—21," *HTR* 55 (1962): 343—55.

41. M. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 92.

42. Ibid., 95.

43. For comparison between the Joseph story and the law of the betrothed slave woman in Lev. 19, see C. Carmichael, "A Strange Sequence of Rules: Leviticus 19.20—26," in Sawyer, *Reading Leviticus,* 187—90.

44. Alex Perry and Mae Sai, "How I Bought Two Slaves, to Free Them," *Time* (March 11, 2002), 7. Compare the words of Akhtar Muhammad, an Afghan father who sold two of his sons for bags of wheat: "I miss my sons, but there was nothing to eat" ("Verbatim" section, *Time* [March 18, 2002], 29).

45. Perry and Sai, "How I Bought Two Slaves," 7.

46. "Only in America" column, *Reader's Digest* (September 2002): 19.

47. J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 146.

48. Ibid.

49. W. Durant, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939/1966), 2:195.

50. A. Cohen, "A Curse of Cliques," *Time* (May 3, 1999), 45.

Leviticus 20

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or
any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must
be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. 3I will
set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for
by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and
profaned my holy name. 4If the people of the community close their
eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail
to put him to death, 5I will set my face against that man and his family
and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in
prostituting themselves to Molech.

6‘I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and
spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off
from his people.

7"'Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your
God. 8Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes
you holy.

9“'If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He
has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own
head.

10“'If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife— with the
wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put
to death.

11“'If a man sleeps with his father’s wife, he has dishonored his
father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood
will be on their own heads.

12“'If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be
put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be
on their own heads.

13 “'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them
have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood
will be on their own heads.
14 “'If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked.
Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will
be among you.
15 “'If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to
death, and you must kill the animal.
16 “'If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it,
kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their
blood will be on their own heads.
17 “'If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his
mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be
cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and
will be held responsible.
18 “'If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has
sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and
she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their
people.
19 “'Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother
or your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you
would be held responsible.
20 “'If a man sleeps with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They
will be held responsible; they will die childless.
21 “'If a man marries his brother’s wife, it is an act of impurity; he has
dishonored his brother. They will be childless.
22 “'Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land
where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 You must
not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out
before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. 24 But I
said to you, “You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an
inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your
God, who has set you apart from the nations.
25 You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean
animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves
by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those
which I have set apart as unclean for you. 26 You are to be holy to me

because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

27“'A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.'"

Original Meaning

HOLY LIVING IS not optional for those who wish to live as God's people. So Leviticus 20 lays out terminal penalties for serious moral offenses, paralleling chapter 18 by prohibiting sexual practices and Molech worship. While this repetition contributes to the structure of Leviticus (see the introduction), chapter 20 presents a number of new features. (1) Whereas chapter 18 follows its laws with the divine penalties of being vomited out of the land and being "cut off," which apply in general to all the aforementioned moral evils (18:28—29), chapter 20 supplies each law with a specific terminal penalty in addition to the overall threat of expulsion from the land (20:22).

(2) Chapter 20 begins its group of sexual laws (vv. 10—21) with the prohibition of adultery (v. 10) and sprinkles laws against homosexual activity (v. 13), bestiality (vv. 15— 16), and intercourse during a woman's genital flow (v. 18) among incest laws, chapter 18 groups incest laws at the beginning (18:6—18).

(3) Chapter 20 expands the injunction against Molech worship, which was introduced in 18:21, and emphasizes it by placing it at the beginning (20:2—5).

(4) Verse 6 prohibits turning to occult sources of information (cf. 19:31), and 20:27 mandates capital punishment for occult mediums. "Thus this chapter clearly distinguishes between a 'user' and a 'pusher.'"[1]

(5) Verse 9 puts serious teeth into the earlier command to respect parents (19:3, cf. Ex. 20:12) by mandating the death penalty for dishonoring/cursing (Piel of *qll)* one's father or mother. Placement of this law here immediately preceding a list of penalties for sexual violations (Lev. 20:10—21) reflects the concept "that dishonoring parents—that is, the breakdown of obligations to one's father or mother—is able to lead to the breakdown of relationships with the other members of the familial chain, including the sexual taboos."[2]

Human sacrifice by passing one's child through/in fire was part of Syro-Palestinian worship of the underworld god Molech.[3] This was a particularly heinous form of idolatry because it showed cruel disrespect for precious life entrusted to parents. Whereas 18:21 simply outlaws giving any of your children (lit., "seed") to Molech and thus profaning God's name, 20:2—5 adds several

elements. (1) The law also applies to resident aliens (v. 2).

(2) The people living in the land are to stone a violator to death (v. 2), implicitly purging the holy land.

(3) A Molech worshiper nominally connected with God, whether an Israelite or a resident alien in God's holy land, not only profanes his holy name (v. 3; cf. 18:21); he also defiles his sanctuary (20:3). God's name, representing his authority and reputation, goes with his sanctuary (see ch. 16). This explains why someone who wantonly defiles the sanctuary, where the Lord's name resides (cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23—24; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2), will have his name blotted out (cf. 29:20) by being "cut off" (Lev. 20:3).

Divinely administered "cutting off" goes beyond capital punishment. When someone deserves more than one death penalty, human justice is stymied. It makes no difference whether an individual murders one or six million; the malefactor has but one life to give for his crime(s). But God can do plenty more: He can make the punishment fit the crime by seeing to it that the sinner's line of descendants, from which he has contributed to another deity, becomes extinct so that he is not even history. It is terrifying to face the prospect of being forgotten and unmissed.[4] God can also deny the offender a positive afterlife. Either way, he is "cut off from his people."[5]

(4) Anyone who ignores the abhorrent practice of Molech worship and fails to act decisively by carrying out the death penalty is condemned to the same divine punishment of being "cut off," along with his family (vv. 4—5).

(5) In 18:21, giving "seed" to Molech parallels the sexual offense of giving "seed" to another man's wife (v. 20), but in 20:5 the sexual analogy is explicit: Molech worship is spiritual prostitution/promiscuity, an illicit union with another party in violation of an intimate relationship established and enforced by the covenant. As in Ezekiel 16:32—34, a spiritual prostitute gives to other gods but receives nothing in return. So not only is it disloyal to God; it is stupid because it fails to achieve the purpose for which it is intended.

In 20:25—26 the closing exhortation recapitulates 11:43—47, where the Israelites are to be holy as God is holy by abstaining from defilement through impure animals. These two passages are bound together by a chiastic relationship between being holy and making distinctions, within which there is also a chiasm between "unclean" and "clean":

Be holy because God is holy (11:44—45)
Distinguish between the *unclean* and the *clean* (11:47)
Distinguish between the *clean* and the *unclean* (20:25)
Be holy because God is holy (20:26)

Because 20:27, condemning practitioners of occult, comes after the concluding exhortation in vv. 22—26 rather than with verse 6, which also deals with occult, some scholars regard verse 27 as an appendix to the chapter. They explain it variously as creating a framing structure for chapter 20 (cf. vv. 7, 26), serving as a transition to chapter 21, or tacked on after the rest of the legislation in chapter 20 had been completed.[6] In support of the framing structure idea, we can expand the frame as follows:

Penalty of stoning (for Molech worship; v. 2)
Prohibition of occult (v. 6)
Be holy because God is holy (v. 7)
"Keep my decrees" (v. 8)
"Keep all my decrees" (v. 22)
Be holy because God is holy (v. 26) Prohibition of occult (v. 27)
Penalty of stoning (for mediums; v. 27)

The choice of laws against occult to occupy strategic positions in this frame could be due to a correspondence between the penalty of stoning in verse 27 and the same punishment at the beginning of the chapter in verse 2, a need for transition to chapter 21, and/or an emphasis that occult is the antithesis of holiness.

Bridging Contexts

SHAME. IN MODERN WESTERN CULTURE, it has become politically incorrect to attach shame to behaviors that were previously viewed as immoral. Anything that threatens self-esteem is anathema, except stigmatization of political incorrectness, which is shameful beyond measure. The result is a society that is increasingly amoral. What else would we expect?

Leviticus 20 shows complete disregard for political correctness, employing a rich vocabulary to express the shamefulness of sexual violations: "perversion" *(tebel;* v. 12), "abomination" *(to'ebah;* v. 13 NRSV), "depravity" *(zimmah;* v. 14), "disgrace" *(hesed;* v. 17), and "act of (repulsive, metaphorical menstrual) impurity" *(niddah;* v.21). These terms carry roughly the same force and appear to be used for cumulative rhetorical effect and for variety, as in the language of modern sports commentators; for example, team A trashed team B, team C walloped team D, team E clobbered team F, and so on. This is more interesting than using the same word ad nauseum.

If shame lowers people's self-esteem, it is for a redemptive purpose: to wake them up to their true danger so that they can seek divine restoration and be saved. This is part of "tough love" that appears intolerant but actually combats the destructive status quo of codependency that supports harmful behavior by putting up with it. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul powerfully illustrates the salvific purpose of church discipline that involves shaming:

> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? … hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:1—5)
>
> … But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. (5:11)

Does Paul shock us? Compare the fate of a man who had his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1) with biblical law: "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death …" (Lev. 20:11). Since the church is not a theocracy, it cannot and should not attempt to carry out capital punishment. However, Paul held that just as a rebellious Israelite subject to terminal punishment under biblical law was thereby excluded from the community of God's covenant people, so the church must expel from its fellowship one who will not bow to the sovereign will of its "new covenant" Lord. Anything less than this damages the cause of God on earth and lulls sinners into the fatal security of thinking they have peace with God when there is no such peace, just as false prophets and apostate priests treated moral metastasis with bandaids (Jer. 6:14, 8:11) and whitewash (Ezek. 13:10).

> God does bring discipline, judgment, and wrath on those who continue in sin and rebellion. Even His discipline, however, always is based on love. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6).[7]

Supporting Paul's stand to the effect that God's standard of holiness has not slipped is the New Testament story of Ananias and Sapphira, whose deliberate sacrilege against God resulted in sudden death, obviously by divine agency (Acts 5:1—11). Whether or not the Lord chooses to exercise his retributive justice as dramatically today, that is what he thinks of such sin committed by Christians.

Penalties for sexual offenses. The bulk of the legislation in chapter 20 has to do with sexual wrongs incurring terminal punishment (vv. 10—21), whether it is capital punishment administered by the Israelite judicial system (vv. 10—16) or the related punishments of being "cut off" (vv. 17—18), bearing one's own culpability,[8] or dying childless (vv. 20—21). Some penalties are especially severe, implying that they punish particularly grave sins. For example, if a man married both a woman and her mother, all three of them were to be burned with fire (v. 14).

In chapter 20 adultery heads the list of sexual offenses (v. 10). In Israel, the act of adultery was viewed in absolute terms and was punishable by death to both parties (see also Deut. 22:22). At least in the case of a betrothed woman, death for adultery was by stoning (v. 24; cf. John 8:3—7). Circumstances could determine whether adultery had occurred (Deut. 22:23—27, regarding a betrothed women); if it had, the death sentence could not be mitigated. Even the husband of an adulterous woman did not have the right to lighten her penalty or

that of her paramour because their violation was a grave sin against God, not merely a wrong committed against the aggrieved man.[9]

Mesopotamian law, by contrast, had a more subjective approach to adultery. Adultery in which both parties premeditated was handled essentially the same as in the Bible, punishable by death. However, distinctions between other types of adultery depended on degrees of intention, with circumstances functioning as mitigating or aggravating factors in the fixing of penalties. An unpremeditating woman was under family law, subject to the jurisdiction of her husband, and her paramour was to suffer the same penalty that the husband fixed for her.[10]

Penalties for Adultery in Ancient Mesopotamian Law Codes

Key to reference abbreviations: LE = Laws of Eshnunna, LH = Laws of Hammurabi, LUN = Laws of Ur Nammu, MAL = Middle Assyrian Laws[11]

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Offender(s)	Circumstances	Penalty	Reference
man & married woman	premeditated and the man knows the woman is married	death	MAL 13
married woman		death	LUN 4; LE 28; LH 133b
man & married woman	in the act	death/according to husband	MAL 15
married woman	woman seduces	according to husband	MAL 16
man & married woman		according to husband	LH 129; MAL 14, 23a
married woman	woman consents to rape	according to husband	MAL 23c

Automatic defilement of the sanctuary. Leviticus 20:3 expresses God's reaction to anyone who gives his child to Molech: "And I myself will set my face against that man and cut him off from among his people, because he dedicated his offspring to Molek, *thus defiling my sanctuary* and desecrating my

holy name" (emphasis supplied).[12] Here a sin defiles the sanctuary from a distance at the time when it is committed.

Similarly, Numbers 19:13 states the consequences of disobeying the Lord's requirement to be purified from corpse contamination: "Whoever touches a corpse, the body of a person who has died, and does not cleanse himself, *defiles the LORD'S Tabernacle,* that person shall be cut off from Israel" (NJPS, cf. 19:20, emphasis supplied). Here pollution of the sanctuary is a delayed reaction: It does not occur *unless/until* a corpse contaminated person commits the serious moral fault of wanton neglect to undergo purification.[13] But there is no delayed reaction in Leviticus 20:3, because Molech worship is a sin of commission rather than omission.

In the cases just described, defilement of the sanctuary occurs simply through violation of God's ritual commandments, either by neglect of the regulation that protects the holy sphere from corpse contamination (Num. 19:13, 20) or by participation in a cruel, alternate ritual worship system that honors another deity (Lev. 20:3). The fact that the Pentateuch does not specify the mode of transportation by which such evils invade the sanctuary (gas, miasma, radiation, electricity, laser, etc.?) need not trouble us because the world of ritual is not limited by constraints that operate in our mundane material world. Because the contamination is *conceptual* in nature, an evil can cause a change of state at a distance through open space.

> This stretches our imagination, even in our modern technological age. Although we have telephones, radios, television, and now the Internet, human physical contamination cannot be instantly transmitted in this way. Your computer may contract a devastating digital "virus" spawned halfway around the world, but your body cannot even catch a minor cold when you talk to a sick person on the telephone.
>
> If we entertain the possibility that the real point of ritual is not physical movement but changes in relationships between parties and other entities belonging to the mundane and supramundane realms, we can find analogies for instantaneous transfers. For example, when members of President Reagan's government engaged in illegal Iran-Contra activities, they simultaneously created a problem for Reagan's reputation. Similarly, a Molek worshiper in Israel automatically, by his very actions, cast the divine Ruler of his land into disrepute.[14]

Generalizing from the special cases in Leviticus 20:3 and Numbers 19:13, 20, Milgrom maintains that other kinds of evil, including all sins and ritual

impurities that are expiable by purification offerings, always pollute the sanctuary when they occur. Then he argues that the more serious the sin, the deeper the aerial miasma of evil penetrates the sanctuary, where its defilement must be subsequently remedied by purification offering blood applied to the same locations, that is, the outer altar, outer sanctum, or inner sanctum.[15]

It is true that moral faults defile the sanctuary,[16] reflecting the fact that they affect God's reputation for holiness (see comments on Lev. 16). However, the automatic/aerial dynamic of defilement is attested only for certain grave ritual wrongs, penalties for which are terminal: being "cut off (Lev. 20:3, Num. 19:13, 20) or death (Lev. 15:31).[17] Following condemnation to such punishment, the sinner is ineligible to receive the benefit of sacrificial expiation prerequisite to forgiveness, even though his or her rebellious sin (*pesaq* see comments on Lev. 16) affects the sanctuary and camp so that it must be removed by the special purification offerings and Azazel's goat ritual on the Day of Atonement (16:16, 21).

> God was pleased when a repentant person brought his/her sin to Him so that He could forgive and cleanse that individual through sacrifice. But when a person "threw" a sin at God so that its defilement invaded His sanctuary in an illegitimate way, God was not pleased. The difference in the attitude of God is understandable. Do you mind if your child brings some dirt into the house on the way to the bath? But what if he/she flings dirt through the window?[18]

Contemporary Significance

CHILD SACRIFICE. Human sacrifice, including child sacrifice, was well known in the ancient world.[19] There was powerful logic to it: An offering of supreme cost was thought to have the greatest potential for motivating divine beings to act favorably (see 2 Kings 3:27, cf. Judg. 11).

Partly analogous to human sacrifice is the function of a “peace child” in the Sawi culture of Irian Jaya. To end hostilities, a father entrusts his precious son to an enemy father to raise as his own.[20] Unlike child sacrifice to a deity, although a “peace child” is given up, he suffers no harm.

The Lord used the dynamic leading up to human sacrifice to test Abraham without the death of Isaac (Gen. 22), and his own slain Son serves as his ultimate “Peace Child” to us (John 3:16). However, despite all the compelling “logic,” the Lord did not require his people to emulate his sacrifice of his Son by sacrificing their children (Mic. 6:7b-8). In fact, he prohibited child sacrifice (Deut. 18:10).

We shudder at those horrible ancient days when children were sacrificed at temples of doom. But is the situation really much better for kids these days, when pictures of thousands of missing children are posted on milk cartons, public bulletin boards, the Internet, and television? Many are found, dead or alive, molested or not, but hundreds each year are never recovered. It appears that some are exploited for pornography, pedophilia, and/or prostitution, then disposed of. What happens to others—occult sacrifices? Unlike Molech worship, these are crimes against families, with parents as secondary victims rather than perpetrators. However, in Asia many poor parents are selling their children into sex slavery, thereby condemning them to moral degradation and in many cases death by HIV (see Contemporary Significance section of Lev. 19). This is not far from Molech worship: sacrifice of one’s child for personal gain.

Sacrifice for personal gain? This sounds more familiar. What about passively sacrificing children on the altar of greed by neglecting them in order to climb the ladder of the god we call “Success"? Are we giving them the physical, mental, social, and spiritual care they need and deserve as gifts of God entrusted to us? Or do we let them fend for themselves year after year with junk food, TV, and whatever friends they can find to keep them company?

Cursing parents. Leviticus 20:9 addresses dishonoring (Piel of *qll)* parents, which usually refers to cursing. To a modern reader, this verse is horrifying. Just for saying "Curse (or d) you, Dad/Mom," a person would be put to death! Notice, however, that the law is formulated for adults *('is 'ts*, lit., "a man, a man," i.e., any man, but generic for male or female), who would be old enough to know the implications of what they say. Furthermore, in ancient times a curse was a weapon believed to have serious and inescapable results (cf. Num. 22—24). To curse someone was not merely a malevolent wish, it was regarded as a way to carry it out.

The prohibition of dishonoring/cursing parents parallels Exodus 22:28: "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people." A person who does not respect his or her parents will have difficulty recognizing accountability to human and divine authority. Anyone who doubts this should read a newspaper or watch the news on TV. We are bombarded with gruesome stories of dysfunctional parent-child relationships spilling out to harm society.

Along with Leviticus 20, Deuteronomy 21:18—21 sought to nip damage in the bud:

> If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Although the modern church community is not the kind of theocracy that can or should carry out death penalties today, the principle of accountability for respect to parents remains applicable.

There is another side to the relationship between parents and their children. The high and sacred place occupied by parents in the lives of their children is an awesome responsibility. If a parent abuses that trust by leading or thrusting a child into lifetime social dysfunction, Jesus said it much more forcefully than I would dare: "It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt. 18:6; see also Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).

1. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1765.

2. Ibid., 1744.

3. Cf. 1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33, 2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6, 23:10, 13, 2 Chron. 33:6, Jer. 32:35. Regarding this hideous practice, see J. Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (UCOP 41, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).

4. Cf. P. Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1997), 9.

5. Regarding the penalty of being "cut off," see comments on 7:20—21.

6. See, e.g., D. Hoffmann, *Das Buch Leviticus* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1905—1906), 2:80; D. Daube, "Codes and Codas in the Pentateuch," *JR* 53 (1941): 242—61.

7. Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God*, 17.

8. Probably resulting in death or being "cut off" (v. 19; cf. v. 17); see Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," 13.

9. M. Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in M. Haran, ed., *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 12—13; A. Phillips, "Another Look at Adultery," *JSOT* 20 (1981): 3—25.

10. Cf. Greenberg, "Some Postulates," 12; J. J. Finkelstein, "Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws," *JAOS* 86 (1966): 355—72.

11. For translations, see *ANET*, 159—88, M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 13—35, 57—142, 153—94.

12. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, except that I have added "to Molek," which was somehow left out.

13. J. Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX)," *VT* 31 (1981): 71; Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 124.

14. Gane, *Cult and Character*, ch. 7.

15. J. Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *RB* 83 (1976): 392—94; idem, *Leviticus 1—16*, 256—58; cf. idem, "Two Kinds of hartad," *VT*26 (1976): 336. Interestingly, long ago A. F. Ballenger generalized from the same passages (Lev. 20, Num. 19) to the same conclusion that expiable sins defile the sanctuary when they are committed *(Cast Out for the Cross of Christ* [Riverside, Calif.: A. F. Ballenger, 1911?], 58—62).

16. Against Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 171, 176, 191—92.

17. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus*, 105 n. 1. On the seriousness of such cases, see Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,"161—63.

18. Gane, *Altar Call*, 212.

19. E.g., A. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (ASORDS 1, Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975). W. Durant, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939/1966), 2:193—94.

20. D. Richardson, “Redemptive Analogy,” in R. D. Winter and S. C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* 3d ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 398.

Leviticus 21

THE LORD SAID to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: ‘A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, 2except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, 3or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband—for her he may make himself unclean. 4He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself.

5“'Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. 6They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the LORD by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy.

7“'They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God. 8Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God. Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy—I who make you holy.

9“'If a priest’s daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire.

10“'The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. 11He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, 12nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD.

13“'The woman he marries must be a virgin. 14He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, 15so he will not defile his offspring

among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy."

16The LORD said to Moses, 17"Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. 18No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; 19no man with a crippled foot or hand, 20or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. 21No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. 22He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; 23yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.'"

24So Moses told this to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.

Original Meaning

AFTER MOSES TEACHES all Israelites how to live holy lives (Lev. 17—20), chapter 21 focuses on the lifestyle of priests. Verses 1—9 concern priests in general, verses 10—15 have to do with the high priest, and verses 16—23 return to priests in general. Moses conveys these laws to Aaron and his sons, but he also makes them known to the rest of the Israelites (v. 24) because they are to respect the holiness of the priests (v. 8).

Priests in general must guard their holiness in several ways. (1) They must not incur corpse contamination, except to bury close relatives (21:1—4). Treatment of dead bodies as impure contrasts with the Egyptian belief that the realm of the dead was divine, holy, and pure.[1]

(2) Priests may not practice the pagan mourning customs of making themselves bald or shaving the edges of their beards. Nor may they put incisions in their flesh (21:5, see comments on 19:27—28) as the Canaanite god El is said to have done when Baal died (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).[2]

(3) A priest's holiness prevents him from marrying three kinds of women: a promiscuous woman (including a prostitute), a defiled woman, or a divorced woman (21:7). Some have interpreted the term *halalah* ("defiled [woman]") as combining in a hendiadys ("one through two") with *zonah* ("promiscuous [woman]") to describe the same person, that is, "defiled by prostitution" (NIV). However, 21:14 reverses the order—"defiled [woman]" followed by "promiscuous [woman]"—showing that they are separate individuals.[3] Because the kinds of women in 21:7 appear to be listed in descending order of undesirability, some have argued that the "defiled [woman]" is a rape victim.[4] Although such a person was innocent (Deut. 22:25—29), perhaps it was not consistent with the holiness of a priest for him to marry someone who had been violated like this.

Leviticus 21:8 touches on the responsibility of all Israelites toward a priest: They must treat him as holy because he offers "the food" (i.e., sacrifices) of their holy God (cf. 21:6), who makes them holy. For the people to maintain the benefit of their relationship with God, they must have priests who live holy lives (cf. 1 Sam. 2—4, Eli's evil sons).

A priest's family members participate in his holiness. This is true both because they are related to him and because he shares with them the holy (but not most holy) portions of sacrificial food (cf. Lev. 22:12—13). For a priest's daughter the good news is that she enjoys an elevated status of holiness. But this privilege carries moral responsibility. The bad news is that if she profanes/desecrates herself by promiscuity (so-called "harlotry," but not limited to prostitution), she not only shames her father (cf. Deut. 22:20—21);[5] she also profanes his priestly holiness. Since this is a particularly grave evil, which affects all Israelites by morally sullying the priesthood, the penalty is harsh even if she is not betrothed or married: She is to be burned (Lev. 21:9; cf. Gen. 38:24; Lev. 20:14).

The high priest is especially consecrated for uniquely intimate access to God on behalf of all Israelites. Correspondingly, he must live by the strictest rules of all (21:10—15). In addition to the regulations for all priests, he may not dishevel his hair or tear his garments (21:10; violated in Mark 14:63), including his nonpriestly clothes, even to mourn for the dead.[6] The high priest is forbidden to incur corpse contamination at all, even for his own father or mother or by merely entering a place where there is a dead body (Lev. 21:11; cf. Num. 19:14).[7]

In Leviticus 21:12, the high priest may not leave the sacred precincts, that is, for the purpose of participating in a funeral and/or mourning (cf. 10:6—7). The fact that in 8:33, 35 confinement of Aaron and his sons to the sacred compound was limited to the seven days of consecration implies that under normal circumstances, they would be free to leave.

To preserve the integrity of his sacred line of descendants (21:15), a high priest's marriage options are limited to a virgin of his own people/kin (21:13). This rules out a widow, in addition to the three classes of women forbidden to ordinary priests, who are now listed in ascending order of undesirability (21:14; cf. v.7).

Although priests who are seriously defective in that they are blind, lame, disfigured, and so on, may eat most holy and holy sacrificial food (i.e., priestly portions that supply an important part of their livelihood), they are forbidden to desecrate the sanctuary by engaging in priestly officiation, whether inside the sacred Tent or at the altar in the court (21:16—23). The rationale for excluding defective priests is related to that of the other rules in this chapter: The priesthood constitutes the Lord's corps of special servants, who must be in harmony with his holy, immortal, perfect sphere to the greatest extent possible. Only in this way can they properly represent the nature and character of God to the people. Because a priest who officiates serves as an ideal Israelite with special access to God, freedom from serious physical defect is even more

essential to qualification for the job than above-average height and freedom from lameness are currently prerequisites to consideration for a position on an NBA basketball team.

Bridging Contexts

WHAT IS A DEAD "SOUL"? Leviticus 21:11 is significant for the biblical understanding of death. Since the Hebrew word *nepes* was translated "soul" by KJV in many other contexts (Gen. 2:7; 12:13; 17:14, etc.), and since many assume that a "soul" has intelligent existence after the death of the body, it is fascinating to find the plural of *nepes* described in 21:11 as "dead" *(napsot met;* cf. Num. 6:6, *nepes met).* What is a dead *nepes* as opposed to a live *nepes* (e.g., Gen. 2:7, "living being")? It is simply a corpse— an unthinking, unfeeling, dead body of a person (cf. Num. 9:6, 7, 10, *nepes ['dam]),* which conveys physical ritual impurity by contact or proximity within an enclosed space. While the word *nepes* has various meanings, including "throat" (the seat of emotions), "life," "person," and so on, it never refers to an entity that has intelligence after death (cf. Ps. 115:17; Eccl. 9:5).

> … the *n.* is never given the meaning of an indestructible core of being, in contradistinction to the physical life, and even capable of living when cut off from that life. When there is a mention of the "departing" (Gen. 35.18) of the *n.* from a man, or of its "return" (Lam. 1.11), the basic idea … is the concrete notion of the ceasing and restoration of the breathing.[8]

Priesthood and gender. Don't worry, I am not going to commit myself on the ecclesiastical policy question of whether females should be ordained, which goes far beyond Leviticus. However, since Christian opponents to female ordination frequently cite the exclusive maleness of the Israelite priesthood as support for their position, we should briefly consider some possible reasons for the male priesthood and ask whether they apply to Christian ministry.

A Christian tradition that has a form of ministry regarded as priesthood will naturally want it to be male, like the Old Testament priesthood. However, for those who wish to follow the New Testament model, the question of whether there is a Christian mediatorial priesthood on earth precedes the question of whether ministers should be male on this basis. The New Testament has a direct connection between an egalitarian priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and Christ's priestly ministry in heaven (Heb. 7—10), with no intervening earthly

elite functioning in a mediatorial capacity. Thus, we must look for less direct relationships between Israelite priesthood and Christian ministry.

There are a number of possible reasons why the Israelite priesthood had to be male, some of which are viable and some of which are not. (1) E. Gerstenberger observes that in spite of the fact that sons could bring discredit to their families (1 Sam. 2:12—17, 22—36, 8:1—3, cf. Lev. 10:1—7), the rules for priests in Leviticus 21 deal only with sexual misbehavior of a daughter, who can dishonor her father in such a way as to jeopardize fulfillment of his office (21:9). He asserts that this "attests the priestly prejudice against women. The male cult is threatened above all precisely by females and their behavior."[9] However, the example of Eli's sons (1 Sam. 2:12—17, 22—36) "proves that dishonorable sons not only dishonor their father, but can cause the disqualification of his line."[10] Additional evidence that Scripture is not prejudiced against daughters is found in Leviticus 10, which Gerstenberger also cites. Here Aaron's sons die by (divine) fire (10:2), just as a promiscuous priest's daughter is condemned to be burned (21:9). Moreover, the priesthood was not only all-male, it was all-Aaronic, limited to a small portion of the population.[11] Does the fact that males not descended from Aaron were excluded from the priesthood mean that they were discriminated against because the Aaronic cult was threatened by non-Aaronides and their behavior?

> (2) Milgrom supplies an alternative reason for the all-male priesthood: Second, the woman's ineligibility for the priesthood is based on purely practical grounds: the impurity of her menses disqualifies her from serving for one week out of every four (and as much as three months during parturition). Extreme caution should be exercised in attributing prejudice, especially where it can be shown that none exists.[12]

Why would it not be possible to schedule around menstrual periods, just as male priests would occasionally be disqualified from officiation when they were ritually impure (22:3—7; cf. 15:18)? The answer is physiological: Unlike male impurities (including nocturnal emission, 15:16), menstruation can begin during a woman's waking hours *without her knowing it.* This is why intercourse during menstruation can happen accidentally (see comments on 15:24). Because menstruation is not 100 percent predictable, it would be impossible to rule out the chance that an officiating female priest could become impure without her knowledge, thereby inadvertently but disastrously defiling the most holy sancta. This alone is reason enough to rule out female participation in priestly

officiation.

(3) "A coterie of female professionals, diverted from pressing family needs, would not have been in the best interest of the community as a whole."[13] Nevertheless, if at least some women could arrange to serve in other capacities at the sanctuary (1 Sam. 2:22), why could they not also arrange for time to participate in priestly officiation there? With extended families living in close proximity, there were plenty of babysitters available.

(4) Some priestly tasks, such as lifting pieces of bulls onto the altar (e.g., 1:8) and guarding the sanctuary (e.g., Num. 3:38) required male upper body strength. However, females could have participated in less strenuous aspects of officiation.

(5) The society was patriarchal, with men normally functioning as leaders in public (including legal) matters. It is true that prophetesses, such as Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, did have public functions. Deborah's civil clout as a court judge and military advisor derived from her prophetic gift (Judg. 4). However, the prophetic role was not one of institutional leadership in the sense that priesthood was.

(6) Women were excluded from priesthood to ensure that the ritual system would not carry sexual connotations associated with participation of men and women together in fertility cults of the Canaanites and other peoples.[14]

(7) Priests had to be male because they typified Christ, the antitypical Priest (Heb. 7—10), who is male. This argument is severely compromised by the fact that some sacrificial animals that typified Christ as victims were female. In fact, a female flock animal was required for the crucial purification offering on behalf of commoners (e.g., Lev. 4:27—35; 5:6; Num. 15:27). So when it came to victims, there is what we can call "equal opportunity representation of Christ."

Of the above reasons, the ones that appear the most solid are (2), (5), and (6). Of these, the ritual impurity of menstruation has no relevance to Christian ministry because the earthly sanctuary/temple, with its sphere of Shekinah holiness, is gone. Furthermore, possible association of our ministry with pagan fertility cults is not likely in most of the world today.

Is modern society still patriarchal in the sense that it is unusual for women to serve in official public capacities, and therefore female ministers would weaken the image that the church wishes to portray? Not so much anymore in modern Western culture. Does the Bible advocate or even require patriarchal society for God's ongoing people as a timeless, universal ideal, or did he simply use existing society to accomplish his purposes? While these questions are fascinating and important, pursuing them would take us far from Leviticus.

Contemporary Significance

PROTECTING LEADERS. Privilege and influence carried responsibility not only for Israelite priests but also for members of their families. Any PK (i.e., priest's kid) was supposed to be exemplary, much like a preacher's or politician's kid today. Failure of a child would harm the influence of his or her father (e.g., 21:9). Thus, the spirit of the exhortation in 21:8—for the Israelites to respect the holiness of priests—would undoubtedly mean that laypeople should help all members of priestly families bear the burden of exemplary living. They were not to undermine their distinctiveness out of jealousy in order to lower them to their own level, whether by unjust criticism, competition, ridicule, deception, or obstruction. Attempting to destroy or compromise those who interceded for them was self-defeating. Unfortunately the Israelites had to learn this the hard way (Num. 16—17).

Although the New Testament has no earthly mediatorial priesthood, as spiritual leaders in the community of faith, Christian ministers and their families carry some of the same burdens that were laid on the ancient priests and their close relatives. The reason is essentially the same: to rightly present the Lord's character to the people. We know that ministers and their families are human and therefore imperfect, but it is devastating to congregations (including radio or TV audiences) when they fall in a serious way. The press, lawyers, anti-religionists, and the devil have a field day, but the people who matter suffer damage to their faith in God.

Ministers must take responsibility for their actions like everyone else, but trying to trip them up is unconscionable and self-defeating. A ministry is a terrible thing to waste. But it is also a wonderful thing to nurture. Rather than exhausting valuable creative energies in contention and criticism, congregations benefit themselves, their communities, and the cause of God by focusing their energies on upholding dedicated leaders and walking with them on the path of holiness.

John the Baptist said of Christ, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). Emulating John, a minister's goal is to have his influence decrease in the lives of his people while that of Christ increases. The more this happens, the safer they are from instability as a result of the imperfections of the human

minister. Nevertheless, as ministers train people to look to Christ, their only infallible example, and to God, who sanctifies them, their attitudes and perceptions are shaped to a large extent by the way the ministers conduct their own lives. Leaders are role models to their people as parents are to their children. This power, which influences destinies not just in this life but also in the life to come, is a sacred trust. It is up to the community, not just to the minister and his/her family, to protect it.

1. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1841.

2. *ANET,* 139 (Ugaritic mythic poetry about Baal and Anath). On such burial and mourning customs, see, e.g., M. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (LBS, New York: KTAV, 1970), 226—39.

3. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1807, 1819, also citing LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch, which provide the conjunction "and" between the terms for the two kinds of women in 21:14.

4. E.g., Ehrlich, *Randglossen Zur Hebräischen Bibel,* 2:74; W. Kornfeld, *Levitikus* (NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter, 1983), 84.

5. Cf. A. J. Phillips, "Another Look at Adultery," *JSOT* 20 (1981): 10.

6. When Nadab and Abihu died, the Lord laid these prohibitions on Eleazar and Ithamar (ordinary priests), as well as Aaron (the high priest), because of the gravity of the situation (Lev. 10:6).

7. For such high sensitivity to impurity, compare a Babylonian high priest, who is defiled by merely viewing the purification of a temple *(ANET,* 333, lines 364—65).

8. H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 20. (See also p. 25: "n. is never the author of specific spiritual activities.")

9. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus,* 314.

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1811.

11. Cf. C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 163.

12. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22,* 1811.

13. Meyers, *Discovering Eve,* 163.

14. Cf. J. Doukhan, "Women Priests in Israel: A Case for Their Absence," in N. Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1998), 31; Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh,* 106—7.

Leviticus 22

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with
respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will
not profane my holy name. I am the LORD.

3“Say to them: ‘For the generations to come, if any of your
descendants is ceremonially unclean and yet comes near the sacred
offerings that the Israelites consecrate to the LORD, that person must be
cut off from my presence. I am the LORD.

4“"If a descendant of Aaron has an infectious skin disease or a bodily
discharge, he may not eat the sacred offerings until he is cleansed. He
will also be unclean if he touches something defiled by a corpse or by
anyone who has an emission of semen, 5or if he touches any crawling
thing that makes him unclean, or any person who makes him unclean,
whatever the uncleanness may be. 6The one who touches any such
thing will be unclean till evening. He must not eat any of the sacred
offerings unless he has bathed himself with water. 7When the sun goes
down, he will be clean, and after that he may eat the sacred offerings,
for they are his food. 8He must not eat anything found dead or torn by
wild animals, and so become unclean through it. I am the LORD.

9‘The priests are to keep my requirements so that they do not
become guilty and die for treating them with contempt. I am the LORD,
who makes them holy.

l0‘No one outside a priest’s family may eat the sacred offering, nor
may the guest of a priest or his hired worker eat it. 11 But if a priest
buys a slave with money, or if a slave is born in his household, that
slave may eat his food. l2If a priest’s daughter marries anyone other
than a priest, she may not eat any of the sacred contributions. l3But if a
priest’s daughter becomes a widow or is divorced, yet has no children,
and she returns to live in her father’s house as in her youth, she may

eat of her father’s food. No unauthorized person, however, may eat any of it.

14“'If anyone eats a sacred offering by mistake, he must make restitution to the priest for the offering and add a fifth of the value to it. 15The priests must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites present to the LORD 16by allowing them to eat the sacred offerings and so bring upon them guilt requiring payment. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.'"

17The LORD said to Moses, 18“Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: ‘If any of you—either an Israelite or an alien living in Israel—presents a gift for a burnt offering to the LORD, either to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering, 19you must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be accepted on your behalf. 20Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf. 21When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. 22Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire. 23You may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfillment of a vow. 24You must not offer to the LORD an animal whose testicles are bruised, crushed, torn or cut. You must not do this in your own land, 25and you must not accept such animals from the hand of a foreigner and offer them as the food of your God. They will not be accepted on your behalf, because they are deformed and have defects.'"

26The LORD said to Moses, 27“When a calf, a lamb or a goat is born, it is to remain with its mother for seven days. From the eighth day on, it will be acceptable as an offering made to the LORD by fire. 28Do not slaughter a cow or a sheep and its young on the same day.

29“When you sacrifice a thank offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 30It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the LORD.

31“Keep my commands and follow them. I am the LORD. 32Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the

Israelites. I am the LORD, who makes you holy [33]and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD.”

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 22 CONTINUES the topic introduced in the last part of chapter 21: disqualifications with regard to sacred things. In 21:16—23 a physically defective descendant of Aaron is permitted to eat priestly portions, including most holy ones, but is *permanently* barred from priestly officiation. In 22:1—7, Moses deals with *temporary* disqualification of nondefective priests from officiation as a result of contracting physical ritual impurity.

Until the required purificatory procedures have been completed and the full term of impurity has expired (e.g., until evening), a priest must be careful not to illegitimately use (Qal of qrb, lit., "approach")[1] sacred things that the Israelites dedicate to the Lord (22:3). Disqualification of impure priests is based on the same principle as the rule that an impure lay offerer is prohibited from eating meat of a well-being offering (7:20—21): Impurity that represents human mortality may not be brought into contact with holiness that characterizes the pure, immortal sphere of God.

In the context of restrictions on what priests may eat, 22:8 prohibits priests from eating animals not slaughtered by humans because they die of themselves or are killed by animals. Priests are held to a higher standard than laypersons, who are permitted to incur minor impurity by eating such an animal (17:15).

While *most holy* sacrificial portions must be eaten in the sacred precincts by the officiating priest himself (6:26—purification offering) or a male member of a priestly family (7:6—reparation offering), *holy* portions may be shared with other family members as part of their livelihood. The boundaries of a priestly family authorized to partake of sacred offerings are specified in 22:10—13. In accordance with the procedure already established in 5:16, if an unauthorized person inadvertently eats a holy thing, he or she must make reparation (22:14).

Like 22:2, 9, verses 15—16 exhort the priests to prevent desecration of the people's offerings. Verse 16 adds that if the priests do desecrate the sacred things that laypersons dedicate to the Lord by permitting them to eat the priestly portions of what they give, they will cause the Israelites to bear culpability *('awon)* of liability *('asmah)* that requires reparation (22:16).[2]

Leviticus 22:17—25 continues the overall topic of qualifications in regard to

sacred gifts. At issue here is the physical qualification of animals brought as sacrifices. This is relevant to the Israelites as a whole because they must offer fit victims, and to the priests in particular since they would undoubtedly be responsible for inspecting animals before slaughter.

From earlier sacrificial regulations we know that in order to be acceptable, a sacrifice had to be unblemished *(tamim;* lit., “whole/complete"; 22:18—21; cf. 1:3; 3:1; 4:28), that is, free from serious defect. Paralleling the list of defects that disqualify priests (21:18—20), 22:22—24 specifies the kinds of defects that render animals unfit.[3]

The rules in chapter 22 only apply to cattle, sheep, or goats (22:19; not including birds), and the defects listed in verses 22—24 are limited to those that are outwardly visible. Verses 26—30 wrap up the topic of ritual qualifications. Apparently out of respect for life, a baby animal may not be taken from its mother as a sacrifice during the first seven days of its life (v. 27),[4] and an animal and its young are not to be sacrificed the same day (v. 28).[5]

Leviticus 22:29—30, reiterating the rule that a thanksgiving offering must be eaten the same day (7:15), complements 19:5—7, which repeats the requirement that other kinds of well-being offerings must be eaten by the second day (7:16—18). Thus 19:5—7 and 22:29—30 form an inclusio that binds together chapters 19—22, which emphasize spatial and personal holiness. This structural “envelope” also relates to 7:15 and 7:16—18 in reverse order to create a chiasm:[6]

thanksgiving offering to be eaten same day (7:15)
other well-being offerings to be eaten by second day (7:16—18)
other well-being offerings to be eaten by second day (19:5—7)
thanksgiving offering to be eaten same day (22:29—30)

A concluding exhortation (22:31—33) contains elements that parallel ingredients of exhortations in chapters 18—21:

- summary command to keep the Lord’s regulations
- reminder that “I am the LORD” (in each verse)
- warning against profaning God’s holy name
- warning that the Lord must be treated as holy among the Israelites
- reminder that it is the Lord who makes Israel holy
- reminder that the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt to be their God

Bridging Contexts

UNBLEMISHED SACRIFICES. Both officiating priests and sacrificial victims must be unblemished in a limited sense (chs. 21—22). In the New Testament, the ultimately unblemished Christ fuses the two ritual roles in himself. As Priest, he is free from the underlying physical blemish that limited the effectiveness of the Aaronic priesthood: mortality (Heb. 7). Furthermore, while he is an empathetic Mediator, he is free from the moral blemish of sin (4:15) that required Aaronic priests to offer sacrifices for their own shortcomings (5:3; 7:27).

In 1 Peter 2:21—25, alluding to Isaiah 53, Christ's freedom from sin qualified him as the perfect Victim. The fact that he was "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:19) was crucial not only to the validity of his sacrifice for its intended global purpose, but also because his successful self-sacrifice qualified him for his uniquely effective priesthood (Heb. 9:12).

Christ's life on earth in harmony with God's law of love serves an additional function: as an example to us (1 Peter 2:21; see also Phil. 2:5—8). Paul's appeal "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1) implies that we can aspire to be without blemish as Christ was. Paul refers to total dedication of physical and mental energies to God and transformation "by the renewing of your mind" (12:2). Our transformation is a gift from God through his Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4—7), who brings divine love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

Contemporary Significance

NO DUMPING ALLOWED. An Israelite who acquired a defective animal from a foreigner was not permitted to pass the problem on to the Lord by offering the animal to him (22:25). Treating God with respect called for giving him something of quality. While he offers needy people abundant help (e.g., Isa. 45:22; Heb. 4:14—16) and accepts a widow's mite (Mark 12:42—44), this does not mean that his people should dump on him "gifts" that neither they nor anybody else wants.

A real estate teacher described an extreme example of an attempt to use God as a dumping ground. A man owned a large piece of property in California, but squatters settled there. When a state health official discovered substandard sanitary conditions in the burgeoning community of uninvited guests, he held the owner responsible and registered a lien against the property. Unwilling to pay and unable to sell the property because of the lien, the owner deeded the property to God! But his attempt to lean on the "everlasting arms" failed. A judge threw out his solution because the law does not allow real estate to be irretrievably alienated—that is, given or sold in such a way that its ownership can never again be transferred (between human beings). If the property belonged to God, its subsequent transfer would require God's signature (cf. Ex. 31:18, Deut. 9:10). Besides, how would the government collect property taxes from God?

Do we devote our best to God in terms of time, energy, and other resources? Or do we condescendingly give him leftover bits of the day, such as spare time (what's that?) and spare change, as if he is a beggar? Speaking of beggars, Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). Do we treat others the way we would treat Jesus? Obviously, our resources are finite and we have families to support. But do we ever "sacrifice" anything from our abundance for anyone else? Or do we only give to others what we would otherwise haul to the dump or use to clothe a scarecrow in the garden?

Another way to dump problems on God is to expect him to do for us things we can and ought to do for ourselves. When we ask him to bless us in spite of the fact that we violate the cause-and-effect principles through which his blessing

comes, we are being unreasonable. Why should he give us success when we are sloppy, provide us with health when we abuse it, make our families happy when we are selfish, or take us to the mountaintop of spiritual fulfillment when we choose forms of entertainment that pull us down in the opposite direction?

The Israelites repeatedly tried to dump their problems on God, as we will see in our study of Numbers. A later episode comes from Judges 10. When the apostate Israelites cried to the Lord to deliver them from the Ammonites, he replied: “Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!” (Judg. 10:14). Why should he save them from disaster resulting from their faithlessness when they persisted in hanging on to the cause of their difficulty, namely, their idolatry? When they finally recognized that they were in control of the root of the problem and took action to do their part by getting rid of their false gods (10:15—16a), the whole divine-human dynamic changed. Now they were no longer dumping on him. Now their problem was his problem, “and he could bear Israel’s misery no longer” (10:16b).

When God appears harsh, unfeeling, or unresponsive, sometimes it is because he is unwilling to support our addiction to sin by entering into a codependent relationship with us. Just as family members of those addicted to destructive drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, or gambling need to learn redemptive “tough love” by refusing to bear responsibility that is not theirs, God reinforces our willpower by teaching us the nature, consequences, and power of our own choices.

1. While published English versions translate *qrb* here with the literal meaning "approaches/comes near,” this does not make good sense. Why would an impure priest be culpable for merely coming near a sacred object? On technical use of *qrb* or its synonym *ngs* for encroachment beyond boundaries of legitimate access, see J. Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite, the Term ’Aboda* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 33—43, R. Gane and J. Milgrom, “Dip qarab,” *TDOT*, 13:140, 143, Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 351—56.

2. Regarding words for liability and reparation from the root *’šsm*, see comments on 5:1—13.

3. For physiological details, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, 1876—80.

4. Compare the fact that a male Israelite infant receives the covenant sign of circumcision only on the eighth day (Gen. 17:11—12), remaining in his natural uncircumcised state for the first week of his life.

5. See also Deut. 22:6, which prohibits taking a mother bird and its young (cf. also, “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk,” Ex. 23:19;

34:26; Deut. 14:21).

6. Cf. B. Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation: Studies in the Priestly Code* (Jerusalem: Magnes/Hebrew University, 1999 [Hebrew]), 298; Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 118—19.

Leviticus 23:1—22

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to the Israelites and say to
them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD,
which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.

3“‘There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a
Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work;
wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.

4“‘These are the LORD’S appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you
are to proclaim at their appointed times: 5The LORD’S Passover begins
at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6On the fifteenth
day of that month the LORD’S Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for
seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. 7on the first day
hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 8For seven days
present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day
hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.’”

9The LORD said to Moses, l10“Speak to the Israelites and say to them:
‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its
harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. l1lHe is
to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your
behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. l12On the
day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the
LORD a lamb a year old without defect, l13together with its grain
offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil—an
offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma—and its drink
offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. l14You must not eat any bread, or
roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your
God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come,
wherever you live.

[15]“'From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. [16]Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. [17]From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD. [18]Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings—an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [19]Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. [20]The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest. [21]On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

[22]“'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.'"

Original Meaning

CONTINUING THE THEME OF HOLINESS, Leviticus 23 turns to the dimension of time, presenting a series of sacred occasions: the weekly Sabbath and yearly festivals. Complementing this sacred calendar, Numbers 28—29 specifies regular daily, Sabbath weekly, "new moon" monthly, and festival yearly sacrifices to be performed on behalf of the entire Israelite community. In this section we will focus on instructions for spring festivals (Lev. 23:5—22), leaving detailed examination of autumn festivals (vv. 23—44) for the next chapter.

The overall structure of Leviticus 23 is as follows:

Overall introduction (vv. 1—2)
Sabbath (v. 3)
Introduction to yearly festivals (v. 4)
Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread (vv. 5—8)
Elevated Sheaf (vv. 9—14)
Festival of Weeks (vv. 15—21)
Command to leave some of the harvest for the poor and resident alien (v. 22)
Festival of Trumpets (vv. 23—25)
Day of Purgation (vv. 26—32)
Festival of Booths (vv. 33—36)
Conclusion (vv. 37—38)
Festival of Booths (vv. 39—43)
Report of Moses to the Israelites (v. 44)

Notice that there are two introductions to the sacred times.[1] The first introduces the chapter as a whole (vv. 1—2); verse 4 reiterates the introduction after the Sabbath command (v. 3). This suggests that although the weekly Sabbath is a sacred time, it is distinguished from the yearly festivals. Note how Genesis 2:2—3 presents Sabbath rest as a creation ordinance (cf. Mark 2:27), by contrast with the rest of the festivals, which originated for the Israelite nation.

In Leviticus 23:2, 4, the festivals are the Lord's "appointed" or fixed times, which the Israelites are to "proclaim" (Qal of *qrʾ*). Therefore, they are designated

as *mitjra'ey qodes* (lit., "proclamations of holiness"; NIV "sacred assemblies"). These special appointments between the Lord and his people are not all "feasts" in the sense of occasions to celebrate with eating. In fact, eating is strictly prohibited on the Day of Purgation (vv. 27, 29, 32; cf. 16:29, 31).

Leviticus 23 attaches the expression "proclamation of holiness" *(miqra' qodes)* to the weekly Sabbath (v. 3) plus seven yearly festival days. Six of these seven are sabbaths of partial rest, when laborious work involving one's trade/occupation/business *($m^{e}la^{J}kah$)* is prohibited but other light work (food preparation; see below) is implicitly permitted. The Day of Purgation, however, is like the weekly Sabbath (v. 3) in that it is a *sabbat sabbaton* ("sabbathly sabbath," i.e., super-Sabbath [v. 32]), requiring total cessation from all work (vv. 28, 30, 31).

Sacred Occasion	Kind of Rest	"Proclamation of Holiness"
Weekly Sabbath	Total	v. 3
Unleaveaned Bread day 1	Partial	v. 7
Unleaveaned Bread day 7	Partial	v. 8
Festival of Weeks	Partial	v. 21
Trumpets	Partial	v. 24
Day of Purgation	Total	v. 27
Festival of Booths, day 1	Partial	v. 35
Festival of Booths, day 8	Partial	v. 36

Why should holy days be occasions of rest? Although the Creator rested only on the weekly Sabbath (Gen. 2:2—3), at that time he established cessation from work as the way to enact holiness in the dimension of time (v. 3, cf. Ex. 20:11, see below).

Verses 5—8 remind the Israelites to celebrate Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan) and the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread immediately thereafter (cf. Ex. 12—13, 23:15, 34:18). Exodus 12:16 establishes a paradigm for Leviticus 23 by labeling the first and seventh days of the festival "proclamations of holiness," when work is forbidden except for food preparation.

Verses 9—21 concern two observances, fifty days apart, that celebrate and implicitly thank God for the beginnings of the barley and wheat harvests, respectively, after they are settled in the Promised Land. First, the Israelites are to bring to the sanctuary the first sheaf of grain that they harvest in the spring,

which is undoubtedly barley.[2] A priest dedicates the sheaf to the Lord as an "elevation offering" by a gesture of raising it up (vv. 11—12, cf. v. 15, see comments on 7:30). On the same day, the people are required to sacrifice a burnt offering with its grain and drink accompaniments (23:12—13). By giving the Lord a token portion before eating any of the new harvest, they act out "saying the blessing," acknowledging that the harvest is from him.

Up to this point everything is clear, but on what day is the sheaf to be elevated? Verse 11 specifies: "on the day after the Sabbath" (see also v. 15). But to which Sabbath does this refer—a weekly Sabbath (v. 3) or a ceremonial sabbath belonging to the Festival of Unleavened Bread (vv. 7—8)? Because we are simply interpreting the text of Leviticus, unencumbered by later tradition, the solution seems simple. While these directions come after those for Unleavened Bread, they are in a separate divine speech that begins in verse 9. In verse 10 the timing of elevating the sheaf is tied to the actual beginning of the harvest, the date of which can fluctuate. Therefore, the Sabbath here seems to be the seventh-day weekly Sabbath. Whatever day the Israelites harvest the first sheaf (not including Sabbath, of course), the priest is to elevate it on the following first day of the week, which we call Sunday.

By the Second Temple period, tradition had connected the elevation of the sheaf to the first part of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and a fierce interpretive controversy raged over whether "the day after the Sabbath" meant the first weekly Sabbath after Passover (Nisan 14) or the ceremonial sabbath on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which always came on the Nisan 15 (vv. 6—7).[3] The latter interpretation is weaker because verses 7—8 do not use the term *sabbat* ("Sabbath") with reference to the partial rest days bracketing Unleavened Bread.

It is difficult for us to appreciate why a ritual detail should generate such a heated fuss. When so many people have a stake in the same ritual, the correct performance of which is deemed crucial for divine favor on the entire nation, the particulars matter. To complicate matters, the timing of the sheaf ritual was the base point for calculating when the subsequent Festival of Weeks was to be observed (v. 15). If the former were incorrect, Weeks would be on the wrong day! That would be like Christmas on December 23 or 27, but worse.

In Leviticus 23 the Festival of Weeks is unlike the other festivals in that it lacks a fixed date (vv. 15—21). This explains why it was necessary to calculate its timing from the elevation of the sheaf, the date of which must float according to agricultural realities. Counting the day when the barley sheaf is elevated as day 1, the Festival of Weeks comes after seven complete Sabbaths (v. 15).

Confirmation that “Sabbaths” (pl. of *sabbat)* in this context mean “weeks” comes from Numbers 28:26, where the usual word for weeks (pl. of *sabua’)* refers to the same period of time. The fact that in Leviticus 23:15 “Sabbaths” are weeks buttresses the argument that “the day after the Sabbath” earlier in the same verse refers to the weekly Sabbath rather than a yearly ceremonial rest day.

Exodus 34:22 provides the name for “the [Festival] of Weeks” (pl. of *sabua’),* which is further described as “the firstfruits of wheat harvest” (cf. Ex. 23:16, Num. 28:26). The one-day pilgrim Festival of Weeks fell on the day after the seventh Sabbath, that is, Sunday, which would be the fiftieth day according to the customary inclusive reckoning (Lev. 23:16). So it was later called Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 20:16, 1 Cor. 16:8).

For the Festival of Weeks the Israelites were to bring a corporate firstfruits offering of new grain, in this case, from the wheat harvest. The wheat was to be baked in two loaves of *leavened* bread (23:16—17) and presented along with a group of animal sacrifices (vv. 18—20, cf. Num. 28:27—31). Like the earlier barley sheaf, the two loaves constituted an elevation offering (Lev. 23:17), acknowledging that the Lord provided the harvest.

Some have suggested that the leavened loaves, elevated with two well-being offering lambs (23:20), are related to the thanksgiving offering of well-being that included cakes of leavened bread (7:13—14).[4] It may appear strange to present firstfruits for thanksgiving at the beginning rather than the end of the harvest.[5] Yet there is a sense in which a crop ready for harvest represented successful completion of an agricultural growth process, for which the people were grateful to God, on whom they could depend for the rest of the harvest (cf. Phil. 1:6).

Through acknowledging God as the one who sustains the lives of his creatures by giving them food (cf. Ps. 145:15—16), the Israelites honored him as their Creator. Since the weekly Sabbath celebrates creation (Gen. 2:2—3; Ex. 20:11; 31:17), it makes sense that timing the relationship between the sheaf ritual and the Festival of Weeks (Lev. 23:15—16) is saturated with Sabbath connections: (1) Counting begins from the day after the Sabbath, (2) weeks are referred to as “Sabbaths,” and (3) before the Festival of Weeks there are seven Sabbaths/weeks, squaring the sabbatical time unit of seven days: $7^2 = 7 \times 7 = 49$ days. We will find further Sabbath-related reminders that God is Creator in connection with the bread of the Presence (24:8) and the sabbatical and Jubilee years (ch. 25).

Because the Festival of Weeks has to do with harvest, 23:22 appends a reminder to leave something for the poor and alien to glean (cf. 19:9—10). Thus, at the heart of Leviticus 23, between instructions for the spring festivals and

those of autumn, the Lord commands his people not to get so focused on their lofty religious duties that they neglect human beings in need (cf. Luke 10:30—32). That is, they should not be so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use.

Bridging Contexts

SABBATH AS THE FOUNDATION of sacred time. Because Leviticus 23 is about holy occasions, it logically begins with the foundation of all sacred time: the weekly Sabbath (v. 3), which the Lord instituted at creation by his archetypical cessation (Qal of *sbt)* from work (Gen. 2:2—3). While nothing in Genesis 2 explicitly tells us that the Sabbath has been made for human beings or is a cyclical event, these factors are clear from the context. By blessing the seventh day and making it holy (Gen. 2:3), God has bestowed on it a special relationship to himself, who alone is intrinsically holy (cf. 1 Sam. 2:2). Elsewhere in the Creation story, it is clear that God set up Planet Earth for the benefit of his creatures, not to make human beings work while he rested (contrast the Old Babylonian epic *Atraha sis).*[6]

This implies that the blessing of Sabbath was for the benefit of human beings from the beginning, as Jesus explicitly declared (Mark 2:27).[7] In order to receive the blessing, human beings made in God's image (Gen. 1:26—27) emulate him by consecrating the day as he did: by altering their behavior.[8] Because what God did on the first six days of creation had ongoing earthly results, we expect the same to be true of the Sabbath within the framework of cyclical time that he set up (cf. 23:14—18).[9] The idea that God was "refreshed" (NRSV) as a result of his Sabbath rest (Ex. 31:17) supports the conclusion that he intended it to be an ongoing observance. Although he does not become weary as humans do (e.g., Ps. 121:4), Exodus speaks of him anthropomorphically as receiving a benefit of refreshment in order to encourage people to follow his example, as a result of which they gain relief for themselves, their human dependents, and their work animals (cf. Lev. 23:12).

> The absence of any explicit command concerning Sabbath-obser-vance prior to Moses does not relegate the Sabbath principle to temporary legislation of the law-epoch. The creational character of God's sabbath-blessing must be remembered. From the very beginning, God set a distinctive blessing on the Sabbath….
>
> God blessed man through the Sabbath by delivering him from slavery to

work….[10]

When Adam and Eve sinned by showing disloyalty to God (Gen. 3:6), their marriage and work suffered from the curse of evil (3:16—19), but the Sabbath institution remains unaffected by the Fall—a little piece of Paradise.[11] Like a lily in a swamp, its luster is enhanced by contrast with the decay all around it. Enshrining holiness in the dimension of time, which structures human life but is indestructible by human beings, was a stroke of divine genius to preserve amidst profane forgetfulness the sacred memory of the way we were meant to be. Abraham Heschel wrote regarding the weekly temple of time:

> Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to *holiness in time.* It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.[12]

Sabbath, festivals, and temporary "types." According to the Bible, basic Sabbath rest for human beings originated before the Fall into sin (Gen. 2:2—3; see above). Hence, it preexisted and was independent from the need for ceremonial "types"/symbols that God set up as a result of the Fall in order to lead human beings back to a positive relationship with him. Thus, although the Israelite ritual system honored the Sabbath with special rituals performed on this day (Lev. 24:8; Num. 28:9—10), their fulfillment and cessation does not affect the timelessness of the Sabbath. Because the weekly Sabbath has never been either a "historical/horizontal type" or a "vertical type," it fundamentally differs from the Israelite sanctuary and its ceremonial system, in which enactments of typical/symbolic significance constituted the essence of observance.

A "historical/horizontal type" prefigures or preenacts a later and greater reality that constitutes its "antitype." When the antitype commences, the type recedes into obsolescence.[13] Thus, according to the book of Hebrews, the Israelite ceremonies served as a "copy and shadow" of later and greater realities: the truly effective sacrifice and perfect Melchizedek priesthood of Christ (e.g., Heb. 8:5—6). The earthly sanctuary system had serious limitations, just as an automobile prototype is not the same as a regular production car. Nevertheless, a prototype is important for showing how something will work when it is fully developed, when "the rubber hits the road."

The festivals were major milestones in the yearly spiritual journey of covenant Israel as the people connected worship of God with his historical and/or

agricultural goodness on their behalf. In the New Testament, the spring festivals are interpreted as historical harbingers/types of events ushering in the "new covenant" era. First Corinthians 5:7 states: "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Thus, Paul metaphorically identifies Christ, who was slain at the Passover season (John 19:14), as the Victim whose role for the deliverance of his people was analogous to the ritual function of an animal that was sacrificed for deliverance from divine judgment when the Lord rescued his people from Egypt (Ex. 12).

Notice three aspects of Paul's statement. (1) The New Testament terminology explicitly refers to the ritual of Passover to explain the function of Christ's sacrifice. To arrive at this connection, there is no need for the Christian to speculate. (2) Christ is "our Passover lamb," that is, the ultimate Lamb for all Christians. His sacrifice of himself is far greater than a ritual using an animal victim, which served only a household (Ex. 12:3). (3) Tightening the connection between Passover and Christ, the Passover timing of his death correlated with his Passover function.

Moving from Christ's death to his resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:20 affirms: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Here Paul explains Christ's resurrection by explicitly referring to another familiar scenario: A ritual offering of new grain at the beginning of the harvest (Lev. 23:11). His point is that Christ's one resurrection preceded the resurrection of many people, just as the firstfruits offering of a sheaf of grain at the beginning of the barley harvest came before the harvest of countless other sheaves.

Again, timing correlates with function: Christ's greater rising from the dead occurred on the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1), when a priest was to ritually raise up and thereby dedicate the first sheaf of barley (cf. Lev. 23:11). It so happened that the Sabbath immediately before Christ's resurrection was a *megale* ("great, high") day (John 19:31), which meant that the weekly and ceremonial Sabbaths coincided that year. So neither side in the Jewish debate over "the day after the Sabbath" (Lev. 23:11, 15) would have an excuse to disbelieve.

Fifty days after elevation of the first barley sheaf, a firstfruits offering of wheat was presented to the Lord at the sanctuary/temple on the Festival of Weeks (Lev. 23:16—20). So it is not surprising to find that fifty days after Christ's resurrection, the next great event for the early church—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a gift from the newly inaugurated heavenly High Priest (cf. Eph. 4:8) and consequent commencement of a great "harvest" of conversions—came precisely on the Festival of Weeks, that is, the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

By contrast with the yearly festivals, the weekly Sabbath never served as a ritual harbinger/type of a later and greater reality that takes its place for Christians. It is true that in Hebrews 4:1—11 God offers a total life "Sabbath-rest" experience to those who believe, but this does not supersede the literal weekly cessation from work. God also offered the total life kind of rest to people in Old Testament times, as Hebrews acknowledges by referring to Psalm 95:7—11, where "the reason why these men did not gain entrance was their own unbelief, not any failure on God's part to have the Rest ready."[14]

The fact that both the seventh-day Sabbath and the "rest" of Hebrews 4 can have valid function in the same era proves that one is not a type of the other.

At first glance Colossians 2:16—17 appears to include Sabbath among "shadows," that is, temporary historical types. However, in this verse, the words (lit.) "a festival or a new moon or S/sabbath(s)" provide a clear inter-textual link by inverting the order found in Numbers 28—29 (cf. Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11), where the calendar of ritual offerings on holy days includes special sacrifices on weekly seventh-day Sabbaths (Num. 28:9—10), monthly new moons (28:11—15), and yearly festivals (28:16—29:40).[15] In question is not Sabbath rest, but *rituals* performed on the Sabbath, which functioned as typological "shadows" within the Israelite worship system.[16] Apparently reinforcing this interpretation is addition of the noun *meros* in the latter part of the list in Colossians 2:16, which literally reads: "in *(en)* eating and in *(en)* drinking or in [the] part of [en *merei]*[17] a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." It is that which concerns or pertains to the festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths that constitutes the "shadow." In other words, Paul is saying that Christians are not accountable for showing that they accept the ongoing validity of an earthly ritual system in any form.

The weekly Sabbath was never a temporary "vertical" type of divine heavenly rest in the way that the Israelite sanctuary down on earth corresponded to God's temple up in heaven (Ex. 25:9; Heb. 8:5; cf. Ps. 11:4). Just because human beings are to imitate God in some way does not indicate the existence of a temporary vertical type. For instance, 1 Peter 1:16 repeats for Christians the timeless call of Leviticus 11:44—45 (cf. 19:2) to be holy as God is holy. More directly to the point, in Genesis 2:2—3 God originally rested on the seventh day in connection with his creation of Planet Earth. There is no hint that earthly Sabbath copied heavenly Sabbath or that the significance of earthly Sabbath has ceased in favor of heavenly Sabbath as priestly ministry at the earthly temple has been superseded by the function of God's original temple in heaven (Heb. 7—10).[18]

Contemporary Significance

SABBATH AND THE PRIVATE world order. In addition to keeping people in touch with God as they celebrate the birthday of the world that was formed and is sustained by his hand, the weekly Sabbath meets an innate human need. G. MacDonald observes:

> There can be little order in the private world of the human being when there is no appreciation for the meaning and pursuit of genuine rest, a *cessation,* as Wilberforce called it, in the routines of our times. From the beginning of all history, it has been an axiom at the base of healthy living, unfortunately, it is a principle badly misunderstood by those whose lives are driven to achievement and acquisition.[19]

MacDonald refers to William Wilberforce from England, who was a member of Parliament in the early nineteenth century. When Lord Addington became prime minister and was forming a new cabinet in 1801, Wilberforce became obsessed with the possibility that he could become a cabinet minister. He found that his ambition was damaging his inner well-being, but when he observed his regular, weekly day of rest, he found a healing corrective to his perspective.

> The Christian politician's journal tells the story best, in its entry at the end of that week of furious fantasizing and temptations to politic for position: "Blessed be to God for the day of rest and religious occupation wherein *earthly things assume their true size. Ambition is stunted."* (italics added)[20]

With spiritual perspective came strength, stamina, social conscience, and moral courage. Some years later, after fighting an uphill battle for nearly twenty years to construct a coalition of lawmakers, the same Wilberforce led Parliament to outlaw slavery in the British empire. His role in leading England to this historic decision "may have been one of the greatest and most courageous acts of statesmanship in the history of democracy."[21] Is it surprising that it took a man who understood God's weekly blessing of deliverance from slavery to work to

champion the cause of freedom from slavery?

MacDonald ponders the fact that in spite of the five-day work week and more leisure time than ever, overwork, fatigue, and burnout are more rampant than ever. He suggests that contemporary people may have lost their comprehension of true rest from work, which God built into the rhythm of creation to allow for reflection on the meaning and mission of life and work in relation to him.

> This rest was not meant to be a luxury, but rather a *necessity* for those who want to have growth and maturity. Since we have not understood that rest is a necessity, we have perverted its meaning, substituting for the rest that God first demonstrated things called leisure or amusement. These do not bring any order at all to the private world. Leisure and amusement may be enjoyable, but they are to the private world of the individual like cotton candy to the digestive system. They provide a momentary lift, but they will not last.[22]

Ironically, one of the greatest blessings of the commandment to abstain from work on the Sabbath is the very fact that the Bible presents it as an absolute requirement. A goal-oriented, driven, "type A" workaholic needs it to be a command from the Lord himself, thundering from Mount Sinai, or he or she will restlessly continue to work and thereby incur damage from burnout.[23] It is an immense relief to halt work for twenty-four peaceful hours in order to enjoy God through church, family, and walks in the woods or by a lake without feeling the slightest twinge of guilt for doing so!

Obeying God's command in order to receive his blessing of genuine Sabbath refreshment is not legalism. In the preface to her profound and down-to-earth book, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting,* Marva Dawn points out: "To keep the Sabbath is not a legalistic duty. Rather, living in accordance with our own natural rhythm gives freedom, the delight of one whole day in every seven set apart as holy." Then she extends an invitation: "Come with me into the experience of observing the Sabbath, and you will discover for yourself—or rather, *in* yourself—the meaning of holy time."[24]

While Sabbath is a special day of worship, it does not need to be crammed with formal religious events. A layman remarked after a particularly long day of church activity, "I'm sure glad that there is only one rest day per week, I'd burn out if we had to go through two 'days of rest' like this every seven days."[25] Rather than an exhausting marathon, from which it takes several days to recover, we need the regular benefit of true Sabbath refreshment. "The world and the

church need genuinely *rested* Christians…. When a godly rest is achieved, you will see just how tough and resilient Christians can actually be."[26]

But how can we afford to give up an entire day of work? Well, how can we afford not to? Marva Dawn tells of a wagon train headed for Oregon, which stopped once a week for the pioneers to observe Sabbath. As the approach of winter made speed an urgent priority, the wagon train split into two groups: those who thought it best to continue seven days a week and those who wanted to go on keeping Sabbath. The latter group reached Oregon first because they and their horses could travel further in six days, with a day of rest in between, than the others could in seven days without such a break.[27] Sabbath provided a physical advantage, and the same benefit of enhanced efficiency also applies in other areas of life (e.g., spiritual, mental, social) that may be crucial to our success and well-being.

Pilgrimage, unity, and prayer. Of the yearly festivals listed in Leviticus 23, three required all Israelite males to make pilgrimage *(hag)* to the sanctuary (cf. Ex. 23:14—17, 34:22—23): Unleavened Bread (including Passover the night before), Harvest (= Weeks), and Ingathering (= Booths). This periodic worship at the sanctuary for powerful national religious events was designed to give the Israelites "a recalibration of the spirit,"[28] enabling them to maintain their connection with God, solidarity with each other, and historical roots. In later times, all kinds of human failures prevented fulfillment of God's ideal for his people, but even in one of those failures we see the unifying power of pilgrimage: When Jeroboam I pulled out of the Davidic monarchy with the ten northern tribes, he was so alarmed by the potent pull of pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Judah, which threatened the success of his secession, that he set up counterfeit, idolatrous worship systems in his own territory (1 Kings 12:26—33).

New Testament Christianity knows no Christian holy place on earth to which we should direct our prayers and make pilgrimage. Many of us have experienced the candles and smelled the incense in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian shrines in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth. Such places are of great historical interest and evoke pungent connections with the life of Christ. However, his presence does not reside at any of these locations in the way that the divine Shekinah abode at the Israelite sanctuary. So our tours of the "Holy Land" are inherently different than Israelite pilgrimages to the sanctuary/temple. Our church services are analogous to weekly synagogue worship in a variety of locations that originated after the Jews were scattered during the Babylonian captivity.

So what holds Christians together? Hebrews 10:19—22 identifies a central

place to which all Christians are invited by faith:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (NRSV)

God's temple in heaven is the only place to which we can legitimately make pilgrimage because it is where he resides and where Christ ministers for us. If we are tempted to feel cheated out of an earthly holy place to which we can journey every now and then, we should ponder the tremendous advantage of a worship center that is only a prayer away. We can visit it several times a day even more easily than a web site! As our prayers converge on God's heavenly headquarters, our hearts are drawn to each other wherever we are located. Martin Luther advised his barber to say "Amen" firmly at the end of his prayers, and explained:

> Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, "Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth." That is what Amen means.[29]

Lack of earthly holy places preempts a plethora of problems for Christians. We have no need to fight with another group over use of some real estate, such as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—regarded as holy by different religious traditions. It is appalling how many people throughout history have suffered and died in religious disputes and crusades over "holy" places. The hemorrhage of murder, rape, and pillage in the name of "religion" gushes on unabated.

One "holy" hot spot is at the northern Indian city of Ayodhya, where Hindu militants destroyed a four hundred-year-old mosque in 1992 because it was built on the site where many Hindus believe that their god Ram was born. In March 2002, when a group of Hindu pilgrims was returning by train from Ayodhya, where they had participated in rituals intended as preliminary to building a temple where the mosque had been, a Muslim mob attacked the train with stones, knives, and gasoline, burned the coaches in which pilgrims were

traveling, and murdered 58 Hindus, mostly women and children. In retaliation, local Hindu leaders gave orders to destroy all Muslims, whereupon a mob of 2,000 armed with sticks, stones, and containers of gasoline went on the hunt for Muslims, whom they murdered, burned, and raped.[30] All this hate was in the name of holiness.

What a relief for Christians that we can make pilgrimage on the wings of prayer rather than by train!

1. Note too that just as Lev. 23 has two introductions, it has two final sections dealing with the Feast of Booths, one before the conclusion proper (vv. 33—36) and one after (vv. 39—43).

2. Cf. *ANET,* 320 (the Gezer Calendar).

3. The Boethusians, Samaritans, and Karaites counted from the morrow of the first Sabbath after Passover, the Pharisees counted from the morning after the Passover, and for the sectarians the date of the sheaf ceremony was Nisan 26 (Y. Yadin, *The Temple Scroll,* 1:117, J. M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* [Leiden: Brill, 1977], 111).

4. Ramban on Lev. 23:17, Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence,* 25.

5. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2004.

6. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, repr. 1999 [orig. 1969]), 54—59 (esp. tablet I, lines 191, 195—97, 240—41).

7. J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis,* 2d ed. (ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 35, Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 68—69.

8. Compare J. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 96—97.

9. On the uniqueness of Sabbath and the weekly cycle, which are not defined by movement of any celestial body, see U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* transl. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 244, N. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 111.

10. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants,* 69.

11. R. Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," *JATS* 10 (1999): 315.

12. A. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), 10.

13. Cf., e.g., Davidson, *Typology in Scripture,* 346—47, 351—52.

14. James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the*

Epistle to the Hebrews (ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), 51, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 73—75.

15. Cf. 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13, referring to Sabbaths, new moons, and festivals.

16. Paul Giem, "*Sabbaton* in Col 2:16," *AUSS* 19 (1981): 195—210.

17. NASB "in respect to"; NKJV "regarding"; NIV "with regard to"; NRSV "of observing"; NJB "about observance of"; BAGD (507) renders "in the matter of, literally 'in the part of.'"

18. Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," 322.

19. G. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 162—63.

20. Ibid., 162.

21. Ibid., 161.

22. Ibid., 164; cf. 163, 165—69. On Sabbath rest as good news for modern Christians, see S. Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome: S. Bacchiocchi, 1980).

23. See M. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 70.

24. Ibid., xii-xiii.

25. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, 171.

26. Ibid., 175.

27. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 65—66.

28. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, 167.

29. Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 29.

30. Meenakshi Ganguly, "In the Heart of Hate," *Time* (March 11, 2002): 51.

Leviticus 23:23—44

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 24“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first
day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred
assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25Do no regular work,
but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.'"

26The LORD said to Moses, 27The tenth day of this seventh month is
the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves,
and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. 28Do no work on that
day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for
you before the LORD your God. 29Anyone who does not deny himself
on that day must be cut off from his people. 30I will destroy from
among his people anyone who does any work on that day. 31You shall
do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations
to come, wherever you live. 32It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you
must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month
until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

33The LORD said to Moses, 34“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth
day of the seventh month the LORD’S Feast of Tabernacles begins, and
it lasts for seven days. 35The first day is a sacred assembly; do no
regular work. 36For seven days present offerings made to the LORD by
fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an
offering made to the LORD by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no
regular work.

37(“'These are the LORD’S appointed feasts, which you are to
proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the LORD
by fire—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink
offerings required for each day. 38These offerings are in addition to
those for the LORD’S Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and

whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD.)

39“'So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. 40On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. “'Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. 42Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths 43so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'"

44So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD.

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 23:23—36 PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONS for three autumn festivals in the seventh month: a memorial of trumpet blasts on the first day, the Day of Purgation on the tenth day, and the Festival of Booths on the fifteenth to twenty-first days, with its closing sacred occasion on the twenty-second day. The fact that the festival calendar culminates in the *seventh* month, at the end of the harvest season, provides an important additional connection to the Sabbath principle as acknowledgment of God's ongoing creatorship.

Directions for the first day of the seventh month are brief (vv. 23—25). The only unique element is a reminder *(iikkaron¸* cf. Ex. 12:14; 13:9) accomplished by "trumpet blasts" *(teru'ah;* Lev. 23:24). This passage does not specify the nature of the sound, the one(s) to whom the reminder is directed, or its purpose. However, in Numbers 10:9 the same kind of sound is a signal for battle: "When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast [Hiphil of *rw']* on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies." Here the signal to fight a just war simultaneously serves as a reminder to God in the sense of a prayer for deliverance (cf. 2 Chron. 13:12—16). While Numbers 10:10 tells us that another kind of trumpet blast is to be sounded over sacrifices at times of rejoicing, at festivals, and at the beginnings of months as a reminder for the Israelites before the Lord, the short blasts at commencement of the seventh month convey special urgency.

Why would a war signal be blown every year on the first day of the seventh month? Numbers 23:21 supplies a clue. Balaam gazed on Israel's war camp and uttered a blessing: "The LORD their God is with them; the shout *[teru'ah]* of the King is among them." Here the word *teru'ah* is a battle cry having the same function as blasts on a trumpet (cf. 2 Chron. 13:12—16). It is the war signal of a royal army, led by a king, and in this case the monarch is none other than God himself, so Israel's victory is guaranteed.[1]

On the first day of the seventh month (23:24), Israelites will hear the trumpet signal, reminding them that their Commander-in-Chief, King, and Deliverer is with them. This is ten days before the Day of Purgation (Atonement), when the

Lord affirms his relationship with those who show loyalty by humbling themselves through self-denial and keeping Sabbath, but he rejects those who neglect to do this (16:29—31, 23:26—32, see further below). Only the loyal will benefit from divine deliverance. So the short blasts on the first day of the month also imply the solemn responsibility of repentance and reformation.

Long after the destruction of the temple, blowing a ram's horn *(sopar)* still ushers in the Jewish "days of awe," the high holy days of the seventh month when it is believed that all humankind must seek repentance in order to be saved.[2] Because the first day of this month heralds renewal of life with God, it has become Rosh Ha-Shanah ("New Year") in postbiblical Jewish tradition.

Following reinforced reiteration of the commands to practice self-denial and abstain from work on the Day of Purgation (23:26—32, see below), verses 33—36 concern the Festival of Booths ("Tabernacles"). This major pilgrim festival celebrates God's goodness at the end of the harvest (i.e., the end of the agricultural year), which is why Exodus 23:16, 34:22 call it the Festival of Ingathering. Its purpose is similar to that of the American Thanksgiving holiday, which was started at Plymouth Bay when the early Pilgrim settlers completed their first successful harvest.

The Festival of Booths runs for seven days from the fifteenth to twenty-first days of the seventh month (Lev. 23:34), plus a connected but distinct solemn assembly *('asarah,* cf. Joel 1:14, 2:15—16, 2 Kings 10:20—21) on the eighth day (Lev. 23:36). This seven-plus-one day sequence of contiguous festival days balances the one-plus-seven day sequence of Passover plus Unleavened Bread in the spring, creating a symmetrical pattern:

Spring
Passover (1 day)
Unleavened Bread (7 days)
Elevated Sheaf (1 day)
Weeks (1 day)

Autumn
Trumpets (1 day)
Day of Purgation (1 day)
Booths (7 days)
Solemn Assembly (1 day)

Following a conclusion in verses 37—38, which emphasizes that the public offerings specified in chapter 23 are in addition to any other sacrifices brought

by the Israelites, verses 39—43 append important supplementary instructions regarding the Festival of Booths. These directions stand outside the scope of the conclusion because they do not concern sacred offerings at the sanctuary.

During the seven days of the festival, the Israelites are to rejoice before the Lord with various kinds of foliage and live in booths as a reminder of life in the desert, when the Lord brought them out of Egypt. Thus, not only do they rejoice in his creative power over agriculture; they also relive his historical redemption, accomplished by his creative power as demonstrated by the signs/miracles he performed for them in Egypt (e.g., the ten plagues), his parting of the Red Sea to save them from Pharaoh, and his provision for their physical needs in the desert (water from rock, manna, etc.). The tight link between the Lord's creative and redemptive roles also appears in the fact that both of them are motives for keeping the Sabbath (Ex. 20:11; Deut. 5:15).

Just as the procedures in Joel 2:15 ("Blow the trumpet [here *sopar]* in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly") address a crucial situation of corporate agricultural need (a locust plague), Milgrom concludes that the three seventh-month festivals, which embrace blowing of trumpets (day 1), fasting (day 10), and a solemn assembly (day 22), appear to function as a dynamic unit to petition God every year "for adequate and timely rain in the forthcoming agricultural year."[3]

Joel 2 also speaks of rain, including literal autumn and spring rain (Joel 2:23) and a later outpouring of God's Spirit (vv. 28—29). According to Peter, God poured out his Spirit on Christians at the spring Festival of Weeks/Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16—18). So just as it was appropriate for Israelites to pray for literal rain, it is fitting for Christians to ask God for the "rain" of his Spirit.

For the Israelites, religious rejoicing climaxed with the pilgrim Festival of Booths. There could also be some joy on the Day of Purgation, particularly when the Jubilee release began on this day (Lev. 25:9). *Mishnah Ta'anit* 4:8 describes the Day of Purgation as a joyful occasion, when the young women of Jerusalem sallied forth to dance in the vineyards and young men chose brides from among them (cf. Judg. 21:19—23).[4] However, *Mishnah Yoma* 7:4 places the mood of rejoicing after that of solemnity: The high priest celebrated with his friends after he emerged safely from the temple. At the end of tractate *Yoma* (8:9), R. Aqiba found another reason for rejoicing: God purified Israel through the events of the great Day.[5]

The sequence of autumn festivals is logical. On the first day of the seventh month, there is a reminder that the Lord is Israel's sovereign deliverer. On the

tenth day (Day of Purgation), God as King judges between his loyal and disloyal subjects. From the fifteenth to twenty-first days of the same month (Festival of Booths), the Lord celebrates his kingship with his loyal subjects.[6] This progression complements Milgrom's idea that the seventh-month festivals had to do with petitioning God for rain (see above). For all blessings, including rain, the Israelites were dependent on their divine King, to whom they were accountable for loyalty.

Bridging Contexts

SELF-DENIAL TO EXPRESS continuing loyalty. Leviticus 23:26—32 recapitulates the commands of 16:29—31 to practice self-denial and abstain from work on the Day of Purgation, adding several elements: (1) It names this day "the Day of Expiation/Purgation," commonly rendered as the "Day of Atonement" (23:27—28). (2) It condemns violators to divine "cutting off" and destruction (vv. 29—30). (3) The commands of self-denial and keeping total Sabbath apply from evening on the ninth day of the seventh month until the next evening (v. 32).

Leviticus and Numbers do not explain how to "deny [afflict] oneself," that is, practice self-denial (Piel of *'nh;* 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Num. 29:7), but the fact that husband-wife relations are involved in Numbers 30:13 suggests the possibility that sexual abstinence could be included (so *m. Yoma* 8:1).[7] Outside the Pentateuch we find more information. When a friend is sick, the psalmist accompanies his prayer by voluntarily denying himself through fasting and wearing sackcloth (Ps. 35:13). In Isaiah 58:3, 5 fasting and practicing self-denial (probably on the Day of Purgation) are in parallel and associated with bowing one's head and lying in sackcloth and ashes. Ezra and his returning exiles besought God for a safe journey while practicing self-denial through fasting (8:21). Daniel also accompanied a petition with self-denial (10:12). Verses 2—3 describe his behavior as mourning and provide the details that he abstained from luxurious food and drink and from putting oil (moisturizer) on himself.

Thus, practicing self-denial is an outward expression accompanying supplication to God at a time of inner distress.[8] Temporary suspension of normal activities, including eating that sustains life, focuses on God without interruption[9] and acknowledges dependence on his power.

The purpose of self-denial on the Day of Purgation appears to be basically the same as that of this practice at other times: to humbly acknowledge total dependence on God at a time of special need. Total Sabbath at the same time facilitates this focus while enacting holiness in harmony with that of the awesome transactions at the sanctuary. On this occasion the Israelites' need is to receive moral cleansing through purgation of the sanctuary on their behalf from sins for which they have already been forgiven (Lev. 16:30). We can conclude

that the Israelites who practice self-denial as an outward token of sincere inner repentance[10] and who keep Sabbath on the Day of Purgation express their ongoing loyalty and humble submission to their holy Lord. By participating in the great Day, those who are faithful accept its efficacy as applying to them.

vindicating the justice of mercy. How do you vindicate the justice and wisdom of mercy that has already been given? King Solomon knew the answer to this question. Although his brother Adonijah attempted to claim the throne while their father David was still alive (1 Kings 1), Solomon won the prize (1:39—40). As the new king, he became judge over Adonijah and granted him conditional pardon: "If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die" (1:52). Obviously Solomon defined this kind of worthiness versus evil in terms of loyalty or disloyalty to himself. For him loyalty was the bottom line.

Whether or not Adonijah kept his pardon depended on his own choice to continue showing that he accepted the terms of Solomon's clemency as a loyal subject to the king. If he proved loyal, the pardon already given would be justified because it would have achieved its goal. But if Solomon judged Adonijah to have turned rebellious, the king would no longer justify the pardon and therefore would revoke it. The latter is what happened some time later. When Adonijah requested permission to marry Abishag, who had belonged to David (2:13—21), Solomon assumed that he was attempting to revive his claim to the throne because having a woman belonging to a previous ruler was a royal privilege (1:22, cf. 2 Sam. 16:21—22). So Solomon ordered Adonijah's execution (1 Kings 2:23—25). Solomon grasped the fact that pardon does not always achieve its goal, which is permanent reformation and reconciliation. His father had learned this the hard way with Absalom.

In Matthew 18, Jesus taught that the kingdom of God works similarly. A king forgave one of his servants a monstrous debt of ten thousand talents (Matt. 18:23—27), but when the servant went out, he grabbed one of his colleagues by the throat to extract payment of a miserable hundred *denarii.* Refusing to grant small mercy after having received amazing grace, he had his fellow servant thrown in prison (vv. 28—30). The king heard about it and revoked his forgiveness of the first servant's huge debt (vv. 31—35).

The point of the parable is that a person who receives forgiveness from God must pass it on if he or she does not want to lose it. Forgiveness that cannot reproduce is sterile, like a mule. Because divine forgiveness, like Solomon's pardon of Adonijah, has the purpose of restoring an ongoing relationship, it is not simply a "one-shot deal." It is something that the recipient must cherish and not throw away by disloyalty to God, which can be shown by the way we treat

our fellow human beings.

When Jesus forgave people, he wanted them to cherish it. Having short-circuited the execution of a woman caught in adultery, Jesus said to her: “Then neither do I condemn you…. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). He freed her from condemnation so that she could have a new kind of life, not to give her another chance to hop in bed with someone else. He accepts us the way we are, but he doesn’t leave us the way we were (cf. Rom. 8:1—4)!

Like the Christ of the New Testament, the Lord of Leviticus sought long-term moral rehabilitation rather than a quick fix that would soon fall apart. This explains why he required the Israelites to demonstrate their ongoing repentance and loyalty to him on the Day of Purgation by observing self-denial and resting from all work (Lev. 16:29, 31, 23:26—32). Having already received forgiveness at stage 1 in the process of expiation throughout the year (e.g., 4:20, 31, 35), they showed on the Day of Purgation that they loyally cherished their restored relationship to God and thus received the vindicating benefit of stage 2: moral purification that resulted from the high priest’s purgation of the sanctuary (16:30, 34).[11]

The benefit of stage 2 was not automatic. The choice belonged to the people. Anyone who disloyally disregarded the Lord’s commands to practice self-denial and abstain from work on that great Day would suffer the terminal divine penalties of being “cut off” and destroyed (Lev. 23:29—30), thereby losing everything, including any forgiveness earlier received. Expiation had to be finished or it was invalidated, just as a baby must be born completely in order to survive, a criminal on parole who commits a crime goes back to jail, and in the Academic Records office of a university an unchanged “Incomplete” turns into an “F."

As a yearly review of divine-human relationships, the Day of Purgation was not unique in the ancient Near East. For example, the Sumerian “Nanshe Hymn,” dating from about 2100—2000 B.C., describes a New Year celebration in which contracts of persons employed by or otherwise economically dependent on the temple of the goddess Nanshe were reviewed in terms of their ritual and ethical behavior during the previous year and their presence at the temple on the New Year.[12] As in Israel, persons within the divinely benefited community were judged on a particular day according to the quality of their loyalty toward a deity and the standards established and enforced by that deity.[13]

On the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year *(Akltu)* Festival of Spring, ritual functionaries purged the Esagila temple of the god Marduk and the Ezida cella of his visiting son Nabû from demonic impurities. Cleansing the Ezida included

wiping (Akkadian *kuppuru*, cognate of Hebrew *kipper)* its walls with the decapitated carcass of a ram, which was then thrown in the Euphrates River. Participants in this ritual became impure and had to remain outside the city for the remainder of the eleve; or twelve-day festival. This is analogous to treatment of human impurity contracted by Israelites who disposed of the purification offering carcasses after the high priest purged the sanctuary (Lev. 16:28).

Later on the same day of the Babylonian festival, the king approached (the image of) Marduk in the Esagila without his crown and royal insignia. Then the high priest humbled/afflicted the king before the god by striking his cheek, pulling him by the ears, and making him kneel down. Addressing Marduk, the king asserted his righteousness.[14] After this un-confession (by contrast with the Israelite high priest's confession; Lev. 16:21), the high priest affirmed Marduk's goodwill toward the monarch, restored his crown and insignia, and struck him to make tears flow as a good omen of Marduk's favor.[15] While the Babylonian and Sumerian festival days paralleled the Israelite Day of Purgation in a number of ways, neither of them included review and reaffirmation of divine forgiveness that had been granted earlier in the year. This element was unique to the Day of Purgation (see comments on Lev. 16).

Judgment day. Because God separated disloyal Israelites from those who were loyal on the Day of Purgation (contrast Lev. 16:30 with 23:29—30), this was Israel's yearly "judgment day."[16] All who had been provisionally or nominally loyal now had the choice to seal their commitment to God or throw it away. Their own decision fixed the Lord's verdict. By the conclusion of the Day of Purgation ceremonies, the community whom God acknowledged as his consisted only of those whom he had morally purified.

Leviticus 16:30 ("For on this day shall purgation be effected on your behalf to purify you of all your sins, you shall become pure before the LORD")[17] provides the reason for the commands to practice self-denial and cease work (16:29, repeated in v. 31 in reverse order, creating a chiasm that frames v. 30). So Israelites who demonstrated their loyalty on the Day of Purgation received moral purification through purgation of the sanctuary. This connection makes sense if the events of that day have to do with vindicating God's justice, including his justice in granting forgiveness to guilty people (see comments on Lev. 16). If a judge forgives a defendant and then the judge's merciful decision with regard to that party is upheld, the defendant is cleared in the sense that forgiveness already received is confirmed.

The Israelites had a vested interest in the sanctuary because they were the source of evils that accumulated there, and its fate was their fate. If they

excessively polluted it through an accumulation of unremedied offenses that damaged the reputation of their covenant deity, he would abandon his earthly residence and them along with it, giving them up to destruction (Ezek. 9:3, 10:4, 18—19, 11:22—23).[18]

On the Day of Purgation, God's justice was also vindicated with regard to unforgiven faults. Purgation of inexpiable rebellious sins from the sanctuary (see comments on Lev. 16:16) sealed his rejection and condemnation of those who had cast off allegiance to him (e.g., 20:3; 19:13, 20), thereby forfeiting their eligibility to receive the benefit of moral purification. Such rebellious sins by people who were nominally connected to the Lord through the covenant had affected his sanctuary by seriously defaming his administration there, raising questions concerning his fairness and authority (cf. Ps. 73). But as the psalmist came to realize, their final destiny is made plain at the sanctuary (v. 17).

Anyone who watched the Iran-Contra hearings on TV during the administration of President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s knows that unlawful activities of subordinates, such as Colonel Oliver North, can malign the reputation of a leader and impair his ability to govern. The only way for him to clear himself/herself is to repudiate such activities and those who carry them out. This is what the Lord does on the Day of Purgation: He clears himself from association with offenses that have gravely misrepresented him, the perpetrators of which are already condemned.

Using language saturated with allusions to Leviticus, Hebrews 10:19—22 appeals to Christians to enjoy access by faith into God's heavenly temple, which Christ has made available by the sacrifice of himself. Verse 22 invites believers to approach God with hearts already having been sprinkled clean from a guilty conscience (cf. 9:13—14). Thus, as on the Israelite Day of Purgation, this experience follows forgiveness. Hebrews 10:23—25 encourages God's people to remain faithful to him in deeds of love and in worship. In this passage, there are two major aspects of loyalty: (1) having faith in Jesus and remaining faithful as he is faithful, and (2) acting in a loving way, which would be in accordance with God's commandments.

Continuing loyalty to God is all the more urgent as "the Day" is approaching (Heb. 10:25). The following verses (vv. 26—30) connect the Day with the Lord's judgment of his people. Perhaps it is more than coincidental that "the Day" coincides with the traditional Jewish abbreviation for the Day of Purgation —*Yoma* (Aramaic), "the Day"—that shows up as the title for the tractate concerning this day in the *Mishnah, Jerusalem Talmud*, and *Babylonian Talmud.*

Hebrews 10:26—30 warns Christians who have received sanctification through Christ's blood of the (new) covenant against the deadly danger of

apostasy (cf. Num. 15:30—31). As on the Israelite Day of Purgation, the Lord's judgment concerns "his people." The post-forgiveness experience of Christians, like that of the Israelites, involves accountability to God for choosing him rather than sin.

Contemporary Significance

SIGNAL OF A NEW beginning. One day in 1987 I was walking along “Tribes of Israel” street in Jerusalem on the way to class at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. Suddenly a siren began to wail. My first thought was an air raid warning—missiles from Syria? But instead of scrambling for cover, drivers stopped their cars and got out. Pedestrians also halted in their tracks. Everyone stood silently at attention for several minutes, facing the direction from which the siren was coming. It was the day to remember those who perished in the Holocaust. The people know that if they ever forget their past and who they are, they will cease to exist, as so many other groups have lost their identity. To remember is to live, to forget is to die.

The seventh new moon day of trumpet blasts was also a crucial time of remembrance *(zikkaron)* for the ancient Israelites (Lev. 23:24). While they would undoubtedly recall the past, the piercing sound also gave hope for the present and future because their divine King would remember and deliver them (cf. Num. 10:9, 23:21). In Revelation 11, a seventh trumpet signals God’s kingship (Rev. 11:15—17). In fact, it announces that the Lord has reestablished his sovereignty over the whole kingdom of this world. Then verses 18—19 speak of judgment and deliverance:

> "The nations were angry, and your wrath has come.
>
> The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets
>
> and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—
>
> and for destroying those who destroy the earth."
>
> Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant….

In ancient Israel the only time when the ark of the covenant was accessible to anyone was on the Day of Purgation, Israel's judgment day, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to begin purging the sanctuary. So Revelation 11:15—19 presents an eschatological parallel to the trumpet and Day of Purgation rituals on the first and tenth days of the seventh month. It is the beginning not just of a new year but of a new era: God's eternal reign of peace. According to this passage, a "new world order" is coming. It won't happen through presidential vision, central intelligence, economic solutions, or military might, but through the divine King, God. Ultimately, his will is to be done on earth, as it is in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:10).

Like a trumpet sound, the appeal of God's sovereignty is urgent, cutting through the din and packed agendas of everyday life. On an airplane trip to southern California and back, I took my Mac PowerBook to continue some pressing work. But on each leg of the journey I barely managed to boot up the computer. Completely above the authority of united Airlines to make seating arrangements, the great Travel Agent in the Friendly Skies had set up a series of appointments to talk to precious people sitting next to me: a social worker, the wife of an emergency room physician, and an artist and musician. I didn't make any special effort to initiate or guide these conversations, but they were not ordinary exchanges. In each case the person was at a special point of change and searching for meaning in life, reaching out and exploring the God option. There was urgency, and God apparently wanted me to be there for them to confirm that they were not alone in hearing his signal.

Ongoing commitment. It is important to say the right words at the right time with sincerity, but after such a commitment comes the opportunity and responsibility to follow through. This is the way it is with an engagement to be married. A young man asks a young woman if she will marry him. She accepts the proposal. They have made a commitment that is tested at the time of the wedding, which in a sense is a kind of "judgment day."

The white and gold announcements may have gone to the ends of the earth. The church may be overflowing with flowers and candles. The multi-tiered cake and multiteared mother of the bride may be as ready as they will ever be, and gifts may be piled high on several tables. Loved ones may be waiting expectantly in the pews, the organist starting to play, attendants in tuxedos and gorgeous frocks about to reenact the age of chivalry, and the minister already standing at the pulpit with his Bible and notes. But if either the bride or the groom gets "cold feet" and decides to pull out at the last minute, no marriage will begin at this time.

If a wedding successfully begins a marriage, the following years parse the big

meaning of the little words “I do” as they are lived out in sickness and in health, in adversity and prosperity. unless actions consistently back up the promise, words are cheap.

Similarly, Christians who accept salvation and receive forgiveness must continue in their faith (Col. 1:23), just as the ancient Israelites were to maintain their loyalty. Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). It is not enough to have done God’s will in the past, even if that included prophesying and performing miracles (7:22—23).

Just as a couple sets a wedding date, God “has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Believing in Christ does not exempt us from judgment. Speaking to Christians, Paul wrote: “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Rom. 14:10). However, there are two pieces of good news.

(1) All divine judgment is through Christ, who died to save us. Having paid the ultimate price, he doesn’t want anyone to be lost (2 Peter 3:9). Charles Spurgeon pointed out the benefit of Christ’s justice: “It may seem a stern attribute, but even that is yours, for He will by His justice see to it that all which is promised to you in the covenant of grace shall be most certainly secured to you.”[19]

(2) God’s judgment is not for the purpose of finding out who has sinned and who has not. Everyone has sinned (Rom. 3:23), so there is no need for a judgment to distinguish between people on this basis. For us, as for the adulterous woman brought to Jesus, the question is: Do we accept and hold on to the transforming gift of forgiveness that Christ has freely granted us (cf. John 8:11)?

For those who are forgiven and remain reconciled to God, judgment reaffirms assurance, it does not take it away. Compare the fact that on the Day of Purgation, the high priest did not purge the sanctuary and its sancta by wiping off bloodstains from earlier sacrifices. Rather, he applied more blood (Lev. 16:14—19) at several of the same places (cf. 4:6—7, 17—18, 25, 30, 34), reaffirming forgiveness already granted through blood.[20] God’s faithful ones, who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice, have nothing to fear in the judgment (cf. Ps. 50:3—6), which God gives them for their benefit (cf. Dan. 7:22). It is Satan, not God, who is trying to take away our assurance (Zech. 3:1—5, Rev. 12:10).

Through parables of wheat versus weeds and good fish versus undesirable fish, Jesus taught that God ultimately distinguishes between his true people and

those who appear to be his but are not (Matt. 13:24—30, 36—43, 47—50). When Christ comes in glory, he will know who are really his. The deciding factor will not be words of commitment, but whether people have followed through by honoring him in the way they have treated others in what many would call "the little things of life" (25:31—46).

Ongoing loyalty to God is not simply an abstract attitude. Rather, it has practical effects that result from the divine-human relationship. Doing things for Christ by doing them for others does not buy salvation, which is exclusively God's gift by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8—9). Rather, serving others is the inevitable outflow of true, living faith that expresses itself through love (Gal. 5:6). If there is a source, there will be a river. If there is no river, James says the source is dead (James 2:26).

Rest and self-denial. Does the Lord expect Christians to do anything analogous to the humbling through self-denial and resting from work that he required of the ancient Israelites on the Day of Purgation (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:26—32)? In Revelation 14, for those who live at the time when God's "judgment has come" (v. 7), verse 12 calls for the patient endurance of God's holy ones, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. These are the same aspects of loyalty that we found in Hebrews 10:19—25 (see above).

There is remarkable correspondence between the two aspects of faithfulness in Leviticus and Revelation.[21] (1) *Humbling through self-denial* (Lev. 16:29) is what Jesus did in the ultimate sense when "he humbled himself and became obedient to death" (Phil. 2:8). So *keeping the faith of Jesus* (Rev. 14:12) can refer to having the kind of humble faith that Jesus did. But it can simultaneously mean having "faith in Jesus" (NASB; NJB) and what he has accomplished for us through his faithful self-sacrifice.

(2) For the Israelites, to completely *rest from work* on the Day of Purgation was to keep Sabbath (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:31—32). There was only one other Sabbath observance of total rest from all work: the weekly Sabbath (23:3). Why would God link the Day of Purgation to the weekly Sabbath in this way? The weekly Sabbath was not simply one of God's commandments. In Exodus 31:13 he commanded the Israelites: "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy." As a "lasting covenant" (31:16), Sabbath was a microcosm of the divine-human relationship, within which the Lord was bringing his people into harmony with himself, his holy character, and all of his commandments, just as God's holy people in Revelation 14:12 are to keep the commandments of God. Similarly, the Israelites' observance of Sabbath on the Day of Purgation was a pledge of allegiance to their covenant Lord, through

whose priest they were morally cleansed from their sins (Lev. 16:30).

For Christians, the point of keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus is not to earn salvation, but simply to keep on loyally trusting God as he sanctifies us through our heavenly High Priest. In this way we participate with him, just as the Israelites were to show solidarity with their high priest when he disappeared from their sight and approached God in the Most Holy Place on their behalf to accomplish a transaction that was a matter of life and death.

What do you do when somebody does something for you that is a matter of life and death? Is it business as usual? Is it a time to go out to eat or throw a party? Queen Esther said "no." When she agreed to go before the king to save her people, thereby risking her life, she wanted some serious support even though other Jews could not come with her. She sent a message to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16).

If Esther's people valued their lives, the least they could do was to fast with her. They were totally dependent on her mediation. Likewise, the Israelites completely relied on the ministration of their high priest to accomplish the purgation of the sanctuary through which they became morally "clean" (Lev. 16:30), and we are utterly dependent on Christ's mediation to make us morally "blameless" (Rev. 14:5).

Humbling ourselves in preparation for or during God's judgment does not mean that we should live our entire lives in an attitude of mourning. Repentance certainly involves sorrow for the grief that our wrongs have brought to God, to other human beings, and to ourselves. But the reason for such remembering is to enable us to let go and forget (cf. Phil. 3:13—14).[22]

By participating with God in forgetting, we can also learn to develop amnesia regarding the pain that others have caused us. An anonymous prayer begins:

> Lord, please shorten my memory.
> I remember some things way too long, Lord.
> I remember words of criticism that were spoken so long ago
> the critic can't even remember having said them.
> And, Lord, if someone has lied to me or about me,
> I never seem to forget.[23]

1. For *teru'ah* in the context of God as king, see also Ps. 47:5, cf. 2 Sam. 6:15 of bringing the Lord's ark up to Jerusalem.

2. See *m. Ros. Has.* 4:5—6, 9, *b. Ros. Has.* 16a, cf. Agnon, *Days of Awe*.

3. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2018; cf. 2043—46; S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* transl. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 1:122.

4. This mood is similar to that which prevailed during much of the Babylonian New Year Festival of Spring. Cf. K. van der Toorn, "Form and Function of the New Year Festival in Babylonia and Israel," in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 6—8.

5. Cf. Agnon, *Days of Awe,* 186, 220—21.

6. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 17. Cf. Levine's observation that the Day of Purgation "ensured that the sanctuary and, hence, the people would be restored to a state of fitness in time for the celebration of the autumn Sukkot festival" *(Leviticus,* 162).

7. Cf. Ex. 19:15, where abstinence from sexual relations was part of preparation for the Lord's appearance on Mount Sinai.

8. Cf. Harrison, *Leviticus,* 175.

9. Philo, *Special Laws* 2:196; Peter-Contesse and Ellington, *Handbook on Leviticus,* 258.

10. Cf. *m. Yoma* 8:8—9; *b. Yoma* 86a-b; Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus,* 261; Noordtzij, *Leviticus,* 171.

11. Cf. Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 14. See also H. Cohen, "The Day of Atonement: I," *Judaism* 17 (1968): 357, idem, "The Day of Atonement: II," *Judiasm is* (1969): 86—87.

12. W. Heimpel, "The Nanshe Hymn," *JCS* 33 (1981): 65—119; Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once…: Sumerian Poetry in Translation,* 125—42.

13. For detailed analysis and comparison with the Israelite Day of Purgation, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 17.

14. *ANET,* 334.

15. For detailed analysis and comparison with the Israelite Day of Purgation, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 17.

16. Cf. *b. Ros. Has.,* 16a-b, *y. Ros. Has.,* 1:3, Regarding judgment in connection with New Year's celebrations in the ancient Near East, see M. Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source Against Their Ancient Near Eastern Background," in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Panel Sessions: Bible Studies and*

Hebrew Language (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies/Perry Foundation for Biblical Research, 1983), 116—17.

17. Transl. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus i — i6,* 1011.

18. Ibid., 258—61.

19. C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening Daily Readings* (Books for the Ages, Version 2.0 on CD-ROM, Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1996, 1997), 7.

20. Gane, *Altar Call,* 340.

21. Ibid., 316, 322.

22. Cf. Brand and Yancey, *In His Image,* 79.

23. Griffith, *Looking Up,* 62.

Leviticus 24

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Command the Israelites to bring you
clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept
burning continually. ‘Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent
of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening
till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the
generations to come. 4The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before
the LORD must be tended continually.

5“Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths
of an ephah for each loaf. 6Set them in two rows, six in each row, on
the table of pure gold before the LORD. 7Along each row put some pure
incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an
offering made to the LORD by fire. 8This bread is to be set out before
the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites,
as a lasting covenant. 9It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat
it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of
the offerings made to the LORD by fire."

10Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went
out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between
him and an Israelite. 11The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the
Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother’s name
was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) 12They put him in
custody until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them.

13Then the LORD said to Moses: 14“Take the blasphemer outside the
camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and
the entire assembly is to stone him. 15Say to the Israelites: ‘If anyone
curses his God, he will be held responsible; 16anyone who blasphemes
the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must

stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.

17“ ‘If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. 18Anyone who takes the life of someone’s animal must make restitution—life for life. 19If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: 20fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. ’'Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. 22You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.'”

23Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him. The Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Original Meaning

AFTER INSTRUCTIONS for holy times in chapter 23, chapter 24 has to do with other holy things: oil for the lamps in the outer sanctum of the sanctuary, bread to be placed on the golden table there, and the narrative case of the brawling blasphemer, whose misuse of God's holy name and violence leads to additional legislation regarding blasphemy and assault.

Regular maintenance rituals in the outer sanctum. Verses 2—4 remind the Israelites of their ongoing duty to supply olive oil as fuel for the lamps on the golden lampstand so that the priest can keep them burning regularly *(tamid)* every night from evening to morning (Ex. 27:20—21). Every morning he is to trim the lamps and fill them with fresh oil, and every evening he is to kindle them (30:7—8, cf. 25:37, Num. 8:2—3). By burning through the night, the lamps parallel the evening regular burnt offering on the outer altar (Lev. 6:2).

Within the Israelite ritual system, the lampstand, table, and incense burner served as the Lord's furniture in his dwelling place (cf. Ex. 25:8). The complex of rituals performed regularly by the priest in the outer sanctum, such as tending the lamps (27:20—21, Lev. 24:1—4) and burning incense (Ex. 30:7—8), constituted the work of a servant for his Lord, who was enthroned behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place.[1]

The regular rituals had the purpose of maintaining an existing order, that is, the Presence of God dwelling among his people in the sanctuary. Thus in F. Gorman's taxonomy of rituals, these are rituals of "maintenance" (cf. Num. 28—29), in contrast to rituals of "founding" that create a normative state (Lev. 8—9: consecration and inauguration) or rituals of "restoration" that accomplish return to the normative state (e.g., purification and reparation offerings).[2]

Another regular *(tamid* in v. 8) priestly ritual duty in the outer sanctum was to renew the "bread of the Presence" (KJV "shewbread"; see Ex. 25:30) each Sabbath on the golden table (Lev. 24:5—9). This special presentation offering of grain, consisting of twelve (probably unleavened)[3] loaves plus frankincense, was placed on the table in two "arrangements" (24:6; NIV "rows"). To fit on the small table (cf. Ex. 25:23), these must have been piles (not rows) of six (probably flat) loaves each.[4] A "memorial" (token) portion of frankincense was "by" (*'al*;

“on"?) each pile (Lev. 24:7), most likely in containers.[5]

Brawling and blasphemy. As in chapter 10 regarding Nadab and Abihu, 24:10—23 is a narrative reporting a person’s sin against the sphere of holiness, which results in his death. Both of these passages, which are the only narratives in Leviticus, are accompanied by additional legislation. Whereas 10:1—7 and the subsequent law regarding intoxication in 10:8—11 are not clearly and tightly connected, the circumstances involved in the narrative of 24:10—14 directly generate the ensuing legislation regarding blasphemy and physical assault (24:15—22).[6] In fact, the laws are framed by the divine sentence of death on the blasphemer (v. 14) and the report of his execution (v. 23).

The text does not say when the blasphemer incident occurred, so it appears to be included here in Leviticus 24 for a thematic reason (holiness) rather than a chronological one. The problem starts when a man whose mother is Israelite but whose father is Egyptian, and who therefore is camped with the mixed multitude of non-Israelites (cf. Ex. 12:38; Deut. 23:7—8), goes out of his area into the Israelite encampment. A fight ensues between the half-Israelite and a full Israelite (Lev. 24:10), which likely has something to do with the fact that the former is in the wrong neighborhood. While the text does not say who started the altercation, because the full Israelite is not later indicted and punished, the intruder must be at fault.

The mother of the half-Israelite is “Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite” (24:11). In addition to specifying his Israelite connection, Mary Douglas has shown that translating these proper Hebrew names reveals a potent subtext emphasizing that actions carry consequences. The effect is something like:

> Once there was a man (with no name), son of Shelomith-Retribution, grandson of Dibri-Lawsuit, from the house of Dan-Judgement, and he pelted insults at the Name … and the Lord said “He shall die, he pelted my Name, he shall be pelted to death.”[7]

Apparently frustrated and angry that he is not achieving his objective, whatever it is, the half-Israelite pronounces (Qal of *nqb)* “the Name,” that is, “YHWH,”[8] the sacred personal name of Israel’s deity, and curses. The shocked Israelites apprehend him and bring him to Moses for determination of his fate (24:11).

By itself *nqb* (“pronounce”) is neutral. In some contexts it is good (Gen. 30:28, Num. 1:17) and even something God does (Isa. 62:2). Saying God’s name could also be proper, positive, and permissible in Old Testament times (e.g.,

Ruth 2:4). However, the half-Israelite disrespectfully misuses God's name, violating the third commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:7). He does not simply take God's name in vain as a construction worker might when he accidentally whacks his thumbnail instead of a sixteen-penney nail, he curses (Piel of *qll,* Lev. 24:11).

It is not that the half-Israelite invokes the name "YHWH" to curse his human antagonist, as the prophet Elisha did (2 Kings 2:24, cf. Josh. 6:26). Rather, he assaults the Lord by cursing *him* personally, as shown by the way the following legislation begins: "If anyone curses [Piel of *qll]* his God, he will be held responsible, anyone who blasphemes [Qal of *nqb]* the name of the LORD *[yhwh]* must be put to death" (Lev. 24:15—16). This reiterates the command of Exodus 22:28: "You shall not curse [Piel of *qll]* God, nor curse [Qal of *'rr]* a ruler of your people" (NASB). Because a curse was regarded as a real and potent weapon in ancient times, such an attack was not merely figurative. There is a closer connection between blasphemy against God and assault on humans and animals, the topics of the legislation in Leviticus 24:15—22, than we thought!

Using the power of speech against God, who created the world for the human species by speaking (Gen. 1), is the height of ingratitude and rebellion. It is also ultimate arrogance to suppose that one can engage in a verbal slugfest with the Almighty. This is an implicit claim to divine power, which is not protected by a right of "free speech" under the Lord's constitution.

Once the Israelites bring the blasphemer to Moses (24:11), we expect the latter to pronounce a sentence on him for violating the legislation in Exodus 22:28. This apodictic law, however, states no penalty for directly attacking the Lord by cursing him—though if one who curses his parents should be put to death (21:17), it seems obvious that the blasphemer has even greater reason to die. Still Moses does not know whether God himself will directly administer capital punishment or whether he will delegate this to the community. Pending a divine oracle to clarify the question, the blasphemer is put under guard (Lev. 24:12).

When the Lord speaks, he specifies the execution procedure: "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him" (24:14). "Outside the camp" is to avoid polluting the camp with a corpse.

The hand-leaning gesture does not show up with other early Israelite executions, most notably that of the man gathering sticks on Sabbath, whom the Lord also commanded the community to stone (Num. 15:32—36; cf. 25:4—5; Josh. 7:25). So it appears that hand-leaning by witnesses must do more than designating the culprit and acknowledging responsibility for his death (cf. Deut. 13:10; 17:7), factors that seem to adequately account for the act in the much later

story of Susanna's false condemnation for adultery (LXX Dan. 13:34). Milgrom contends that the function of hand-leaning in the context of Leviticus 24 is to "convey the pollution generated by the blasphemy back to its producer."[9] This is probably related to the high priest's leaning both hands on the nonsacrificial live goat and loading the moral faults of the Israelites on it before sending it away to Azazel, the source of evil (Lev. 16:21—22; cf. 16:10).

Whatever the nature of the "pollution" affecting the witnesses may have been, it appears that the dynamic curse has affected them in some way. By leaning their hands on the blasphemer, they briefly make a connection for the sake of rejection: Yes, they have heard the curse, but no, they were not party to it; therefore the evil and its consequences belong to the blasphemer alone.

By having the Israelites put the curse "genie" back in the "bottle" through hand-leaning and execution (24:14, 23), the Lord indicates that the community is responsible for rooting out such devastating sin committed by an individual in its midst,[10] even if he was not fully Israelite. Failure to carry out the divine mandate to repudiate, isolate, and annihilate evil will bring condemnation on the community (cf. 20:4—5). As President George W. Bush said to the countries of the world after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there are only two sides. Either you help destroy evil or you are with the enemy.

After telling Moses what to do with the blasphemer in particular (24:14), the Lord formulates his ruling into an ongoing law against cursing God and blaspheming his name (24:15—16). There is another objectionable aspect of the blasphemer's behavior: physical violence. The following legislation lays down a series of penalties for various kinds of violence related to the case at hand by logical extension, including murder, assault, and killing animals belonging to others (24:17—22).[11]

In the law of assault regarding (presumably intentional) infliction of permanent physical injury (24:19—20), we encounter the *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation"), famous for its devastatingly simple approach to pure justice: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." This kind of law also appears in Exodus 21:22—25 for a particular case of physical injury that results from a fight, and in Deuteronomy 19:19, 21 for abuse of the legal procedure by a malicious false witness.

Literal retaliation is clearly expressed by the preposition "as" and the verb "do" in Leviticus 24:19 ("just *as* he has *done*, so it shall be *done* to him", NASB, emphasis supplied) and Deuteronomy 19:19 ("then *do* to him *as* he intended to *do* to his brother", emphasis supplied). Exodus 21:23—25, Leviticus 24:18, and Deuteronomy 19:21 contain the formulation "life for life," which can refer either

to monetary or literal talion. In Leviticus 24:18, “life for life” indicates that restitution in kind for killing someone else’s animal should be equal to the value of the slain animal. However, when a person is the victim of permanent injury, retaliatory penalties (“fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” v. 20) are actually physically inflicted on the culprit, as shown by the “as … done” formulation (vv. 19—20).

Bridging Contexts

BALANCING ACT. According to Genesis 1:27, God made humankind in his own image. Although we are like God, we are not the same as him. Paralleling the tension in nature is a tension in encounter. After the Fall drastically curtailed divine-human interaction, the Lord draws near by assuming human form (Gen. 18, Judg. 6:11—23, 13:3—20), by abiding at the Israelite sanctuary (Ex. 40:34—38), through the incarnation of Christ (Matt. 1:18—23, John 1:14), and through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16—18, 16:12—15). However, amidst the immanence, the Bible also emphasizes the transcendence of "the high and lofty One … he who lives forever, whose name is holy" (Isa. 57:15), "who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16).

> God interacts with us, but this is no ordinary encounter. For our interactions with God to have divine efficacy and power, we should always, within the contexts of our respective cultures, acknowledge that while God makes Himself familiar, we must maintain our sense of awe rather than slipping into undue familiarity.[12]

Like the Israelites, other ancient Near Easterners believed that cultivation of healthy divine-human relationships was essential to their well-being. Thus a Sumerian hymn to the goddess Nanshe (c. 2100 B.C.) extols the benefits of her presence:

> The living quarters of the land prosper in her presence …
> Does not propriety shine brightly in the presence of the lady? …
> In the presence of Nanshe abundance triples in Lagash….[13]

Through prayers, recitations, hymns, and rituals, ancient peoples believed that they interacted with supernatural beings who lived and moved in the heavens and the air, on earth, in the region of subterranean fresh water, or in the netherworld.[14] Myths taught them the origins, powers, and exploits of these mighty personalities.[15]

Devotion to divinities from a distance was not enough. Needing tangible evidence of divine presence among them, people constructed temples as palaces for their gods. The Sumerian “Cylinder A” reports that Gudea, the Ur III period governor of Lagash (c. 2141—2122 B.C.), erected a temple for the god Ningirsu according to divine orders,[16] just as Exodus 25:8 tells us that the Lord directed the Israelites to build him a sanctuary. The layout of the portable Israelite tabernacle (Ex. 25—30) and of the later permanent temple built by Solomon (1 Kings 6—7) was remarkably similar to that of other ancient Near Eastern shrines. For example, archaeologists have discovered the remains of several Syrian temples, each of which had an inner room or area (= Most Holy Place), a main hall (= Holy Place), and, like Solomon’s temple, a portico.[17]

Regular rituals at the Israelite sanctuary reinforced the concept that the divine King (cf. Num. 23:21) was in residence and treated him to a significant extent the way a human king would be served: Priests tended lamps (Ex. 27:20—21; Lev. 24:1—4), burned incense to sweeten the atmosphere at "mealtime” (Ex. 30:7—8),[18] and offered meat with grain and drink (Num. 28:1—8). So in a dwelling of human fabrication, the Lord received service from human priests and accepted human food. Sacrifices offered to him at his outer altar were explicitly termed the *lehem* (“food”) of God (Lev. 21:8, 17, 21, 22, 22:25, see also Num. 28:2). Granted that he enjoyed altar sacrifices in a non-human way through the smoke alone (e.g., Lev. 1:9), in his outer “living room,” the “bread of the Presence” *(lehem [hap]panim)* was laid out on the golden table before him (Ex. 25:30, Lev. 24:5—9), the way it would for a human king.

Outside Israel, ritual bread-laying appears long before Moses or even Abraham, as early as a Sumerian inscription of Urukagina (Uruinimgina, c. 2350 B.C.). Placement of bread before deities was part of the daily care and feeding of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Hittite gods, which were represented by their images. Aside from receiving food and drink, idols were washed, clothed, and in some cases provided with makeup (Egypt).[19]

Corresponding to treatment of deities in a quasi-human manner, they were regarded as really needing human food. For instance, according to the old Babylonian epic Atraha sis, the gods suffered from hunger and thirst when the great flood annihilated the human population. Consequently, when Atrahasis offered a sacrifice after the Flood, the gods smelled it and crowded around like flies.[20] Because human beings were simultaneously dependent on the gods, divine-human relationships were symbiotic.

Unlike other deities, however, the Lord was not viewed as consuming food set before him. We have already mentioned that he enjoyed only the smoke of altar

sacrifices. It is true that the “bread of the Presence” was a presentation offering on a table rather than burned on an altar. However, the ritual by which the bread was renewed (Lev. 24:5—9) distanced him from excessive anthropomorphism by denying his need for human sustenance.[21]

(1) Unlike other regular Israelite rituals and non-Israelite presentation offerings of food, the Israelite bread ritual was performed only once a week (24:8).

(2) To show that he did not merely have a slow metabolic rate, the Lord assigned the bread to the priests as their due when they removed it (24:9).

(3) The ritual preempted the possibility that enjoyment of the bread by the priests could be viewed as secondary utilization following consumption by the deity, as in the Hittite ritual system.[22] The Lord received only the frankincense offered with the bread as his token portion, presumably by having it burned (cf. 2:2, 9, 16; 6:15), when the priests were authorized to eat the bread (24:7). It was not a case of “you can have it when I’m done with it.” Rather, “you can have that and I’ll have this."

The bread was changed weekly on the Sabbath (24:8), which commemorates creation (Gen. 2:2—3; Ex. 20:11; 31:16—17). Reinforcing the Sabbath connection, Leviticus 24:8 labels the twelve loaves an eternal “covenant,” a microcosm of the relationship between God and the twelve tribes of Israel, which was also represented by the Sabbath (Ex. 31:16). Thus, renewing the “bread of the Presence” not only differed from analogous non-Israelite rituals by denying that the Lord needs human food (cf. Ps. 50:12—13); it affirmed precisely the opposite: As the Creator, the Lord provided for Israel.

Talk about high-tension theological balance! The offering of bread (i.e., basic food; cf. Sir. 29:21) walks a tightrope to demonstrate God’s real Presence while simultaneously denying that he is just like a human being. Although God dwelt among his people in an earthly palace, he was neither human nor like other ancient Near Eastern deities in that he had no need whatsoever to consume food provided by human beings (Ps. 50:12—13). By providing the bread, the Israelites acknowledged that the Lord was Israel’s Creator-in-residence, who continued to sustain his people (cf. Job 12:10; Ps. 145:15—16; Dan. 5:23).[23]

Christ as bread offering. There is more to life than maintenance of mortal existence. In John 6:48—51 Jesus said:

> I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If

> anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Manna (i.e. “bread” from heaven) physically fed the Israelites in the desert (cf. Ex. 16:14—18). It thereby sustained their temporal lives in a way that they acknowledged by keeping a token sample of manna with the ark of the covenant (16:33—34; Heb. 9:4) and also by offering the “bread of the Presence” (Lev. 24:5—9). However, the life that Christ makes available to everyone through the sacrifice of his own flesh is eternal (John 6:51).

The idea that Christ is the “bread of life” informs his words at the Last Supper, when he broke Passover bread: “Take and eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26). By eating bread and drinking wine at the Lord’s Supper/Communion, we reenact and thereby reinforce the conversion transaction: incorporation of Christ and his eternal life into our own lives (cf. Gal. 2:20). At the ancient Israelite sanctuary/temple, bread and wine were accompaniments to animal sacrifices (Num. 15). Earlier, Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High,” brought out bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him (Gen. 14:18—20). Appropriately, our Christian ceremony has only bread and wine but no animal sacrifice, acknowledging that “Christ, our Passover lamb” (1 Cor. 5:7) has already been sacrificed and that he is now the Melchizedek high priest (Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1—28) of all spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham (Gal. 3:29).[24]

Contemporary Significance

VIOLENCE AND RETALIATION. "If anyone takes [lit., smites] the life of a human being …" (Lev. 24:17); "anyone who takes the life of someone's animal …" (v. 18); "if a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor …" (v. 19 NKJV). Sounds like today's news: An ex-husband injures his ex-wife and kills her new boyfriend. A road-raged man grabs a little dog from a woman's car and throws it out into the California traffic, and it is run over. Mike Tyson bites off part of his opponent's ear. Alas, Leviticus is distressingly relevant. We wish it were less so.

We know that murder, assault, and killing or harming someone else's animal are wrong. If we didn't know, the principle of respect for human and animal life in Genesis 9:4—6, the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13), and the Covenant Code (Ex. 21:12—36) would have told us before we got to Leviticus 24. We also know that violations do occur, even in the best societies, and justice must be preserved through some kind of punishment. Long ago Aristotle observed:

> For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with the arms of intelligence and with moral qualities which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he have not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states, and the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.[25]

To what extent are the biblical penalties still relevant, given that the Israelite theocracy no longer exists? We do not have a problem with restitution of the equivalent value of an animal by payment of money or giving another animal to take the place of a dead one (Lev. 24:18, see also v. 21).[26] But what about capital punishment for every case of murder (vv. 17, 21) and infliction of equivalent disfigurement for assault that causes permanent injury (vv. 19—20)? We are accustomed to occasional capital punishment, though many modern people oppose even that. We hear about disfigurement as punishment for crimes in a few strictly Islamic countries, but it sounds barbaric to us. Furthermore, didn't

Jesus do away with the *lex talionis:* "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:38—39)?

The easiest thing for us to do is to simply dismiss the biblical penalties as passe because the governments of our countries and their judicial systems fix penalties today. However, if we live in a democracy and possess the right to vote, our values and attitudes are of some indirect relevance to the way the state conducts its business, and if we are Jewish or Christian, our basic ethical values are informed to some degree by the Bible. Therefore, it is not surprising that contemporary debates over life and death matters, such as capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia, often refer to the Bible, though rarely in an informed, balanced, or systematic way.

For us the question is not whether we want to push for a modern American pseudo-theocracy, equivalent to what the Taliban had in Afghanistan. We don't. Without the divine Shekinah ruling from an earthly administrative center, as in ancient Israel, attempts at theocracy based on any religion have always produced (and are still producing) gruesome results. Our question, as believers in the humanitarian God of the Bible, is how to understand his values so that within the context of democracy, we can make morally informed choices when we have opportunities to support one option or another.

Obviously this commentary is not the place to settle all issues involved in penalties for murder and assault, but we can raise some factors that should be kept in mind as debates continue.[27] Regarding the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" approach to assault that causes permanent injury, we should keep in mind a number of factors. (1) Before the monarchy, ancient Israel had no prisons. Thus, the modern, expensive "catch-all" of incarceration was not an option.

(2) Israelite law sought to make punishments fit crimes. Thus, stealing property appropriately called for monetary penalties (Ex. 22:1—15) rather than having one's hand cut off (as in some countries even today), and inflicting permanent physical damage to humans correspondingly resulted in corporal punishment with a permanent effect.

(3) The *lex talionis,* by which "whatever he has done must be done to him," was 100 percent justice that enforced the principle of fairness underlying Jesus' "Golden Rule": "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

(4) Leviticus 24 implies that assault causing permanent damage is partial murder. The *lex talionis* for assault resulting in permanent disfigurement (24:19—20) appears within an introversion of laws against killing persons and animals (24:17—18, 21):[28]

kill human being: death (v. 17)
kill *animal:* restitution life for life (v. 18)
assault: as he did, done to him (v. 19)
"fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (v. 20a)
assault: as he did, done to him (v. 20b)
kill *animal:* restitution (v. 21a)
kill human being: death (v. 21b)

This structure indicates that the concern is for life, which God has made in his image (cf. Gen. 9:6). Just as a disfigurement or serious blemish *(mum)* in a priest disqualified him from sacred officiation (Lev. 21:16—23) and such a defect (also *mum)* in an animal invalidated its fitness for holy sacrifice (22:17—25), so it was a serious matter for an Israelite who belonged to God's "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) to receive a disfigurement (mum; Lev. 24:19—20). Emphasized by placement of "fracture for fracture" at the center of the structure is the implication that such damage detracts from holiness by partially defacing the live human image of God. In a sense, assault is analogous to blasphemy, which also violates holiness.[29]

(5) Israelite law was concerned with justice for the victim, unlike modern law that often compromises such justice in favor in protecting the criminal.

(6) Unlike the ancient Israelites, we have orthopedists, ophthalmologists, orthodontists, and plastic surgeons, and so on, to fix many bodily injuries. Furthermore, we have all kinds of conveniences for physically challenged individuals. In ancient times, losing something such as an eye or a tooth would have a much greater practical impact on a person's life. For example, a man with only one eye could not fight adequately to defend himself, his family, and his territory (cf. 1 Sam. 11:2). This could be life-threatening.

(7) Talionic punishment first appears in the Old Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (laws 196—97, 200, cf. 116, 210, 229—230). Rather than regarding this form of punishment as more primitive than money payments, A. S. Diamond concludes:

> … we should have to regard this change from pecuniary to corporal sanctions for the most serious wrongs as a sociological advance. It occurs in the later laws as against the earlier, and—still more important—it apparently occurs in the laws of the larger and more powerful and more centralised and economically more advanced states, where the codes and collections of laws are larger and richer in detail (C.H. and M.A.L.) as against the smaller states, with their simpler economies and briefer

collections of laws.[30]

S. Paul points out that talion would have improved jurisprudence in two ways. (a) It curbed excessive retaliation (e.g., Gen. 4:23). (b) It provided for "equal opportunity punishment" without class discrimination: Rich and/or higher status individuals received the same corporal punishment as other people.[31]

(8) When Jesus promulgated his higher standard of reconciliation rather than retaliation (Matt. 5:38—39, see above) in his Sermon on the Mount, he was speaking to a group of private individuals (4:25—5:1). Some were undoubtedly inclined to seize on the *lex talionis* as justification for personal vengeance. In context, Jesus taught the principle of Leviticus 19:18: "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself." Like this verse, he was not addressing civil penalties administered by the court system, even though the original setting of the *lex talionis* in chapter 24 was judicial (24:19—20). Unless we distinguish between the private and judicial/public spheres, verses 19—20 (public: retaliation) contradict 19:18 (private: no revenge).

Although we refer to the *law* of retaliation, in the judicial sphere this is not revenge, as it would be in the private domain. Rather, it is corporal punishment fixed by a court, which is the same as the injury suffered by the victim. Jesus was not revoking retaliation as a judicial penalty any more than he was rescinding the laws against murder and adultery by pointing to a higher standard of avoiding inner attitudes that cause these wrongs (Matt. 5:21—22, 27—30).

While the *lex talionis* made good sense for ancient Israel from the viewpoints of justice, theology, and practicality, it would be viewed as "cruel and unusual punishment" today, even for those who perpetrate cruel and unusually painful and damaging crimes. Nevertheless, Leviticus teaches us the importance of respecting the sanctity of another person's body, facing the full consequences of one's physical violence, treating everyone equally before the law, and protecting the rights of victims. Deuteronomy 19:19—20 also upholds the need to deter wrongdoing by making it "expensive": "… then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you."

1. See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, 216—19, M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 191—92.

2. Gorman, “Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status,” 47—64.

3. Cf. Lev. 2:11, where leaven was forbidden in grain offerings burned on the outer altar. Tradition holds that the “bread of the Presence” was unleavened (m. *Menah.* 5:1; *b. Menah.* 57a).

4. B. Mitchell, “Leviticus 24:6: The Bread of the Presence—Rows or Piles?” *BT* 33 (1982): 447—48.

5. On possible locations of the frankincense, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2097—98.

6. Ibid., 2102.

7. Douglas, *Leviticus As Literature,* 207.

8. This “tetragrammaton,” consisting of four consonants, may have been pronounced something like “Yahweh.” “Jehovah” is an old transliteration of this name, which is often rendered “the Lord,” following the LXX.

9. Milgrom, *Leviticus 2 3—27,* 21 13.

10. Cf. Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:13, 19, etc.

11. On the process by which ancient Near Eastern law was formed from case to code, see R. Westbrook, “Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes,” *RB* 92 (1985): 247—64, esp. 261—64 regarding Lev. 24:10—23, Num. 9:6—14, 15:32—37, 27:1—11, 31:25—28.

12. R. Gane, “Temple and Sacrifice,” *JATS* 10 (1999): 358.

13. Lines 12, 32—33; transl. W. Heimpel, “The Nanshe Hymn,” *JCS* 33 (1981): 83, 85.

14. A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), 194—97.

15. See *ANET,* 3—155.

16. Ibid., 268.

17. V. Fritz, “Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon’s Temple?” *BAR* 13 (1987): 38—49.

18. Compare household use of incense in secular life (K. Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* [VTSup 38, Leiden: Brill, 1986], 90).

19. Gane, “'Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” 190. For an example of a Babylonian regular presentation offering that includes twelve loaves of bread and incense on a golden table, plus libations, see *ANET,* 334.

20. Atrahasis III v 30—36, W. G. Lambert, and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasls: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, repr. 1999, orig. 1969), 98—99.

21. Gane, “'Bread of the Presence,'” 179—203.

22. *ANET,* 208.

23. Gane, “Bread of the Presence,” 199—203.

24. For the connection between Melchizedek’s bread and that of the Last Supper, see M. Douglas, “The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus,” 209.

25. Aristotle, *The Politics,* in O. A. Johnson, ed., *Sources of World Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 1:155.

26. See D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1947), 103—15.

27. We will deal with the penalty for assault here and capital punishment in the context of Num. 35.

28. Milgrom shows that vv. 17—21 form the heart of a larger introversion that embraces vv. 13—23, integrating the laws with the narrative *(Leviticus 23—27,* 2128—33).

29. Ibid., 2131—33.

30. A. S. Diamond, “An Eye for an Eye,” *Irac* 19 (1957): 153.

31. S. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant,* 76. However, the Laws of Hammurabi prescribe talion inequitably: An *aw’lum* status individual who blinds the eye or breaks the bone of another *awtum* receives the same injury as punishment, but if the victim is of lesser status, only monetary compensation is required (laws 196—99, *ANET,* 175, Roth, *Law Collections,* 121).

Leviticus 25

THE LORD SAID to Moses on Mount Sinai, 2“Speak to the Israelites
and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the
land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. 3For six years sow your
fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops.
4But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath
to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. 5Do not
reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines.
The land is to have a year of rest. 6Whatever the land yields during the
sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your manservant and
maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live
among you, 7as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your
land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

8Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so
that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years.
9Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the
seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet
throughout your land. ‘0Con-secrate the fiftieth year and proclaim
liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for
you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his
own clan. ‘’The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and
do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. ‘2For it
is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly
from the fields.

l3“'In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property.

l4“'If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him,
do not take advantage of each other. l5You are to buy from your
countryman on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And

he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. [16]When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. [17]Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.

[18]“'Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. [19]Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. [20]You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” [21]I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. [22]While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

[23]“'The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. [24]Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

[25]“'If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. [26]If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, [27]he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property. [28]But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property.

[29]“'If a man sells a house in a walled city, he retains the right of redemption a full year after its sale. During that time he may redeem it. [30]If it is not redeemed before a full year has passed, the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the buyer and his descendants. It is not to be returned in the Jubilee. [31]But houses in villages without walls around them are to be considered as open country. They can be redeemed, and they are to be returned in the Jubilee.

[32]“'The Levites always have the right to redeem their houses in the

Levitical towns, which they possess. 33So the property of the Levites is redeemable—that is, a house sold in any town they hold—and is to be returned in the Jubilee, because the houses in the towns of the Levites are their property among the Israelites. 34But the pastureland belonging to their towns must not be sold; it is their permanent possession.

35“"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. 36Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. 37You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. 38I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

39“"If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. 4lThen he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers. 42Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. 43Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.

44Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. 45You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. 46You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.

47“"If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien’s clan, 48he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: 49An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. or if he prospers, he may redeem himself. 50He and his buyer are to count the time from the year he sold himself up to the Year of Jubilee. The price for his release is to be based on the rate paid

to a hired man for that number of years. [51]If many years remain, he must pay for his redemption a larger share of the price paid for him. [52]If only a few years remain until the Year of Jubilee, he is to compute that and pay for his redemption accordingly. [53]He is to be treated as a man hired from year to year; you must see to it that his owner does not rule over him ruthlessly.

[54]“"Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee, [55]for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Original Meaning

THE THEME OF THE PROMISED LAND unifies the divine speech in Leviticus 25—26, which the Lord delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai (25:1, 26:46, cf. 7:37—38). In chapter 25 the Israelites must let their fields lie fallow every seventh year and allow ancestral land that has been sold to revert to its original owner in the Jubilee year. In chapter 26 the Lord puts teeth into his exhortation to obey his commands by saying that if the Israelites disobey, he will send them into exile away from the land, which can then enjoy its sabbatical rest.

The *cyclical* release of land and debt slaves in the Jubilee year is unparalleled in the ancient Near East. A number of Mesopotamian kings, such as Hammurabi and Samsuiluna, are known to have proclaimed times of release involving remission of commercial debts and manumission of private slaves.[1] These were irregular and infrequent occurrences determined by the will of the monarch, generally near the beginning of his reign in order to demonstrate his concern to correct social inequity. The divine King of Israel, by contrast, set up a system of release at fixed intervals, which was not dependent on arbitrary human leadership.

The laws of sabbatical and Jubilee years in chapter 25 raise several questions. (1) How does the chronology of these years work? (2) How would the Israelites survive during fallow sabbatical and Jubilee years? (3) How would the release in the Jubilee year affect real estate ownership and servitude?

Chronology. The counting of sabbatical years was to begin when the Israelites conquered Canaan and owned their own fields (Lev. 25:2—3). After seven sabbatical years totaling forty-nine years, the Jubilee year is the fiftieth year, beginning on the tenth day of the seventh month, which is the Day of Purgation (25:8—11). Notice that although Exodus 12:2 puts the first month (= Nisan) in the spring, the Jubilee year begins in the fall and overlaps the spring-spring year the way modern July-July fiscal years overlap our January-January calendar.

Why does the Jubilee year begin on the Day of Purgation, ten days after the beginning of the seventh month? “The jubilee year, we are informed (Lev. 25:10, 12), was regarded as a *holy* period, accordingly it could not begin until the annual ceremony of purgation and resanctification had taken place.”[2]

How the ongoing cycles of sabbatical and Jubilee years are integrated is not obvious. The problem is that adding the Jubilee year as the fiftieth year would seem to put the previous and following sabbatical years, that is, the forth-ninth year of the previous cycle and the seventh year of the following cycle, eight years apart rather than seven:

49 50 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A solution must take into account all the chronological factors indicated by the text. (1) Sabbatical years continue in unbroken succession (25:3—4). Compare the close relationship between the fallow law of Exodus 23:10—11 and the law of the weekly Sabbath immediately following it (23:12), which implies that sabbatical years follow the same regular pattern as weekly Sabbath days.

(2) The fiftieth year is a separate year following the forty-ninth year rather than coinciding with it.

(3) The ongoing Jubilee cycle is linked to the sabbatical cycle rather than independent of it.

(4) The text does not give a date for beginning sabbatical years, but presumably they begin at the seventh month like the Jubilee years.[3] Support for a fall sabbatical year is found in the order of agricultural activities in Leviticus 25:4—5: “Do not sow … do not reap.” Fall was the normal time for sowing crops that were harvested in the following spring.

(5) The fact that 25:11 prohibits both sowing and reaping during the Jubilee year implies that it is a full year.

We can conclude: “Given an unbroken succession of sabbatical years in which the Jubilee year is a separate, full, 50th year following the seventh sabbatical year, the Jubilee Year must coincide with the first year of the following sabbatical cycle.”[4]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
49 **50**

Because the fiftieth = first year was fallow, this would leave only five regular years of agricultural work (years 2—6) between the forty-ninth-year sabbatical and the seventh-year sabbatical of the following cycle. At first glance this would seem to conflict with Leviticus 25:3 (“For six years sow your fields …”). However, six years was simply the norm. Compare the fact that the weekly Sabbath commandment reads, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Ex. 20:9), but extra ceremonial sabbaths (Lev. 23) could reduce the number of workdays to five in a particular week.

The relationship between sabbatical and Jubilee years in Leviticus 25 parallels

the relationship between seven weekly Sabbaths and the Feast of Weeks on the fiftieth day (23:15—16). Here the integration is simpler because the 7 x 7 = 49 + 1 = 50 cycle of days is not immediately followed by an identical cycle. However, column 21 of the *Temple Scroll* from Qumran specifies a series of subsequent fifty-day cycles from the Feast of Weeks to the Feast of Firstfruits of Wine and the Feast of Firstfruits of Oil. The last day of each fifty-day period counts as the first day of the next cycle (lines 12—14).[5]

Fallow years. The sabbath of the land in the seventh year was "to the LORD," so letting the land revert to its natural state carried religious significance. According to Exodus 23:11 there was also a humanitarian purpose: "Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave." Because there would be no sowing, whatever grew by itself from kernels spilled during the previous harvest would belong to anyone, human or animal, who needed it. Since there was no reaping, even of that which sprang up by itself (Lev. 25:5), the whole population would live off the land from day to day (cf. gleaning in 19:9—10, Ruth 2).

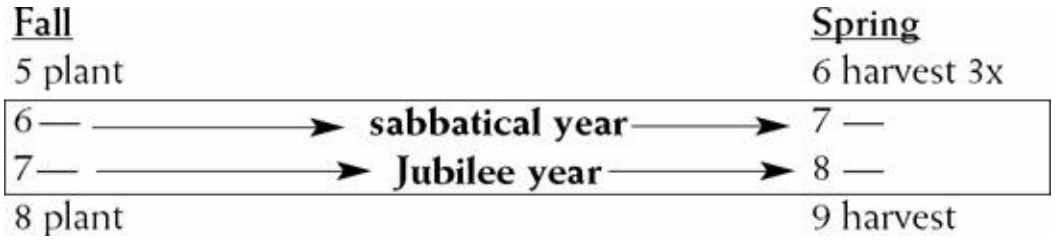
Even with eating what the land would produce by itself, the question arises: "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" (Lev. 25:20). God answers in the context of the last sabbatical period in the Jubilee cycle: "I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in" (25:21—22).



Here is the same principle as God's promise to provide a double portion of manna on the sixth day of the week so that the Israelites would not need to collect any on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:5, 22—30). But the triple harvest in the sixth year had to provide for that year and last over a fallow sabbatical year, immediately followed by a fallow Jubilee year. We are reminded of the Joseph story, in which good agricultural years provided for following years of lack (Gen. 41).[6]

Since planting was in the fall and harvesting was in spring, crops planted in the fall of year 8 would be harvested in the spring of year 9. Working backward and filling in earlier years, we find that in Leviticus 25:20—22 years numbered ("sixth year," "seventh year," etc.) from the beginning of the last sabbatical period of a Jubilee cycle must start with the first month in the spring (cf. Ex.

12:2). However, because the sabbatical and Jubilee years commence in the seventh month in the fall, according to the agricultural calendar that follows the order of planting (fall) → harvesting (spring), they overlap the numbered spring years: sabbatical = year 6—7 and Jubilee = year 7—8.[7] The following reconstruction accounts for the chronological data in Leviticus 25:20—22, as opposed to other options that are not consistent with the constraints of a 6—9 year framework with a threefold blessing on the harvest in year 6:[8]



If the sabbatical year begins in the seventh month (see above), why doesn't it commence half a year *after* the beginning of the seventh spring year rather than half a year *before,* in the sixth year? The sabbatical year fallow follows the protocol for observance of rest on the Day of Purgation, when Jubilee years (and probably also sabbatical years) begin (25:9). Although the Day of Purgation is on the tenth day of the seventh month (16:29; 23:27; Num. 29:7), its sabbath of complete cessation runs from the evening before, on the ninth day, to the evening of the tenth day (Lev. 23:32). In Nehemiah 13:19, weekly seventh-day Sabbath rest commences on the evening of the sixth day of the week, just as we find that the seventh-year fallow begins in the sixth year. So it appears that sacred units of time commence before the equivalent units of secular time that they overlap.

Real estate release. The heart of the Jubilee law is in 25:10: "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan." Here is the ultimate New Year, a time of beginning again for disenfranchised Israelites. If they had been separated from their land (by sale) or from their clan (by entering servitude), they would be reunited with them. By contrast with the Egyptians, who permanently lost their land and became serfs of Pharaoh as a result of their progressive deterioration of economic circumstances during a seven-year famine (Gen. 47:13—26), the Israelites as privileged servants of the Lord were to recover their landed property and independence after a succession of seven sabbatical years, during which there were no crops.[9] We will consider the release of land here and take up the question of servant release in the Bridging Contexts section.

The starting point for consideration of Israelite ownership of the land is the premise that it was all “crown property” in the sense that it belonged to the divine King (25:23). He gave it to the Israelites (25:38) to be subdivided equitably among their clans (Josh. 13—17, Num. 34:54). To protect this distribution from permanent alienation of ancestral land by sale, the Lord decreed that *nobody* outside the clan to which a given property was attached could hold more than a temporary interest in it (Lev. 25:23—24, cf. 1 Kings 21:3). In the event that a piece of such land was “sold” (i.e., really leased), its value was to be prorated according to the number of years remaining until the next Jubilee (Lev. 25:13—18). So it was use of the land, not the land itself, that was sold.

The Jubilee law is concerned with ancestral real estate necessary to maintain an agricultural livelihood. This includes houses in unwalled villages, which are zoned with open country, but not urban dwellings in walled cities (25:29—31). For ensuring that the land of a clan would be kept for the support of its members, the Jubilee release was the remedy of last resort. If a person became poor and “sold” part of his land, his kinsman should redeem it (25:25), that is, buy it back.[10] If he had no redeemer but his situation later improved, he could redeem the property himself at a price that was prorated until the next Jubilee year (25:26—27). Failing the above options, the land would revert to the original owner at the Jubilee (25:28).

Real estate belonging to Levites was unique. Because this tribe was to have cities surrounded by pastures (Num. 35:1—8)” rather than large territories, their urban dwellings were to be released in the Jubilee as if they were in unwalled villages (Lev. 25:32—33). Their pastures could not be sold at all.

Bridging Contexts

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. I. Mendelsohn has pointed out that "the fundamental cause for the evermounting number of free-born citizens thrust into the arms of slavery was insolvency, for in case of default the insolvent debtor was seized by the creditor and compelled by him to perform service."[12] Once a person became a debt slave, it was difficult to get out of this situation.

According to A. Levy, the slave release laws of Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15 addressed the need for debt relief. These laws required release after a maximum six-year period of servitude, regardless of the size of the debt that an individual was working off. The problem was that a creditor could lose if the debt was greater than the value of the service. This would produce negative results: Well-to-do Israelites would refuse to lend, or they would seek to get their money's worth by driving a servant too hard or refusing to release him or her on time.[13]

Levy sees Leviticus 25 as an attempt to mitigate debt bondage in a way that would be more acceptable to creditors. The maximum term is raised to forty-nine years, but the poor Israelite would be treated as a hired servant or resident alien rather than as part of the master's property (vv. 39—43). I believe that Levy is on the right track and would further suggest that the reason why Leviticus 25 raises the maximum term to forty-nine years is due to practical linkage between freedom for debt servants and release of land (see below).

Although Leviticus 25 is legislation, it appears to tell a story of increasing want and desperation. Verse 25 begins, "If one of your countrymen becomes poor…." By verse 28 he has sold some of his ancestral property and is waiting for the next Jubilee to retrieve it. Verse 35 reiterates: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor…." Although the words are the same, his situation has deteriorated. "Poor" here means "poorer." He is like an alien because he lacks land to support himself, without which his very survival is at stake, as indicated by the words "so he can continue to live among you." Here "live" (root *hyh)* refers to living rather than dying, not living simply as residing.

The unfortunate Israelite is vulnerable to exploitation, but making a profit at his expense by charging interest or selling him food above cost is forbidden

(25:36—37). Who says so? “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God” (v. 38). This is a reminder of God’s generosity, which his people are to emulate, and also of his authority as their master and primary owner of the land.

> In fact, the land, and the camp which prefigures it in important aspects, is viewed as an extension of the sanctuary. The Israelites, each of whom has received a holding of landed property, are pictured as asy-lants having found refuge on temple lands. In consequence, they have to honour the divine owner and Lord of the land, through their gifts and through observance of his laws.[14]

Verse 39 repeats: “If one of your countrymen becomes poor….” By now he is completely unable to support himself, so that he “sells himself to you.” Why would anyone do this? The alternative is death by starvation, not a good way to go.[15] As mentioned above, “you” are to maintain him in a dependent status like a hired servant until the next year of Jubilee (25:40—41).

Verses 47—55 regulate a scenario in which an Israelite sells himself to an affluent resident alien. Since the master is a foreigner, a relative of the Israelite may redeem him, in which case the Israelite will presumably work for the kinsman to pay off the redemption price.[16] Alternatively, if he becomes sufficiently well off, he may redeem himself. This suggests that he could receive a small wage/allowance in addition to amortization of his debt. The price of redemption is calculated according to the wages of an ordinary hired servant, prorated over the time remaining until the next Jubilee.

Thus far we have found several connections between land tenure and debt bondage: (1) An Israelite who has been unable to support himself on his own land can end up with nothing of marketable value but himself and his children. (2) The value of persons and land depend on the length of time they can be utilized. (3) A debt servant remains in that state only until he reclaims the ancestral land that enables him to survive independently.

By contrast, Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12 get servitude over with in six years[17] through relatively rapid debt amortization, a bargain basement standard of living, and no linkage to land at the end. Deuteronomy 15:18 places the value of a slave’s work as “double the service of a hired man” (NJPS). This is possible because the slave receives no wages and is supported at a subsistence level on half of what a hired worker would receive. So the profit margin applicable against the debt is much greater than in Leviticus 25, where a debtor

is “to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident” (Lev. 25:40).

The Bible does not say that a poor Israelite would have an opportunity to choose between the Exodus-Deuteronomy or Leviticus options. If A. Schenker is right, the latter more lengthy servitude until the Jubilee applies only to Israelite men who are married with children—and therefore costly to maintain— before they enter slavery, a situation not covered by the Covenant Code of Exodus.[18]

Aside from providing for a higher standard of living, Leviticus addresses a practical problem that is implicitly recognized in Deuteronomy 15, which commands a master to provide a slave with liberal gifts when he releases him (Deut. 15:13—14). Such gifts temporarily help him make a transition to independence through a vulnerable time when he feels weak and emancipated and it would be easy to fall prey to slavery once again (cf. Jer. 34:11). Leviticus 25 declares a more permanent provision for independence: Precisely at the time when an Israelite is freed, he regains his ancestral land on which to make an agricultural living.

The Jubilee law thus represents 1) a reliable, ongoing decree by God, King of Israel, and owner of the land, 2) a protection of the distribution of ancestral land set up at the time of the settlement, 3) a realistic recognition of the fact that maintaining an independent livelihood in an agrarian society could be difficult without the use of agricultural land, and 4) a practical solution to the problem of debt-servitude which is fair to all parties involved. The provision for automatically receiving one’s land at the Jubilee would not encourage the farmer to be slothful, since losing land could involve a long wait to recover it. But it would ensure that the results of hard times would not be perpetuated from one generation to another.

“Under all is the land….” Above all is God. Upon the land the people of God may fall into hard times, but these times should not be too hard, or for too long.[19]

Why did God tolerate slavery in biblical times? This question hits a nerve because of our revulsion for the degrading, racist type of servitude practiced in the United States until the Civil War. For us the term *slavery* instantly evokes images of tobacco plantations, cotton fields, abusive masters drawing blood with whips, and separated family members sold on the auction block. Our reaction is horror and anger at this kind of moral leprosy.

When we read the Bible, however, we find laws regulating slavery to mitigate its worst effects (Ex. 21, Lev. 25, Deut. 15), but we do not find what we want: a law totally banning slavery. So we are likely to ask: What is the matter with God? Why aren’t his moral sensibilities as keen as ours?

It is helpful to recognize that there are several kinds of slavery or servitude, with varying causes and effects on individuals. For example, many poor white people voluntarily emigrated to America in colonial times under a system called "indentured servitude." Because they could not afford the fare for crossing the Atlantic, wealthy landowners in America would pay their way. Then the new immigrants were obligated to work for a period of time to pay off their debt. Today we find similar dynamics when an employer sponsors a person's education in exchange for a commitment to work for that employer until the debt is fully amortized.

In the ancient Near East, a person could choose to sell himself or herself and/or one or more dependents into servitude, generally for food to survive (see above). However, there was another way to end up in the same situation. A person could voluntarily take out a loan for some reason, including survival, and if he or she was unable to pay and the loan went into default, the creditor had a right to seize collateral, as in modern foreclosure. The difference is that in those days persons were fair game as collateral. So a voluntary loan carried with it the risk of involuntary servitude. Bankruptcy as we know it did not exist. Even in times of general prosperity, death or incapacitation of a family's primary earner could have disastrous consequences that could lead to enslavement of other family members (2 Kings 4:1).

In his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), John Locke recognized the difference between servitude in the biblical law codes and the kind of slavery practiced in his day:

> I confess we find among the Jews, as well as other nations, that men did sell themselves; but it is plain this was only to drudgery, not to slavery; for it is evident the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotical power; for the master could not have power to kill him at any time whom, at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service; and the master of such a servant was so far from having an arbitrary power over his life that he could not, at pleasure, so much as maim him, but the loss of an eye or tooth set him free (Ex. xxi).[20]

While we will never feel comfortable with the biblical servitude laws, we should take the following factors into account. (1) God did not institute slavery. Nor did he like it any more than he liked polygamy or divorce, which he also regulated to prevent their worst effects (Ex. 21:10—11; Lev. 18:18; Deut. 21:15—17; 24:1—4). Through Jeremiah, the Lord excoriated the people of Jerusalem who took back the slaves they had released (Jer. 34:12—22), and in Revelation

18:13, trafficking in human lives is one of the sins for which eschatological "Babylon" is destroyed.

(2) The revelation of God's principles is progressive. For example, he tolerated Jacob's marrying two sisters although he later outlawed this practice (Lev. 18:18). Already within the Pentateuch, we see advancement in the requirements for humane treatment of servants. By comparison with Exodus 21, Deuteronomy stipulates release of female slaves (Deut. 15:12) and introduces the command for a master when he frees a servant: "Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress" (15:14).

(3) It appears that in the context of Israelite tribal society, which was almost completely dependent on agriculture and lacked a state welfare system, God tolerated debt servitude as the lesser of two evils to keep people alive who would otherwise starve if they could not get help from relatives in times of distress (see above).

The biblical release laws benefited Israelite slaves/servants. Non-Israelites could be held in perpetuity, whether they were acquired through purchase (Lev. 25:44—46) or conquest (Deut. 20:10—15). This is much more difficult for us to deal with. Why did God allow his people to do this, and how does it differ from slavery in America? Without attempting to arrive at a definitive answer, we can make some preliminary observations in the following paragraphs. For one thing, without the release legislation, the default situation would have allowed perpetual slavery for Israelites. What is exceptional is not that non-Israelites could be held in perpetuity, but that Israelites could not. God elevated their status in accordance with their election and redemption. They had already served their time in Egypt (Lev. 25:42, Deut. 15:15)!

God's intention for other nations was to bless them through the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:3, 22:18), not to exploit them. The Israelites were to be a channel for revealing divine principles so that other peoples would want to join them in serving God, they were not to be an elite, exclusive caste. Nonetheless, the Israelites came in conflict with a number of other peoples. When hostilities broke out between Israel and a city not located in their Promised Land, the Israelites were to make an offer of peace. "If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it" (Deut. 20:11—13).

Here we see the usual ancient Near Eastern alternatives: slavery or death. At first glance it is simply the law of the jungle, with the strong preying on the weak. However, in the book of Numbers we will find that on a number of

occasions the Israelites were up against enemies who wanted to destroy them (Num. 21—22, 25, 31). In the absence of a "United Nations," Israel could only survive by eviscerating such threats through controlling or destroying enemy males, who posed military danger. To go on the offensive was the only viable defense.

In biblical Israel there seems to be no hint of the racist attitude associated with American slavery, namely, that a person is inferior because of his or her skin color, so that it is legitimate to hold that individual as a slave. In spite of the pseudo-exegetical acrobatics of southern white ministers before the Civil War, there is no biblical justification for subhuman slavery as it was practiced in America.

Exodus 21:20—21, 26—27 appears to protect all slaves, whether Israelite or not, from injury because of physical abuse by their masters. These laws lack the qualification "Hebrew" (see 21:2) and are separated from the part of the chapter dealing with Hebrew slaves (21:1—11). That God did hold Israel responsible for treatment of at least one group of non-Israelite slaves (i.e., the Gibeonites; cf. Josh. 9) is graphically illustrated in 2 Samuel 21:1—14.

According to the New Testament, ethnic divisions, slave or free status, and gender are irrelevant to participation in the new covenant (Gal. 3:26—29). The New Testament does not attempt to attack slavery in a political manner (see Philemon) because the new covenant community is not a political group. Christ repeatedly stressed that the purpose of his kingdom of grace (before he returns to earth) is not to right all wrongs in the world by force. The church was not to become another Spartacus revolt against Roman slavery, which would end similarly with thousands of crosses lining the Appian Way. Rather, the converting power of the gospel would undermine evils such as slavery by drawing human beings of varying social statuses into spiritual fellowship with each another.

The New Testament approach does not mean that modern Christians in democratic countries have no moral obligation to lift their voices and votes against social evils. But before we criticize the New Testament writers, we should remember that they were not living under a democracy; they had neither voice nor vote in shaping the policies of the Roman empire.

Contemporary Significance

THE SABBATICAL PRINCIPLE and society. We generally think of Sabbath in religious terms as the chief day of worship, or in individual terms as the day of special rest. In an academic or otherwise professional context, a "sabbatical" is also for an individual professor. Leviticus 25 radically extends the sabbatical principle of rest and relief to the human environment, economy, and society. We find an earlier inkling of this approach in Exodus 23:10—12, where the seventh-year fallow benefits both the poor and wild animals in addition to the land, and the seventh-day cessation from work benefits not only Israelites but also beasts of burden and marginalized persons—slaves and aliens—whom Jesus could have called "the least of these brothers [or sisters] of mine" (Matt. 25:40).

Leviticus 25 carries the sabbatical year over and builds on it. A "Jubilee" year following a sabbatical of sabbaticals (i.e., 7 x 7 = 49 years) is what amounts to a "super-sabbatical." Not only does the land rest, it returns to its original owner. Not only do agricultural workers rest by not planting or harvesting, they return to their own clans and land. Not only does the economy rest, debts that have kept people under obligation claim them no more. This legislation stresses the desirability of economic self-sufficiency and the need to treat people undergoing economic hardship with kindness and respect.

At the time of Jubilee, accumulation of economic and social imbalance tending toward feudalism was to be restored to a decentralized, egalitarian equilibrium.[21] This was to avoid the kind of class struggle between rich and poor that plagued the monarchies of Israel and Judah and much later incited Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to advocate abolition of private property.[22] Every Israelite who lived a normal life span was supposed to have at least one opportunity to erase the oppression of circumstances and make a new start— all this without government bailouts, taxes, or even insurance companies!

Before we decide to run for public office on a platform of Leviticus 25, we should be aware that implementation would be challenging. Obviously individual farmers are free to observe a seventh-year fallow. However, although only a minority of our population makes an agrarian living, shutting down even a small percentage of our agricultural sector every seven years would be a

monumental upheaval and, at least in the case of a two-year fallow at the end of a “Jubilee” period, would require religious faith in divine blessing.

Also difficult for a “Jubilee” release of land is the historical question: Who is the “original” owner, to whom ownership should revert? Does Manhattan go back to the Indians? According to the Pentateuch, God gave the Jubilee legislation even before ancestral land was divvied out, so people would know from the outset what a real estate “sale” meant. But attempting to impose a theoretical ideal on an already functioning system of land tenure, as the communists attempted to do during much of the twentieth century, can have catastrophic results.

Some kind of debt amnesty would indeed be helpful. Individuals are crushed under accumulating loads of debt, from which they are unable to extricate themselves. In fact, many credit card debts are set up in such a way that they are self-perpetuating. Making regular payments of the stipulated amount will never pay off the debt because the payments are not enough to overcome the accumulation of interest.

Developing nations are also strapped with colossal debts, many of which amount to billions of dollars and drag down the lives of millions of people as they struggle to make ends meet and improve their standard of living. Banks, businesses, governments, and the International Monetary Fund provide bailouts, but always with big “strings” attached. Undoubtedly some of these strings are necessary to ensure that help goes where it is needed rather than into “black holes” of poor management and corruption. But there is a widespread craving for some kind of “Jubilee” relief.[23]

Milgrom describes an international Jewish-Christian Symposium on the Jubilee, sponsored by the World Council of Churches and held at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, in 1996. This conference highlighted the plight of economically shackled Third World countries, which are suffering declining per capita incomes while the global market economy booms, and the environments of which are being polluted and irreversibly depleted by large business interests.[24] A particularly serious tragedy has flourished in democratic India, where in 1992 it was estimated that five million adults and ten million children were held in bonded labor. Almost all of them are Untouchables (the lowest caste). Working without wages to pay off real or imaginary debts, they have almost no hope of escape.[25]

Debtor countries have demanded of creditor nations that their debts be cancelled, land and resources be restored to their original owners, pilfering and pollution of natural resources be stopped, and economic slavery be terminated by

mandating minimum wages on which people can survive.[26] Milgrom points out: "The Jubilee prescribing remission of debts, restoration of land, sabbath rest for land and people, and release from economic servitude corresponds to all four demands."[27]

Implementation of such measures in favor of the oppressed would undoubtedly be opposed by the rich and powerful, who would stand to lose, as in ancient Judah (cf. Jer. 34:8—11). Nevertheless, in modern times there is evidence in Tonga and South Korea that restoring and maintaining individual ownership of land are highly effective in promoting general prosperity, which ends up benefiting everyone.[28] This practicality, possibly reinforced by allusions to Jubilee years in biblical Judah (e.g., Jer. 34),[29] suggests that the legislation of Leviticus 25 is not simply utopian. In the narrative of Numbers 36, the Gileadite chieftains certainly did not understand the Jubilee release to be utopian, or they would not have factored it into their practical concern that the daughters of Zelophehad could remove property from their clan by marriage (Num. 36:4).

With debt release the big question is: Who picks up the tab?[30] Unlike ancient Israelites, who owed individual creditors, our debts are primarily to organizations, such as banks, credit unions, credit card companies, or government organizations such as the FHA. How do you get an organization to exercise compassion? If debt release is enforced, why would lenders want to extend credit again in the future?[31] Of course, creditors already lose at least part of many loan amounts through a modern form of remission: bankruptcy.

While it would not be fair or feasible to require modern lending organizations to give up the principal amounts of loans or to abstain from charging some interest under normal conditions, our society would do well to ponder the practical implications of Leviticus 25:35—37: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you … do not take interest of any kind from him…. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit."[32] Many of the fiscal woes that we face on all levels, from the individual up to the international, are a result of debts with interest. Most of these are not incurred for survival. Many of them are for worthy causes, such as education and development of resources, but many are simply because we want things before we have the money to pay for them. If we would base our spending more on earnings and savings and less on loans, some things would happen a bit slower, but we would ultimately pay a lot less and be better off.

Taking out a loan can be risky, especially when it is most needed. In *Nothing to Do but Stay: My Pioneer Mother,* Carrie Young tells of her mother's desperate lack of money when the wheat crop failed for the fourth year in a row. She

owned plenty of land and hated the word “mortgage.”

> But for her children’s education she would do anything, and one hot windy day in August she walked into the Citizens National Bank of Williston and requested a loan of a thousand dollars. As collateral, she offered 320 acres of the most productive land in Williams County. The president of the bank told her, in the most high-handed manner, that even if she owned all of the farmland in the entire state of North Dakota he wouldn’t lend her a thousand dollars.
>
> When she emerged from the bank that day my mother was angrier than I had ever seen her. She was not a swearing woman, so she uttered the worst word she could bring herself to say: “Stygging!” Nasty fellow.
>
> Not until years later did my mother realize that this was one of the luckiest days of her life. What she couldn’t have known on that summer morning in 1933 was that six more crop failures in a row were coming up and never in any of those years would she have been able to meet the mortgage payments. She would have lost her homestead land as surely as she stood in the bank that day putting it up as security.[33]

The dynamics of this story are much like those behind Leviticus 25. Unlike Carrie’s mother, our culture has become addicted to loans. It is to the advantage of powerful lenders to feed on our addiction by encouraging us to spend greedily beyond our means to buy that new SUV, dream vacation, or all those inexpensive trinkets that add up to big bucks. We see, therefore we buy. It’s a lot more glamorous than saving, especially when the interest earned on savings accounts is so low.

The solution? If we were legislators, we could talk about making lending less predatory and profitable, with caps on usurious credit card interest and a ban on indefinitely self-perpetuating terms. We could also look for ways to encourage financial institutions to earn more of their money through investing what people deposit and less on loans. If we are ordinary citizens, we can still encourage ourselves and others to control our desires, buy as we can pay, and save. Too many of us, including myself, have confirmed by hard experience the ancient dangers of debt and interest recognized long ago by Leviticus.

As we seek to be responsible with our resources, it is helpful for us to remember that ultimately they come from God. “God’s foremost rule of finance is: We own nothing. We are managers, not owners. Stewards, not landlords. Maintenance people, not proprietors. Our money is not ours, it is his.”[34]

The author of Leviticus 25 would certainly agree (cf. v. 38). He would add: “If

one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him … so he can continue to live among you" (v. 35). Why manage our resources well? So we can be secure and have more to spend on ourselves, like a rich man with an edifice complex, of whom Jesus spoke (Luke 12:15—21)? No. Our good management is the first phase of a ministry of sharing. By taking good care of the blessings God gives us and passing them on, we acknowledge that they are not simply our own. Even with all our efforts, we would have nothing without the ability that he has given us (Deut. 8:17—18). We can't take it all with us, anyway. "Hearses pull no U-Hauls."[35]

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson waged war on poverty with his "Great Society" initiative. After getting entire generations addicted to state welfare and spending billions of dollars on all kinds of projects, poverty is alive and flourishing. This is no surprise. Deuteronomy 15:11 says: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (cf. Matt. 26:11). The question is not how to eradicate poverty but how to maintain intelligent compassion as we seek to alleviate its worst effects.

While it is important that the church not try to take over functions of the state, the church is not exempt from addressing social problems, such as poverty and equality, or ecological concerns just because the state is working on the same problems. Leviticus 25 teaches us that for those who believe in God, faith and ethics impact the larger context of our lives.[36]

Another biblical passage that powerfully integrates social and sabbatical themes for the community of God's people is Isaiah 58. Here social kindness and cessation from work are linked to self-denial (Isa. 58:3) and therefore to the Day of Purgation, which was a Sabbath (cf. vv. 13—14) and the only regular fast day prescribed in the Hebrew Bible (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27—32). It was also the time of humanitarian celebration when the Jubilee year began (25:9). On the Day of Purgation, when the sins of the Israelites were purged out of the sanctuary so that they could be morally pure (ch. 16), it was more inappropriate and hypocritical than ever to commit more rebellious faults and sins of social unkindness (Isa. 58:1—5).

Self-denial, social kindness, and sabbath/Sabbath coordinate to reveal important priorities involved in our relationships with God and with each other.

- *Holiness:* We can emulate God, who rested at creation (Gen. 2:2—3) and does not need human food (Ps. 50:12—13), and Christ, whose self-sacrificing kindness involved humbling himself to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

- *Humility:* Those who fast and keep Sabbath become weaker, stop seeking their own welfare, and remember the Creator who sustains them. This voluntary observance prepares them to recognize the needs of poor people, who involuntarily go hungry and whose work is insufficient to sustain them.
- *Equality:* The diet and work of those who fast and keep Sabbath is alike whether they are rich or poor.[37] Abraham Heschel describes the Sabbath:

A reminder of every man's royalty, an abolition of the distinction of master and slave, rich and poor, success and failure. To celebrate the Sabbath is to experience one's ultimate independence of civilization and society, of achievement and anxiety. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. The greatest sin of man is to forget that he is a prince.[38]

1. See, e.g., CAD, 1/2:115—17.

2. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year,* 183.

3. Cf. *m. Ros. Has.* 1:1; *b. Ros. Has.* 8b.

4. R. Gane, "The Laws of the Seventh and Fiftieth Years," *JAGNES* 1 (1990): 6. For a brief review of some other theories, which do not adequately account for all the data, see 4 n. 4. My conclusion agrees with that of R. Judah against the sages with whom he disputed, who held that the succession of sabbatical years would be interrupted by interpolation of the Jubilee year *(b. Ned.* 61a).

5. See Yadin, *The Temple Scroll,* 1:104. On such overlapping in the sectarian *Book of Jubilees,* see J. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 139.

6. C. Carmichael, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt," *Bib* 80 (1999): 228—30.

7. Ramban on Lev. 25:20; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2181—83; revising my explanation in "The Laws of the Seventh and Fiftieth Years," 7.

8. For critique of other theories, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2181—83.

9. Carmichael, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle," 229—32.

10. On legal dynamics of land redemption in Lev. 25 and Ruth 4 and preemption (before sale) in Jer. 32:6—15, see R. Westbrook, "Redemption of Land," *ILR* 6 (1971): 367—75.

11. For details, see J. Milgrom, “The Levitic Town: An Exercise in Realistic Planning,” *JJS* 33 (1982): 185—88.

12. I. Mendelsohn, *Legal Aspects of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria and Palestine* (Williamsport, Pa.: Bayard, 1932), 7, 14.

13. A. Levy, “Aspects of Bondage and Release in the Bible: Comparative Studies of Exodus 21:2—6; Leviticus 25:25—55; Deuteronomy 15:12—18” (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1981).

14. J. Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code* (VTSup 67, Leiden: Brill, 1996), 198, see also 196—97.

15. Cf. the progression of events during the Egyptian famine in Joseph’s time (Gen. 47:13—26).

16. See Westbrook, “Redemption of Land,” 369.

17. Cf. the Laws of Hammurabi, law 117, which limited bondage of a wife and children to three years *(ANET,* 170—71).

18. A. Schenker, “The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves: The Road from Exodus to Leviticus,” *JSOT* 78 (1998): 33, 36.

19. Gane, “The Laws of the Seventh and Fiftieth Years,” 13.

20. J. Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government,* ed. T. P. Peardon (LLA; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 17.

21. Cf. C. Wright, *Living As the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 37—38.

22. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Bantam, 1992 [repr. of 1888]), 17—18, 34.

23. For example, Reggae artist Ziggy Marley (son of the legendary Bob Marley) is attempting to popularize the idea of debt relief “by joining U2's Bono in asking the world’s richest countries to forgive the debts of poorer nations like Marley’s native Jamaica” (D. Philadelphia, “Global Briefing,” *Time* [September 2, 2002]: A7).

24. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2270—71.

25. E. Gargan, “A Single-Minded Man Fights to Free India’s Slaves,” *New York Times* (June 4, 1992).

26. See practical suggestions by P. Spray, “Five Areas for Jubilee Today,” in H. Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility?* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 134—39.

27. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2271.

28. Ibid., 2248, 2271.

29. L. S. Fried and D. N. Freedman, “Was the Jubilee Year Observed in Preexilic Judah?” in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2257—70.

30. For a list of practical challenges involved in applying the biblical law, see N. Gottwald, “The Biblical Jubilee: In Whose Interests?” in Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge,* 38—40.

31. See N. Solomon, “Economics of the Jubilee,” in Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge,* 154—55.

32. See also Ex. 22:25; cf. Deut. 23:19—20.

33. C. Young, *Nothing to Do but Stay: My Pioneer Mother* (New York: Dell, 1991), 24—25.

34. M. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 68.

35. Ibid., 69.

36. Wright, *Living As the People of God,* 34—35.

37. On social equality during the sabbatical year, see G. Blidstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” *Tradition* 9 (1966): 48—55.

38. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Noonday, 1955), 417.

Leviticus 26

DO NOT MAKE idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for
yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down
before it. I am the LORD your God.
2‘Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am
the LORD.
3“"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands,
4I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops
and the trees of the field their fruit. 5Your threshing will continue until
grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and
you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.
6“"I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one
will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and
the sword will not pass through your country. 7You will pursue your
enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. 8Five of you will
chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and
your enemies will fall by the sword before you.
9“"I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase
your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. 10You will still
be eating last years harvest when you will have to move it out to make
room for the new. 11I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will
not abhor you. 12I will walk among you and be your God, and you will
be my people. 13I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of
Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke
the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.
14“"But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these
commands, 15and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail
to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, 16then I

will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. 17I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies, those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

18"'If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. 19I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. 20Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.

21"'If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. 22I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

23"'If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, 24I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. 25And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands. 26When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied.

27"'If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, 28then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. 29You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. 30I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. 31I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. 32I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. 33I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in

ruins. 34Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.

36“'As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. 37They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies. 38You will perish among the nations, the land of your enemies will devour you. 39Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins, also because of their fathers’ sins they will waste away.

40‘But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, 41which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. 43For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. 44Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God. 45But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.'”

46These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses.

Original Meaning

LEVITICUS 26 PROVIDES a dramatic climax to the book of Leviticus, after which the concluding rules of chapter 27 are anticlimactic. It consists mainly of a series of conditional covenant blessings (f the Israelites obey the Lord) and curses *(if* they disobey his commands).

Before the blessings begin in verse 3, verses 1—2 introduce this chapter by reiterating the commandments against idolatry and for observing the Lord's Sabbaths (cf. Ex. 20:4—6, 8—11). As an example of a prohibited idolatrous practice, verse 1 speaks of placing a *maskit* stone to prostrate oneself on it. This kind of stone is mentioned only here in the Bible, but on the basis of comparison with an Assyrian text, V. Hurowitz describes it as "a stone slab placed in the ground, possibly in a doorway, decorated with engraved divine symbols and bowed down upon, enabling the supplicant to kiss the ground with the purpose of having his or her wish granted. We may translate it as 'decorated wishing stone.'"[1]

The brief unit of 26:1—2 forms a structural tie with the same commands in 19:4, 30, where the theme is holy living because the Lord is holy. Staying away from idolatry, keeping Sabbath, and reverencing the Lord's sanctuary are basic ways that the Israelites can show loyalty to him. Conversely, violation of these commands will play a prominent role in bringing on them the curses and exile from the land that are so prominent later in this chapter.

Leviticus 26:3 begins a series of blessings with "if" (^{J}im). The much longer section of curses similarly begins with "but if" (v. 14). Repetitions of "if" in 26:18, 21, 23, 27 threaten progressively more dire consequences if fulfillments of earlier curses do not stop the Israelites in their tracks. A final "but if" in 26:40 brings the juggernaut of catastrophe to a screeching halt and turns the seemingly inexorable situation around: "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers…." A more stunning accent on the power of repentance is hard to imagine.

The blessings in 26:3—13 touch the major aspects of life that are dear to an ancient Israelite: agricultural prosperity, plenty of food, peace and safety from human and animal enemies, military victory against overwhelming odds, and

freedom with dignity under the beneficence of a resident covenant deity. The Israelites can trust the Lord's goodwill toward them because he has already definitively proven it by delivering them from the heavy burden of Egyptian oppression (v. 13).

If the contrast between blessings and curses seem shocking, it is meant to be. The curses in 26:14—39 invoke a comprehensive catalogue of calamities. They are much more extensive than the blessings, partly because the blessings are more simple and obvious and partly because negative motivations need to be more substantial in order to serve as an effective deterrent (cf. Deut. 31:15—29). Curses are the predominant operational dynamic in Israel's later history.

In 26:14—17 there is fear, sickness, plunder of agricultural produce by enemies, military defeat, and subjection to enemy rulers. In case the first dose of "medicine" is not enough to bring disloyal Israelites to their knees, there is plenty more. In 26:18—20, introduced by another "if," the Lord threatens to multiply the punishments for their sins by seven (see also 26:21, 24, 28). Although this is a figure of speech for many times over (cf. Ps. 119:164; Prov. 24:16; Luke 17:4), seven is also the sabbatical number of completeness[2] and holiness (see further below). Thus, it is both appropriate and ironic that divine retribution is sevenfold. In response to the hardness of their hearts, the Lord will make the sky like iron and the ground like copper so that agricultural effort will be spent in vain (Lev. 26:19—20).

Following yet another "if," 26:21 threatens further increase of affliction by seven times "according to your sins" (NASB). Thus the downside of covenant cause and effect is proportional to exacerbation of the sin problem, which is like skin disease that grows and metastasizes (cf. chs. 13—14). Moreover, rejecting the repeated warnings of the divine Judge, whether through his messengers, conscience, Scripture, or providential punishments, constitutes "contempt of court."

If the Israelites throw away the blessing of having predatory animals removed from their land (cf. 26:6), the Lord will commission such beasts to thin the population of humans and domestic animals (26:22). As in some large cities today, even muggers will be afraid to go out.

Surely by now the people will call a moratorium on their self-destructive rebellion! In case they don't, the fires of affliction are just getting warmed up. If they decide not to walk with God by keeping his covenant (cf. 26:3), he will walk on a collision course with them (v. 24) and bring them all the miseries of military attack. They can run, but they cannot hide (vv. 25—26).

The next unit that begins with "if" is much longer (26:27—39) and constitutes one of the most frightful warnings in the entire Bible. The dam restraining

retributive justice bursts open with a vengeance, disclosing the ultimate horrors of starvation during siege ("You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters," v. 29), appalling devastation of the land (vv. 30—32), and scattering of the people into exile (vv. 33—35).

In the rubble we see one of the main causes for divine judgment: "I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you" (26:30). It is fitting that the presumed holiness of these idols be defiled by corpse contamination because they are like lifeless, impure corpses anyway. In 26:31, God will destroy "*your* sanctuaries" (plural, contrast v. 2: "have reverence for *my*sanctuary" [sing.]).

When the people are in exile and the land has been so devastated (Hiphil of *šmm)* that even the enemies of Israel who move in are devastated/appalled (Qal of *šmm)* by the sight (v. 32), the following ironic link to chapter 25 occurs:

> Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it (26:34—35).

Here we see the significance of the command in verse 2: "Observe my sabbaths." The Lord's sabbaths include weekly Sabbaths, ceremonial sabbaths, and sabbatical fallow years, which acknowledge his lordship over the people and the land. If the people deplete the land by failing to grant its sabbatical respites, they will be deleted from it. It is as if the exhausted land heaves a mighty sigh of relief and settles down to a long nap to recover from its sleep deficit.

The survivors in exile will be a miserable lot, so "shell-shocked" that "the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight" (26:36). Unable to stand (v. 37), they revert to their pre-Exodus state, before the Lord set them free to walk upright (v. 13). In exile they will rot away (Niphal of *mqq)* in their culpability *('awon)* and the culpabilities of their ancestors (vv. 38—39).

After all that has happened, it is a wonder that anyone has survived at all! But 26:40—45 pries open a door of hope at what looked like a dead end. Like the blessings earlier in the chapter, it is conditional, introduced with "but if":

> But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies— then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my

covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

We would expect a requirement of extreme expiation for prodigal Israel to be reaccepted by the divine Father, but there are no animal sacrifices here. Indeed, how could there be with the people in exile and the temple destroyed? Moreover, what sacrifice could they bring for deliberate, high-handed rebellion that called for nothing but their extirpation (cf. Num. 15:30—31)?

Here at the climax of Leviticus there appears at first glance to be a massive letdown, like a dramatic pause in a Beethoven symphony: "if [the Israelites] will confess their sins…." That's all—only confess. No elaborate ceremonies. Only humbling themselves before the Lord, admitting they have made bad choices and putting themselves at his mercy, where they really have been all along but wouldn't admit it.

It sounds too simple, but what the Lord has wanted all along is for his people simply to return to loyalty and dependence on him. Verses 43—45 repeat the promise to make sure it sinks in. Although the Israelites will in some sense pay for the debt of their culpability through suffering, God will remember his covenant with their ancestors, whom he brought out of Egypt (cf. v. 42). Not that he has forgotten, but he will restore application of the covenant benefits when the people once more agree to receive them. The implication is that there will be a second Exodus, this time from exile. By referring to the Exodus generation, the breathtaking finale to Leviticus comes back to the original audience of the book according to the narrative framework of the Pentateuch (v. 46, cf. 25:1—2).

In 26:45 is the forty-ninth and last instance of "I am the LORD" in the book of Leviticus.[3] Is it coincidence that this key expression is used the same super-sabbatical (7 x 7) number of times as the seven weeks of days between the elevated sheaf and the Feast of Weeks (23:15) and the seven weeks of years between Jubilees (25:8), as well as the number of separate applications of purification offering blood by which the sanctuary is restored on the Day of Purgation (16:14—19),[4] when the Jubilee year begins (25:9)? Associated as this multiple of the sacred number seven is with the Lord's identity and sacred occasions, the number forty-nine carries a connotation of high holiness.[5] Thus, we find that Leviticus, like other great artistic works such as Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, makes connections by patterns under as well as on the surface.[6]

Verse 46 concludes the Sinai revelation of chapters 25—26 by stating that the Lord gave these "laws, rules," and "rituals"[7] between himself and the Israelites on Mount Sinai through Moses. The expression "between himself and the Israelites" means that the legislation was placed within the framework of the

covenant relationship.

Bridging Contexts

THE COVENANT FRAMEWORK OF DIVINE LAW. The word "covenant" *(berit)* is prominent throughout Leviticus 26,[8] where God promises blessings on the condition that his people obey his laws: "If you walk [hlk] in my laws and keep [sm r, guard] my commandments and do *('sh*) them …" (v. 3, pers. transl.). The verbs "walk," "keep," and "do" underline the Lord's practical approach to holiness and loyalty to him. It is an ongoing way of life, a "walk" that calls for vigilant, careful attention, and right action, not just good intentions or words.

The covenant between God and the Israelites necessarily involves principles that can be called "laws" because it is an interpersonal relationship, which needs guidelines to be harmonious. If God's people obey him, their reward is a relational one: He will keep his covenant with them (26:9). All of the good things they receive flow from maintenance of this unequal relationship with the One who can supply all their needs and healthy desires.

But if God's people break the covenant by disobedience, he will punish them by giving the opposite of blessings (26:15, 25). At first glance this appears harsh, but the remarkable thing is that God does *not revoke* the covenant. What do we do when someone with whom we have a relationship, whom we have helped in a major way, treats us like dirt? But if God were to walk away from Israel, Israel could not survive. It would be like an adult abandoning a baby. Thus, God mercifully disciplines his people to bring them to their senses and teach them the value of his gifts so that he will not need to abandon them to utter oblivion. If his discipline is potent, it is because the stakes are corporate life and death.

When God's people return to him, he will remember his covenant and the land he has promised them (26:42). In this strategic verse, precisely at the point where his attitude toward Israel changes, we find clusters of three instances of the word "covenant" and three of "remember."[9] Here the covenant is a restored, remembered one, not a totally new relationship that begins from scratch. Although Israel has thrown away its covenant blessings and many individuals have been "pruned" off, God has not revoked his side of the corporate covenant by putting his contract with the nation through the shredder (v. 44). He can pull the covenant out of the file anytime those who remain are ready.

Why will God pursue Israel's loyalty so relentlessly? What is there in it for him?

> For God's purpose … was not just for righteous individuals, but a new community who in their social life would embody those qualities of righteousness, peace, justice and love which reflect God's own character and were his original purpose for mankind.[10]

The Lord is intent on extending his blessings to all peoples through the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). A model society will reveal the advantages of his rule so that others will want to come under his benevolent sovereignty, thereby expanding his human domain on earth.

God's goal in revealing his law to Israel is to manifest the superior and therefore attractive nature of his lordship and character within the framework of his gracious covenant with Israel (cf. Deut. 4:6—8).[11] The law is God's instrument to give blessings to his people. He can only achieve his purpose if they will allow him to bless them, and he can only bless them if they live by workable principles of cause and effect and thereby properly represent his sensible character. If he blesses them even when they abandon his reasonable principles, he will defeat his universal goal by reinforcing a false message to the world.

Blessings and curses within covenant formulation. The blessings and curses concluding the legislation of Leviticus (ch. 26) and Deuteronomy (chs. 27—30) emphasize the covenant framework of God's law. Scholars have pointed out striking parallels between biblical covenant formulations, especially of Deuteronomy, and the structure of ancient Near Eastern political treaties, especially between Hittite emperors and lesser rulers during the second millennium B.C. Such a treaty typically included the following elements:[12]

1. A preamble identifying its author, that is, the superior party
2. A historical prologue recounting the past relationship between the overlord and the vassal, underscoring the benevolence of the former toward the latter
3. Stipulations/laws that the vassal must agree to keep as conditions of submission to the overlord
4. Provision for periodic public reading of the covenant document to refresh memory of obligations
5. Invocation of divine witnesses who can hold the lesser party accountable to the terms of the treaty
6. Curses and perhaps blessings to be visited on the lesser party by the gods

for noncompliance or compliance with the stipulations

While Leviticus does not exhibit all of these elements, it does clearly identify the parties (God and Israel), refer to God's past goodness to Israel (delivering from Egyptian bondage; 11:45; 19:36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38; 26:13, 45), present ritual and ethical laws (constituting the bulk of the book), and conclude with blessings and curses (ch. 26).

Adapting the existing treaty format from the sphere of international diplomacy to the covenant between Israel and its divine Lord has the advantage of driving home the corporately binding implications of their relationship with him, which he will enforce. As a persuasive rhetorical strategy for motivating compliance,[13] the positive and negative reinforcement of blessings and curses can accomplish several things. (1) It will impress the Israelites with awesome respect for God and his power. (2) It will show that the law is unified because all of it is involved in the divine-human relationship. (3) It will give the people an opportunity to make a clear choice to follow the Lord or not (cf. Deut. 30:15—18). (4) It will positively appeal to the Israelites through articulation of blessings, making clear that they come from God and encouraging them that obedience is possible (cf. Deut. 30:11—14). (5) It will help the people to understand the cause of their distress, such as exile, if they are punished for disobedience.

The conditional blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 give a later reader the eerie sense that it previews the rest of Old Testament Israelite history, as if it were a prophecy that is subsequently fulfilled. The violent ups and downs reported in the book of Numbers soon demonstrate the effects of loyalty versus disloyalty. When the Israelites follow the Lord under Joshua, intermittently during the period of the judges, more gloriously under King David and early Solomon, and sporadically through the divided monarchy era, they are blessed with peace, prosperity, and glorious successes against their enemies, even against overwhelming odds.

When the people forsake the Lord and his covenant, however, and turn to other gods, their moral state and consequently their fate spiral precipitously downward. The long periods of the judges and the divided monarchy are notable for a "roller coaster" experience—some exhilarating ups, but mainly just gravity slide. God repeatedly warns his people through prophets and disasters, but ultimately to no avail.

Parents do end up eating their children (2 Kings 6:28—29, cf. Lev. 26:29), the northern Israelites and then the Judahites go into exile, and the land is devastated. But some do remember, as they weep by the rivers of Babylon (cf. Ps. 137). By grasping the reason for their distress, some have hope for

restoration by turning back to God (Dan. 9, cf. Deut. 30:1—3). The fact that prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel hammer the same conditional message as Leviticus 26 largely explains why Jewish hope survives the Babylonian captivity. In accordance with the latter part of Leviticus 26, the last three verses of the Hebrew Bible report fulfillment of the land's sabbath rest and the people's restoration from exile (2 Chron. 36:21—23).[14]

Contemporary Significance

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. The second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776) reads: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The *pursuit* of happiness is an unalienable right, but happiness itself is not guaranteed. A democratic country can provide freedom to seek well-being and fulfillment, but whether or not such desires are achieved depends on all kinds of factors. Even after more than two centuries, not everyone in the United States is happy. Some are physically or mentally unwell and depressed. Others are in prison. Some are too poor.

Even highly successful and wealthy people are not necessarily happy. A maker of luxury home stereo systems (Essence company, based in Lincoln, Nebraska) can take as long as a week to custom install a system in a home. Over the last couple of decades the owner has become acquainted with some of the richest of the rich, who are surrounded by all the fabulous comforts and conveniences that modern life has to offer. Remarkably, he has not found any of these privileged individuals to be happy.

If happiness is not in the pot of gold at the end of the American dream rainbow, where is it? Is the pursuit of happiness inevitably futile? Or is there another way? The Bible says that there is:

> If you will only obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; *all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you,* if you obey the LORD your God. (Deut. 28:1—2 NRSV; emphasis supplied)

The end of the famous “Shepherd Psalm” has the same idea: “Surely *goodness and love will follow me* all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6; emphasis supplied).

Here is a dramatic paradigm shift. Our pursuit of happiness will be successful only if we allow happiness to pursue us! Our approach must be indirect. As the

ancient Israelites found out through long and bitter experience, directly chasing happiness will only chase it away, as if it were a wild antelope. We get happiness to pursue us by pursuing a positive relationship with God, the Source of all blessings. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). It is a matter of priorities. If we want God first, we will have happiness, especially in the age to come (Rev. 21—22).

The happiness that God gives is not exactly the same as our human definition of “happiness.” It is *far better:* “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9, cf. Isa. 64:4). If we are hell-bent on happiness as we define it, with God left out of the picture, relegated to the sidelines, or used as a mere tool, we are doomed to failure. The ancient Israelites had to learn this the hard way even though God had told them the final score in advance (Lev. 26). According to the Bible, there is simply no such thing as full, genuine happiness without God and the guidance he offers.

> An old television show, *Let’s Make a Deal,* reached its climax each week in what was called the Big Deal of the Day. Two contestants were given a choice: “You can have what’s behind Door No. l, Door No. 2, or Door No. 3.” The contestants could give up what they had won so far for the chance at Really Big Money. But they might end up with nothing at all….
>
> Many people give little thought to spiritual guidance until they face a major decision: whom to marry, which house to buy, where to go to school, what job to accept? What these people really want is not guidance, in any Christian sense of the term. They want “inside information” so they will know which door to choose. They want to know beforehand which choice will lead to money, happiness, and success.[15]

Jesus said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9 NKJV). He is Door No. 1 — and there is only one door. It is not a game and there is no risk or uncertainty. There is real “pasture”—that is, happiness—behind this door, not just a cheap pile of money or perishable material goods.

Jesus also said: “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). We are all like “sheep” (cf. Isa. 53:6), and sheep need a shepherd in order to lead them to “pasture” (Ps. 23:1—2). So rather than ignoring our Guide, it makes sense to admit that we are “sheep” and to return to “the Shepherd and Overseer” of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). Acknowledging that we are dependent on an overseer/overlord in an unequal covenant relationship requires humility, but this

is the only way to happiness.

Having a divine Overseer means that we will not always have our own way, but we can count on his tough love.

> When one of my children could not get his own way, he used to say, "You don't love me." Was that true? No, it wasn't true. My love had not changed. At that moment, however, my love was expressing itself differently than he wanted it.
>
> When our only daughter Carrie was sixteen, the doctors told us she had cancer. We had to take her through chemotherapy and radiation. We suffered with Carrie as we watched her experience the sickness that goes along with the treatments. Some people face such an experience by blaming God and questioning why He doesn't love them anymore. Carrie's cancer treatments could have been a very devastating experience for us. Was God loving us still? Yes. Had His love changed? No, His love had not changed.[16]

If we focus on our individual interests rather than seeing our lives within the larger picture of a community under God on earth, it is easy for us to become self-centered and buy into "the popular notion that religion is just another form of 'self-help' valuable to the extent that it 'works for us.'"[17] *U.S. News & World Report* has pointed out the pervasiveness of this disorientation:

> Once stern and prescriptive in worldly matters, religion has become nothing more than a source of psychological uplifting, a tool of therapy that buttresses individual choice and lets people feel good about whatever code of conduct they choose … the faithful go about their lives "pretty much the same as those who have no faith at all."[18]

Like the ancient Israelites, we can benefit by a dose of "covenant consciousness." Like the prodigal son, who finally "came to his senses" in a pigsty (Luke 15:17), we need awareness of who our Father is and what he has been offering us all along. It is not necessary to wait until life has gone to the hogs. We can offer a covenant prayer anytime, anywhere: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven …" (Matt. 6:9—10).

1. V. Hurowitz, "Wish Upon a Stone: Discovering the Idolatry of the

Even Maskit,” BRev (October 1999): 51.

2. Compare M. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (LBS, New York: KTAV, 1970), 137—9.

3. The first are 11:44—45, 18:2, 4, 5, etc.

4. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6,* 1038—39.

5. On seven as the “prime sacred number,” see M. Tilley, “Typological Numbers: Taking a Count of the Bible,” *BRev* 8 (1992): 48—49.

6. Cf. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus.*

7. Transl. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 1941. For explanation, see 2342.

8. The word is distributed between the contexts of blessing (v. 9), curse (vv. 15, 25), and restoration (vv. 42 [3x], 44, 45).

9. Then NIV omits one of the “I will remember” verbs.

10. Wright, *Living As the People of God,* 34—35.

11. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan,* 65. Compare the prologue to the Laws of Hammurabi, which makes clear that the purpose of the laws was to express the king’s justice *(ANET,* 164—165; Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor,* 76—81.

12. For a convenient comparison between the biblical and other ancient Near Eastern treaty formats, see Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context,* 101—5.

13. See Watts, *Reading Law,* 45—48.

14. Note that in contrast to our English Bibles, in which the Old Testament ends with Malachi, the last four books of the Hebrew Bible are: Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

15. J. Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 140.

16. Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God,* 15—16.

17. Gane, *God’s Faulty Heroes,* 34.

18. *U.S. News & World Report* (September 26, 1994): 82.

Leviticus 27

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to the Israelites and say to
them: ‘If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the LORD
by giving equivalent values, 3set the value of a male between the ages
of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary
shekel, 4and if it is a female, set her value at thirty shekels. 5If it is a
person between the ages of five and twenty, set the value of a male at
twenty shekels and of a female at ten shekels. 6If it is a person between
one month and five years, set the value of a male at five shekels of
silver and that of a female at three shekels of silver. 7If it is a person
sixty years old or more, set the value of a male at fifteen shekels and of
a female at ten shekels. 8If anyone making the vow is too poor to pay
the specified amount, he is to present the person to the priest, who will
set the value for him according to what the man making the vow can
afford.

9“"If what he vowed is an animal that is acceptable as an offering to
the LORD, such an animal given to the LORD becomes holy. 10He must
not exchange it or substitute a good one for a bad one, or a bad one for
a good one, if he should substitute one animal for another, both it and
the substitute become holy. 11If what he vowed is a ceremonially
unclean animal—one that is not acceptable as an offering to the LORD
—the animal must be presented to the priest, 12who will judge its
quality as good or bad. whatever value the priest then sets, that is what
it will be. 13If the owner wishes to redeem the animal, he must add a
fifth to its value.

14“"If a man dedicates his house as something holy to the LORD, the
priest will judge its quality as good or bad. whatever value the priest
then sets, so it will remain. 15If the man who dedicates his house

redeems it, he must add a fifth to its value, and the house will again become his.

16“'If a man dedicates to the LORD part of his family land, its value is to be set according to the amount of seed required for it—fifty shekels of silver to a homer of barley seed. 17If he dedicates his field during the Year of Jubilee, the value that has been set remains. 18But if he dedicates his field after the Jubilee, the priest will determine the value according to the number of years that remain until the next Year of Jubilee, and its set value will be reduced. 19If the man who dedicates the field wishes to redeem it, he must add a fifth to its value, and the field will again become his. 20If, however, he does not redeem the field, or if he has sold it to someone else, it can never be redeemed. 21When the field is released in the Jubilee, it will become holy, like a field devoted to the LORD; it will become the property of the priests.

22“'If a man dedicates to the LORD a field he has bought, which is not part of his family land, 23the priest will determine its value up to the Year of Jubilee, and the man must pay its value on that day as something holy to the LORD. 24In the Year of Jubilee the field will revert to the person from whom he bought it, the one whose land it was. 25Every value is to be set according to the sanctuary shekel, twenty gerahs to the shekel.

26“'No one, however, may dedicate the firstborn of an animal, since the firstborn already belongs to the LORD; whether an ox or a sheep, it is the LORD'S. 27If it is one of the unclean animals, he may buy it back at its set value, adding a fifth of the value to it. If he does not redeem it, it is to be sold at its set value.

28“'But nothing that a man owns and devotes to the LORD—whether man or animal or family land—may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted is most holy to the LORD.

29“'No person devoted to destruction may be ransomed; he must be put to death.

30“'A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. 31If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. 32The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the LORD. 33He must not pick

out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If he does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed.'"

34These are the commands the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites.

Original Meaning

SCHOLARS HAVE GENERALLY REGARDED Leviticus 27, containing additional laws and a summary (v. 34), as an appendix to the book after its climactic conclusion in chapter 26, which ends with a summary (26:46).[1] C. Carmichael, however, points out that it is connected with chapters 25—26 by its references to the Jubilee and continuation of the parallels with Genesis 47 that appear in Leviticus 25:

> Pharaoh acquires both the Egyptians' possessions and their persons, and he enters into a transaction with them when he gives them seed to grow in the fields. Leviticus 27 addresses issues about Yahweh's claims to an Israelite's possessions and person, and the transactions that follow.[2]

If chapters 25—27 of Leviticus constitute a concluding unit, their order is logical. In chapter 25 the sabbatical (25:1—7) and then Jubilee provisions (25:8—55) provide the basis for later references to sabbatical (26:34—35) and then Jubilee years (27:17—24). Chapters 25—26 form a subunit framed by an inclusio: reference to Mount Sinai at the beginning of chapter 25 (v. 1) and again at the end of chapter 26 (v. 46). So chapter 27 must come after this sub-unit rather than immediately following chapter 25. Placement of the dramatic climax in chapter 26 at the center of chapters 25—27 rather than at the very end of the book may disturb us, but it would be artistically satisfying from the viewpoint of ancient Hebrews, who often put their most weighty literary expressions at the centers of literary structures. Because chapter 27 is the real end of the book, it requires a concluding summary (27:34), echoing the earlier summary in 26:46.

Leviticus 27 regulates gifts to the sanctuary: vows of persons (vv. 2—8) and animals (vv. 9—13), dedications of houses (vv. 14—15) and fields (vv. 16—25), firstborn animals (vv. 26—27), proscribed/banned items (vv. 28—29), and tithes (vv. 30—33). The focus of this chapter on holy things links it with earlier portions of Leviticus.

Verse 2 introduces the topic of votive gifts in typical case law style: "When [ki] a person makes an extraordinary vow to YHWH concerning the (fixed) valuation of a human being…."[3] Apparently what is extraordinary about such a

vow is that the gift is a human being (cf. Num. 6:2).[4] Rather than human sacrifice (cf. Judg. 1 1:30—31, 35—36, 39) or lifelong service at the sanctuary (1 Sam. 1:1 1, 24—28; 2:11), the Lord will receive what amounts to a redemption price corresponding to the valuation of an individual as fixed by the following scale:

Gender	*Age*	*Valuation in shekels*
male	20–60 years	50
female	"	30
male	5–20 years	20
female	"	10
male	1 mo.–5 years	5
female	"	3
male	60+ years	15
female	"	10

The variables are gender and age. In this list, ages begin with the prime of adulthood and decrease to infancy, after which valuations of elderly persons are specified.

Verse 8 makes a concession for a poor person who wants to make such a vow but cannot afford the usual amount. The priest lowers the valuation of the vowed person in proportion to the vower's ability to pay. Earlier in Leviticus we have seen concessions for the poor in terms of less expensive sacrifices (5:7—13; 12:8; 14:21—32; cf. 1:14—17). However, 27:8 is unique in giving a priest the authority to specify a lesser value for a gift to the Lord.

Verses 9—10 constitute a subcase. If that which is vowed is a sacrificeable animal, it becomes holy so that no other animal can take its place, even a better animal. Attempted substitution will result in both animals becoming holy to the Lord, meaning that they will belong to the sanctuary (v. 10).

An Israelite can also vow an unclean and therefore unsacrificeable animal that can be used by the priests for work or sold (v. 11; cf. v. 27). In this case a priest will assign the value of this gift to the Lord (v. 12). The value will be relevant for sale of the animal to someone else or for redemption if the owner wants to keep the animal, in which case he or she will pay the value plus one fifth (v. 13). This 20 percent charge is the same amount as the penalty for sacrilege in 5:16. Although redemption is not a sin and requires no reparation offering, it is related to sacrilege in that it withdraws something from the holy domain.

Verse 14 opens up a new main case (introduced by *ki*, "When …") of non-votive dedications/consecrations. Unlike vows, which are conditional promises

to be fulfilled in the future, such dedications go into effect immediately. Consecration (Hiphil of qds) of a house works like a vow of an unclean animal: The priest sets the value and any redemption requires that amount plus a fifth (vv. 14—15). Notice that the sanctuary and its priesthood will own the auxiliary property, as did temples elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In addition to all their other competencies, Israel's priests are cattle judges and real estate appraisers!

Unlike a house, ancestral land cannot be permanently sold, but it reverts to its original owner in the Jubilee year. Therefore, the value of a piece of land is based on its potential agricultural yield—as indicated by the amount of seed required to sow it—until the next Jubilee. Verses 16—25 deal with two possibilities: Either the dedicator is the original owner (vv. 16—21) or he has bought (really leased) someone else's land (vv. 22—25). Redemption by the original owner requires an extra fifth, as expected (v. 19).

The meaning of verses 20—21 is not transparent: "But if he does not redeem the field but has sold the field to another, it shall no longer be redeemable, when the field is released in the Jubilee, it shall be holy to YHWH, as a proscribed field, it belongs to the priest."[5] As M. Haran has shown, the key to understanding this passage is the tense of the verb "has sold" (Qal of mkr) in verse 20. Whereas the other verbs in the same verse are imperfect, this one is perfect, indicating the pluperfect sense of prior action: The owner who inherited the land consecrated it *after* having sold it. Ordinarily the land would simply revert to the owner at the Jubilee. But by dedicating it to the sanctuary after already selling its use to someone else until the Jubilee, the original owner indicates his intention to dedicate something over and above that which he has already sold, namely, permanent ownership. Therefore at the next Jubilee, when the property would normally revert to him, it instead becomes the permanent property of the priesthood. It is like *herem* property—something irrevocably "banished" to the sphere of holiness (see comments on v. 28).[6]

The remaining laws of Leviticus 27 cover restrictions on firstborn animals, proscribed things, and tithes. Israelites cannot consecrate firstborn animals to the Lord because they are already his (v. 26). However, an impure firstborn animal can be redeemed (see v. 13, cf. Ex. 13:13).

Verses 28—29 concern the intense *herem* category of proscribed things or persons that have been irredeemably consecrated to the divine sphere and therefore are "most holy to the LORD." We are most familiar with this category in terms of sacral devotion to destruction within the context of warfare against other nations (Num. 21:2—3, Deut. 7:2, 20:16—17, Josh. 6:17, 7:1, 1 Sam.

15:3).[7] Under extreme circumstances, the Israelites could also destroy their own rebels in the same way, whether in civil war (Judg. 21:10—11) or in peace as a judicial penalty for worship of a deity other than the Lord (Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13:12—18). Leviticus 27:28—29, however, refers to a peacetime *herem.* J. Milgrom succinctly explains the thrust of this legislation:

> In sum, the *herem* imposed voluntarily by the owner on his property, whether it is his slaves, animals, or tenured fields, transfers it to permanent sanctuary ownership where it may be neither sold nor redeemed because of its most sacred status. But persons who are declared *herem* by some outside body (presumably, an authorized court) must be put to death.[8]

Tithes are like a firstborn animal in that they are already holy to the Lord and can be redeemed (vv. 30—32; cf. vv. 26—27). When a tithe consists of every tenth animal, no substitution can be made without forfeiting both animals (vv. 32—33; cf. v. 10).

The book of Leviticus ends: “These are the commands the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites” (27:34). This echoes the earlier conclusion in 26:46: “These are the laws, rules, and the rituals that YHWH established between himself and the Israelites at Mount Sinai through Moses.”[9]

Bridging Contexts

MONETARY WORTH OF A PERSON. Why vow the monetary worth of a person? We speak of a person being worth his or her weight in gold. The idea is an old one. The mother of Domitia took it seriously when she vowed her daughter's weight in gold and paid it at Jerusalem.[10] Nevertheless, the idea of vowing the monetary worth of a human being (as in 27:1—8) seems strange to us.

Scholars have explored possible rationales for the valuations of persons in 27:3—7. Because this scale places the highest valuations on persons in the prime of adulthood, when their work productivity is at a maximum, it appears that this system of relative worth has to do with the benefit that the sanctuary will receive if the vowed person belongs to it as a servant. The fact that female valuations of work capacity are as high as they are, taking into account the female responsibility for bearing and raising children, indicates that women were an important part of Israelite labor force.[11]

There are some correlations between the valuations in Leviticus 27 and prices that individuals would bring if they were to be enslaved. For example, the brothers of young Joseph sold him as a slave for twenty shekels of silver (Gen. 37:28), which is the same as the valuation of a five to twenty-year-old male in Leviticus 27:5. Also, to ransom his country from the king of Assyria, King Menahem of northern Israel exacted fifty shekels of silver from each successful man (2 Kings 15:20), which equals the Leviticus 27 valuation of a twenty to sixty-year-old man in the prime of life (Lev. 27:3) and a reasonable price for a male adult slave in Mesopotamia.[12]

Yet several factors distance the valuations in Leviticus 27 from prices of slaves.[13] (1) In Exodus 21:32 the fixed amount of reparation to the master of a male or female slave gored to death by an ox is thirty shekels of silver. This agrees with the valuation of a female adult in Leviticus 27:4, but not a male (27:3). (2) Unlike slave prices, the scale in Leviticus 27 is fixed rather than fluctuating according to market conditions. (3) Unlike slave prices, the scale in Leviticus 27 does not take into account factors such as an individual's appearance or strength, which determines actual productivity. As Philo pointed out, the fixed valuations of Leviticus are egalitarian: Everyone of a certain

gender and age is worth the same amount.[14]

Not only are the valuations fixed in Leviticus 27; so is the currency: “the sanctuary shekel, twenty gerahs to the shekel” (v. 25). Another valuation of a human being set according to this currency is the redemption price of five shekels for one-month-old firstborn sons (Num. 18:16). Five shekels agrees with the valuation of a male from one month to twenty years of age in Leviticus 27:6.

According to Numbers 3:12—13, 45—46, the Levites took the place of the firstborn Israelites at the time of the initial census (cf. 8:16—18). We learn what redemption means in this context by seeing what happened to the Levites: Because they belonged to the Lord instead of the firstborn, they became the Lord’s servants, to work for his sanctuary under the supervision of the priests (Num. 3, 8).

When an Israelite vowed to dedicate to the Lord the valuation of a human being if he (God) would provide a certain benefit, it was as if the vowed person would become the servant of the sanctuary, as Samuel did when Hannah fulfilled her vow (1 Sam. 1:1 1, 24—28; 2:11). This is a valuable gift indeed. But why would someone want to make such a pricey vow? To request something major from the Lord, as Hannah did.

If every vowed person became a sanctuary servant, the priests would become inundated with helpers dependent on them but for whom they lacked sufficient work. So the legislation of Leviticus 27 provides a solution: Israelites can still vow persons, but what they actually give to the sanctuary functions as a redemption price according to a fixed scale that extends from a parallel with the five-shekel redemption price of one-month-old firstborn males.

Taking into account wage levels in ancient Israel, valuations of persons in Leviticus 27 are not cheap. For example, in Judges 17:10 Micah offered a young Levite: “Live with me and be my father and priest, and I’ll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food.” At that rate, if an Israelite saved 100 percent of wages over basic living expenses, it would take a year to earn enough to vow a five to twenty-year-old or a female older than sixty years (Lev. 27:5, 7). Vowing an adult male would require five years (27:3). However, so that the poor would not be excluded from the benefit of making such vows, Leviticus 27 allows a priest to set a lower valuation (27:8).

Contemporary Significance

REAL WORTH OF A PERSON. What is a person worth? It depends what you mean. The physical materials in a dead person's body have little commercial value unless organs are used for transplants or a cadaver belongs to a medical school. A living person, however, is valuable for work productivity. Such labor or its potential explains why ancient Israelites could have prices for human beings. These prices reflected what persons *did* rather than what they *were.* Likewise, a Forbes estimate that someone is "worth" a certain amount of money is talking about what that person *has* as a result of what he or she has *done or received* rather than about intrinsic worth.

So what is a person really worth? The fact that Numbers 35:31 forbids accepting a ransom of any amount for the life of a murderer reflects the concept that human life is priceless. Justice demands that a murderer must pay with his life because nothing else is equivalent to the value of the life he has taken.[15] The afterlife is also costly:

> No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—
>
> the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—
>
> that he should live on forever and not see decay. (Ps. 49:7—9)

Why is a person so valuable? Each one fills a unique place in a web of relationships. A beloved spouse, parent, sibling, child, or other relative or friend is irreplaceable. Economic, physical, and emotional consequences of losing such an individual may differ, but love puts the value of a relationship beyond price.

My understanding of what a human being is worth made a quantum leap in the early hours of September 5, 1991, when I met my daughter for the first time in a delivery room. Just after she was born, the obstetrician placed her on a table so that assistants could make sure everything was all right. Exposed and examined

by strange hands before anyone had even welcomed her into the world, she wailed in protest. That was too much for me. I went over and put my face down close to hers so that she could see me. Then I said softly, “Hello Sarah.” She instantly stopped crying. Apparently she recognized my voice. She looked into my eyes and I looked into hers. At that moment a relationship was born. She could do nothing but take my time, energy, and money, but I would die for that child.

Of course, it makes sense that a person made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 9:6) is of inestimable value. How can anyone put a price on the image of God? Because we do not fully comprehend the Original, we cannot appraise our own worth. Life that comes from the holy Creator is sacred. Therefore treating others as if their lives are cheap is profanity and sacrilege.

Any notion that we may have figured out our intrinsic worth is swept aside by a mystery: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s gift was not a conditional vow, neither was it a money substitute, nor was his beloved Son only made in his image as a human being, nor was he given merely to provide live service (cf. Col. 1:19—20). His love puts the value of every human being *way* beyond price.

1. E.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2401—2.

2. Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt,” 235—36.

3. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 1941. For explanation see 2368—73.

4. T. Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 147, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 142.

5. Transl. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27,* 1942.

6. M. Haran, *herem* in EM, 6:394 (Hebrew). W. Houston agrees with this against other proposed solutions, but without knowing of Haran’s discussion (“Contrast in Tense and Exegesis,” 418—20).

7. See Bridging Contexts section of Num. 31. The Mesha inscription (9th century B.C.) attests sacral *herem* annihilation of Israelites by the Moabites (lines 16—17; transl. *ANET,* 320; for detailed discussion, see P. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel’s Religious Experience* [BJS 211; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 19—56).

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus 2 3—27,* 2396.

9. Transl. ibid., 1941.

10. See *m. ’Arak.* 5:1.

11. C. Meyers, “Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel,” *JAAR* 51 (1983): 584—87; idem, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 170—71.

12. G. Wenham, “Leviticus 27:2—8 and the Price of Slaves,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 264—5; idem, *Leviticus,* 338. For prices of slaves in ancient Mesopotamia, see Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East,* 117—19.

13. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 2 3—27,* 2370—71.

14. Philo, *The Special Laws,* 2.32—34; cf. the United States “Declaration of Independence.”

15. Greenberg, “Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law,” 13—17.

Introduction to Numbers

On Reading Numbers

FLORENCE LITTAUER SAYS, "After a wedding, there's a marriage." That's obvious, but it is also profound. After the romance and celebration of a new, permanently binding relationship, with its vows of mutual fidelity, there's the rest of life. After "forsaking all others … to have and to hold … for better or for worse … in sickness and in health … until death do us part," we find out what these words mean through the joys, sorrows, mistakes, and successes of faulty human beings living together in an imperfect and sometimes brutally challenging world.

So it was with Israel and God. After the wedding at Sinai, where God proclaimed the covenant vows (Ten Commandments) with awesome splendor, Israel said "I do," and they built a house (sanctuary) together, there was a journey through the wilderness of real life. Whatever happened, they were in it together. The vows he had given were not only for Israel to keep; they were his vows too. When he had said, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3)—the equivalent of "forsaking all others"—he not only forbade polytheism, but he also pledged himself to be Israel's God.

What happened after that was profoundly disturbing. While the divine Groom lavished care on his bride, bringing her breakfast in bed (manna), protecting her from danger (e.g., poisonous snakes in the Sinai peninsula), and literally hovering over her (in the Shekinah cloud), she grumbled about the food, blamed his appointed representative (Moses) when anything went wrong, and kept saying she would rather return to the abusive home she had left (Egypt) to find a different husband. Is it any wonder that Israel's new Husband was nonplussed?

Now the book of Numbers makes more sense. As the fourth book of the Torah/Pentateuch, it is like the second book (Exodus) in recounting a journey of the Israelites. Numbers picks up the travel story where Exodus leaves off, moving from the Sinai Desert to the steppes of Moab by the Jordan River at the eastern border of Canaan. Between Exodus and Numbers is Leviticus, the legislation of which continues the "wedding" begun in the latter part of Exodus.[1] If that sounds like a long wedding, we are reminded of the fact that the Groom was a deity and the Bride was a human nation.

The fact that the covenant "wedding" comes after the journey of Exodus and

before its continuation in Numbers explains an important difference between these two books. In Exodus, God does not punish the Israelites for faithless complaining with regard to food and other problems (Ex. 16—17), but in Numbers he does because they have now committed themselves to faithfully following him.[2]

H. H. Guthrie points out the effectiveness of doing theology, as Numbers does, by telling God's story:

> … since Yahweh was the living God and not the symbol of some abstract truth, theology had to be done by recounting the course of events in which Yahweh had been involved and not by producing abstractions of which Yahweh was symbolic. The process was analogous to the way in which, in order finally to convey the reality of *who* a living someone is, we have to tell that person's story and not engage in racial or sexual or social or psychological or statistical abstractions.[3]

Thus far we have found that our modern experience, in this case marriage, sheds light on the relational dynamics running through the biblical story. What makes the book of Numbers part of Scripture is the fact that its story turns around and illuminates our story.

> Because the story is open-ended and because a member of the community of faith in any period may identify his or her own time with the new generation which arises in the second half of Numbers, the story is designed to make a claim upon the reader. The reader is asked to include himself or herself as a participant in the promise and challenge of this new generation of God's people.[4]

If we believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, we can learn about him and how to interact with him not only from what he said at his "wedding," but also from the way he has dealt with other faulty people like us. If we have entered into a covenant with him, we are in the same position as the Israelites were during the book of Numbers. The divine party to the covenant is the same.

> Everything that happened in the small area of Canaan or Israel over a wide expanse of time, almost two thousand years, is being relived now somewhere across the wide geographical expanse of planet earth in each small moment of our existence. Old Testament time was expansive (2,000 years) and its space minuscule (only 6,000 square miles of land), in the

> mission of biblical religion today time is minuscule (each moment), and space is as expansive as the earth. Somewhere today a family, tribe, or country is reliving the secular culture and religious response of each age and person in the Bible.[5]

Do you have struggles of faith as you seek to survive, and your "daily bread" isn't always obvious? Do you have difficulty leading those whom God has entrusted to your care or following those whom he has chosen to coordinate your efforts with those of others? Are you tempted to balk at "giant" obstacles that stand between you and the destiny to which God is calling you? Then the book of Numbers is the right place to be.

It is unfortunate that, after the glorious "wedding," God's "marriage" with Israel was not "happily ever after." We would hardly regard a marriage in which the wife repeatedly rebelled and threatened to stone the husband's representatives, and in which the husband disciplined his wife with fire, plagues, a bottomless pit, and venomous vipers (Num. 11, 16, 21), as happy. This makes for some of the most dramatic and gut-wrenching reading in the Bible. Were the Israelites right that life under Pharaoh was the lesser of two evils?

The point is that God provided the *only* way for Israel to survive as a nation. Egypt would have ultimately destroyed their identity, they could not penetrate Canaan by themselves, and there was not enough food and water in the desert. It was either trust and follow God or be annihilated. With those kinds of stakes, it is not so surprising that God strongly enforced the covenant and made what should have been a trip of a few weeks into a forty-year journey of biblical proportions. Many died, but not without repeated warnings of increasing severity. By rebelling against God, they had chosen the fate that would have met the entire nation if he allowed it to wander from the oasis of his grace.

It is humbling to admit that we are ultimately as dependent on God as the Israelites were and that we have some of the same faults. It is also sobering to realize that there is only one road to eternal survival.

Numbers has what appears to be a bipolar personality. It presents extremes of divine glory and community harmony with God on the one hand, and rebellion and retributive justice on the other. These contrasts emphasize the choice between the way of life and the way of death, almost to the point of overkill.

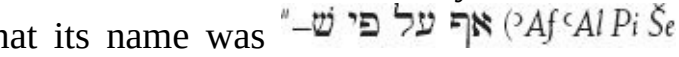
It is amazing that the omnipotent deity allows faulty people to have any choice at all. Obviously our faculty of choice and wise exercise of it are high priorities to him. "Personhood is formed through making decisions. We learn to think and weigh options, we discover what we truly value, we take responsibility for our choices. God wants us to be people, not robots, and that means we must

make decisions."[6] This explains why covenant "marriages" between God and human beings are so messy: He allows us to grow by making our own decisions and enjoying or suffering the consequences.

When the situation in Numbers gravitates to the drastically negative side, the book becomes downright depressing. If we step back from the story and reflect on its relationship to our own adventure, the ironic truth dawns: By showing how God not only could, but did bring his people out of desperate situations and took them to their promised home, the Bible encourages us that he can handle any crises we will ever face. So the more depressing the biblical story, the more powerful its hope for our modern story—provided we stand with Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua rather than Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Numbers is for real people with problems, who live in the real world. It is not for sanitized life in a vacuum, which some talk about, but which we do not experience because it doesn't really exist.

> Modern churches tend to feature testimonies of spiritual successes, never failures, which only makes the strugglers in the pew feel worse.… Yet delve a bit deeper into church history and you will find a different story of those who strain to swim upstream like spawning salmon.[7]

The encouragement of Numbers reminds me of a boat that my wife and I discovered in a small maritime museum in Haifa, Israel. The largest item on exhibit looked like an old ferry. As we went into it to look around, we noticed that its name was  (ʾAfʿAl Pi Še) which is modern Hebrew for "In Spite of the Fact That …" What a strange name! Then we learned that it had been used for the dangerous job of transporting refugees who were fleeing from Europe to Israel during the horrible 1930s and 1940s. *In spite of the fact that* there were all kinds of obstacles, the vessel took them safely to their new homeland. Yes! "Michael, row your boat ashore!"

Authorship of Numbers

AS WITH LEVITICUS and the other Pentateuchal books, Numbers is an anonymous work but is ascribed by tradition to Moses, who served as the intermediary between God and Israel within its narrative framework. The New Testament (including Jesus) accepts the idea that the entire Pentateuch is basically Mosaic (e.g., Luke 16:29; 24:27, John 1:17; 5:46; 2 Cor. 3:15). This does not rule out participation of others in the writing/editing process.[8] For example, it has long been recognized that the affirmation of Moses' unparalleled humility in Numbers 12:3 was likely penned by someone else.

In its final form, the book of Numbers shows evidence that it draws on a variety of materials, such as administrative lists, legal records, the story of Balaam (chs. 22—24), and written historical accounts, including the explicitly cited "Book of the Wars of the LORD" (21:14).[9] Critical scholars have spent a great deal of energy attempting to isolate and date individual strands of authorship with varying perspectives, reconstructing the composition process by dissassembling the "sources" of Numbers and then reassembling them in chronological sequence.[10] Even though they have often drawn conclusions that go beyond the surviving evidence, they have contributed to our understanding of the book by highlighting interdependence between Pentateuchal books and the remarkable diversity of literary genres and styles that have been combined to provide a rich portrayal of Israel's life with God.[11]

> The generic variety that characterizes Numbers surpasses that of any other book of the Bible. Note these examples: narrative (4:1—3), poetry (21:17—18), prophecy (24:3—9), victory song (21:27—30, pre-Israelite), prayer (12:13), blessing (6:24—26), lampoon (22:22—35), diplomatic letter (21:14—19), civil law (27:1—11), cultic law (15:17—21), oracular decision (15:32—36), census list (26:1—51), temple archive (7:10—88), itinerary (33:1—49).[12]

Structure and Themes of Numbers

NUMBERS IS NOT PRIMARILY about numbers. This name of the book, assigned by the Septuagint, reflects the prominence of census accounts (chs. 1 and 26) in its basic literary structure. However, the censuses were simply part of the overall organization in preparation for taking the Promised Land. The present Hebrew title is *Bemidbar* ("in the desert"), the fifth word of the first verse. This captures the setting of the whole book between Egypt and Canaan.[13]

These two titles already reflect important structural factors: censuses and geography. The second census (ch. 26), which counted the younger generation of Israelites after their rebellious parents died in the desert, established a new beginning. After decades of wandering, the nation was back to where it had been in chapter 1, except that it consisted of a different group of people.

Following the view of D. Olson that the census lists of chapters 1 and 26 form the basic unifying framework of Numbers, we can divide the book into chapters 1—25 and 26—36.[14] Within the latter segment, chapters 27 and 36— both of which concern land inheritance by the daughters of Zelophehad— form a frame/inclusio that binds together the miscellaneous materials of the intervening chapters under the heading of preparation to occupy the Promised Land. Notice that chapters 26 and 27 are linked by the notices in 26:33 that Zelophehad had only daughters and "the land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names" (26:53).[15]

In addition to the two census lists, D. Olson has found an impressive series of other connections between chapters 1—25 and 26—36, which "strengthen the argument for a cohesive editorial construction of the book into two major parts that both echo and contrast with each other."[16]

Numbers 1–25 The Old Generation of Rebellion	Numbers 26–36 The New Generation of Hope
1—census of twelve tribes	26—census of twelve tribes
3—census of Levites	26—census of Levites
5—legal discourse involving women	27—legal discourse involving women
6—laws concerning vows	30—laws concerning vows

7, 15 — lists and laws concerning offerings	28, 29—lists and laws concerning offerings
9—celebration of Passover	28:16–25—instructions for future celebrations of Passover
10:8–9—law concerning priests blowing trumpets to sound alarm for holy war	31:6—priests blow trumpets to sound alarm for holy war against Midian
13—list of spies from twelve tribes chosen to spy out the Promised Land	34—list of tribal leaders from twelve tribes chosen to divide the Promised Land
13–14—spy story and Israel's rebellion that led to death of old generation	32:6–15—spy story of Num. 13–14 recalled as lesson for new generation
10–25—scattered geographical notations about places Israel journeyed in the desert	33—summary of places Israel journeyed in the desert
18:21–32—provisions for Levites	35—provisions for Levitical cities
21:21–35—victory over Kings Sihon and Og and capture of land east of Jordan	32—assignment of land captured from Sihon and Og east of Jordan to Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh
25—Midianites cause Israel to sin and God's command to Israel to punish Midianites	31—holy war against Midianites to punish them for what they did in ch. 25

The narrative progression of Numbers can be viewed as related to phases of geographical movement as the Israelites prepare to leave the Sinai Desert (1:1—10:10), journey from Sinai to Kadesh, where they are condemned to wander in the desert (10:11—19:22), start moving toward Canaan again from Kadesh at the end of forty years (20:1—25:18), and make preparations for occupying Canaan while they are encamped by the Jordan River (26:1—36:13). These phases form the major divisions in my detailed outline of the book (see below).[17]

Within chapters 1—21, preceding the Balaam story (chs. 22—24), apostasy at the Jordan (ch. 25), and the new beginning containing no more rebellion or apostasy (chs. 26—36), it is possible to discern an introverted structure centered at the legislation of chapter 15:

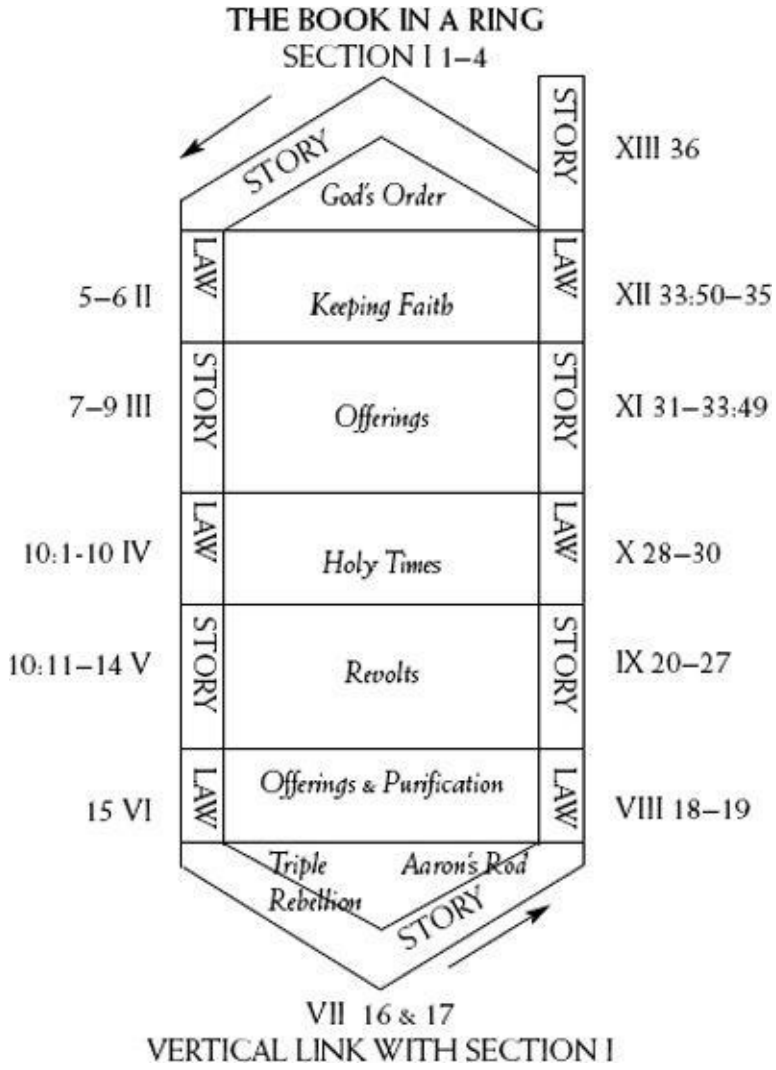
a Organization for conquest (chs. 1—10)
b Corpses at Kibroth-Hattaavah (“Graves of Craving”) (ch. 11)
c Moses’ leadership, prelude to rebellion (chs. 12—13)
d. Rebellion (ch. 14)
e Loyalty: inadvertent versus defiant sin (ch. 15)
d’ Rebellion (ch. 16)
c’ Aftermath of rebellion, Aaron’s leadership (chs. 17—18)

b’ Corpse contamination (ch. 19)
a’ Conquests (chs. 20—21)

Surrounded as chapter 15 is by extravagant illustrations of defiant/rebellious sin (see also 15:32—36), it is here in 15:22—31 that the Lord lays out the crucial contrast between inadvertent sin, which can be expiated by a purification offering (15:22—27), and defiant (“high-handed”) sin, for which there is no remedy (15:30—31). Strikingly, there is a close thematic relationship between this passage regarding loyalty to God and Leviticus 16. Here at one of the centers of Leviticus (see the introduction to Leviticus), special purification offerings purge the Israelite sanctuary and camp of evils that include inadvertent and rebellious sins, but those who committed the latter receive no benefit (see Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 16).

Notice that the introversion presented above[18] provides one answer to a question that has long puzzled scholars: Since Leviticus 21 and 22 and Numbers 5, 6, and 9 already speak of corpse contamination, why wasn’t the ritual law of Numbers 19 regarding purification from this kind of bodily ritual impurity placed earlier? The answer is that putting this law where it is provides a structural counterpart to the narrative in chapter 11 regarding “Graves of Craving.”

As she does with Leviticus (see the introduction to Leviticus), Mary Douglas proposes that the book of Numbers is arranged in a ring composition pattern:[19]



In her analysis, Douglas has highlighted the striking alternation between narrative and law that underlines the close relationship between these two elements in the persuasive rhetorical strategy of the book that develops its theme.[20] Law and story reinforce and respond to each other in an ongoing process of elaboration and development. The result is an overpowering sense of accountability to God, whose way works best.

So why didn't the Lord give all his laws at once and get it over with? Emily Dickinson explains why not:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—[21]

1. See Ex. 19—40, minus the affair with another "lover" (the golden calf in chs. 32—33), which threatened to annul the marriage while the wedding was still in progress.

2. Cf. J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), xvi.

3. H. H. Guthrie, *Theology As Thanksgiving: From Israel's Psalms to the Church's Eucharist* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 42—43.

4. D. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (BJS 71, Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 163, cf. 151, 183—84, 196.

5. C. Stuhlmueller, "'Would That All Were Prophets!' (Numbers 11:29)," in F. C. Holmgren and H. E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 132.

6. J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 143.

7. P. Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 19.

8. Cf., e.g., R. D. Cole, *Numbers* (NAC 3B, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 34.

9. Cf., e.g., J. Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," *JSOT* 24 (1982): 10.

10. E.g., B. Levine, *Numbers i-20* (AB 4, New York: Doubleday, 1993), 48—84, 89—109. Levine insists on the importance of "identifying significantly different perceptions of the wilderness experience, perceptions that might be lost to us were we to study only the final product of the biblical process at the expense of the phases reflected in its literary development" (49). He also maintains that "the historicity of the Tabernacle traditions is highly questionable to start with" (172). On modern interpretation of the book of Numbers, see T. B. Dozeman, "Numbers, Book of," in J. H. Hayes, ed., in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 2:216—17.

11. E.g., Milgrom, *Numbers*, xvii-xxi., I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

12. Milgrom, Numbers, xiii.

13. Cf. Olson, The Death of the Old, 48—49.

14. Ibid., 83—125.

15. K. Sakenfeld, “Zelophehad’s Daughters,” PRSt 15 (1988): 38.

16. D. Olson, *Numbers* (IBC, Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 5—6.

17. For a survey of proposed outlines of Numbers and Olson’s own outline, see Olson, *The Death of the Old,* 31—37, 118—20. Cf. Cole, *Numbers,* 36—52. Y. Radday suggests an overall tripartite structure (see his “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in J. W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 89: A Events that occurred and commandments given at Mount Sinai (1:1—10:11) B The thirty-eight years in the desert (10:12—21:36) A^1 Events that occurred and commandments given in the Plains of Moab (22:1—36:13)

18. For some other introverted, chiastic, and inclusio/frame patterns in the book of Numbers, see, e.g., Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” 89—90, Milgrom, *Numbers,* xxii-xxvi, xxviii-xxix.

19. M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSup 158, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), esp. 118.

20. On this relationship between narrative and law, see ibid., 102—4, 117, J. W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (BSem 59, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 36—60, Levine, *Numbers 1—20,* 78—79, Milgrom, *Numbers,* xv-xvi.

21. X. J. Kennedy and D. Gioia, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama,* 2d compact ed. (New York: Longman, 2000), 798.

Outline of Numbers

I. Preparations for Journey from Sinai Desert (1:1—10:10)

A. Military Census (1:1—46)

1. Instructions for Military Census (1:1—16)

2. Implementation of Military Census (1:17—46)

B. Exemption from Census and Introduction to Duties of Levites (1:47—54)

C. Arrangement of Military Camp and Marching Order of Tribes (2:1—34)

1. Judah Group (2:1—9)

2. Reuben Group (2:10—16)

3. Levites and Tabernacle (2:17)

4. Ephraim Group (2:18—24)

5. Dan Group (2:25—31)

6. Summary (2:32—34)

D. Census and Duties of Levites (3:1—4:49)

1. Levites to Assist Priests in Place of Firstborn (3:1—13)

2. Census, Camping Arrangement, and Responsibilities of Levites (3:14—39)

3. Census and Redemption of Firstborn (3:40—51)

4. Census and Specific Duties of Levite Subdivisions (4:1—49)

a. Instructions (4:1—33)

b. Fulfillment (4:34—49)

E. Laws of Community Purity and Holiness (5:1—6:27)

1. Exclusion of Seriously Impure Persons from the Camp (5:1—4)

2. Items Belonging to Priests (5:5—10)

3. Ritual for Suspected Adulteress (5:11—31)

4. Rules for Temporary Nazirites (6:1—21)

5. Priestly Blessing on the Community (6:22—27)

F. Final Preparations of the Sanctuary Infrastructure (7:1—8:26)

1. Gifts of Chieftains to Sanctuary at Initiation of Altar (7:1—88)

2. God Speaks to Moses from Above Ark of Covenant (7:89)

3. Reiteration of Instruction for Placement of Tabernacle Lamps (8:1—4)

4. Ritual Purification and Separation of Levite Work Force

(8:5—22)

5. Instruction for Ages of Service to Sanctuary by Levites (8:23—26) G. Exodus from Sinai (9:1—10:10)

1. Second Passover for Those Unable to Observe Regular Passover (9:1—14)

2. Guidance for the Israelites (9:15—10:10)

II. Journeying in the Desert (10:11—19:22)

A. Departure from Sinai (10:11—36)

1. Marching Order (10:11—28)

2. Moses' Appeal to Hobab to Help Guide Israel (10:29—32)

3. Guidance by Ark of the Covenant (10:33—36)

B. Rebellions in the Desert (11:1—14:45)

1. Grumbling and Divine Fire at Taberah (11:1—3)

2. Grumbling, Aid for Moses, and Plague at Kibroth Hattaavah (11:4—34)

a. Grumbling for Meat Rather Than Manna (11:4—9)

b. Moses' Prayer of Distress (11:10—15)

c. God's Reply: Solution of Seventy Elders and Meat (11:16—23)

d. Appointment of Seventy Elders of Spirit to Assist Moses (1 1:24—30)

e. Quail and Graves of Craving (11:31—34)

3. Rebellion of Miriam and Aaron Against Moses at Hazeroth (11:35—12:16)

4. Major Community Rebellion at Kadesh (13:1—14:45)

a. Chieftains Chosen and Sent to Scout Canaan (13:1—24)

b. Return and Report of Scouts (13:25—33)

c. Rebellious Response of Community (14:1—10a)

d. God's Wish to Destroy Israel (14:10b-12)

e. Moses' Intercession (14:13—19)

f. God's Qualified Forgiveness With Sentence on Rebels: Forty Years (14:20—35)

g. Death of Unfaithful Spies (14:36—38)

h. Presumptuous and Aborted Attempt to Enter Canaan (14:39—45)

C. Laws and Narrative Regarding Loyalty Versus Disloyalty (15:1—41)

1. Grain and Drink Accompaniments to Sacrifices (15:1—16)

2. Offering of First Dough (15:17—21)

3. Remediable Versus Irremediable Moral Faults (15:22—36)

4. Tassels to Remember God's Commands (15:37—41)

D. Rebellion of Korah & Co. and Its Aftermath (16:1—

18:32)

1. Rebellion of Korah & Co. and Moses' Challenge to Them (16:1—17)

2. Rebels' Presumption, God's Threat, Intercession (16:18—22)

3. Divine Destruction of Rebels (16:23—35)

4. Censers of Rebels Become Plating on Altar (16:36—40 [Heb. 17:15])

5. Rebellious Response of Community, Plague, Intercession (16:41—50 [Heb. 17:6—15])

6. Budding of Aaron's Rod Proves Divine Choice of High Priest (17:1—11 [Heb. 17:16—26])

7. Danger Borne by Priests and Levites (17:12 [Heb. 17:27]-18:32)

a. The People's Fear to Come Near the Tabernacle (17:12—13 [Heb. 17:27—28])

b. Priests and Levites to Bear Community's Responsibility (18:1—7)

c. Rewards for Priests and Levites (18:8—32)

E. Law of Purification from Corpse Impurity (19:1—22)

1. Procuring Supply of Ashes Through Red Cow Ritual (19:1—10a)

2. Application of Ash Water for Purification from Corpse

Impurity (19:10b-22)

III. Up and Down Road to the Borders of the Promised Land (20:1—25:18)

A. Kadesh Again and More Bad News (20:1—29)

1. Death of Miriam (20:1)

2. Contention over Lack of Water and Divine Instructions (20:2—8)

3. Moses and Aaron's Failure and Condemnation (20:9—13)

4. Edom Refuses Passage (20:14—21)

5. Death of Aaron at Mount Hor (20:22—29)

B. Initial Victories (21:1—35)

1. Victory over Arad (21:1—3)

2. Grumbling on Detour, Fiery Serpents, and Bronze Serpent Remedy (21:4—9)

3. On the March and Water from a Well (21:10—20)

4. Defeat of Amorite King Sihon (21:21—30)

5. Defeat of King Og of Bashan (21:31—35)

C. Attempt of King Balak to Destroy Israel Through Balaam (22:1—24:25)

1. Balak Calls Balaam to Curse Israel, but God Refuses Permission (22:1 — 14)

2. Balak Calls Balaam Again and God Grants Permission (22:15—20)

3. Angel Waylays Balaam and His Donkey, But Lets Him Continue (22:21 — 35)

4. Balaam Meets Balak (22:36—40)

5. Balaam's Repeated Failure to Curse Israel (22:41—24:25)

a. Blessing on Israel from Bamoth Baal (22:41—23:12)

b. Blessing on Israel from the Top of Pisgah (23:13—26)

c. Blessing on Israel from the Top of Peor (23:27—24:13)

d. Parting Blessing on Israel and Prophecies Against Nations (24:14—25)

D. Apostasy by the Jordan at Shittim with the Baal of Peor (25:1 — 18)

1. Immorality and Idolatry of Israelite Men Enticed by Moabite Women (25:1—5)

2. Phinehas Stops Divine Plague by Slaying Zimri and Cozbi (25:6—9)

3. God's Response (25:10—18)

IV. Preparation for Occupation of the Promised Land (26:1—36:13)

A. *Déjà vu:* Second Census of Surviving Younger Generation (26:1—65)

1. Divine Command for Military Census (26:1 —4)

2. Military Census Carried Out (26:5—51)

3. Size of Tribal Land Inheritance Proportional to Its Population (26:52—56)

4. Census of Levites (26:57—62)

5. Summary: Only Caleb and Joshua Survive From First Census (26:63—65)

B. Transfers to Persons of Younger Generations (27:1—23)

1. Transfer of Inheritance from Zelophehad to His Daughters (27:1—11)

2. Transfer of Leadership from Moses to Joshua (27:12—23)

C. Calendar of Cyclical Sacrifices (28:1 —29:40)

1. Daily Burnt Offering (28:1—8)

2. Additional Sabbath Sacrifices (28:9—10)

3. Additional New Moon Sacrifices (28:11 — 15)

4. Yearly Festivals (28:16—29:40)

a. Spring Festivals (28:16—31)

b. Autumn Festivals (29:1—38)

c. Summary (29:39—40)

D. Law of Vows (30:1—16)

1. Male Vows or Sworn Pledges (30:1—2)

2. Female Vows or Sworn Pledges (30:3—15)

3. Summary (30:16)

E. War of Vengeance Against Midianites (31:1—54)

1. Preparations for War (31:1—6)

2. The War Itself (31:7—12)

3. Aftermath (31:13—54)

a. Treatment of Women and Children (31:13—18)

b. Purification of Persons and Spoils from Corpse Contamination (31:19—24)

c. Distribution of Spoils (31:25—47)

d. Voluntary Contribution by Grateful Army Officers (31:48—54)

F. Allocation of Transjordanian Land to Reuben, Gad, and Half of Manasseh (32:1—42)

1. Request to Settle in Transjordan Rebuffed by Moses (32:1—15)

2. Clarification of Plan to Help Fight and Moses' Approval (32:16—33)

3. Building Activities of Gadites and Reubenites (32:34—38)

4. Conquests by Manassites (32:39—42)

G. Summary: Stages of Travel from Egypt to the Steppes of Moab (33:1—49)

H. Instructions for Conquest and Settlement in Canaan (33:50—35:34)

1. Command to Drive Out People and Destroy Idolatry (33:50—56)

2. Boundaries of the Promised Land (34:1—15)

3. Leaders Assigned to Divide the Land (34:16—29)

4. Levite Towns (35:1—34)

I. Keeping Land in the Family When Inherited by Daughters (36:1—13)

1. Concern of Gileadites Regarding Marriage of Zelophehad's Daughters (36:1—4)

2. Divine Solution (36:5—9)

3. Compliance by Daughters (36:10—12)

4. Summary (36:13)

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Numbers 1

THE LORD SPOKE to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: [2]"Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. [3]You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army. [4]One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you. [5]These are the names of the men who are to assist you: from Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur;

[6] from Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai;

[7]from Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab;

[8] from Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar;

[9] from Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon;

[10]from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur;

[11] from Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni;

[12]from Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai;

[13]from Asher, Pagiel son of Ocran;

[14]from Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel;

[15]from Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.”

[16]These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of the clans of Israel.

[17]Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, [18]and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month. The people indicated their ancestry by their clans and families, and the men twenty years old or more were listed by name, one by one, [19]as the LORD commanded Moses. And so he counted them in the Desert of Sinai:

[20]From the descendants of Reuben the firstborn son of Israel:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families. 21The number from the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.

[22]From the descendants of Simeon:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were counted and listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families. [23]The number from the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.

[24]From the descendants of Gad:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [25]The number from the tribe of Gad was 45,650.

[26]From the descendants of Judah:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [27]The number from the tribe of Judah was 74,600.

[28]From the descendants of Issachar:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their

clans and families. [29]The number from the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.

[30]From the descendants of Zebulun:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [31]The number from the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.

[32]From the sons of Joseph:

From the descendants of Ephraim:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [33]The number from the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500.

[34]From the descendants of Manasseh:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [35]The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.

[36]From the descendants of Benjamin:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [37]The number from the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.

[38]From the descendants of Dan:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [39]The number from the tribe of Dan was 62,700.

[40]From the descendants of Asher:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [41]The number from the tribe of Asher was 41,500.

[42]From the descendants of Naphtali:

All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. [43]The number from the tribe of Naphtali was

53,400.

44These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family. 45All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel's army were counted according to their families. 46The total number was 603,550.

47The families of the tribe of Levi, however, were not counted along with the others. 48The LORD had said to Moses: 49"You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. 50Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. 51Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death. 52The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. 53The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

54The Israelites did all this just as the LORD commanded Moses.

Original Meaning

JUST AS LEVITICUS BEGINS with a speech by the Lord to Moses "from the Tent of Meeting" (1:1), Numbers commences with a divine speech "in the Tent of Meeting" (1:1). This verse provides additional information regarding the geographical and chronological setting: "in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the israelites came out of Egypt."

Before the Israelites resume their journey, the Lord commands that they take a military census of men twenty years old or more who are to serve as soldiers (1:2—3). This is preliminary to the organization of a "people's army," with no upper age limit for retirement, which can exert maximum force to conquer Canaan. Although the census report, with its names, numbers, and repetitions, may not excite the modern reader, the event surely would quicken the pulse of the israelites because it heralds dramatic events leading to the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to give them the Promised Land, where at last they will have a permanent home.

The count is accomplished fairly quickly (cf. 1:1; 10:11 —less than twenty days; contrast 2 Sam. 24:8) because it is organized like a modern election in that groups (in this case, clans) simultaneously collect their own tallies of names and then hand them over to higher level of supervisors (tribal chiefs and Moses). This mustering of troops (verb *pqd + saba'*, Num. 1:3) is similar in terminology and procedures to military censuses elsewhere in the ancient Near East during the second millennium B.C., especially at Mari.[1] Later, during the israelite monarchy, several censuses served basically the same purpose: to assess and organize military human resources (2 Sam. 24:9, 2 Chron. 17:13—18, 25:5 [also from age twenty], 26:11—13).

As we would expect for a tribal nation, the Numbers 1 census is structured according to hierarchical social groups determined by the patriarchal family tree (1:2). A chieftain representing each tribe (1:3—16)[2] assists Moses and Aaron, the high priest. Each tribe constitutes a major army division, within which members of the same "father's house" belonging to each clan will fight alongside each other.

The high priest's involvement is appropriate because the Israelites are

preparing for *holy* war, in which they will fight under the Lord's direction. Priests are to be involved with warfare in several ways. Before each battle the high priest is to encourage the troops that God is with them to give them victory (Deut. 20:2—4). Also through him, undoubtedly by means of the Urim and Thummim in his breastplate, the army can inquire of the Lord for guidance in making military decisions (Judg. 20:27—28). Later in Numbers, Phinehas, son of Eleazar the high priest, goes into battle against the Midianites with some temple utensils and signal trumpets (Num. 31:6).

The fact that Moses promptly implements the census on the same day the Lord gives him the command (1:17—19) conveys the impression that he is eager to get rolling. Verses 20—43 list the total number of potential fighting men from each of the twelve tribes. These numbers range from a high of 74,600 for Judah (v. 27) to a low of 32,200 for Manasseh (v. 35). The grand total is 603,550 (v.46).

The military census does not include a thirteenth tribe—Levi—because the Levites are not to be part of the regular army. Rather, their job is to guard and take care of the tabernacle. Thus, they are counted separately later on (chs. 3—4). There are thirteen tribes because faithful Joseph, the oldest son of Jacob's first love Rachel, received a double inheritance when Jacob gave Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, equal status with his own sons (Gen. 48). Because of the uniquely loyal role of the Levites at the time of the golden calf episode, God gave them privileged status as his servants at the sanctuary (Ex. 32:26—29).

Numbers 1 concludes with a simple notice of compliance: "The Israelites did all this just as the LORD commanded Moses" (1:54). This obedience is the initial benchmark for the book of Numbers, but as the book progresses, we will find that on more than one occasion the people do *everything but* what the Lord commands through Moses.

Bridging Contexts

HOW MANY ISRAELITES were there? According to Exodus 12:37—38, the Israelites who left Egypt were "about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds" (Ex. 12:37—38). The census of Numbers 1 supplies a more precise figure: In the second year after their departure from Egypt there are 603,550 able-bodied Israelite men who are twenty years of age or more (Num. 1:46).

This number does not include any females, males below age twenty, elderly and infirm males, 22,000 male Levites a month old or more (Num. 3:39), or non-Israelites who left Egypt with the Israelites (Ex. 12:38). Another military census at the end of the desert wandering totals 601,730 (Num. 26:51). Adding all these groups according to normal demographic ratios, the total community can hardly have been less than two million and may have been considerably more than that.

Although the beginning of the book of Exodus testifies to explosive Israelite population growth in Egypt, which alarmed Pharaoh to the point that he instituted drastic and brutal measures to slow it down, many scholars do not believe that the Israelite community numbered in the hundreds of thousands or millions by the time it broke away from Egyptian rule. Problems include the length of time it would have taken for that many people to cross the Red Sea; impossible logistics of daily providing food and water for so many people and their cattle in a desert environment, even if it were less arid than in modern times; rugged terrain in the Sinai Peninsula, which would make moving around and camping difficult for a big group, and lack of archaeological support for a population group so large, whether in Egypt, the desert, or Canaan.[3]

Some have suggested ingenious ways to lower the Israelite population at the time of the Exodus. N. Sarna argues that the high figures accurately reflect the population at the time of the united monarchy, centuries later.[4] G. Mendenhall has proposed that in the census reports of Numbers 1 and 26, the Hebrew word *Mep* ("thousand") carries a technical meaning referring to a military contingent.[5] If so, there would have been about six hundred contingents, which could have added up to far fewer than 600,000+ fighting men.[6]

The solutions of Sarna and Mendenhall contradict the plain sense of the biblical text. In response to Sarna, within the narrative contexts of Exodus and Numbers the 600,000+ men were counted when the Israelites left Egypt and lived in the desert, not during the reign of David. David conducted his own military (not total population) census (2 Sam. 24:9, 1 Chron. 21:5—6). An attempt to transfer the 600,000+ from its context to the time of the united monarchy must inconsistently accept the figures in the book of Numbers but discount the historicity of the census figures in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.[7]

Another passage to take into account is Judges 20:2: "The leaders of all the people of the tribes of israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand soldiers armed with swords." This was a voluntary assembly (not a comprehensive census) that convened soon after the conquest of Canaan (cf. 20:28) and did not include the army of Benjamin, which numbered "twenty-six thousand swordsmen from their towns, in addition to seven hundred chosen men from those living in Gibeah" (20:15). B. Scolnic has shown that in this context *'elep* must be "thousand" rather than "military unit" for the narrative to make sense.[8]

With regard to Mendenhall's approach, the biblical data do not allow for *'elep* in the census reports to be anything other than the numeral "thousand." (1) Note how Numbers 1 and 26 follow *'elep* with numeric units down to hundreds and tens.[9] For example, "six hundred three thousand *['elep]* five hundred fifty" (1:46 NRSV, see also 2:32). If Mendenhall were correct, there would be 603 "clans," but what sense would "five hundred fifty" make? This number is comprehensible only if *'elep* is the higher numeral "thousand." Others have proposed a clever solution to the problem (in the context of 2:32):

> The total in verse 32 would originally have been written 598 military divisions ('lp), 5 thousand *('lp)* and 5 hundred men. But at some point in the transmission of the text the two words were confused and added together to make 603 thousand. If this solution is correct, the size of the Israelite group that left Egypt would have been about 20,000.[10]

This is attractive because it gets the numbers down to a manageable size, but it is conjecture and does not solve other problems (see below).

(2) In the separate censuses of Levites, there are 22,000 (Num. 3:39) and later 23,000 males a month old or more (26:62).

> We are outside the military realm when we speak of Levites, so we cannot be talking about "contingents." Even if we were, we could not have

twenty-two units of zero men. If the figure 22,000 stands as is, it destroys the proportions set up by the "contingent" theory, which has seven hundred thirty men in the largest tribe.[11]

(3) In 3:43, "the total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273." What does that mean? Were there military contingents of non-Levite firstborn that included babies? If this is to be read as a straightforward number of firstborn males, how does it affect the idea that the total number of Israelite men, women, and children amounted to about 20,000, or 40,000 for that matter?

(4) In Exodus 38:25—26 the amount of silver gathered through a half shekel tax on each Israelite who was counted (in accordance with 30:12—16) corresponds to that of 603,550 men, taking *'elep* as "thousand." We know that this census was earlier than that of Numbers 1, where the head count was exactly the same (Num. 1:46), because the silver collected in this way was used for constructing parts of the sanctuary (Ex. 38:27—28). While we do not have enough information to determine the extent to which the Israelites repeated the census process (did the Num. 1 census utilize data from Ex. 38?), it is clear that Exodus 38 and Numbers 1 emphasize different outcomes: silver and soldiers, respectively.

(5) Numbers 31:32—40 counts animals and persons captured in the war against the Midianites. Formatting of numbers is the same as in the census reports of chapters 1 and 26, but here *'elep* obviously cannot refer to a tribal/military subunit of animals.

At least according to the plain sense of the final form of the biblical text, Exodus and Numbers clearly indicate that the number of Israelites is large in order to make a thematic point: God has fulfilled his promise to the patriarchs that they would have a multitude of descendants (Gen. 13:16, 15:5, 16:10, etc.).[12] These books also repeatedly acknowledge the practical impossibilities involved in getting them across the Red Sea and keeping them alive in the desert with all their animals. There is no way this could have happened without the miracles recorded in these books. Anyone who does not accept the possibility of miracles must reject the census figures out of hand.[13]

As to geographic and archaeological problems, until scholars definitively establish the route of the Exodus and desert wandering and fully account for populations of tent-dwellers that leave almost no trace of material remains, there are too many open-ended variables to make a confident comparison with the biblical census figures. Thus, the bottom line is that the problem of Israelite

population remains unresolved,[14] but this by no means wipes out our ability to grasp the message of the book of Numbers.

Contemporary Significance

FIGHTING AS A FAMILY. According to Numbers 1, the Lord directs that the Israelite army be organized by family units. Thus, each soldier must train and fight alongside his relatives. There are several advantages to this. (1) Soldiers already have experience working with their relatives, so they can concentrate on developing military skills without the added burden of building new relationships with strangers. (2) The tribal social structure provides a ready-made system of military leadership. (3) Most important, soldiers have tremendous incentive to protect their fellow soldiers and effectively cooperate with them. A casualty will not simply be a fellow private first class, sergeant, or lieutenant, he will also be a brother, cousin, or uncle!

Do Christian family members need to fight alongside one another today? In Ephesians 6:10—12, Paul describes a battle "against the spiritual forces of evil" in which each Christian is involved. We need each other's support as a "family" of believers (Gal. 6:10, cf. 1 Peter 4:17). This "family" encompasses all spiritual "brothers and sisters" (cf. Gal. 3:26—29, 1 Pet. 3:8), including physical family members (e.g., Eph. 5:21—6:4, 1 Pet. 3:1—7). Like the ancient Israelites, we are stronger together as bonded units than if we try to fight alone. If anyone thinks that he or she is as strong spiritually as Samson was physically, remember that as a one man army, solitary Samson made no lasting impact (Judg. 14—16).

In the context of the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 1:18, 6:12), every Christian social unit takes on significance as a kind of "military" unit. Church communities and their subdivisions—spouses, parents, children, and extended family members—are not simply companions and helpers for each other, we are fellow soldiers in a high-stakes battle that is real even if most of it is unseen. Like the Israelites, we fight alongside those who are dear to us and to whom we are precious. We have life-and-death motivation not only to win, but to help each other win, because if they do not, we lose.

When physical or spiritual family members turn on each other, it is civil war, which weakens everyone and makes them easy prey. This is why a crucial step from brokenness to victory is repentance that turns the hearts of family members back to each other (cf. Mal. 4:6). By God's grace, we must fight evil together as a family.

1. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 336—37.

2. On the meanings of the names of these chieftains, see R. Brown, *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land* (BST, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 31.

3. See, e.g., J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews, and M. W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, 1ll.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 86, 88, Y. Shiloh, "The Population of Iron Age Palestine in the Light of a Sample Analysis of Urban Plans, Areas, and Population Density," *BASOR* 239 (1980): 25—35.

4. N. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPSTC, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 62.

5. Cf. the meaning of *'elep* as "clan" in Judg. 6:15, 1 Sam. 10:19, Mic. 5:2.

6. G. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77 (1958): 52—66.

7. B. Scolnic, "Theme and Context in Biblical Lists" (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1987), 63.

8. Ibid., 47—53.

9. Cf. ibid., 66—70. For "thousand" also in numbers of fighting men in the Gideon story (Judg. 6—8), see 43—47.

10. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary,* 144.

11. Scolnic, "Theme and Context," 68. Cf. Olson, *The Death of the Old,* 76.

12. Scolnic, "Theme and Context," 90—91, Olson, *The Death of the Old,* 79, W. H. Bellinger, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NIBC 3, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 182.

13. Cf. H. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 150—51.

14. Cf. the conclusion of T. Ashley at the end of his detailed critique of the various proposals: "In short, we lack the materials in the text to solve this problem" *(The Book of Numbers* [NICOT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 66, cf. 60—65).

Numbers 2

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron: 2“The Israelites are to camp
around the Tent of Meeting some distance from it, each man under his
standard with the banners of his family.”
3On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah
are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah
is Nahshon son of Amminadab. 4His division numbers 74,600.
5The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them. The leader of the
people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. 6His division numbers
54,400.
7The tribe of Zebulun will be next. The leader of the people of
Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. 8His division numbers 57,400.
9All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their
divisions, number 186,400. They will set out first.
10On the south will be the divisions of the camp of Reuben under
their standard. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of
Shedeur. 11His division numbers 46,500.
12The tribe of Simeon will camp next to them. The leader of the
people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. 13His division
numbers 59,300.
14The tribe of Gad will be next. The leader of the people of Gad is
Eliasaph son of Deuel. 15His division numbers 45,650.
16All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their
divisions, number 151,450. They will set out second.
17Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out
in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they
encamp, each in his own place under his standard.
18On the west will be the divisions of the camp of Ephraim under
their standard. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of

Ammihud. [19]His division numbers 40,500.

[20]The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. [21]His division numbers 32,200.

[22]The tribe of Benjamin will be next. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideoni. [23]His division numbers 35,400.

[24]All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100. They will set out third.

[25]on the north will be the divisions of the camp of Dan, under their standard. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. [26]His division numbers 62,700.

[27]The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Ocran. [28]His division numbers 41,500.

[29]The tribe of Naphtali will be next. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. [30]His division numbers 53,400.

[31]All the men assigned to the camp of Dan number 157,600. They will set out last, under their standards.

[32]These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All those in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550. [33]The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.

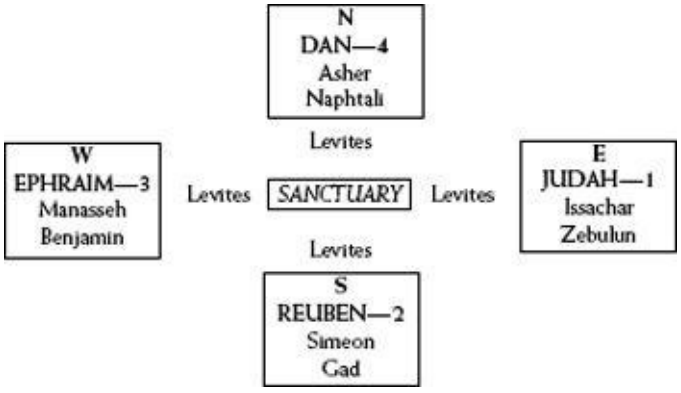
[34]So the Israelites did everything the LORD commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each with his clan and family.

Original Meaning

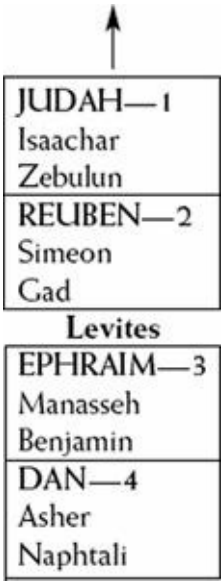
IF THE ISRAELITE MEN were to be organized into an army, their camp had to be a military camp. So Numbers 2 outlines the arrangement of tribal groups within the war camp. Numbers 1:52—53 has already briefly summarized the overall plan, and to resume this topic, 2:2 reiterates: "The Israelites are to camp around the Tent of Meeting some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family."

The rest of chapter 2 specifies the locations of the various tribes around the sanctuary. The twelve tribes, not including Levi, are to be divided into four groups of three tribes each. With reference to the sanctuary and Levite camp in the middle, each group of three tribes occupies a position to one of the four directions of the compass. The text lists these directions in clockwise rotation beginning with east, the direction of sunrise and the standard starting point for Israelite directions: east, south, west, north. Each of the four groups is led by one of the three tribes of which it is composed, so that the groups are called "the camp of Judah" (2:9), "the camp of Reuben" (2:16), "the camp of Ephraim" (2:24), and "the camp of Dan" (2:31).

The Israelite encampment is arranged as a square, just like the Egyptian war camp of Pharaoh Rameses II (thirteenth century B.C.). While the similarity is striking, so is a crucial difference: The center of the Israelite war camp is occupied by the Lord's sanctuary rather than the tent of Pharaoh, a human god-king.[1] As Balaam later observes, the Israelites enjoy the power and protection of a Leader in their midst who is not only royal, he is truly divine (Num. 23:21)!



The numbers assigned to the four groups indicate the order in which the groups set out when the Israelites move from place to place. The Levites carrying the sanctuary and its furnishings come between groups 2 and 3 (2:17). Thus the Israelites march in this order:



Just as the Lord's sanctuary occupies the protected middle of the camp, which protects it in the event of an attack (cf. Ex. 17:8), so it travels with the Levites in the middle of the marching column, in case the Israelites are attacked in front or behind (cf. Num. 21:1). Because the order of encampment corresponds to the marching order (2:17), the Israelites can hit the road or set up camp with optimum efficiency. Aside from cutting stress and fatigue, this prevents "road rage" disputes that could easily develop by people and animals getting in each other's way. It also enables the Israelites to react quickly in case of emergency.

Bridging Contexts

ORDER. THE CENSUS and organization of Numbers 1—2 were important steps to make a mob of ex-slaves into a focused, disciplined, conquering army. Around the fully functioning sanctuary of the divine King at the core of the war camp, every able-bodied man was in his place and accounted for. All was in order for efficient and effective deployment.

Why should the Lord be concerned with order and efficiency? After all, hadn't he promised to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites by his own power? To begin with, the Bible portrays the Lord God as a God of order. In the creation account of Genesis 1—2 he set up everything on and around Planet Earth to function in harmonious order (cf. Job 38).

After sin disrupted the order God had set up, he proclaimed on Mount Sinai and demonstrated at the Israelite sanctuary a well-functioning order in harmony with his holy character. Through the instructions of Leviticus, he taught his model community how to interact with and emulate him at every level of life and society. In this way he sought to establish a holy New World Order that was really a beachhead for restoration of his Original World Order.

God provided all the order, efficiency, and power the Israelites needed, and to him went the glory for every victory, but he did not do for them what they could and should do themselves. Canaan was his gift to them, but they could only receive it if they would go up and take it. When they did go up, they needed careful strategy and precise execution of plans to get the most "shock for the shekel."

For example, an overconfident attack on the small city of Ai by only about three thousand Israelites was a dismal failure, and their swash quickly buckled (Josh. 7:3—5). But after sin had been purged from their midst, a carefully planned assault by Joshua and his whole army, which included a clever ambush, resulted in resounding success (Josh. 8, cf. Judg. 20). Confidence in superior numbers to squash the opposition may provide sloppy arrogance, but victory comes through cooperation with the Lord, who empowers fully utilized and well-ordered human intelligence and strength.

Contemporary Significance

WHO IS AT the center? The annals of egocentrism are glutted with gloating. The Assyrian tyrant Sennacherib (seventh cent. B.C.), who called his residence at Nineveh "Palace Without a Rival" (beat that, Donald Trump!), vaingloriously styled himself as follows:

> Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the earth), the wise ruler [lit., shepherd, "pastor"], favorite of the great gods … perfect hero, mighty man, first among all princes, the powerful one who consumes the insubmissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt, the god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivaled kingship has entrusted to me, and above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons, from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all humankind (the black-headed race) he has brought in submission at my feet and mighty kings feared my warfare….[2]

Similarly, King Nebuchadnezzar's words betray no problem with low self-esteem: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). Julius Caesar was briefer, but no less forceful: *Veni, vedi, vici* ("I came, I saw, I conquered").

Although W. E. Henley was not a ruler or conqueror, in a poem commonly known as "Invictus" he penned some lines that soar to heights of individual self-assurance:

> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul.

These assertions of personal power and unassailable self-sufficiency pale in comparison with the hyper-hubris of the fallen "morning star, son of the dawn," who said in his heart:

> “I will ascend to heaven,
> I will raise my throne
> above the stars of God,
> I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
> on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.
> I will ascend above the tops of the clouds,
> I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isa. 14:13—14)

“I will make myself like the Most High” does not refer to imitation of God’s holy moral character (e.g., Lev. 19:2), but to a desire to usurp God’s sovereign power and authority. Eve heard this philosophy from a forked tongue: “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God,* knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4—5, emphasis supplied). Eve was already created in God’s image (1:26), but here was something more: uniquely divine insight that would make her like God so that she would be independent of him for knowledge. With her curiosity and ego intoxicated, she took the bait (3:6).

Our modern culture revels in personal independence. Living in private dwellings, perhaps in restricted access communities, we can live our own lives the way we want and control much of our contact with other people. We have answering machines, voice mail, and e-mail to facilitate limited communication according to our schedules. Now we can do much of our business from home over the Internet. Everything is designed around us for our security, convenience, and comfort. In our private cars we have wraparound sound. At home we have remotes for TV, video, CD, and DVD. Commercials bombard us from all directions to reinforce what we already know: We are the center of the universe, and our desires govern it.

Numbers 2 disagrees with our egocentric worldview. In the Israelite camp, the Lord spatially demonstrated the only proper place of the Most High in the world order of his people: at the center. The desert war camp formed a hollow square, with the tabernacle of the divine Presence in the middle. He was the Source of strength, the “nuclear reactor.” God’s people were not islands of destiny but a community under God, with each individual and every subgroup fully accountable to him.

We cannot be the center of our own religion if we want to claim the religion of the Bible. Placing ourselves, anything, or anyone in place of God makes us his enemy. King Manasseh did it when he placed a symbol of the goddess Asherah in Solomon’s temple (2 Kings 21:7). In 2 Thessalonians 2 a “man of lawlessness” who is “doomed to destruction” also does it: “He will oppose and

will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

Eve bought the lie and become the mother of sorrows, acquainted with grief. It is better to be content with what we are—people created in God's image—than to reach above it, only to find that we fall far below it.[3] As Dr. Seuss's story *Yertle the Turtle* illustrates, he who tries to climb higher and higher at everyone else's expense in order to be king of all that he sees will end up falling into the mud, where he will see only mud, and therefore be king of the mud.[4]

1. Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 1:236—37, K. Kitchen, "The Tabernacle—A Bronze Age Artifact," *Bible and Spade* 8 (1995): 36.

2. Oriental Institute Prism Inscription, col. I, lines 1—4, 7—16, transl. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1924), 23—24.

3. Cf. P. Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 22—39.

4. Dr. Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1958).

Numbers 3—4

THIS IS THE account of the family of Aaron and Moses at the time
the LORD talked with Moses on Mount Sinai. 2The names of the sons of
Aaron were Nadab the firstborn and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.
3Those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests, who were
ordained to serve as priests. 4Nadab and Abihu, however, fell dead
before the LORD when they made an offering with unauthorized fire
before him in the Desert of Sinai. They had no sons; so only Eleazar
and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron.
5The LORD said to Moses, 6"Bring the tribe of Levi and present them
to Aaron the priest to assist him. 7They are to perform duties for him
and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work
of the tabernacle. 8They are to take care of all the furnishings of the
Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the
work of the tabernacle. 9Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they
are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him. 10Appoint Aaron
and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the
sanctuary must be put to death."
11The LORD also said to Moses, have taken the Levites from among
the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite
woman. The Levites are mine, 13for all the firstborn are mine. When I
struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every
firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal. They are to be mine. I am
the LORD."
14The LORD said to Moses in the Desert of Sinai, 15"Count the
Levites by their families and clans. Count every male a month old or
more." 16So Moses counted them, as he was commanded by the word
of the LORD.

[17]These were the names of the sons of Levi: Gershon,
Kohath and Merari.

[18]These were the names of the Gershonite clans: Libni
and Shimei.

[19]The Kohathite clans: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and
Uzziel.

[20]The Merarite clans: Mahli and Mushi. These were the
Levite clans, according to their families.

[21]To Gershon belonged the clans of the Libnites and Shimeites;
these were the Gershonite clans. [22]The number of all the males a
month old or more who were counted was 7,500. [23]The Gershonite
clans were to camp on the west, behind the tabernacle. [24]The leader of
the families of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael. [25]At the Tent
of Meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the
tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the Tent
of Meeting, [26]the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance
to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—
and everything related to their use.

[27]To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites,
Hebronites and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans. [28]The
number of all the males a month old or more was 8,600. The
Kohathites were responsible for the care of the sanctuary. [29]The
Kohathite clans were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle.
[30]The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son
of Uzziel. [31]They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table,
the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in
ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. [32]The chief
leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was
appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the
sanctuary.

[33]To Merari belonged the clans of the Mahlites and the Mushites;
these were the Merarite clans. [34]The number of all the males a month
old or more who were counted was 6,200. [35]The leader of the families

of the Merarite clans was Zuriel son of Abihail; they were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. 36The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, 37as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

38Moses and Aaron and his sons were to camp to the east of the tabernacle, toward the sunrise, in front of the Tent of Meeting. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites. Anyone else who approached the sanctuary was to be put to death.

39The total number of Levites counted at the LORD'S command by Moses and Aaron according to their clans, including every male a month old or more, was 22,000.

40The LORD said to Moses, "Count all the firstborn Israelite males who are a month old or more and make a list of their names. 41Take the Levites for me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites. I am the LORD."

42So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the LORD commanded him. 43The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273.

44The LORD also said to Moses, 45"Take the Levites in place of all the firstborn of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock. The Levites are to be mine. I am the LORD. 46To redeem the 273 firstborn Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites, 47collect five shekels for each one, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. 48Give the money for the redemption of the additional Israelites to Aaron and his sons."

49So Moses collected the redemption money from those who exceeded the number redeemed by the Levites. 50From the firstborn of the Israelites he collected silver weighing 1,365 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel. 51Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, as he was commanded by the word of the LORD.

4:1The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 2"Take a census of the Kohathite branch of the Levites by their clans and families. 3Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work

in the Tent of Meeting.

4“This is the work of the Kohathites in the Tent of Meeting: the care
of the most holy things. 5When the camp is to move, Aaron and his
sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark
of the Testimony with it. 6Then they are to cover this with hides of sea
cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place.

7“Over the table of the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and
put on it the plates, dishes and bowls, and the jars for drink offerings;
the bread that is continually there is to remain on it. 8Over these they
are to spread a scarlet cloth, cover that with hides of sea cows and put
its poles in place.

9“They are to take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand that is for
light, together with its lamps, its wick trimmers and trays, and all its
jars for the oil used to supply it. 10Then they are to wrap it and all its
accessories in a covering of hides of sea cows and put it on a carrying
frame.

11"'Over the gold altar they are to spread a blue cloth and cover that
with hides of sea cows and put its poles in place.

12“They are to take all the articles used for ministering in the
sanctuary, wrap them in a blue cloth, cover that with hides of sea cows
and put them on a carrying frame.

13“They are to remove the ashes from the bronze altar and spread a
purple cloth over it. 14Then they are to place on it all the utensils used
for ministering at the altar, including the firepans, meat forks, shovels
and sprinkling bowls. Over it they are to spread a covering of hides of
sea cows and put its poles in place.

15“After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy
furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to
move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not
touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry
those things that are in the Tent of Meeting.

16“Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, is to have charge of the oil for
the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering and the
anointing oil. He is to be in charge of the entire tabernacle and
everything in it, including its holy furnishings and articles.”

17The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 18“See that the Kohathite
tribal clans are not cut off from the Levites. 19So that they may live

and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. [20]But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die."

[21]The LORD said to Moses, [22]"Take a census also of the Gershonites by their families and clans. [23]Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting.

[24]"This is the service of the Gershonite clans as they work and carry burdens: [25]They are to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, its covering and the outer covering of hides of sea cows, the curtains for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, [26]the curtains of the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, the curtain for the entrance, the ropes and all the equipment used in its service. The Gershonites are to do all that needs to be done with these things. [27]All their service, whether carrying or doing other work, is to be done under the direction of Aaron and his sons. You shall assign to them as their responsibility all they are to carry. [28]This is the service of the Gershonite clans at the Tent of Meeting. Their duties are to be under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.

[29]"Count the Merarites by their clans and families. [30]Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting. [31]This is their duty as they perform service at the Tent of Meeting: to carry the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts and bases, [32]as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs, ropes, all their equipment and everything related to their use. Assign to each man the specific things he is to carry. [33]This is the service of the Merarite clans as they work at the Tent of Meeting under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest."

[34]Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the community counted the Kohathites by their clans and families. [35]All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting, [36]counted by clans, were 2,750. [37]This was the total of all those in the Kohathite clans who served in the Tent of Meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD'S command through Moses.

[38]The Gershonites were counted by their clans and families. [39]All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, [40]counted by their clans and families, were 2,630. [41]This was the total of those in the Gershonite clans who served at the Tent of Meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD'S command.

[42]The Merarites were counted by their clans and families. [43]All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, [44]counted by their clans, were 3,200. [45]This was the total of those in the Mer-arite clans. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD'S command through Moses.

[46]So Moses, Aaron and the leaders of Israel counted all the Levites by their clans and families. [47]All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to do the work of serving and carrying the Tent of Meeting [48]numbered 8,580. [49]At the LORDS command through Moses, each was assigned his work and told what to carry.

Thus they were counted, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Original Meaning

MINISTERIAL EXEMPTION FROM military duty. Because the Levites were the Lord's ministers, performing vital service that was continually necessary for the well-being of the nation, they were not drafted into the army. As a result, they were not included in the general military census (1:49). Numbers 3 fills in details regarding the tribe of Levi, within which the family of Aaron is singled out for the priesthood. Verse 4 adds a detail not found in Leviticus 10: When Nadab and Abihu died, they left no sons to carry on lines of descendants. So in effect, they were "cut off" from Israel. Consequently, the priesthood is limited to the two branches from Aaron's surviving sons: Eleazar and Ithamar.

Nonpriestly Levites are to assist the priests by performing duties pertaining to the sanctuary infrastructure (3:6—9). However, Aaron and his sons are to guard their priestly prerogatives. Any unauthorized person (i.e., non-priest, including Levites) will be put to death if he attempts to "approach" *(qrb)* the sanctuary (in the restricted, technical sense of usurping or encroaching on an exclusive priestly function, see 3:10).[1]

Although Levites are not soldiers, it is necessary to count them and organize their work force. Rather than counting males twenty years of age or more who can serve in the army, the register of Levites (3:14—37) begins with babies one month old (3:15), because the members of this tribe substitute for firstborn male Israelites (3:40—41), who are to be redeemed with five shekels when they were one month old (18:15—16). One month conveniently allows some time for the payment following the birth and means that parents do not have to pay the redemption price in the tragic event that a baby dies soon after birth. Even though Levite males are counted down to the age of one month, there are still far fewer Levites than members of any other tribe: only 22,000 (3:39, cf. 1:35, 2:21).

The Levites belong to the Lord, who has given them to the priests as assistants in place of the Israelite firstborn, whom he consecrated to himself along with firstborn animals when he spared them when he struck the firstborn in Egypt (3:11 — 13, cf. Ex. 13:2, 11 — 16). Rather than using the firstborn of every tribe for lifelong service to the sanctuary, which would take people away from their families, God has chosen one tribe to maintain and guard the sacred precincts.

The census report of Levites covers their clans in the order Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (as in Gen. 46:11 and Ex. 6:16—19). Numbers 3:21—26 provide several kinds of information regarding the Gershonites: (1) the number of their males a month of age and up, (2) their place of encampment— behind and to the west of the tabernacle, (3) the name of their chieftain, and (4) their duties for the sanctuary. They are responsible for the sanctuary fabrics and hides (3:25—26, cf. Ex. 26—27), but not the most sacred fabric of all— the inner veil, which is entrusted to the care of the Kohathites (Num. 3:31), who cover the ark of the covenant with it at the time of a journey (4:5).

Numbers 3:27—32 supplies the same categories of data regarding the Kohathites: their number, place of encampment (on the south side of the sanctuary), chieftain, and duties. They are responsible for the sanctuary furniture and utensils, plus the inner veil (3:31). Since the Kohathite clan is that of the priests, the administrative chief of all the Levites is a Kohathite: Eleazar, son of Aaron, the high priest (3:32).

Finally, the Merarites are to camp on the north side of the tabernacle and take care of the entire framework of the sanctuary, the courtyard posts, and everything connected with them (3:33—37).

The encampment of Moses and the priests is to guard the sanctuary on the east, where it is most vulnerable because that is where its entrance is located. Again the text warns that an unauthorized person who encroaches on priestly prerogatives is to be put to death (3:38, cf. v. 10). This is no empty threat. The unsqueamish zeal of Phinehas exemplifies the readiness of priests to use weapons in order to defend holiness (25:6—8).

We may have thought that substitution of the Levites for the male firstborn (3:12 —13) involves an inexact kind of abstract equivalence. Now we learn that there is to be one-to-one numerical correspondence between the Levites and the firstborn whose place they take. A census of firstborn males in the other twelve tribes yields a total of 22,273 (3:40—43). So 22,000 Levites replace 22,273 firstborn. Surely that is close enough! But no. While 22,000 firstborn are redeemed by the substitution of the Levites, the remaining 273 must be redeemed another way: with five shekels apiece, totalling 1,365 shekels (3:44—51). Such monetary redemption is required for all subsequent firstborn (18:15—16).

The five shekel redemption price for each Israelite firstborn male and the lifelong dedication of Levites to God’s work at the sanctuary in place of the firstborn serve as tokens of redemption, ongoing reminders of the roots of Israelite freedom. When Egypt refused to free Israel, whom God called “my firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22), the Lord struck down the firstborn of Egypt (Ex.

12:29) but spared the firstborn Israelites.

Levite labor. The census of male Levites a month old or more in Numbers 3, totaling 22,000 (3:39), substitutes for the 22,000 of the firstborn of the other tribes. In Numbers 4 another census is needed to determine the number of Levites available for the actual work of the sanctuary by men thirty to fifty years of age, that is, mature and in their physical prime. As we would expect in any normal population group, these numbers are significantly less: 8,580 (4:48).

Chapter 4 divides itself into two parts, consisting of the Lord's instructions for the census (4:1—33) and the report of these instructions being carried out (4:34—49). Each of these parts is divided into three sections, dealing with the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. In addition to commanding the census, the Lord fills out the job descriptions of the three Levite groups (cf. 3:25—26, 31, 36—37), particularly in terms of their procedures when the portable sanctuary is to be moved from one place to another. In contrast to chapter 3, where the Gershonites come first, chapter 4 moves the Kohathites to this position because the transportation procedures begin with their role in packing up the most holy furniture.

The job description of the Kohathites (4:4—20) is by far the longest and most complicated because it involves careful coordination with the priests, who are to cover the sacred objects of furniture before the other, nonpriestly Kohathites can carry them. Packing up for a journey begins with the most sacred item of furniture (the ark of the covenant), which is appropriately covered with the most sacred fabric (the inner veil). Over the veil goes a leather protective covering, and over that a violet *(tekelet)* cloth.[2] In addition, the long carrying poles are to be put in place (4:5—6), implying that they are detached when not needed for transport (but cf. 2 Chron. 5:9 later in Solomon's temple).

Coverings on the pieces of sanctuary furniture in transit are color-coded according to whether these items belong in the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, or the court. The ark of the covenant from the inner sanctum has violet cloth over its leather covering (4:6), a detail missed by the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* Leather is on the outside of the other pieces (with their auxiliary utensils), but whereas the furniture of the Holy Place has violet cloth under the leather, the cloth under the leather covering the outer bronze altar is red-purple *('argaman).*[3]

When the Kohathites have emptied the sanctuary of its furniture and utensils, the Gershonites are to pack up and carry away all the fabric and skin coverings of the sanctuary and its court, including the ropes that go with them (4:24—28). After they have stripped the portable sanctuary down to its skeleton, the Merarites are to carry the disassembled pieces of this framework and everything

pertaining to it (4:31—33).

Bridging Contexts

FRIENDLY WARNINGS OF divine danger. When the priests have completely covered all the furniture and utensils belonging to the sanctuary, the other Kohathites are to carry them from their respective poles, carefully avoiding contact with the sacred items themselves, or they will die (4:15). This sounds frightfully strict, but to make sure the warning is adequately understood, the Lord addresses Moses and Aaron again to emphasize it. He also adds that the nonpriestly Kohathites must be completely under the control of the priests, who will assign them their tasks. The Levites must not enter the sanctuary prematurely so as to look at the sancta "even for a moment" (lit., "swallowing"), or they will die (4:17—20).

In 4:18—19 the Lord makes clear that his warning to the Kohathites is so that they will live and not die when they come near the most sacred items. This reveals God's character. It is not a matter of arbitrary vindictiveness. He is not trying to be nasty. Rather, he is trying to protect his servants so they will not get hurt.

The Lord's own holy life force is so powerful that it constitutes a real danger to those who get close to him, as if he possesses a mega-voltage aura! Whatever the nature of this force may be, it is lethal to human beings who cross boundaries of authorization that he sets for them (cf. Num. 16, 1 Sam. 6:19, 2 Sam. 6:6—7, 2 Chron. 26:16—21).

So why doesn't the Lord simply authorize everyone so he will not destroy anyone? Undoubtedly so that his people will not become overly familiar with him so as to lose their sense of the vast difference between him and themselves. This perspective is essential if they are to enjoy a beneficial relationship with him by totally trusting in his power. As Albert Einstein understood, reverence and awe go with mystery:

The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed. It was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and

the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds—it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity….[4]

Contemporary Significance

No SERVICE FOR the Sovereign is small. Nehemiah was a waiter, but he wasn't working at Denny's for a bit more than minimum wage, plus tips. He was the personal cupbearer of Artaxerxes, king of the Persian empire (Neh. 1:11, 2:1). The monarch implicitly trusted Nehemiah to make sure there was no poison in his wine. With frequent, intimate access to the king, Nehemiah was a high-ranking member of the royal court, who ended up rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and serving as governor of Judah. His cup-bearing role was by no means menial because the one he was serving was important.

At the ancient Israelite sanctuary the Levites do what appears to be menial labor: maintenance, guarding, packing, hauling. But all of it is honorable and vitally important because it is for the divine King. Similarly, the smallest and most insignificant task that contributes to God's work today is important: cleaning the church, changing its light bulbs, preparing food for a social event, visiting a sick person, teaching a scriptural song to a child, encouraging a neighbor, and so on.

> Nothing that is done for God is small. When Elijah sent his servant to see if there was any sign of rain, and when the servant saw the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, perhaps he thought it was a very insignificant thing. But Elijah knew what it meant, and he told the man to go and warn Ahab that he had better make haste and get home or he would get a good drenching before he got there. Elijah knew God was in the cloud. Anything that God is in isn't small. If we go to work right at home we will have success. There isn't a child of God but can do something if he will.[5]

As in Bible times, service for God is anywhere he leads, not just at church. Some find his work in the classroom, others in the boardroom. Some help the least of Christ's brothers and sisters on the streets of San Francisco or Calcutta, others the more outwardly fortunate in posh apartments and country clubs. Everyone has a place and a role to play. God "does not make spare parts. *You* are not a spare part. You have a purpose—a design that is central to God's dream for the human race."[6] For the person who seeks to do everything to God's glory (cf.

1 Cor. 10:31), life is holy. It is as though every meal is a sacrament, every word a prayer, and every deed an act of worship.[7]

1. See J. Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite; the Term 'Aboda* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 16—21, R. Gane and J. Milgrom, *qarab,"* in *TDOT,* 13:140, 143.

2. On *tekelet* as violet (i.e., blue-purple, from dye extracted from the gland of the murex snail), see Milgrom, *Numbers,* 411.

3. From another variety of the murex snail, see ibid.

4. A. Einstein, "My Views," in E. Knoebel, ed., *Classics of Western Thought: Volume III—The Modern World,* 4th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 3:539.

5. D. L. Moody, *The Home Work of Dwight L. Moody* (Books for the Ages, Version 1.0 on CD-ROM, Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 70.

6. J. Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58.

7. Cf. N. Herman, *Brother Lawrence: The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life* (New York: Revell, 1958), 26.

Numbers 5

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Command the Israelites to send away
from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a
discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a
dead body. 3Send away male and female alike; send them outside the
camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them.”
4The Israelites did this; they sent them outside the camp. They did just
as the LORD had instructed Moses.

5The LORD said to Moses, 6“Say to the Israelites: ‘When a man or
woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD,
that person is guilty 7and must confess the sin he has committed. He
must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it
all to the person he has wronged. 8But if that person has no close
relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution
belongs to the LORD and must be given to the priest, along with the
ram with which atonement is made for him. 9All the sacred
contributions the Israelites bring to a priest will belong to him. 10Each
man’s sacred gifts are his own, but what he gives to the priest will
belong to the priest.'”

11Then the LORD said to Moses, 12“Speak to the Israelites and say to
them: ‘If a man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him 13by
sleeping with another man, and this is hidden from her husband and
her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and
she has not been caught in the act), 14and if feelings of jealousy come
over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure—or if he
is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure—15then he is
to take his wife to the priest. He must also take an offering of a tenth of
an ephah of barley flour on her behalf. He must not pour oil on it or
put incense on it, because it is a grain offering for jealousy, a reminder

offering to draw attention to guilt.

16“"The priest shall bring her and have her stand before the LORD. 17Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water. 18After the priest has had the woman stand before the LORD, he shall loosen her hair and place in her hands the reminder offering, the grain offering for jealousy, while he himself holds the bitter water that brings a curse. 19Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, “If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you. 20But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have defiled yourself by sleeping with a man other than your husband”—21here the priest is to put the woman under this curse of the oath—“may the LORD cause your people to curse and denounce you when he causes your thigh to waste away and your abdomen to swell. 22May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells and your thigh wastes away.'”

“"Then the woman is to say, “Amen. So be it.”

23“"The priest is to write these curses on a scroll and then wash them off into the bitter water. 24He shall have the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and this water will enter her and cause bitter suffering. 25The priest is to take from her hands the grain offering for jealousy, wave it before the LORD and bring it to the altar. 26The priest is then to take a handful of the grain offering as a memorial offering and burn it on the altar; after that, he is to have the woman drink the water. 27If she has defiled herself and been unfaithful to her husband, then when she is made to drink the water that brings a curse, it will go into her and cause bitter suffering; her abdomen will swell and her thigh waste away, and she will become accursed among her people. 28If, however, the woman has not defiled herself and is free from impurity, she will be cleared of guilt and will be able to have children.

29“"This, then, is the law of jealousy when a woman goes astray and defiles herself while married to her husband, 30or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to have her stand before the LORD and is to apply this entire law to her. 31The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing, but the woman will bear the consequences of her sin.'”

Original Meaning

HAVING DESCRIBED THE PROCESS of organizing the Israelite camp (chs. 1—4), Numbers 5 reintroduces concerns of physical ritual impurity (5:1—4) and then moral faults (5:5—31) from the perspective of community relations. This legislation supplements rules given earlier in Leviticus.

Physical ritual impurity. As in Leviticus 12—15, Numbers 5:1—4 has to do with physical ritual purity from human sources. Here the focus is on maintaining the purity of the war camp rather than on diagnosing and remedying impurities of individuals. The Israelites are to send out of the camp any person, male or female, who has one of the three most serious kinds of impurities: scaly skin disease (cf. Lev. 13—14), genital discharge (cf. Lev. 15), or corpse contamination (cf. Num. 19).

We already know from Leviticus 13 that a person with a scaly skin disease was required to live apart (Lev. 13:46), but Leviticus 15 says nothing about genital discharges requiring temporary residence outside the camp. Neither does Numbers 19 require a corpse contaminated person to stay away from home (Num. 19:3, 9).

The more stringent rules in Numbers 5:1—4 regarding genital discharge and corpse contamination appear to reflect an elevation in the sacral status of the Israelite war camp. Under normal conditions only scaly skin diseased persons are to be banished, but the war camp is a special situation.[1] The reason for sending impure persons away is not to avoid the spread of ordinary sickness, which definitely would not include corpse contamination, but to avoid defiling the holy camp in which the Lord dwells among his people (Num. 5:3). Around the sanctuary, with its three gradations of holiness—the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the court—there is a fourth gradation: the camp.[2]

Ethical wrongs. Numbers 5:5—10 supplements the law of reparation for an ethical wrong involving sacrilege (Lev. 6:1—7). After summarizing the reparation procedure and adding the requirement of confession (Num. 5:6— 7, cf. Lev. 6:5), the main innovation of the Numbers 5 unit is in verse 8, which deals with the contingency that the wronged person dies and leaves no kinsman (“redeemer”) to whom reparation can be paid. The solution is that the person

who committed the wrong pays the reparation to the priest, as the Lord's representative, along with the required reparation offering of a ram of "expiation" *(kippurim),* by which the priest makes expiation *(kipper)* for the sinner (cf. Lev. 6:6—7).

Notice that Numbers 5:6 refers to the person who commits the wrong as "a man or woman" and then as "that person" *(nepes).* So it is clear that *nepes,* which often appears elsewhere with reference to a person who commits a wrong and/or offers a sacrifice (e.g., Lev. 2:1, 4:2, 27, 5:1, 2, 4, 15, 17, 6:2), is gender neutral language.[3]

Suspected adulteress. The first two sections of Numbers 5 regarding ritual *impurity* (root *tin',* 5:2—3) and ethical sin by a man or woman involving sacrilege (i.e., *unfaithfulness* to the Lord, root *m'l,* 5:6, cf. Lev. 5:15, 6:2), brief as they are, pave the way for verses 11—31. Here a remarkable law concerning a woman suspected of adultery intertwines matters of impurity (Niphal of *tm',* 5:13—14, 20, 27—29) and unfaithfulness to a husband (root m'l, 5:12, 27) within the social context of the Israelite community.

The case is particularly problematic because (1) it deals with suspicion rather than clear-cut guilt, (2) guilt or innocence can be impossible for a human tribunal to establish as a result of the secret nature of the offense, (3) the stakes are high—adultery is a capital offense (Lev. 20:10), (4) unresolved suspicion can wreck a marriage, and (5) suspicion could be lethal to a woman, since men controlled legal matters.

The protasis, introduced by *ki* ("when") and establishing the conditions of the case (Num. 5:12b-14), consists of two possible scenarios. (1) The first concerns a wife who actually goes astray (Qal of 'th, "turns aside") and is unfaithful *(m'l)* to her husband by having sexual relations with another man, this defilement of herself (Niphal of tm') goes undetected, but her husband is overcome with an anxious spirit/feeling of jealousy.[4] (2) The other one concerns a husband who is jealous even though his wife has not defiled herself.

With regard to the first possibility, verse 13 tells us in four ways the crucial factor that the woman who has defiled herself by adultery cannot be brought to justice by human agency: "but it is *hidden* from her husband, so that she is *undetected* though she has defiled herself, and there is *no witness* against her since she was *not caught* in the act" (NRSV, emphasis supplied). Notice that "she has defiled herself" comes in the middle, between the second and third expressions for concealment. This structure suggests that defilement is of central significance, an idea confirmed in verse 14, where the woman's guilt or innocence is expressed in terms of her having defiled herself.

The suspected adulteress passage never uses a word from the root *n'p*, which specifies adultery (Ex. 20:14, Deut. 5:18, Jer. 7:9, etc.) that is punishable by human agency when humans apprehend the guilty parties (Lev. 20:10). Distancing the suspected adulteress from the usual death penalty in this way points to the fact "that jurisdiction in this case lies outside the human court."[5] Only God can adjudicate.

From Numbers 5:15 on, the remainder of the chapter constitutes the apodosis, which states the results of the conditions set up in the protasis. In this instance, the apodosis consists of a ritual prescription. The jealous husband takes the initiative by bringing his wife to a priest at the sanctuary. To invoke the Lord's jurisdiction, he must bring a grain offering on behalf of his wife. Like the grain purification offering for sin in Leviticus 5:11, this grain offering of jealousy, which serves as a reminder of culpability, lacks oil and frankincense (Num. 5:15), two elements associated with happier occasions (Lev. 2:1, 15).

The priest has the woman stand before the Lord (Num. 5:16), that is, in the courtyard. The Supreme Court of Israel is in session, with God himself as Judge! Next the priest takes some holy water, probably from the sacred laver/basin (cf. Ex. 30:17—29). He adds to it some dust from the dirt floor of the holy tabernacle (Num. 5:17), presumably enhancing the potency of the water. The point is not the water's dirtiness, but its holiness.

The priest prepares the woman for her ritual role by removing her headdress to loosen her hair, which is elsewhere associated with mourning (Lev. 10:6, 21:10, cf. 13:45), and by placing the grain offering of jealousy in her hands while he holds the vessel containing the holy water, which is now ominously called "the bitter water that brings a curse" (Num. 5:18). He then places her under oath before the Lord (5:19—22).

The oath consists of two parts, corresponding to the contrasting possibilities stated earlier—guilty or innocent (5:12b—14)—but in reverse/chiastic order—innocent or guilty. If she is innocent, she will be immune to the effects of the water (5:19). But if she is guilty of having defiled herself by committing adultery (5:20), she will be punished.

At first glance, the idea that an adulteress defiles herself (5:13—14, 20, 27—29) seems to be metaphorical use of ritual impurity language to stigmatize moral impurity. However, closer examination of the oath uttered by the priest suggests that actual physical ritual impurity may be in view. Eschewing the customary euphemisms of English versions that dull the edge of the Hebrew, a literal translation is as follows:

1. "If a[nother] man has not laid you and if you have not turned aside [Qal of *sth*] [to/from?] impurity *']* under your husband, be clean [= vindicated and

immune] from this bitter cursing water" (5:19).

2. "But if you have turned aside [Qal of *sth*] [while/from] under your husband and if you have defiled yourself [Niphal of tm^{J}] and a man other than your husband has put his penis in you …" (5:20).[6]

Translations interpret "under your husband" as "while under your husband's authority" (NKJV, NRSV, NJB, cf. NASB), that is, "while married to your husband" (NIV, NJPS), as in Ezekiel 23:5 (cf. Rom. 7:2).[7] Indeed it is important that suspected infidelity be limited to the duration of the marriage, which defines the wrong as adultery rather than premarital sex, regarding which the statute of limitations would have passed (cf. Ex. 22:16—17, Deut. 22:13—29).

In Numbers 5:19, "if you have not turned aside [to/from?] impurity under your husband" is generally understood as turning aside *to* the moral impurity of adultery (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, cf. NJPS). If so, "impurity" *(tume'ah)* here refers to the same defilement as in 15:20: "if you have defiled yourself [Niphal of tm')." The NJB levels the distinction by rendering "made yourself unclean" in both verses. However, lack of a preposition "to" in 5:19 (cf. Prov. 7:25 with 'el, "to") leaves the expression ambiguous. It could just as easily mean "from" (cf. Prov. 4:15), in which case "you have not turned aside *from* impurity under your husband" may refer to legitimate ritual impurity incurred while physically lying under her husband (cf. Lev. 15:18, Deut. 24:4). If so, the force of the reflexive (or passive) Niphal in Numbers 5:20—"you have defiled yourself" (or "you have been defiled")—would be that having turned aside from under her husband (cf. 5:29) in terms of lying under him and therefore submitting to his authority, the woman incurs the physical ritual impurity without him.

In any case, adultery involves physical ritual impurity that is forbidden and is therefore morally wrong, because it is incurred with the wrong party (cf. Lev. 18:20 of a man defiling himself with his neighbor's wife).[8] The presence or absence of such *illegal* defilement is the deciding factor in the dynamics of the suspected adulteress ritual.

If a suspected adulteress is guilty of allowing a man other than her husband to put (Qal of *ntn)* his penis in her (Num. 5:20), the punishment will fit the crime. The Lord will put/set (Qal of ntn) her as an imprecation among her people by putting (Qal of *ntn)* physical maladies in the relevant area of her body, that is, the reproductive area: Her "thigh" will drop (?) and her belly will swell (?) (5:21—22, 27). The former, in which "thigh" apparently connotes reproductive organs (cf. Gen. 24:2, 9), can be taken to imply sterility and may refer to a prolapsed uterus. H. C. Brichto suggests that abdominal swelling indicates a state "known to the layman as 'false pregnancy.' This condition … is featured by distended

belly, cessation of the menses and incapacity to conceive."[9]

While scholars have not agreed on the gynecological implications of the Hebrew terminology, they sound painful and clearly cause sterility (contrast 5:28). So the conditional imprecation, to which a suspected woman must assent by saying *'amen, 'amen* (5:22), specifies outcomes that any Israelite woman dreads: social stigma, physical suffering, and inability to bear children. Although the oath provides a powerful incentive for a guilty woman to volunteer a confession before saying *'amen*, the text does not say whether her punishment is mitigated if she does confess.

The ritual continues. The priest writes the curses and then physically rubs off the words into the holy water so that it symbolically contains the curses (5:23, cf. Jer. 51:59—64).[10]Then he takes the grain offering of jealousy from her, dedicates it to the Lord by elevating it before him, and burns a handful of it on the altar as the Lord's token portion (Num. 5:25—26).

The next move is startling and brings the entire procedure to a climax: The priest has the woman drink the holy water that is now bitter with conditional curses (5:26b, anticipated in 5:24). If she is guilty of defiling herself and committing unfaithfulness against her husband, the water causes the bitter suffering specified in the oath (5:24, 27). But if she is pure/innocent, she is vindicated (Niphal of *nqh,* lit., "clean") and can "be sown with seed," that is, be made pregnant by her husband (5:28). The order here—guilty or innocent—completes an interlocking pattern:

guilty (5:12a—14a)
innocent (5:14b)
innocent (5:19)
guilty (5:20—22a)
guilty (5:27)
innocent (5:28)

Verses 29—31 conclude the chapter by labeling and summarizing "the law of jealousy." Verse 31 adds an important concept: A husband who takes his wife to the sanctuary for the suspected adulteress ritual remains clean/free *(nqh)* from culpability *('awon),* that is, even if she is innocent, but his wife bears her culpability *('awon),* that is, if she is guilty. His suspicion is not an accusation, for which he would be culpable if she were innocent (cf. Deut. 19:16— 19, 22:13—19).

Bridging Contexts

MORAL "LITMUS TEST" as divine judgment, only for women. The suspected adulteress ritual (Num. 5:11—31) enacts a kind of trial by the Lord, functioning as Judge at his sanctuary.[11] At its core is a kind of litmus test in which a suspected woman takes into her body a holy substance (water + tabernacle floor dust) containing conditional curses (5:17—24, 26b). It is a pregnancy test, not to find out whether she is pregnant but to determine whether she will be able to get pregnant in the future (15:28).

If she is pure from illegal sexual defilement, there is no problem because holiness and purity are compatible. But holiness and impurity are mortal enemies.[12] So if she has illegitimately defiled herself by adultery, the interaction of holiness and this type of moral impurity, targeted by the curses, causes a "poisonous" reaction. The verdict is simply manifested by whether or not she suffers harm.[13]

Why is the suspected adultery ritual only for a woman? To a modern reader it is unfair that a wife who suspects her husband of illicit sexual activity cannot also put him through the ordeal at the sanctuary. This apparent inequity is mitigated when we take into account the makeup of the society within which the procedure operates. In ancient Israel, legal matters were normally administered by males, and dependent females came under their legal protection and jurisdiction (cf. Num. 30). Men initiated marriage and divorce proceedings (e.g., Deut. 24:1—4) and also charges of sexual misconduct, which could lead to capital punishment (cf. 22:13—21). So women were vulnerable to potentially lethal suspicion of marital infidelity. Moreover, in ancient culture it was a woman's situation alone that determined whether or not adultery had occurred. If a married man had sexual relations with another woman, it could be a concubine, only if the sex act were with a married woman would it be considered adultery.

To protect innocent but suspected women from the inevitable bias of a male-dominated trial, God removes their fates from human jurisdiction. He can be fair because he alone knows all the relevant facts of a given case. The suspected adulteress ritual is the only instance in all of ancient Israelite jurisprudence in which the Lord promises to judge and render the verdict himself by supernatural

means. The right to such a Supreme Court trial belongs only to women.[14]

If God himself clears a woman of suspicion through the stringent and intimidating ritual prescribed in Numbers 5, her husband can rest assured that his wife has been faithful and has nothing to hide. Such assurance will provide a solid basis for restoration of the marriage relationship. Thus, the suspected adulteress ritual reveals concern for the feelings of husbands and wives toward each other.

In addition to protecting innocent women and healing their marriages, the suspected adulteress ritual is designed to condemn and punish those whose guilt is carefully concealed from human witnesses. There is no indication in Numbers 5 that an adulteress convicted through the ritual at the sanctuary will be put to death by the Israelites after suffering the breakdown of her reproductive system (5:21—22, 27). This punishment will turn her into a curse among her people (v. 27), presumably in the sense that Israelites can say to someone else with reference to her: "If you commit adultery, may you be like Mrs. So and So."

Such a stigma, which would be worse than a Puritan woman wearing a scarlet letter "A,"[15] will likely make an adulteress wish she were dead. It will also serve as a potent deterrent to others tempted to stray (sth, "turn aside") from the safe path of marital fidelity.

Guilty as charged, but forgiven. In Numbers 5 a priest loosens the hair of a woman suspected of sexual immorality, so that she has an appearance of mourning. He places in her hands an offering for the all-knowing Lord, which lacks sweet-smelling incense (5:18, cf. v. 15). Then he brings her into contact with holiness to find out what kind of person she is (5:24, 26). Now compare Luke 7:37—39:

> When *a woman who had lived a sinful life* in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of *perfume,* and as she stood behind him at his feet *weeping,* she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them *with her hair,* kissed them and poured perfume on them.
>
> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, *"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him* and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (emphasis supplied).

As in Numbers 5, the woman's reputation is affected, she brings a gift to her Lord, is in an attitude of sorrow/mourning, lets down her hair, and contacts holiness (cf. Luke 1:35), and a man questions whether divine insight perceives that she is guilty. However, in Luke 7 (cf. Matt. 26:6—13, Mark 14:3—9, John

12:1—8) the focus of the woman's sorrow is on Christ, her gift consists of sweet-smelling perfume, the man who questions regarding her (Simon, the host, Luke 7:40, 43—44) is not her husband, he has no doubt that she has been guilty of indiscretion, and his accusation is only to himself rather than out in the open.

As the Lord himself judges a case of suspected immorality in Numbers 5, Jesus renders a verdict in Luke 7. But what is there to judge if the woman is already known to be guilty? There is no possibility that she could be vindicated. Nevertheless, Jesus addresses the thoughts of her accuser (Luke 7:47—50:

> "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."
>
> Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."
>
> The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"
>
> Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

The verdict: guilty as charged, but forgiven. Christ's forgiveness did not mean that he was lowering the moral standard. In his Sermon on the Mount he raised it by condemning even lust of the eyes (Matt. 5:27—28). It is not that his standard is weaker, but that his "new covenant" forgiveness is stronger. Thus Chrysostom had no difficulty with Jesus' relating to an immoral woman, such as Mary Magdalene.

> That He might put away her iniquity, that He might show His lovingkindness, that thou mightest learn that there is no malady which prevaileth over His goodness. Look not therefore at this only, that He received her, but consider the other point also, how He changed Her….[16]

Similarly, John Calvin wrote on Luke 8:

> Surely it hardly behoved the Son of God to take round with Him women known for their unchastity. In fact, we see the better from this that the vices with which we were burdened before we believed are no hindrance to Christ's glory, rather do they magnify it. It is certainly not said that He found the Church which He chose without spot or stain, but He cleansed it with His blood that it should be pure and beautiful. The wretched and shameful state of those women brought great glory to Christ after He had freed them. They were the insignia of His power and grace.[17]

The striking similarities between the suspected adulteress ritual (Num. 5) and Christ's forgiveness of an immoral woman (Luke 7) have led us to compare the two. In the process we have found the difference that is the basis of the "new covenant" prophesied by Jeremiah: "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:34).

Contemporary Significance

COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY. John Donne eloquently described the worldwide web of interdependent relationships:

No man is an island entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.[18]

The ancient Israelites understood, as shown by the ritual (not medical) quarantine of Numbers 5:1—4. The camp of their community was a unit. Something that affected one person could impact everyone.

In ancient times people were always aware that they could not survive on their own, and there was safety in belonging to a group. It is still true. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it: "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."[19] But we are not so apt to admit it. In modern times our individuality has asserted itself at the expense of corporate solidarity.

The church community, in some ways the equivalent of the ancient Israelite "camp," is a good place to affirm our need to belong to each other. Within this community we have "horizontal" relationships to each other at the same time as we enjoy a "vertical" relationship to God. Our safety, like Israel's, is in staying together as a group under the guidance and protection of the Lord, who saves us individually (e.g., John 3:16) and corporately (e.g., Eph. 5:23—27).

The point to be learned from Numbers 5:1—4 is not to expel some ritually impure people out of our church community. Such defilement, which resulted from the human state of mortality rather than from sinful action, was relevant only while the divine Shekinah was dwelling among his people in an earthly temple.

Neither should we shun, banish, excommunicate, disfellowship, or dismember believers simply because they are struggling with weaknesses. To the contrary, our role is to strengthen and encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11, Heb. 3:13, 10:25), recognizing we all have weaknesses (Gal. 6:1). Christ's church is exactly and precisely where people with weaknesses belong, even if they are not the

same as our weaknesses. He explained his mission: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

Numbers 5:1—4 does remind us that our influences, whether positive or negative, can affect others and their relationship to God. Moral and spiritual influence is communicable for better or for worse. Sometimes a rebellious individual who is hurting the church may need to be “put out of the camp” for the ultimate benefit of all concerned, including the potential salvation of that person (1 Cor. 5). When such church discipline is necessary, even when it is temporary, the occasion is one of mourning rather than rejoicing. When we lose someone, we are diminished. When the bell tolls, it tolls for *us*.

Jealousy for an intimate relationship. When an ancient Israelite man was “jealous” with regard to his wife, he could bring her to the sanctuary, where the Lord would settle the matter (Num. 5:11—31). This “jealousy” was not a selfish, sinful, or petty feeling of envy (as in Gen. 30:1, 37:11), for which the husband deserved censure. Rather, it was rightful *zeal* to protect the exclusively intimate covenant relationship of marriage as God had instituted it.

The Song of Songs 8:6 passionately expresses the zeal of love:

> Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm,
>
> for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
>
> It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.

This rich kind of love is enjoyed by two people who give it only to each other and completely trust each other. Other kinds of love are for sharing around with others, but not marital romance.

Grass is greener on the other side of the fence. “Stolen water is sweet, food eaten in secret is delicious!” (Prov. 9:17)—maybe for an initial rush of exciting chemistry. But when lustful curiosity is sated and glamour fades like yet another episode of a soap opera, adultery is shallow and boring, and it leaves an aftertaste of guilt. There is no comparison to the sustainable emotional and spiritual depth of “your own cistern” (Prov. 5:15). Decades ago a married man who enjoyed dating around justified himself by saying to me, “Variety is the spice of life.” Although not yet married, I replied: “The spouse is the spice.”

As marriage partners are to each other, God is the exclusive covenant partner

of his people. Covenant intimacy demands this exclusiveness. He forbids his people to engage in idolatry or worship of other deities because he is "a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5, 34:14, Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15).

Biblical history shows that the open and tolerant, "variety is the spice of life," pluralistic philosophy of polytheism was popular for centuries. Although the Lord repeatedly restored his spiritually "adulterous" people (e.g., Jer. 3, Hosea), it took the "tough love" of the Exile to win Israel back. God's patient, relentless pursuit of the monotheistic ideal teaches us the supreme value he places on exclusive intimacy with him. He wants us to place our ultimate trust and hope only in him, not also in other "gods" that offer us security, such as wealth or professional success.

God's passionate, redemptive fidelity, as demonstrated in the New Testament through Christ, also provides an example for us to emulate in our marriages: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Eph. 5:25—26). If Christ can restore his people, unfaithful as they have been, he can also restore a human marriage when one or both partners are suspected or guilty as charged, but forgiven (cf. Luke 7:47—50).

1. Cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 33.

2. On equivalent spatial gradations established by the rabbis for the temple, Temple Mount, and Jerusalem and by the Qumranites for the Temple City and ordinary cities, see H. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (SBLDS 143, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 57—58.

3. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16* (AB 3, New York: Doubleday, 1991), 178.

4. Using the Greek word for sexual immorality, we could call this "*porneia* paranoia."

5. J. Milgrom, "A Husband's Pride, a Mob's Prejudice," *BRev* 12 (1996): 21.

6. See H. Orlinsky, "The Hebrew Root *skb*," *JBL* 63 (1944): 40.

7. See also BDB, 966, 1065, Milgrom, *Numbers*, 40.

8. Cf. also Gen. 34:5, 13, 27, Lev. 18:23, 24, Ezek. 18:6, 11, 15, 22:11, 23:17, 33:26.

9. H. C. Brichto, "The Case of the *Sota* and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law,'" *HUCA* 46 (1975): 66.

10. Compare: "in Egypt 'the most approved mode of charming away

sickness or disease is to write certain passages of the Koran on the inner surface of an earthenware cup or bowl, then to pour in some water, and stir it until the writing is quite washed off: when the water, with the sacred words thus infused in it, is to be drunk by the patient'" (G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* [ICC, New York: Scribner's, 1903], 54).

11. For an analysis of this ritual and some ancient parallels, see J. M. Sasson, "Numbers 5 and the 'Waters of Judgement,'" *BZ* 16 (1972): 249—51.

12. Cf., e.g., Lev. 7:20—21 regarding ritual impurity.

13. Compare trial by the divine Euphrates River in Laws of Hammurabi, law 2 (transl. *ANET,* 166, M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* [SBLWAW 6, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 81). Drowning established guilt, but surviving proved innocence.

14. Cf. Brichto, "The Case of the *Sota,*" 67, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 350, idem, "A Husband's Pride," 21.

15. Cf. N. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Signet Classic, 1999), e.g., 46—48.

16. *NPNF[1]: Volume XIV—Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews,* 227 (Homily LXII).

17. J. Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke,* transl. T. H. Parker (CC, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1972), 2:62.

18. J. Donne, in M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 215.

19. M. L. King, in ibid., 215.

Numbers 6:1—21

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to the Israelites and say to
them: ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of
separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, 3he must abstain from wine and
other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or
from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat
grapes or raisins. 4As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything
that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.

5“'During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be
used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to
the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long.
6Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go
near a dead body. 7Even if his own father or mother or brother or sister
dies, he must not make himself ceremonially unclean on account of
them, because the symbol of his separation to God is on his head.
8Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD.

9“'If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he
has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing—the
seventh day. 10Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two
young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
11The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt
offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the
presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head.
12He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation
and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous
days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.

13“ ‘Now this is the law for the Nazirite when the period of his
separation is over. He is to be brought to the entrance to the Tent of

Meeting. 14There he is to present his offerings to the LORD: a year-old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering, a year-old ewe lamb without defect for a sin offering, a ram without defect for a fellowship offering, 15together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and a basket of bread made without yeast—cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil.

16“'The priest is to present them before the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. 17He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to the LORD, together with its grain offering and drink offering.

18“'Then at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the Nazirite must shave off the hair that he dedicated. He is to take the hair and put it in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering.

19“'After the Nazirite has shaved off the hair of his dedication, the priest is to place in his hands a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, both made without yeast. 20The priest shall then wave them before the LORD as a wave offering; they are holy and belong to the priest, together with the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. After that, the Nazirite may drink wine.

21“'This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD in accordance with his separation, in addition to whatever else he can afford. He must fulfill the vow he has made, according to the law of the Nazirite."’

Original Meaning

NAZIRITE VOW. Any of God's people could choose to be special! An exceptional (Hiphil of pl^{J}, 6:2, NIV "wants") vow of "Nazirite" status made it possible for an Israelite to voluntarily separate (Hiph. of *nzr)* himself/herself to the Lord at a high level of holiness for a period of time that the individual specified. The Hebrew term for "separated one"— *nazir* (Num. 6:2, 13, 18—21) —has given us the label "Nazirite." This legislation is related to that of chapters 5 and 7 in that it concerns rituals and gifts to the Lord.

In Leviticus 27 we found that an exceptional (Hiphil of pl^{J}, 27:2, NIV "makes") kind of vow permanently dedicates the valuation of a person (27:2—8). However, in Numbers 6 the exceptional vow is to temporarily dedicate oneself, not another person or a monetary equivalent.

A "man or woman" (Num. 6:2) from any tribe could enjoy special sanctity as a Nazirite. Jewish tradition tells us that pious women chose to become Nazirites during the Second Temple period and provides names of some of them, including Queen Helena of Adiabne and Miriam of Tadmor (Palmyra).[1] The fact that royal women wanted to be Nazirites indicates that this status was an honored one.

Why would someone choose to become a Nazirite? By not specifying a motivation, the biblical text leaves open a range of possibilities that could suit a variety of individuals and circumstances. Like other voluntary vows and dedications to the Lord (e.g., Lev. 27), commitment to Naziriteship could simply be an expression of devotion and gratitude to the Lord, or it could be tied to a request for some kind of tangible or spiritual benefit from God. The intensely personal nature of Naziriteship—dedication of oneself to a high status of holiness (see below)—would make it attractive as a particularly potent form of votive dedication.[2]

In Numbers 6 there are three lifestyle restrictions that a temporary Nazirite must scrupulously observe throughout the entire period of dedication. (1) A Nazirite must remain separate (Hiph. of *nzr)* from all alcoholic beverages, vinegar, and any other grape product even if it is not fermented (6:3—4). (2) The Nazirite must not have his or her hair cut (6:5). (3) The Nazirite must not go near

a dead person *(nepes,* cf. Lev. 21:11), even to incur corpse contamination from closest relatives (Num. 6:6—7).

The reasons for the first and third of these requirements are readily apparent. Like a priest, a Nazirite is holy to the Lord (Lev. 21:6, Num. 6:8). Holiness is antagonistic to impurity caused by death (see comments on Lev. 12), so the Nazirite must shun some things connected with death, such as corpses and beverages or food products that are fermented or especially susceptible to fermentation, which involves decomposition that is related to the decay of death.

The Nazirite prohibitions against any alcoholic beverages or corpse contamination are generally more strict than those laid on permanently dedicated priests. All priests, including the high priest, are forbidden to drink wine or other fermented drink only when they enter the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 10:9). Ordinary priests are allowed to incur corpse contamination for certain close blood relatives (21:1—4), but the high priest is totally barred from corpse contamination (21:11). Thus, although the Lord has set up a closed priestly circle to do special sacred tasks in intimate proximity to himself, he allows any member of his "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) to reach a high level of holiness as a Nazirite, somewhat paralleling the holiness of the high priest![3]

The reason why a Nazirite should refrain from having a haircut is not so obvious, but the end of Numbers 6:7 provides a clue: "because the symbol of his separation *[nezer]* to God is on his head." So the Nazirite's uncut hair is the outward symbol of separation to special holiness to the Lord (cf. 6:5, 8). Similarly, the reason why the high priest must not incur corpse contamination (Lev. 21:11) is the fact that he is consecrated to special holiness by a symbol of separation *(nezer)* on his head, in this case anointing with oil (21:10, 12, cf. 8:12). Another symbol on his head is a golden "diadem" (also *nezer),* engraved with the words "HOLY TO THE LORD" (Ex. 39:30, cf. 29:6, Lev. 8:9).[4] Again, the holiness of the Nazirite is analogous in some ways to that of the high priest.[5]

Accidental annulment. While a Nazirite can control drink, food, and haircuts, it is possible for such a dedicated person to unintentionally come in contact with a corpse if someone close by suddenly dies. If this occurs, the period of Naziriteship is automatically aborted, with the previous days rendered null and void (Num. 6:9, 12). In addition to the usual purification for corpse contamination on the third and seventh days by sprinkling water containing ashes of the red cow (19:11 — 12, 17—19), the Nazirite must shave his or her head "on the day of his cleansing—the seventh day" (6:9). This removes the sign of Naziriteship.

On the eighth day a sacrifice of two birds, serving as a purification offering supplemented by a burnt offering, provides expiation *(kipper)* for the unintentional sin (Qal of *hf*) of breaking the vow (6:10—11). Here sin is objective: Corpse impurity has simply occurred through adverse circumstances, thereby violating the divine prohibition, without any failure of intention, carefulness, vigilance, or memory on the part of the Nazirite (cf. Lev. 5:2—4).

The same day as the purification and burnt offerings, the Israelite must begin the period of Naziriteship all over again, (re-)consecrate his or her head, and bring a lamb for a reparation offering (6:11—12). The reason for this type of sacrifice, which remedies sacrilege (see comments on Lev. 5:14— 6:7), is implied by the words, "The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation" (Num. 6:12). The corpse impurity has desecrated sacred things that belonged to the Lord (cf. Lev. 5:14—16), namely, the hair of the Nazirite and unfulfilled days of Naziriteship.[6]

Completion of the Nazirite period. Numbers 6:13—21 outlines a ceremony for termination of a successfully completed Nazirite period, after which the Nazirite restrictions are lifted. The ritual procedure includes several sacrifices, among which is a purification offering (6:14, 16). This is problematic: For what "debt" of inadvertent sin or ritual impurity could such a sacrifice expiate in this context?[7]

I propose that a partial key to answering this difficult question comes from recognizing a strong parallel between the Nazirite's complex of sacrifices and the sacrificial complex performed at the consecration of the priests.[8] The priests sacrificed purification and burnt offerings (Lev. 8:14—21), plus a special ordination offering (8:22—32) along with an offering of unleavened grain items in a basket (8:26—28, 31—32, cf. 8:2, Ex. 29:2—3, 23—25, 32, 34). The ordination offering was like a well-being offering in that it was eaten by the offerers, in this case, Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:31, cf. Ex. 29:32—33). Similarly, the Nazirite sacrifices purification, burnt, and well-being offerings, and an offering of unleavened grain items in a basket (Num. 6:14—16).

It appears that the purification offering of the Nazirite has basically the same function as that of the priestly consecration service: carrying out purification before offering consecration gifts to the Lord. The difference is that whereas the priests offered their consecration gifts at the *beginning* of lifelong service at the sanctuary, Nazirites offer theirs at the *end* of temporary, voluntary periods of holiness. Unresolved is the precise nature of prerequisite purification accomplished by the purification offerings in these cases: Is it for an unspecified offense, possibly involving treatment of some kind of physical ritual impurity?[9]

We do not know.

As part of the completion ceremony, the Nazirite must shave his or her head and put the hair on the altar fire under the well-being offering (6:18, cf. Acts 21:23—24). Thus, the token portion of the offerer that represents separation to the holy Lord is sacrificed to him.[10] No wonder the hair has been special: Unlike the rest of the Nazirite, it is *permanently* dedicated to God!

Bridging Contexts

LIFELONG NAZIRITES. Unlike the voluntary, temporary Nazirite of Numbers 6, who is obligated to offer sacrifices at the termination of his votive period, Samson was a lifelong Nazirite. God designated him as such before he was born (Judg. 13:3—5, cf. 13:7, 14). As an especially holy person, Samson was not to come under the influence of wine or other fermented drink, even while in the womb. This prenatal prohibition for his mother implies a fortiori that as a Nazirite, he would be forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages after he was born. Also as a Nazirite, he would forego haircuts.

Corpse contamination is not mentioned among the restrictions on Samson. For Samson as a holy warrior, a one-man army who would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg. 13:5), it would be impossible to avoid corpse impurity. On one occasion he was surrounded by heaps of a thousand corpses that he had hacked to death with a donkey's jawbone (15:15—16).

In spite of the high honor of separation to holiness that God conferred on Samson at his birth, he spent much of his adult life trying to be normal, like "any other man" (Judg. 16:17)." He ended up betraying himself by telling Delilah the secret of his special Nazirite separation to God, which was the source of his strength (16:17). He knew what she would do with the information. When the symbol of his separation—his hair, plaited in seven mighty dreadlocks—was shaved off, the Lord left him (16:19—20). But even though Samson chose to have his Naziriteship violated, unlike the temporary Nazirite who is accidentally contaminated and must shave off his or her hair before beginning again (Num. 6:9, 12), God restored Samson's Nazirite strength when his hair grew back (Judg. 16:22 —30).

After Samson, two biblical characters were dedicated in some ways like Nazirites before they were born, even though the designation "Nazirite" is not explicitly applied to them. They too were born to infertile mothers with divine assistance. (1) Hannah vowed to dedicate Samuel even before he was conceived: "Then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head" (1 Sam. 1:11). She did not specify abstinence from wine, but perhaps "no razor" meant "Nazirite," which implied no alcoholic beverages.[12] Nor did she speak of avoiding corpse contamination. Although

Samuel was not a warrior like Samson, he did personally execute King Agag of the Amalekites when King Saul failed to do it (15:33).

(2) Like Samson, John the Baptist was designated by an “angel of the Lord” (in this case, Gabriel) before he was born (Luke 1). The angel announced to his father: “He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (1:15). As with Samson and Samuel, there was no mention of corpse impurity. It is surprising, however, that Gabriel did not prohibit haircuts for John. Since this regulation was essential to the separated status of Samson, who was explicitly called a Nazirite (Judg. 13:5, 7, 17), it is not clear that John was a Nazirite in the same sense. He was more like the Recabites, who were blessed for faithfully following the command of their ancestor, Jonadab, by abstaining from wine and living as nomads (Jer. 35, esp. vv. 6—7).

Contemporary Significance

To BE SPECIAL. Hallmark has sold millions of birthday, anniversary, graduation, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day cards by affirming that people are special. We want to be special, in order to enjoy friendship, companionship, and intimacy. We also want others to know that they are special to us, not just numbers or faces in a crowd.

Numbers 6 made provision for any of God's people to be special as a Nazirite. With this privilege and honor came restrictions. Life is often like that. With a promotion and pay raise come increased responsibilities and less free time. But paradoxically, some restrictions bring freedom. A person who abstains from alcoholic beverages (including a Nazirite) is free from fear that he or she might get into trouble as a result of being intoxicated. Faithful marriage partners spare themselves many health and emotional risks. Restrictions on leaders and their families protect them from physical or character assassination.

Whether God's restrictions are viewed as passports to the freedom of safe adventure or as arbitrary, unfair oppression to be surmounted, circumvented, or loopholed at all cost depends on one's attitude toward the character of God. The former is trust, believing that restrictions are ultimately for the best. The latter is distrust, which can manifest itself in outright rebellion, passive noncooperation, and/or legalism, which tries to be "good" in order to earn rewards without adequate trust that God is loving and merciful, as he says he is (Ex. 34:6—7). We will find these contrasting approaches lavishly illustrated in the remainder of the book of Numbers.

A Nazirite *voluntarily* committed himself/herself to *additional* restrictions and sacrificial expenses, beyond those available for the well-being of all Israelites, in order to identify with God more closely. Without trust in the Lord and placing a high value on one's relationship with him, there was nothing worthwhile to be gained by sincerely taking a Nazirite vow, the cost of which was above the call of duty.

While a Nazirite was "separate" in some practices, tuning in to piety did not mean dropping out from society. "The biblical Nazirite, though an ascetic, is definitely not a hermit. He does not lead a monastic existence apart but, to the contrary, is an active participant in all his familial and communal affairs."[13]

Samuel was very much involved in the lives of people. So was Sam-son—sometimes too involved!

Numbers 6 only outlines external activities to set up a framework of holiness that reminded a Nazirite of his or her special relationship to God. This does not mean that Naziriteship was necessarily limited to a list of do's and don'ts. Rather, God gave such a person freedom regarding the internal aspects of the experience. It was as though he said: "Come and be close to me. Let's spend some time together, and we'll do or talk about whatever is meaningful to you." Children love such special occasions with their parents. Sometimes it takes a bit of effort to set time aside, but then good things happen!

Like ancient Nazirites, modern laypersons who belong to the "priesthood of all believers" can dedicate themselves to God and enjoy a holy experience with him in their personal spiritual lives (through prayer, Bible study and meditation, spiritual retreats, etc.), even if they are not chosen as worship leaders. As in days of old, this and all other holiness of human beings come at the cost of a Sacrifice.

The story of Samson, the lifelong Nazirite, illustrates the fact that the greatest danger to our holiness and godly power comes from ourselves—from our own pride, hardheartedness, materialism, self-gratification, and so on, which separate us from the Source of sacredness. "Satan is a lot like Delilah— he beguiles us into allowing our connection with God to be cut, and as soon as the snipping is over, he summons the Philistines."[14] But if we focus on the Lord and maintain our separation *to* him, "Who shall separate us *from* the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35, emphasis supplied).

1. See, e.g., *m. Nazir* 3:6, 6:11.

2. For reasons why people took Nazirite vows during the latter part of the Second Temple period, including faulty reasons (asceticism, wagers, fits of temper), see Milgrom, *Numbers,* 358.

3. Ibid., 355.

4. Elsewhere the word *nezer* can refer to the crown of a monarch (e.g., 2 Sam. 1:10, 2 Kings 11:12).

5. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 355.

6. J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (SJLA 18, Leiden: Brill, 1976), 66—70, idem, *Leviticus 1—16,* 357—58.

7. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 48.

8. Milgrom convincingly counters the theory of A. Marx ("Sacrifice

pour les péchés ou rite de passage? Quelques réflexions sur la fonction du *hatta't" RB* 96 [1989]: 37—48) that this and other purification offerings are "rites of passage" (J. Milgrom, "The *Hatta't:* A Rite of Passage?" *RB* 98 [1991]: 120—24, idem, *Leviticus 1—16,* 289—92). Milgrom tentatively follows Ramban in regarding this sacrifice as uniquely functioning for the purpose of desanctification as the Nazirite removed himself or herself from the sacred domain (Milgrom, *Numbers,* 48). But the text provides no evidence that the ritual has a kind of goal outside the scope of purification offerings in general.

9. On this question regarding the priests' purification offering, which also decontaminates the outer altar (Lev. 8:15), cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16,* 521—22.

10. On hair, which grows throughout life, representing vitality and offered in place of whole persons in ancient rituals, see Milgrom, *Numbers,* 356—57.

11. B. G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 169.

12. If so, it is ironic that Eli mistakenly thought she was intoxicated (1 Sam. 1:13 — 14).

13. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 355.

14. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes,* 107.

Numbers 6:22—27

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 23“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

24“‘"The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” ‘

27“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.’

Original Meaning

A BLESSING DESERVES the best. So God himself gives his priests the words to "bless" (Piel of *brk)* his people, that is, to put his name on them by invoking him as their deity so that he will bless them (v. 27). We have already encountered an occasion when words like these would have been appropriate: At the conclusion of the inauguration service, Aaron "lifted his hands toward the people and blessed [Piel of *brk]* them" (Lev. 9:22, cf. v. 23).

The blessing here is brief (Num. 6:24—26) but poetic,[1] with three pairs of parallels (author's translation):

> May the LORD bless you and guard you,
>
> May the LORD make his face shine toward you and be gracious to you,
>
> May the LORD lift up his face toward you and give you well-being.

Each pair begins with Yahweh as subject and wishes for him to have a favorable attitude: blessing, making his face shine, and lifting up his face. These ancient expressions of favor appear in other texts. For example, harvesters greeted Boaz: "The LORD bless you!" (Ruth 2:4). The second member of each pair wishes for Yahweh to do something positive for his people: guard, be gracious, and give well-being. To be gracious (Qal of hnn; Num. 6:25) is not merely to smile, it is to show favor in the form of beneficial action (cf. Gen. 33:5, 11, Judg. 21:22, 2 Sam. 12:22).

The language of verse 27 ("So they will put [Qal of sym] my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them") is related to that of verse 26 ("and give [Qal of *sym]* you well-being").[2] Notice how verse 27 encapsulates the blessing by referring to the beginning and ending ideas, but in reverse (chiastic) order:

bless (v. 24a) put = give (sym, v. 26b)

put (sym, v. 27a) bless (v. 27b)

In this structural pattern, the Lord's putting his name on the Israelites (v. 27a) is the functional equivalent of giving them well-being (v. 26b). Implied is reinforcement of the idea that through their connection with God, whose name represents his Presence and character (cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 21, Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22), his people receive well-being.

Later biblical echoes of the priestly blessing and ideas expressed in it (2 Chron. 30:9, Ps. 4:6, 67:1, cf. 119:135) testify to its prominence and appeal. Citation of an abridged form of the priestly blessing on two small amulets of silver leaf found in the tomb chambers of a cave overlooking the Hinnom valley outside the ancient city of Jerusalem also indicates that Israelites have long found profound comfort in these cherished words. Discovered in 1979, the miniature scrolls with about twenty lines scratched into their surfaces had apparently been worn about the neck on cords through central holes. Dating to the end of the seventh century B.C. or the beginning of the sixth century, they are among the earliest quotations of any scriptural passage.[3]

Some texts outside the Bible contain phraseology resembling that of this priestly blessing, showing that elements related to its mode of expression were known and appreciated elsewhere in the ancient Near East:

> Two Mesopotamian documents reveal a remarkable similarity of language and literary form. A ninth-century boundary stone inscription contains the following terms: "his countenance brightened … he turned his attention … with his bright gaze, shining countenance … he granted his servant." A sixth-century document reads: "turned her countenance toward me, with her shining face she (the goddess Gula) faithfully looked at me and actually caused (him, the god Marduk) to show mercy." The latter passage is particularly striking in indicating, as does the Priestly Blessing, that the turning and bestowing of a shining face results in a bestowal of mercy. Of more direct relevance is the eighth-century Hebrew insciption written in paint on a large jar at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the upper Sinai containing the words "the Lord bless you and keep you and be with you."[4]

Bridging Contexts

OLD TESTAMENT "LORD'S PRAYER." The priestly blessing at the end of Numbers 6 is a prayer. If it were to be uttered by God, it would be a divine decree (see, e.g., Gen. 17:16, 20), but it is to be recited by human beings. If it had the Lord as direct object of the verb "bless" (Piel of *brk),* it would be a prayer of praise (see Ps. 115:18, 134:2). However, "with man as the direct object and the Deity as the expressed or implied subject, the prayer is a request for blessing (e.g., Ps. 115:12—13,15, 118:26, 134:3)."[5] Compare the prayer with which Joseph greeted his beloved brother Benjamin, after being separated from him for many years: "God be gracious to you, my son" (Gen. 43:29).

The three requests in the middle of the "Lord's Prayer," which Christ taught his followers, chiastically parallel the three requests of the Numbers 6 prayer, which the Lord taught his priests:

> *guard* (Num. 6:24) *give daily bread* (Matt. 6:11)
> be gracious (Num. 6:25) forgive debts (Matt. 6:12)
> *give well-being* (Num. 6:26) lead not into temptation, but *deliver* (Matt. 6:13)

The correspondence between guarding (Num. 6:24) and delivering (rather than leading into temptation, Matt. 6:13) is obvious. Divine graciousness (Qal of hnn, Num. 6:25) is related to forgiveness (Matt. 6:12) in the sense of God's compassion for sinners (Ex. 33:19, 2 Sam. 12:22, 2 Kings 13:23, Ps. 41:4). For example, when David repented from his adultery with Bathsheba, he prayed: "Have mercy [Qal of 'nn] on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1).

"Well-being" (Num. 6:26) translates the familiar Hebrew word *salom,* which is usually rendered "peace," but its basic meaning has to do with completeness (Jer. 13:19) and total welfare (Gen. 29:6, 37:14, 43:27). As acknowledged by the "bread of the Presence/Face" placed on the golden table in the outer sanctum of the Israelite sanctuary (see comments on Lev. 24:5—9, cf. God's "face" in Num. 6:25—26), a fundamental component of well-being is the daily sustenance of food, represented by bread (Matt. 6:11, cf. Sir. 29:21), the ordinary food of the

Israelites (e.g., Ex. 16:3, Num. 21:5, Deut. 8:3, Ps. 104:15). The Hebrew word for “bread” *(lehem)* can refer to food in general, including meat (Judg. 13:15—16, Lev. 21:6) and honey (1 Sam. 14:24—28).

Contemporary Significance

PRAYERS THAT ARE REAL. The priestly blessing provides special assurance because its requests are formulated by the divine Giver himself. This implies an invitation like the one later extended by Jesus: "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7, cf. vv. 8—11). Hebrews 4:14—16 also invites Christians to ask as they approach God's throne through their sympathetic High Priest in heaven to receive mercy and grace in time of need (see also 10:19—22).

So why don't we ask more? If our prayers are real to God, are they real to us? Do we "mumble sleepy clichés in a vague mist of unreality, as unsure of the results as we are unclear about what we are doing?"[6] Or do we have confidence that our praises and petitions to God, feeble and unfocused as they are, have been successfully transmitted to him with the aid of his Spirit (Rom. 8:26)?

Here are some suggestions for bringing a stronger sense of reality into your prayer life. (1) *Regularly pray at a church or other place of corporate worship,* just as the priestly blessing was a prayer to be offered at the sanctuary and later the temple, which was a "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7, Matt. 21:13, Mark 11:17). When God's people prayed at the sanctuary, whether corporately (as in Num. 6:22—27) or individually (1 Sam. 1:9—11 [Hannah], 1 Kings 8:22—53 [Solomon], 2 Kings 19:14—15 [Hezekiah]), his Presence in the cloud over his earthly residence (Ex. 40:34—38) was within earshot of their voices. This gave them confidence that when they were away from the sanctuary, they could pray horizontally toward that place and their praises and petitions would go ballistic from there up to God's heavenly dwelling place (cf. 1 Kings 8:27, 30, Dan. 6:10 —even after the temple was destroyed).

Today we have no sacred structure over which the Shekinah hovers in a glory cloud. Nevertheless, our churches are dedicated to God as houses of prayer, and our prayers go up to heaven like incense (Rev. 5:8, cf. 8:4), linking heaven and earth, as the Lord's Prayer says: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

(2) *Treat prayers as transactions.* For the Israelites, the sanctuary was a big help in overcoming virtual unreality because God had an earthly address at which to receive their tangible gifts and token debt payments. Through ritual

transactions, they could go through steps of approaching and interacting with him. Sacrifices were visible prayers (cf. Isa. 56:7).[7]

God no longer maintains an earthly address in the sense that his visible Presence resides at an earthly meeting place. Yet what we lose in tangible expression, we gain in universal access. We can accomplish all of our interactions and transactions with God by means of prayer that ascends *directly* to his throne of grace in heaven through the way of access that Christ has opened (Heb. 4:14—16, cf. Rom. 5:1—2, Eph. 2:17—18, Heb. 6:19—20).

How can our prayers, which are communications that transfer information across the boundary to the unseen world, take the place of tangible sacrificial gifts to God, which were transactions that transferred value? Linguistic theorists have recognized a category of "performative" speech that *does* something in addition to communicating information. For example, the solemn words "I do" in the context of a marriage vow create a new covenant relationship by transferring something of value, namely, the person uttering the words, to another person. The communication accomplishes a relational transaction of breathtaking significance.

A person who accepts God as Lord and says "I do" to him begins a relationship through a transaction that Paul would call a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). Once the covenant with God is established, it can be maintained through prayer every day, just as the daily sacrifices at the sanctuary reaffirmed the Israelites' connection with God (Num. 28:1 —8). Prayer can also carry out other transactions, such as expressing devotion to God, thanking him for blessings, making promises, and receiving forgiveness.

(3) *Accompany prayers with tangible offerings (money, material gifts, service, etc.) to God.* Such offerings can be tied to specific prayer transactions. For example, a gift of money can be placed in the church offering plate as a token of thanks for a particular blessing or to express repentance for a sin.

In the process of making prayers real in this way, we should remember that anything given to God comes from him and purchases nothing. Tangible tokens have value only insofar as they express sincere inner attitudes, and the only gift that provides salvation is God's gift to us of his Son. We who have no "money" are invited to "come, buy and eat … without money and without cost" (Isa. 55:1). It is a transaction, a transfer of infinite value bought at a staggering, blood-drenched cost, but the price to us is free.[8]

1. See M. Korpel, "The Poetic Structure of the Priestly Blessing," *JSOT* 45 (1989): 3—13.

2. The idea of putting/giving (Qal of *sym)* peace/well-being *(salom)* also appears in Ps. 147:14.

3. P. Kyle McCarter, *Ancient Inscriptions: Voices from the Biblical World* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996), 121—22, E. Puech, "Palestinian Funerary Inscriptions," ABD, 5:127.

4. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 360—61.

5. Ibid., 360.

6. Gane, *Altar Call,* 152.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 158.

Numbers 7

WHEN MOSES FINISHED setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils. 2Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings. 3They brought as their gifts before the LORD six covered carts and twelve oxen—an ox from each leader and a cart from every two. These they presented before the tabernacle.

4The LORD said to Moses, 5"Accept these from them, that they may be used in the work at the Tent of Meeting. Give them to the Levites as each man's work requires."

6So Moses took the carts and oxen and gave them to the Levites. 7He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, 8and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required. They were all under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. 9But Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible.

10When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar. 11For the LORD had said to Moses, "Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar."

12The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.

> 13His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, 14one gold dish

weighing ten shekels, filled with incense, [15]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering, [16]one male goat for a sin offering, [17]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.

[18]On the second day Nethanel son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, brought his offering.

[19]The offering he brought was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; [20]one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [21]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [22]one male goat for a sin offering; [23]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Nethanel son of zuar.

[24]On the third day, Eliab son of Helon, the leader of the people of zebulun, brought his offering.

[25]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; [26]one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [27]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [28]one male goat for a sin offering; [29]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Eliab son of Helon.

[30]On the fourth day Elizur son of Shedeur, the leader of the people of Reuben, brought his offering.

[31]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; [32]one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [33]one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [34]one
male goat for a sin offering; [35]and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Elizur son of
Shedeur.

[36]On the fifth day Shelumiel son of zurishaddai, the leader of the
people of Simeon, brought his offering.

[37]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, [38]one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense, [39]one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering, [40]one
male goat for a sin offering, [41]and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Shelumiel son of
Zurishaddai.

[42]On the sixth day Eliasaph son of Deuel, the leader of the people of
Gad, brought his offering.

[43]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, [44]one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense, [45]one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering, [46]one
male goat for a sin offering, [47]and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Eliasaph son of

Deuel.

48On the seventh day Elishama son of Ammihud, the leader of the
people of Ephraim, brought his offering.

49His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, 50one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense, 51one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering, 52one
male goat for a sin offering, 53and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Elishama son of
Ammihud.

54on the eighth day Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, the leader of the
people of Manasseh, brought his offering.

55His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, 56one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; 57one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; 58one
male goat for a sin offering; 59and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Gamaliel son of
Pedahzur.

60On the ninth day Abidan son of Gideoni, the leader of the people
of Benjamin, brought his offering.

61His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 62one gold dish

weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [63]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [64]one male goat for a sin offering; [65]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Abidan son of Gideoni.

[66]On the tenth day Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, the leader of the people of Dan, brought his offering.

[67]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; [68]one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [69]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [70]one male goat for a sin offering; [71]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai.

[72]On the eleventh day Pagiel son of Ocran, the leader of the people of Asher, brought his offering.

[73]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; [74]one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; [75]one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [76]one male goat for a sin offering, [77]and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Pagiel son of ocran.

[78]On the twelfth day Ahira son of Enan, the leader of the people of Naphtali, brought his offering.

[79]His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and
thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy
shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with
fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, [80]one gold dish
weighing ten shekels, filled with incense, [81]one young bull, one
ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering, [82]one
male goat for a sin offering, [83]and two oxen, five rams, five male
goats and five male lambs a year old, to be sacrificed as a
fellowship offering. This was the offering of Ahira son of Enan.

[84]These were the offerings of the Israelite leaders for the dedication of the altar when it was anointed: twelve silver plates, twelve silver sprinkling bowls and twelve gold dishes. [85]Each silver plate weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and each sprinkling bowl seventy shekels. Altogether, the silver dishes weighed two thousand four hundred shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel. [86]The twelve gold dishes filled with incense weighed ten shekels each, according to the sanctuary shekel. Altogether, the gold dishes weighed a hundred and twenty shekels. [87]The total number of animals for the burnt offering came to twelve young bulls, twelve rams and twelve male lambs a year old, together with their grain offering. Twelve male goats were used for the sin offering. [88]The total number of animals for the sacrifice of the fellowship offering came to twenty-four oxen, sixty rams, sixty male goats and sixty male lambs a year old. These were the offerings for the dedication of the altar after it was anointed.

[89]When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD,
he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony. And he spoke with him.

Original Meaning

A NEW HOUSE calls for celebration, including "house-warming gifts." So just as modern neighbors may shower recently installed residents with presents, ancient Israelites gave useful items to the Owner of the freshly completed "Mansion" at the center of their neighborhood. It was the chieftains, representing their tribes (not including Levi), who brought their gifts to the sanctuary when Moses anointed and thereby consecrated it (Num. 7:1—2, cf. Lev. 8). This narrative continues the theme of the sanctuary (Num. 3—4) and contributions to it (5:8—10, 15, 25—26, 6:10—21).

The chiefs give six wagons and twelve oxen, two for each wagon, which logically go to the Gershonite and Merarite Levites for transporting the sanctuary (7:3—8). This helps to explain why the present archival account is placed here in the book of Numbers. The gifts meet needs created by the Levite job descriptions (ch. 4).

The Kohathites do not need wagons because they transport the sacred furniture on their shoulders by poles (7:9). This requires manpower, but it protects the precious items from the kind of jolting that later cost Uzzah his life when he reached out to steady the ark of the covenant on its cart (2 Sam. 6:3—7). In the Hittite ninth year festival of the god Telipinu, a cart similarly transported sancta, consisting of idols and a cult pedestal, but a priest rode in the cart to protect the objects.[1] The same approach will not work for the Levites, who are responsible for transporting the sacred furniture but are not permitted to touch it (Num. 4:15).

Having introduced the twelve tribal chieftains in chapter 7 because of the relevance of their gifts to the Levite duties, the rest of this chapter (except for v. 89) continues with an inventory of their other offerings, even though they brought them earlier for the service of the outer altar when it was initiated/inaugurated, shortly after it was anointed (7:10—88, cf. v. 1). Although this inventory belongs between Leviticus 8 and 9 from a chronological perspective, its present location maintains thematic cohesion by avoiding interruption of the grand consecration-inauguration process in Leviticus and by keeping the chiefs' presents to the sanctuary together.[2]

The word for “initiation” (NIV “dedication”) of the altar is *hanuhkah* (vv. 10, 11, 84, 88). This noun, or the verb from the same root (hnk), denotes the first use of a structure for the purpose for which it was intended.[3] Thus a house (Deut. 20:5), city wall (Neh. 12:27), or image (Dan. 3:2—3) could be initiated, as was Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:63, 2 Chron. 7:5) and its altar (2 Chron. 7:9). Later *hanukkah* appears in Aramaic for the initiation of the Second Temple (Ezra 6:16—17). The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah in December celebrates the initiation of a new altar when the Maccabees purified and reconsecrated the Second Temple after its desecration by the persecuting forces of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (1 Macc. 4:52—59).

Unlike the gifts of “my true love” on “the twelve days of Christmas,” the offerings of the Israelite chieftains over twelve days are all the same. The list of items is fully repeated twelve times, sacrificing the economy of “ditto” to the grand impact of an archival record in which each chieftain is given his moment in the spotlight.

At first glance, the last verse of Numbers 7 (v. 89) looks isolated.[4] But it harks back to the beginning of the chapter, which refers to Moses’ setting up and consecrating the sanctuary. As the Lord promised when he provided directions for constructing the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:22), Moses heard the Lord’s voice “speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony” (Num. 7:89).

The initial occasion when Moses could enter the tabernacle after its consecration and encounter the divine glory like this was at the conclusion of the public inauguration service (Lev. 9:23, cf. v. 6), for which sacrificial victims and other materials (vv. 1—5) undoubtedly had been provided by the chieftains. At that time Moses and Aaron blessed the people (vv. 22—23, cf. Num. 6:22—27). So Numbers 6:22—7:89 contains a cluster of connections to the founding events of Israelite worship, on which any progress would be based.

Bridging Contexts

SUPPLIES, CELEBRATION, AND SOVEREIGNTY. The tribal emphasis of Numbers 7, featuring the same chieftains who (later) represented their tribes in the military census and war camp (chs. 1—2), helps to further explain why the description of initiation offerings appears in Numbers 7 rather than in Leviticus, which recounts the consecration/dedication (Lev. 8) and inauguration/initiation (Lev. 9) of the sanctuary and its altar. At this point the organization of biblical material is based primarily on thematic rather than chronological criteria.

The presents of the chieftains serve three important functions. (1) They contribute to an important stage of setting up the sanctuary infrastructure by providing it with vehicles for transportation, vessels, and sacrificial materials, and victims for public offerings.

(2) The gifts celebrate the initial public use of the Lord's outer altar (cf. Lev. 9), following its dedication (Lev. 8). This altar in the courtyard is central to the corporate worship of ancient Israel. While God's Presence resides in and over the Most Holy Place, it is to the outer altar that the people bring their sacrifices for all kinds of reasons and watch the smoke ascend for divine acceptance.

(3) The offerings of the chieftains, who represent the political and military structure of Israel, acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty over their nation. The tribes are unified because their leaders give homage to the same ruler: the divine King of Israel. Verse 89 highlights the Lord's sovereignty by reporting that Moses receives communication from him (cf. Ex. 25:22).

The gifts are large and expensive, are provided by tribes, and are mandatory because God has commanded that they be brought (v. 11). If God were a foreign ruler, we would say that the chieftains are bringing "tribute" (cf. Judg. 3:15, 17—18, 2 Kings 17:3), but he is their own King. As such, he has the right to require resources of materials (Num. 7) and manpower (ch. 8—Levites) from his people.[5]

Contemporary Significance

HOMAGE TO THE ABSOLUTE LORD. To those of us who live in democratic nations, kingship is a foreign concept. We tend to associate it with the glamour of modern constitutional monarchs (e.g., that of Britain), who are largely figureheads, or with dictatorial despots who use their absolute powers to enrich themselves and their families at the expense of their citizens. But whether we encounter members of royalty through tabloids or a tourist trip, we are generally content to have them maintain distance from us. As the rabbi in *Fiddler On the Roof* replied when asked to formulate an appropriate prayer for the czar: "A blessing for the czar? Of course. May God bless and keep the czar—far away from us!"[6]

Indeed, the history of monarchy is not a pretty one. For every Catherine the Great or Richard the Lionhearted there lurks an Ivan the Terrible or Ibrahim the Mad. In the Old Testament, kings like Jeroboam I, Ahab, and Ahaz greatly outnumbered those like Hezekiah and Josiah. Absolute power tends to absolutely corrupt.

If we feel uncomfortable associating God with kingship, should we start thinking about him as our President? This creates more problems than it solves. For one thing, in some parts of the world a person called "president" can be a dictator, so we gain nothing. For another, the idea of a democratically elected president fails to do justice to the absolute nature of God's sovereignty. Biblical Israel was not a democracy, it was a theocracy.

If anything, God wields far greater power than any human totalitarian regime. Even the technologically sophisticated "Big Brother" superstate of George Orwell's *1984* would covet the Lord's powers of surveillance (e.g. Num. 12:2, Ps. 94:11, 139:1—24, Luke 16:15) and capability to instantly destroy his enemies and detractors (Gen. 19, Num. 16, 25).

So why do we pray, "your *kingdom* come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, emphasis supplied)? Do we really want his sovereignty here, over our lives, with the same total power that he wields in heaven (cf. Isa. 6, Dan. 7:9—10, Rev. 4—5)? Only if we believe the first part of the same prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9). The fact that he is our Father means that he has a vested interest in us as members of his royal

family (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)! Moreover, his name is holy. Since his name represents his character and a holy character is one of love (e.g., Lev. 19:2, 18, 1 Thess. 3:12—13), he is the God of love (1 John 4:8). We can feel safe and happy with him only because the absoluteness of his love matches that of his power.

Like the Israelite chieftains, who brought gifts to the Lord at the sanctuary (Num. 7), and the Magi, who paid rich homage to the newborn King (Matt. 2:11), we have the privilege of joyfully acknowledging him with tangible gifts as well as prayers, songs, and testimonies. When modern people initiate the use of a church and provide it with a van, kitchen utensils, and food for God's work in their community, they are following in the worthy footsteps of Nahshon, Nethanel, Eliab, and their fellow leaders.

1. R. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, forthcoming), ch. 6.

2. Cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 53.

3. Rashi on Gen. 14:14, Deut. 20:5, see S. C. Reif, "Dedicated to "[]?," *VT* 22 (1972): 495—501.

4. On this problem, see P. J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5, Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 85—87.

5. Cf. 1 Kings 4:7, 5:13 of King Solomon's requirements for resources. However, notice that he did homage to the Lord by providing offerings to initiate the temple that he built (1 Kings 8:62—64). In a sense the human king replaced the tribal chieftains (see also Ezek. 45:17).

6. S. Richards, ed., *Best Plays of the Sixties* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 252.

Numbers 8

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Speak to Aaron and say to him,
‘When you set up the seven lamps, they are to light the area in front of
the lampstand.'” 3Aaron did so, he set up the lamps so that they faced
forward on the lampstand, just as the LORD commanded Moses. 4This
is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold—
from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the
pattern the LORD had shown Moses.

5The LORD said to Moses: 6“Take the Levites from among the other
Israelites and make them ceremonially clean. 7To purify them, do this:
Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them, then have them shave their
whole bodies and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves. 8Have
them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with
oil, then you are to take a second young bull for a sin offering. 9Bring
the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole
Israelite community. 10You are to bring the Levites before the LORD,
and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. “Aaron is to present
the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the Israelites, so
that they may be ready to do the work of the LORD.

12“After the Levites lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, use the
one for a sin offering to the LORD and the other for a burnt offering, to
make atonement for the Levites. 13Have the Levites stand in front of
Aaron and his sons and then present them as a wave offering to the
LORD. 14In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other
Israelites, and the Levites will be mine.

15“After you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave
offering, they are to come to do their work at the Tent of Meeting.
16They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to me. I have

taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. [17]Every firstborn male in Israel, whether man or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. [18]And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. [19]Of all the Israelites, I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to do the work at the Tent of Meeting on behalf of the Israelites and to make atonement for them so that no plague will strike the Israelites when they go near the sanctuary."

[20]Moses, Aaron and the whole Israelite community did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses. [21]The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD and made atonement for them to purify them. "After that, the Levites came to do their work at the Tent of Meeting under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses.

[23]The LORD said to Moses, [24]"This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, [25]but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. [26]They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites."

Original Meaning

FORWARD LIGHTING. It is not enough to have light. You also need direction. So the detachable lamps in the tabernacle must be set up so that their light is directed in front of the lampstand, that is, into the central area of the outer sanctum and illuminating the golden table and incense altar (8:1—4).

This brief passage, where the tabernacle lamps are mentioned for the last time in the Pentateuch, repeats the divine instruction in Exodus 25:37, where the lamps appear for the first time. Numbers 8:3 provides the only new information: Aaron complies with the instruction after inauguration of the sanctuary, when he can enter the sacred tent (cf. Lev. 9:23). Notice that Numbers 8:1— 4 adds to the links between this part of the book of Numbers and earlier information relating to the sanctuary (see Original Meaning section of Num. 7).

Numbers 8:1—4 logically follows 7:89, which reports fulfillment of the Lord's promise to speak with Moses from between the cherubim over the ark of the covenant (cf. Ex. 25:22). This arrangement gives the impression that the first command God gave Moses in this way was reiteration of the prescription for placement of the lamps. In any case, Numbers 7—8 refers to initiation of all three major portions of the sanctuary: the outer altar (7:10— 88), the inner sanctum (v. 89), and the outer sanctum (8:1 —4).

Separating the Levite work force. Not surprisingly, before the Levites can begin their sacred duties of transporting the sanctuary and its sancta (8:5—19, cf. ch. 4), they must be ritually purified and set apart from the other Israelites. First, Moses must sprinkle "the water of cleansing on them, then have them shave their whole bodies [cf. Lev. 14:8—9] and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves" (Num. 8:7).

Sprinkling "water of cleansing/purification" (mey *hatta't)*, that is, "water of lustration" (mey *niddah)* that includes ashes of the red cow purification offering *(hatt'* 19:9), remedies any corpse contamination that the Levites may have incurred (cf. 19:11—20). Diametrically opposed to holiness/life, this kind of severe impurity defiles the sanctuary even from a distance if it is not removed (19:13, 20).

Unlike the ordination of the priests (cf. Lev. 8), who are uniquely qualified to directly contact the sancta, the authorization service for the Levites does not

include consecration with anointing oil. Members of the Israelite community are to lay their hands on the Levites, presumably to designate them as the ones who will perform the work of the sanctuary as representatives of the community (Num. 8:9—11). Then Aaron is to dedicate the Levites as an "elevation offering" *(tenupah)* before the Lord from the Israelites (8:11). Since Aaron cannot literally elevate the Levites as he does portions of a sacrificial animal (cf. Lev. 9:21), this "ritual must be presumed to have been executed only in symbolic form."[1] As part of the service, the Levites are also to receive expiation *(kipper)* through the sacrifice of two bulls as a purification-burnt offering pair (Num. 8:12, cf. 8:8).

Verses 14—19 explain the work of the Levites at the sanctuary: They belong to the Lord, to serve the priests in place of the firstborn males of all the other tribes (cf. 3:6—9, 12—13, 41, 45). The Levites are to do the work of the sanctuary on behalf of the rest of the Israelites and are to ransom *(kipper)* them so that no plague will strike the community if some Israelites approach (Qal of ngs, synonym of qrb) the sanctuary, that is, cross boundaries of authorized access (cf. Qal of *qrb*—1:51, 3:10, 38, 18:7).[2]

We think of this kind of ransom for life as accomplished through animal sacrifice (Lev. 17:11) or the half shekel ransom at the time of a census (Ex. 30:11—16). In fact, by leaning their hands on the Levites and "elevating" them (see above), the Israelites and Aaron, respectively, treat the Levites as if they are a corporate sacrificial victim. Although they are not offered on the Lord's altar, they are responsible for guarding the sanctuary against encroachment, literally with their lives. If they fail to stop this evil by putting the offender(s) to death (Num. 1:51, etc., see above), they will bear the culpability (cf. 18:23), but the other Israelites will be spared. Thus "the Levites are ransom for Israel, a lightning rod to attract God's wrath upon themselves whenever an Israelite has encroached upon the sancta."[3]

Expiation *(kipper)* for the Levites by means of a purification offering, supplemented by a burnt offering (cf. Num. 8:12), purifies (Piel of *thr) them* (v. 21), that is, the *offerers,* not part of the sanctuary.[4] Is this cleansing accomplished by the purification offering rather than the other procedures? After all, the Piel of *th r* in verse 21 forms an inclusio with verses 6—7, at the beginning of the divine instructions to Moses for purification of the Levites: "Take the Levites from among the other Israelites and make them ceremonially clean [Piel of *th*r]. To purify [Piel of *th*r] them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them…."[5] However, at the end of verse 21, "to purify [Piel of *thr]* them" states the purpose of the sacrifices performed by Aaron, not the sprinkling of water by Moses.[6]

The end of Numbers 8 specifies the ages of men included in the Levite work force: twenty-five to fifty (8:23—26). After the age of fifty a Levite is to retire from the strenuous work of moving the sanctuary, but he can still assist with guard duty (root smr, “guard", 8:26, cf. 3:7). This passage is at variance with chapter 4 (vv. 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47—seven times), where the census of the Levite work force ranges from thirty to fifty years of age. The rabbis attempted to harmonize by supposing that the first five years (i.e., ages 25— 30) constituted a training period.[7] When the sanctuary later found a permanent resting place at Jerusalem and the Levites’ job description changed from carrying it to less rigorous duties at the temple, David instructed that they be counted from age twenty, with no upper age limit (1 Chron. 23:24—27, cf. Ezra 3:8, 2 Chron. 31:17).[8]

Bridging Contexts

THE LIGHT OF GOD. Numbers 8:1—4 tells us that the magnificent golden lampstand in the sanctuary is not simply an ornament and its ritual is not merely for the sake of going through the motions. The lamps function as the tabernacle's source of light. As such, they must be aimed the right way.

Aside from the practical benefit of supplying light for the priests to properly perform their ritual duties at the incense altar and the golden table, the lamps are the Lord's light—not that he needs a human source of light, but to symbolize the fact that the tabernacle is his residence and Somebody is home! Furthermore, his light stays on all night, from evening until morning (Ex. 27:21, Lev. 24:3). So the Lord is awake all night. He is not suffering from insomnia, rather, he is simply not a human being who requires sleep. As Psalm 121:4 puts it: "See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" (NJPS).

It was a tremendous boon for Israel to have a divine Protector who was vigilant twenty-four hours a day every day of the year. Any child or adult could wake up anytime in the night, look toward the tabernacle, and be strangely warmed by the comforting glow from God's lamps under the Shekinah cloud that shone like fire from evening until morning (Num. 9:15). "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the circling gloom, Lead Thou me on!"[9]

Just as the Lord himself was the original Source of light at Creation and established the sun, moon, and stars to provide regular day and night cycles of light from the sky (Gen. 1:3—5, 14—19), he is the Source of light in the cloud over the tabernacle and ordains his lamps to regularly illuminate it. Although darkness prevails during the night, the Creator has provided "pilot lights" to give assurance that full light will appear in the morning, when he will supply "daily bread," represented by the "bread of the Presence" on the golden table in the sanctuary (see comments on Lev. 24:5—9).

"Light" from God is a powerful biblical metaphor for his protection and guidance: "You are my lamp, O LORD, the LORD turns my darkness into light" (2 Sam. 22:29). "How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness!" (Job 29:2—3). "You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning, my God turns my darkness into light" (Ps. 18:28). In these passages the Lord

supplies “light” through the “darkness” of life in several ways: He is the “lamp” (2 Samuel), has the “lamp” (Job), and sustains the human “lamp” (Psalms and Proverbs).[10]

Once God’s “light” comes to represent his guidance, it is natural for it to symbolize his word/communication, by which he directs human beings: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105, cf. Prov. 6:23, 2 Peter 1:19).

For the Israelite camp in the desert, the connection between God’s light and his “word” is literal. Movements of the divine glory cloud—settling on the tabernacle or rising from it—guide their journeys (Num. 9:15—23), and the Lord communicates with Moses from between the cherubim over the ark (7:89), where his glorious Presence is enthroned (1 Sam. 4:4, 6:2).

Thus far we have found God’s light connected to his creatorship and his word. John 1:3—5, 14 applies this cluster of concepts to Christ:

> Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it….
>
> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us….

Through his incarnation, the divine Word (Christ) came to dwell on earth (John 1:14), just as the ancient Israelite tabernacle was for God to live among his people (Ex. 25:8). This is why Christ could speak of himself as a temple (John 2:19—22).

Just as light came from the Israelite tabernacle, Christ spoke of himself as “the light of the world” and promised, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Just as the divine “lamp” (2 Sam. 22:29) sustains the human “lamp” (Ps. 18:28, see above), Christ’s holy life, which is in him rather than borrowed and is “the light of men” (John 1:4), supplies human beings with “the light of life.”

This is not only “light” for guidance and safety in the present life, but light that provides more lasting life, which overcomes the darkness of mortality (cf. Christ as water and bread of eternal life in John 4:14, 6:51). For human beings to have an eternal light of life, they must have a continuous supply of power. Even today our lights depend on a constant flow of electricity. God’s oil lamps on the golden lampstand in the Israelite tabernacle required a regular supply of olive oil from the Israelites (Lev. 24:2—4), and they had to be refilled every day. If the priests failed to maintain them in this way, they would go out (cf. Matt. 25:1—13). To adapt an old beverage commercial, when you’re out of oil, you’re out of

light!

The vision of Zechariah 4 presents the solution to the problem of maintaining unfailing “light”:

> He asked me, “What do you see?”
>
> I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”
>
> I asked the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?”
>
> He answered, “Do you not know what these are?”
>
> “No, my lord,” I replied.
>
> So he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

As was in the tabernacle, Zechariah sees a lampstand with seven lamps. But in this vision, olive trees on either side directly and reliably provide a continuous flow of oil to the lamps (cf. Zech. 4:11 — 12). The meaning is: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” (4:6). So Zechariah associates continuous lamplight with God’s Spirit. So does John, when he describes God’s heavenly temple: “Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5).

According to the end of the Bible, night itself will become history (Rev. 21:25, 22:5), eternal day will dawn, and “pilot lights” will be eclipsed and obsolete (21:23, 22:5). There is no need for a temple in the new Jerusalem “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (21:22). Nor does the city need illumination from the sun or moon, “for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (21:23). Dwelling there will be like living behind the veil with the Lord in the awesome Most Holy Place. Not by coincidence, the dimensions of the city form a perfect cube (Rev. 21:16), as did the dimensions of the Israelite inner sanctum (1 Kings 6:20).[11]

Contemporary Significance

SHINING THE RIGHT direction. The idea of Zechariah 4 that God's Spirit is a constant, dependable source of "light" accords with the New Testament role of the Spirit in providing illumination, teaching, and guidance on behalf of Christ (John 14:25—26, 16:7—15) and power to witness for him (Acts 1:8). Acts 2 records the commencement of Christ's promise of power from the Spirit: On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the Christian believers, visibly manifested in the form of tongues of fire and enabling them to speak in other tongues/languages (2:1—4). Whereas light from flames in lamps had earlier metaphorically represented God's Word (see above), now his Spirit gave flames that empowered literal transmission of his Word.

Each Christian, filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4), was like a lamp shining forth with light in the darkness, a sign of "daybreak" ahead! Every church congregation was like a golden lampstand, faithfully tended by Christ as High Priest (Rev. 1:12—20, cf. 2:1—5). Although light and "voltage" come from above and there is no longer a need to maintain literal lamps with olive oil, Christians have a role to play by staying "plugged in" to their divine Source. If they become "unplugged" by forsaking their "first love," contrary to the Spirit, who freely pours love into human hearts (Rom. 5:5), they will lose their light (Rev. 2:4—5).

When Christians have light, they should let it out where it will do the most good. If you walk down the trail from Vernal Falls in Yosemite National Park at night and you have a flashlight but others don't, you shine it where it can guide their feet as well as your own. Likewise, it is not enough to have spiritual or intellectual illumination. It must be focused in a direction that is beneficial to others. History is littered with the bleaching bones of unfortunate folk who failed to receive vital direction from those who have had access to "light."

Just as the lamps in the tabernacle had to be pointed forward into the open rather than back into the corner (Num. 8:1—4), Jesus said (Matt. 5:14—16):

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your

> light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Here the “light” refers to “good deeds,” the point of which is not legalism or glorification of human piety, but showing the way to the divine Source of all that is in harmony with a truly loving way of life. Similarly, just before his arrest, Jesus prayed for his disciples and future generations of believers “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). Loving unity of this magnitude, which can only come from God, cannot be hidden. It is a “tracer” that unerringly leads back to the Heart of the universe.

Deacons. Just as Levites were specially set apart to do tasks for the benefit of the priests and the Israelite community (Num. 3:6—7, 8:5—22), deacons were set apart to serve the Christian community by doing administrative tasks so that the apostles could be free for spiritual leadership (Acts 6:1—6), devoting themselves “to prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:4). Just as the dedication of Levites involved laying hands on them before the Lord and standing them before the priests (Num. 8:10, 13), when the early church chose deacons, “they presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6).[12]

Of course, there are important differences between Levites and deacons. Setting the deacons apart included prayer but not ritual purification, an “elevation offering,” or animal sacrifices (see Num. 8). More significantly, the deacons were dedicated to assist apostles by dealing with matters such as daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1), not to help priests by taking care of the inffrastructure for ritual worship at a sanctuary/temple.

The dedications of Levites and deacons reinforce the concept that seemingly mundane tasks for the Lord and his community are sacred. Both were especially chosen for particular reasons (Ex. 32:25—29, Acts 6:3, 5), and their jobs were important enough to demand divine qualification. Deacons were chosen because they were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3, cf. 6:5— “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”). So it is not so surprising that in Acts 7 and 8 we find two deacons—Stephen and Philip—to be highly effective evangelists in addition to their practical administrative work. While administration is not as directly spiritual in nature, it too is sacred and must be done well because it is service for the Lord’s holy community, who form “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9).

Unlike the Levites, the early Christian deacons did not encounter the mortal peril of close proximity to most sacred objects. However, they were commissioned to deal with danger of a different sort: dissension between social

groups that threatened to rend the unity of the infant church (Acts 6:1). Rather than bringing all members of their communities into harm's way, the Israelites and Christians designated special forces (Levites and deacons, respectively) to carry out hazardous missions.

Modern communities deploy qualified persons, who know what they are doing, to perform dangerous tasks—such as firefighting, working in nuclear reactors, and combating terrorism—effectively and as safely as possible. A church community can also have its dangers, and we generally think of the pastor as the one qualified and paid to address them. However, social and administrative problems can drain a pastor's time and energy so that he or she has little left for crucial spiritual leadership. Why not return to the early Christian solution by resuscitating the original job description of deacons? They were administrators and social conflict managers, not simply ushers. As such, they freed spiritual leaders to spiritually lead. Partly as a result of this, the church experienced explosive growth.

1. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 62.
2. Ibid., 342—43.
3. Ibid., 371, cf. 369—70.
4. See Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 4.
5. Pointed out to me by J. H. Walton of Wheaton College.
6. For preposition *l* + infinitive construct to express purpose, see GKC §114g. An alternate reading, "and Aaron effected purgation on their behalf, purifying them" (cf. GKC §114o), would have the same net effect.
7. See, e.g., *t. Seqal.* 3:26, *SipreNumbers* 62.
8. Compare 1 Chron. 23:3, where the starting age is thirty, with no upper limit.
9. Cardinal John Henry Newman, in R. Atwan & L. Wieder, eds., *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by The Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 125.
10. For human beings as "lamps" or having metaphorical "lamps," cf., e.g., 2 Sam. 21:17, 1 Kings 11:36, Job 21:17, Ps. 132:17, Prov. 13:9, 20:20, 24:20.
11. Sanctuary class lecture, Jon Paulien, Andrews University, 2002.
12. Cf. the Code of Justinian, according to which a man could not become a Christian deacon before the age of twenty-five (M. C. Mirow and K. A. Kelley, "Laws on Religion from the *Theodosian* and *Justinianic Codes,"* in R. Valantasis, ed., *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* [PRR,

Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000], 267—68), the same age at which an ancient Levite could go on active duty (Num. 8:24).

Numbers 9

THE LORD SPOKE to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month
of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, 2"Have the
Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. 3Celebrate it at
the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in
accordance with all its rules and regulations."

4So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, 5and they did
so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first
month. The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded
Moses.

6But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day
because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So
they came to Moses and Aaron that same day 7and said to Moses, "We
have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be
kept from presenting the LORD'S offering with the other Israelites at the
appointed time?"

8Moses answered them, "Wait until I find out what the LORD
commands concerning you."

9Then the LORD said to Moses, 10"Tell the Israelites: 'When any of
you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are
away on a journey, they may still celebrate the LORD'S Passover. "They
are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at
twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and
bitter herbs. 12They must not leave any of it till morning or break any
of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all
the regulations. 13But if a man who is ceremonially clean and not on a
journey fails to celebrate the Passover, that person must be cut off
from his people because he did not present the LORD'S offering at the
appointed time. That man will bear the consequences of his sin.

14“'An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’S
Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You
must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born.'”
15on the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up,
the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the
tabernacle looked like fire. 16That is how it continued to be; the cloud
covered it, and at night it looked like fire. 17Whenever the cloud lifted
from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled,
the Israelites encamped. 18At the LORD’S command the Israelites set
out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed
over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. 19When the cloud
remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the
LORD’S order and did not set out. 20Sometimes the cloud was over the
tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD’S command they would
encamp, and then at his command they would set out. 21Sometimes the
cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the
morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud
lifted, they set out. 22Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for
two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and
not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. 23At the LORD’S
command they encamped, and at the LORD’S command they set out.
They obeyed the LORD’S order, in accordance with his command
through Moses.

Original Meaning

THE DRAMA OF DELIVERANCE is continuing. The Israelites are about to exit the Mount Sinai region and resume their journey toward the Promised Land (Num. 10). Numbers 9 tells how God reminds the Israelites to celebrate Passover (9:1—5) and makes provision for those who are ritually impure to observe it later (9:9—14), and then describes how the Lord's cloud guides the people in their journeys (9:15—23). At first glance, the topics of Passover and the divine cloud seem unrelated to each other, but we must remember their connection in the book of Exodus: The Lord commanded Passover, the Israelites left Egypt, and God in his cloud guided and protected them (Ex. 12—14).

Numbers 9:6 introduces a problem that called for new instruction: Some Israelites are not able to celebrate Passover at the proper time because they have become ritually impure from a corpse *(nepes ʾadam,* lit., "the [dead] person of a human being").[1] Celebrating the Passover involves eating a holy sacrifice. But the Israelites are strictly forbidden to eat sacrificial food while in a state of ritual impurity (Lev. 7:20—21).

It is clear that the impure Israelites have not arranged to be disqualified from Passover so that they can skip it. Rather, they approach Moses and Aaron right away to express frustration that extenuating circumstances beyond their control, which we would call "a death in the family," are preventing them from joining the rest of the people in the privilege of presenting the Lord's offering (Num. 9:6—7). Theirs is a refreshing kind of complaint!

The Lord's solution is to establish an ongoing second date for Passover observance, a month later on the fourteenth day of the second month, for those prevented by corpse contamination from celebrating it at the normal time (9:8—12). To this concession, he graciously adds its application to individuals who might be away on long journeys at the usual time of the festival in the first month (9:10). Presumably this will go into effect when the Israelites are settled in Canaan.

What about persons with impurities other than corpse contamination, who would also be barred from eating sacrificial food (Lev. 7:20—21)? The text does not say. The rabbis, however, understand corpse contamination in Numbers 9:10

to represent all kinds of ritual impurities (cf. 2 Chron. 30:3, 17—20).[2]

Numbers 9:15—23 continues the transition to resumption of the desert journey (see above) by reiterating the behavior of the divine cloud (cf. Ex. 40:34—38). Its movements prompt the Israelites to set out or to camp.

Numbers 9 appears to be out of chronological sequence. Verse 1 puts God's reminder regarding Passover "in the *first month* of the second year after they came out of Egypt" (emphasis supplied). This must be early in the first month, before the Israelites are to celebrate the festival on the fourteenth day of this month (9:3). So the Lord gives this reminder before his command in chapter 1 to carry out a military census, which he issues "on the *first day of the second month* of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt" (1:1, emphasis supplied). Why this reversal?

The problem vanishes when we take into account the content of the new legislation in chapter 9: The second Passover on the *fourteenth day of the second month* is to be observed after the census has begun and just before the Israelites leave Mount Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month (10:11).[3]

Bridging Contexts

STORIES AND LAWS. Leviticus and Numbers record four occasions when Moses does not know what to do with people and the Lord answers his questions.[4] The first instance concerned the problem of what to do with a blasphemer, that is, whether God would punish him directly or whether the Israelites would do the job (Lev. 24:10—16, 23). The second is the one here in Numbers 9:6—13. The third is the matter of how to punish a man caught gathering wood on Sabbath (15:32—36). The final one is the question of whether women can inherit property in the absence of male heirs (27:1—11).

In each case, God's oracular decision sets a precedent for future application. In three of these instances (not including the wood-gatherer), the Lord places the narrative case within the context of new legislation that transcends the scope of the issue at hand. In other words, like many a human teacher, he uses a question as an opportunity to provide a larger answer.[5]

New law also comes after narrative in Leviticus 10:1—11, where the tragedy of Nadab and Abihu is followed by the rule that priests must not drink alcoholic beverages when they enter the sacred tent.[6] However, unlike the four passages mentioned above, the Lord addresses this prohibition to Aaron, not to Moses, and the law is not tightly connected to the narrative event by resolving uncertainty regarding what to do with the individuals featured in the story.

Although only a few portions of Numbers contain narrative and law dealing with the same event, this book is notable for its alternation between the two genres,[7] which emphasizes that law "is inextricably bound to narrative— that is, the set of circumstances that engender it."[8] Laws are also linked to narratives in the sense that they (the former) are intended to guide responses to future circumstances. Furthermore, in addition to providing law with context and purpose, story is like law in that it can have a moral.[9] So the two kinds of literary vehicles can effectively cooperate within a rhetorical strategy directed toward a common goal.[10]

Divine cloud. The Lord's cloud first appears in Exodus 13:21, where he went ahead of the Israelites "in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or

night” (cf. 13:22). In addition to providing guidance and illumination, God in his cloud protected them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (14:19, 20, 24).

Later the Lord regularly came in the pillar of cloud to speak with Moses at a “tent of meeting” outside the Israelite camp, before the tabernacle was constructed (33:7—10). When the sanctuary was built and in operation, God appeared in the cloud above the ark cover in the Most Holy Place. Not even the high priest could enter behind the veil, except in a special ritual on the Day of Atonement, and then only with a protective smokescreen of incense (Lev. 16:2, 12—13).[11]

The divine cloud could be intimidating to those outside the tabernacle. When the Lord heard the Israelites grumbling, he showed some of his glory from the cloud to vividly remind them of his awesome Presence (Ex. 16:9— 12). Manifestations of God’s glory coincided with his lethal anger when the Israelites talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10) and when Korah gathered his followers in opposition to Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the sanctuary (16:19, cf. 16:42).

In the pillar of cloud that enshrouded the divine majesty, thereby protecting the Israelites from his glory, the Lord expressed his will and his attitudes toward his people. As long as they were in harmony with him, “No fear!” But if they rebelled, “Watch out!”

Just as God’s lamps illuminated the tabernacle from the inside (Num. 8:1—4), the divine cloud atop the Most Holy Place glowed like fire from evening until morning (9:15). With that kind of “night light,” there was no reason to be afraid of the dark! Anyone could look up in the cool night air and be assured by the same kind of incandescent radiance that Moses was privileged to encounter at the burning bush (Ex. 3).

Contemporary Significance

TEACHING STYLE. IN Numbers 9:1 — 14 we see several aspects of God's character at work. (1) He takes the trouble to remind the Israelites that Passover is coming up again. (2) He is flexible in his requirement to observe the festival, bending the religious calendar for those who are stuck in a dilemma. (3) He is generous and farsighted, going beyond the immediate need by also providing for people on long trips to celebrate Passover at the later date. (4) He is economical, setting up ongoing rules as answers to similar questions in the future. (5) He is not susceptible to manipulation, but emphasizes that exceptions apply only to those who actually need them. (6) He allows guests to participate, as long as they follow the same rules as everyone else.

In short, the Lord sounds like a wise and well-balanced teacher! He is caring, recognizing the weaknesses (including forgetfulness) and challenging circumstances of his "students." He is reasonable and fair, yet firm about extending deadlines listed in his "syllabus." He foresees potential problems and systematically preempts them in advance. Finally, he lets "auditors" experience the "class" if they are serious about it and do not disrupt things by irregular behavior. We already know from Exodus, Leviticus, and the earlier chapters of Numbers that the Lord's "syllabus" and "classroom" are well organized. But here in Numbers 9 we learn more about his effective "teaching style," which will encourage his "students" to remain committed to his "class."

Rather than simply congratulating God and assuring him that we will vote for him to receive "tenure," we have the challenge and opportunity to emulate him within our respective spheres of influence. Whether we are raising our own children, teaching, ministering, administrating, interacting with others at work, or socializing, we would do well to follow God's model. Are we considerate, flexible, reasonable, fair, patient, far-sighted, generous, organized, economical, and firm as he is? Do we give second chances, as he granted a second Passover to those impure or travelling, and as he extends another opportunity for the redemption that the Passover symbolized to those whose life journeys have taken them far away from home (cf. the prodigal son in Luke 15:11 —24)?[12] Or are we the opposite in some of these areas, perhaps trying to play "god" in a more demanding and arbitrary way than "God" himself? How can learning to follow

God's example in specific situations improve our lives and the lives of those around us?

Letting the Shekinah lead. For the Israelites to be with God's resident Presence, called "Shekinah" in rabbinic Hebrew, they must move with him. It is no use lingering to venerate the spot where he has been. Nor is it worthwhile trying to guess where he may go next and running ahead to get there first. Often he gives no reason for what he does. The important thing is to know where his cloud is and to follow it.

God's leadership calls for readiness to move at any time, and also patience to stay put until he directs otherwise. For an individual who wants to set his or her own agenda, this arrangement can be intensely irritating and unsettling.

But it is fine for someone who wants to be with God more than anything else. Such a person can feel content, like a baby carried by a parent, unworried about the specifics of the route as long as Mama or Papa is there.

It is not that divine leading is a shortcut to do away with decisions and risks. "Indeed, God wants us to develop good judgment, and there is no way to develop it apart from a process that involves choices and risks."[13] But his guidance serves as a Global Positioning System, a dynamic reference point and framework for navigating the challenges of the way.

The Lord doesn't merely give his people a detailed map of their "journey" that shows when they will reach "rest stops," "filling stations," and their final destination. He himself is their map. Henry Blackaby illustrates this concept:

> For 12 years I pastored in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. One day a farmer said to me, "Henry, come out and visit with me at my farm." His directions went something like this: "Go a quarter mile past the edge of the city and you will see a big red barn on your left. Go to the next road and turn to your left. Take that road for three-quarters of a mile. You'll see a tree. Go right for about four miles, and then you will see a big rock…." I wrote all of this down, and one day I got there!
>
> The next time I went to the farmer's house, the farmer was with me. Since there was more than one way to get to his house, he could have taken me any way he wanted to. This time I didn't need the instructions I had written down. You see, he was my "map." What did I have to do? I simply had to listen to him. Every time he said, "Turn," I did just what he said. He took me a way I had never been. I probably couldn't retrace that route on my own. The farmer was my "map." He knew the way.[14]

To avoid getting lost, we can find out where God is leading and follow him.

Although we have no visible divine cloud to follow, we can discern his will through a combination of avenues, such as his Spirit, our consciences, the Bible, Providence, and balanced counsel from mature believers. “Even when His will doesn’t make sense from your human perspective, your obedience will reveal that His will was right.”[15]

1. Cf. *nepes met* (“dead person,” NASB) in Lev. 21:11, Num. 6:6.
2. *t. Pesah* 8:1.
3. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 67.
4. On this literary pattern, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 98—102.
5. Cf. R. Westbrook, “Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes,” *RB* 92 (1985): 261—64. On the dynamic relation between sin and law, in which sin creates the need for additional expressions of law to control human behavior, see, e.g., J. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 312—13.
6. Cf. J. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4, Dallas: Word, 1992), 406.
7. See Milgrom, *Numbers,* xv-xvi, Douglas, *In the Wilderness,* 102—4, 117.
8. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27* (AB 3B, New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2102.
9. R. Cover, “*Nomos* and Narrative,” *HLR* 97 (1983): 4—5.
10. Watts, *Reading Law,* 32—60.
11. Cf. the thick cloud on Mount Sinai that veiled the divine glory (Ex. 19:9, 16, 24:15, 16, 18, 34:5).
12. Cf. E. Feldman, “The Second *Pesah:* Mitzvah As Paradigm,” *Tradition* 24 (1989): 43.
13. J. Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 142.
14. H. T. Blackaby and C. V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 20—21.
15. Ibid., 15.

Numbers 10

THE LORD SAID to Moses: 2“Make two trumpets of hammered
silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having
the camps set out. 3When both are sounded, the whole community is to
assemble before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 4If only
one is sounded, the leaders—the heads of the clans of Israel—are to
assemble before you. 5When a trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes
camping on the east are to set out. 6At the sounding of a second blast,
the camps on the south are to set out. The blast will be the signal for
setting out. 7To gather the assembly, blow the trumpets, but not with
the same signal.

8“The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to
be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. 9When you
go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing
you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by
the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies. 10Also at your
times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals—
you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship
offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am
the LORD your God.”

11On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the
cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. 12Then the
Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to
place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran. 13They set
out, this first time, at the LORD’S command through Moses.

14The divisions of the camp of Judah went first, under their
standard. Nahshon son of Amminadab was in command. 15Nethanel
son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of Issachar, 16and Eliab

son of Helon was over the division of the tribe of Zebulun. [17]Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, set out.

[18]The divisions of the camp of Reuben went next, under their standard. Elizur son of Shedeur was in command. [19]She-lumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe of Simeon, [20]and Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the tribe of Gad. [21]Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. The tabernacle was to be set up before they arrived.

[22]The divisions of the camp of Ephraim went next, under their standard. Elishama son of Ammihud was in command. “Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of Manasseh, [24]and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of the tribe of Benjamin.

[25]Finally, as the rear guard for all the units, the divisions of the camp of Dan set out, under their standard. Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was in command. [26]Pagiel son of Ocran was over the division of the tribe of Asher, [27]and Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali. [28]This was the order of march for the Israelite divisions as they set out.

[29]Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, “We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel.”

[30]He answered, “No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people.”

[31]But Moses said, “Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes. [32]If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us.”

[33]So they set out from the mountain of the LORD and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. [34]The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

[35]Whenever the ark set out, Moses said,

> “Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may
> your foes flee before you.”

[36]Whenever it came to rest, he said,

“Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel.”

Original Meaning

TRUMPET SIGNALS. When the divine cloud over the tabernacle rises from its resting place, the Israelites are supposed to get ready for travel (Num. 9:17). But what if people are inside their tents and do not see the movement of the cloud? No worries! As with other people in the ancient world (e.g., Egyptians, Roman armies), signal sounds get their attention.

Two signal trumpets of silver are to be blown by the priests at the sanctuary in order to assemble the people or to announce the break of camp (10:1—8). "Headquarters" are always guarded by priests, who do notice movements of the cloud, and from this central location the trumpet blasts can be heard throughout the camp.

Different types of trumpet blasts signal a variety of activities, to which a wide range of emotions are associated. Variables in trumpet calls include (1) one or two trumpets, (2) the kind of blast: long (Qal of *tq')* or short *(teru'ah* or Hiphil of *rw'),*[1] and (3) the number of blasts.

Signal blasts included the following:

Assemble at sanctuary	*long on 2 trumpets:* community assembles at sanctuary court (10:3, 7) *long on 1 trumpet:* chieftains assemble at sanctuary court (10:4)
Break camp for travel	*1st short:* tribes camping east of sanctuary set out (10:5) *2d short:* tribes camping south of sanctuary set out (10:6) *3rd short:* tribes camping west of sanctuary set out (understood; LXX 10:6; cf. 2:24; 10:22) *4th short:* tribes camping north of sanctuary set out (understood; LXX 10:6; cf. 2:31; 10:25)
Go to war	*short:* Israelites go to war in their land against oppressors (10:9)
Celebrate	*long:* Israelites celebrate religious joyful times, appointed festivals, new moons (10:10)

Notice that with regard to the distinction between the two kinds of trumpet

blasts, the order of presentation in the text is chiastic, optimistically ending with celebration:

long: assemble
short: break camp
short: go to war

long: celebrate

Unlike assembly and celebration (both long), breaking camp and going to war (both short) involve moving out. In fact, whenever the Israelite war camp went on the march, it was implicitly going to war. Use of the noun *teru'ah* or the corresponding Hiphil of *rw'* for short blasts to signal march/war is appropriate in view of the fact that the same Hebrew terminology can elsewhere denote a battle shout (e.g., Josh. 6:5, 10, 16, 20, Amos 1:14). To specify that the martial sound is produced on a trumpet, Numbers 10 must either mention the instrument (10:9) or use *tq'* before *teru'ah* as the generic term for sounding a trumpet (10:5—6).

on the march! Only twenty days after announcement of the military census (Num. 1:1), "the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony" (10:11). This is not a prescription for some future occasion, nor is it a drill. It is the real thing. After remaining for almost a year at Mount Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:1—2), the Israelites are actually setting out.

The departure from Mount Sinai toward the desert of Paran (Num. 10:12) is a major transition in the Israelites' experience. The Lord has kept them at Mount Sinai long enough to make them into a functioning nation so that they can be unified under his benevolent rule—"one nation under God"—and stay that way once they spread out in the Promised Land. Now they are ready to fulfill his dream and theirs!

As the Israelites are about to leave Mount Sinai, Moses urges "Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law" *(hoten)* to come with them (10:29). Hobab is a relative of Moses by marriage, but it is not clear whether the description "Moses' father-in-law" applies to him or to Reuel. In other words, is Hobab the father-in-law of Moses or his brother-in-law? In support of the former, Judges 4:11 speaks of "Hobab the father-in-law *[hoten]* of Moses" (NRSV, cf. 1:16). However, in support of the latter, Exodus 2:18 (cf. 2:21) refers to Moses' father-in-law as Reuel, who was the "priest of Midian" (2:16). In 3:1 and 18:1, Moses' father-in-law *(hoten)* and "priest of Midian" is called Jethro. Thus, in the book of Exodus, "Reuel" and "Jethro" are alternative names for the same man.

At least for the first three days of travel from Mount Sinai, the ark of the covenant goes before the Israelites "to find them a place to rest" (Num. 10:33). This indicates that unlike the rest of the tabernacle furniture (10:21, cf. 2:17), the ark precedes the entire column of Israelites. Perhaps the divine cloud that hovers over them (10:34), apparently for shade and protection, moves over the ark when it is time to halt (cf. 9:17). So the cloud and the ark may function together, rather than represent alternative traditions regarding divine guidance.[2]

Attached to the end of this chapter are two prayers that Moses pronounces, the first whenever the ark sets out and the second whenever it comes to rest (10:35—36).[3] The second prayer can be taken in any or all of three ways, depending on whether the Lord returns *to* the Israelite hosts, is Lord *of* the Israelite hosts, or *is* the hosts of Israel, that is, Israel's strength, as in the traditional expression "LORD of hosts" (e.g., 1 Sam. 1:3, 11, 4:4, 15:2): (lit.) "Return O LORD the myriads of thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:36). In translating this verse, the NIV, NASB, and NKJV have "to" (preposition understood), the NRSV has "of" (Heb. construct), and the NJPS has "you who are" (apposition).

Bridging Contexts

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET. In Leviticus 23:24 we found that there was to be a special reminder of God's martial sovereignty through short blasts *(teru'ah)* on the first day of the seventh month. Since the silver trumpets at the sanctuary were to be blown with long blasts (Qal of *tq')* on the first day of every month (Num. 10:10), the unique short blasts coincided with the seventh new moon trumpet signal of the year.

In Joshua 6 there are more connections between trumpets and the number seven. At the Lord's command (6:3—5), seven priests blowing *(tq')* seven horns went before the ark as the Israelites walked around the city of Jericho for six days (6:6—14). On the seventh day they circumambulated the city seven times in the same way. When the trumpets sounded at the seventh time around, Joshua commanded, the people shouted (Hiphil of *rw')* a great shout *(teru'ah),* and the city wall collapsed (6:15—16, 20).

The account of Jericho shows some differences from Numbers 10:9, where the priests are to blow short blasts (Hiphil of *rw')* on the silver sanctuary trumpets at the onset of war: (1) At Jericho the seven trumpets are made of animal horns rather than silver, (2) it is the people who produce a *teru'ah* by shouting, and (3) this is a battle of conquest rather than gaining deliverance from a foreign oppressor. Nevertheless, there are some striking similarities: (1) Priests blow the trumpets, showing that the event is sacred, (2) there is a *teru'ah* that commences battle, and (3) the *teru'ah* invokes aid from the divine Sovereign to overcome foreigners. In Joshua 6 the divine response is seismically and paradigmatically miraculous.

Seven trumpets appear in only one other place in the Bible: Revelation 8—11. Here seven trumpets blown by seven angels herald apocalyptic events. As in Leviticus 23:24 and Joshua 6:16, the trumpet blast at the seventh time is a special signal of divine sovereignty: "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever'" (Rev. 11:15). As in Numbers 10:9, the apocalyptic trumpet sounds the death knell of oppression against God's people (Rev. 11:18). As at Jericho, the blast announces that the Lord is taking over, but this time his impact is on a

cosmic as well as Richter scale (cf. 11:19).

Practicality and causality. Granted that Hobab was an experienced desert-dweller with the right kinds of connections to the people who controlled desert regions on the way to Canaan,[4] why does Moses need his guidance (Numbers 10:31) when the Israelites have the Lord's ark and cloud to perform the same function? Doesn't Moses fully trust God's ability to direct Israel? Milgrom resolves the paradox by pointing out a pattern of human and supernatural causality that runs through the desert and conquest accounts. For example, sending scouts to explore Canaan was initiated by God according to 13:2, but by the Israelites according to Deuteronomy 1:22. Later the walls of Jericho miraculously toppled when trumpets blew and the people shouted (Josh. 6), but spies also played a role by looking for weaknesses in the city (ch. 2).

> This "double causality" is also present in the Genesis narratives. Jacob's prosperity as a shepherd is attributed to both his cunning (Gen. 30:32ff.) and God's directives (31:10—12), and Joseph's enslavement in Egypt is attributed to his brothers' machinations (37:18ff.) and to divine design (45:5—8, 50:20).[5]

Milgrom attributes the double causality of guidance by the cloud and ark, on one hand, and by Hobab, on the other, to conflation of two traditions in the narrative. However, this is not the only possibility. Causality is a notoriously complex matter, even when the question of "Whodunit?" does not involve God.

When God is leading, prospering, protecting, and/or giving victory, he can participate and bring about his purposes providentially through human activity (cf. Gen. 45:5—8). Even when he provided a miracle at Jericho, he had the Israelites cooperate with him by entering and taking the city. Similarly, it appears that Moses saw Hobab's potential for enhancing the quality of Israel's desert experience and cooperation with the Lord by guiding some specifics within the overall framework of God's direction and/or giving the people confidence and ability to plan ahead by telling them what to expect (cf. Num. 13:17—20).

Contemporary Significance

COOPERATION WITH GOD. The concept that God's people benefit from cooperation with him runs through the Old Testament, from Noah's building an ark in which God saved him (Gen. 6—8), Abraham's defeat of a coalition of kings (ch. 14), the Israelites' conquest of Canaan, and the exploits of "judges" against foreign oppressors (e.g., Othniel, Ehud, Deborah-Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson),[6] to the victories of faithful Israelite kings (especially David).

Divine-human coordination also appears in the New Testament. Jesus had other people use their muscles to roll away the stone blocking the entrance to Lazarus' tomb rather than performing an unnecessary miracle to do the job (John 11:39, 41). He told his disciples to cast their nets on the other side of the boat rather than giving them fish where they were (21:6).

Why does the Lord have human beings do something, no matter how small, when he wants to do something amazing for them? Obviously it is not because he cannot do those things, and far more efficiently too. Rather, it is because human activity is an expression of faith.

What if Jesus' disciples had answered, "No way! We're tired and don't feel like going to the trouble of hauling our nets over to the other side of the boat." What if the mourners at Lazarus' tomb had responded, "Forget it! The man is already decomposing. Why should we open his grave just to take a whiff?" What if the Israelites had refused to shout at Jericho or to enter the city? What if Noah had replied, "Lord, can't you save me an easier way? Just think how much missionary work I could do in all that time and how many churches could be built with all that wood!"

What if the priests and Levites had decided not to blow trumpets, pack up, and move out when they saw the divine cloud move from over the tabernacle, choosing rather to stay at Mount Sinai and pray that God would levitate them all the way to the Promised Land? "Whoever prays *must work.* It is for power to work that prayer has such great promises."[7]

Not that human work substitutes for prayer or is the basis for success. The apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi: "Continue to work out your

salvation with fear and trembling, *for it is God who works* [or 'energizes,' another definition for the Gk. word *energeo] in you* to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12—13, emphasis supplied). Without the Lord, the Israelites could have packed, moved, and fought to the extent of their strength, ability, and wisdom, and they still would have failed to conquer Canaan.

Today most of us have no problem working. If anything, we tend to work too much, to the detriment of our health and families. So why don't we see God doing great things in our lives even more than we do? Perhaps we should pray more. Just putting in more time on our knees isn't the answer. To most fully experience divine power we need coordination between prayer and work, so that our efforts are directed and empowered where God sees and decrees that they will be most effective. To achieve our mission, we need a "transmission" that connects the divine "engine" to where the rubber hits the road.

Cooperation with God requires first learning what he wants and then doing it, so that our work cooperates with his. If our prayers are simply oneway monologues in which we speak to him without listening for his voice or his "trumpet" or looking for his "cloud," we miss opportunities for his direction to guide our work.

> One recalls Lily Tomlin's line in the play *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe:* "Why is it that when we speak to God we are said to be praying, but when God speaks to us we are said to be schizophrenic?" Why should God's end of the line be equipped with a receiver but no mouthpiece?[8]

When you are in a room with people of various administrative ranks, you can tell who the most important people are because they control the discussion and do most of the talking when it comes to shaping policy. Others generally listen, take notes, and nod in agreement. So why is it that when we pray to the Lord of the Universe, we often act as if we are more important than he?

> As long as we are going to pray to the God who spoke the creation into being, who communicated to prophets and priests and kings— and ordinary people, who wrote a thousand-page book we know as the Bible—and who refers to his Son as "the Word made flesh," then surely we accept the possibility that sometimes he may want to get in a word or two with us.[9]

Martin Luther understood the importance of allowing God to control the agendas of our prayers, and therefore of our lives:

If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.[10]

1. According to postbiblical tradition in *m. Ros Has.* 4:9.

2. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 80, lists three traditions "concerning the nature of Israel's divinely designated guide: a cloud-encased fire (Num. 9:15—23, 14:14, Deut. 1:33), the Ark (Num. 10:33, Josh. 3:3, 6, 11), and an angel (Ex. 14:19a, 23:20—23)."

3. Milgrom takes 10:35—36 as comprising a poetic unit that he calls "The Song of the Ark" (ibid., 81).

4. Cf. W. Dumbrell, "Midian—A Land or a League?" *VT* 25 (1975): 331.

5. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 79.

6. On divine-human cooperation in the book of Judges, see R. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1996), 39—40, 43, 51—52, 56, 71—73, 127—28.

7. A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springdale, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1981), 142.

8. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted,* 135.

9. Ibid., 150.

10. M. Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 30.

Numbers 11

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing
of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire
from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the
outskirts of the camp. 2When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed
to the LORD and the fire died down. 3So that place was called Taberah,
because fire from the LORD had burned among them.

4The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the
Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5We
remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers,
melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6But now we have lost our appetite;
we never see anything but this manna!"

7The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. 8The
people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a handmill or
crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes.
And it tasted like something made with olive oil. 9When the dew
settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

10Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the
entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses
was troubled. 11He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this
trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you
put the burden of all these people on me? 12Did I conceive all these
people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in
my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath
to their forefathers? 13Where can I get meat for all these people? They
keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14I cannot carry all these
people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15If this is how you
are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor

in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

16The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who
are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have
them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you.
17I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the
Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you
carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it
alone.

18"Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for
tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you
wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!"
Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. 19You will not
eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, 20but
for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe
it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have
wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"'"

21But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on
foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!'
22Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for
them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught
for them?"

23The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD'S arm too short? You will
now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

24So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said.
He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around
the Tent. 25Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with
him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the
seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but
they did not do so again.

26However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had
remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not
go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they
prophesied in the camp. 27A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad
and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

28Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke
up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"

29But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all

the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" [30]Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

[31]Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It brought them down all around the camp to about three feet above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction. [32]All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. [33]But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. [34]Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

[35]From Kibroth Hattaavah the people traveled to Hazeroth and stayed there.

Original Meaning

GROUSING. We have made it through ten chapters of the book of Numbers without hearing of anyone having a bad attitude. Even those who are frustrated because they cannot celebrate the Passover at the proper time only want to follow the Lord's instructions (9:6—7).

In 11:1, however, we hit a sour note that sounds like déjà vu all over again. Experiencing the discomforts of travel, the people ungratefully complain (Hithpolel of *'nn,* elsewhere only in Lam. 3:39) "in the hearing of the LORD," who is watching over them in his cloud *('anan,* cf. Num. 10:34). Whereas the divine cloud has been appearing like fire at night to protect the Israelites (9:15—16), now the Lord answers grumbling with destructive fire at the outskirts of the camp, reminiscent of the fire that consumed Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2). The text does not directly say what the fire consumes, but most likely some people are hurt.

The next episode is about the Lord's cafeteria menu, the staple of which is manna (Num. 11:4—6).[1] The disgruntled riffraff *('asapsup,* i.e., the "mixed multitude" who accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt, cf. Ex. 12:38) are the catalyst for complaining. Because the non-Israelites would have lived at the outskirts of the camp, outside the areas designated for the twelve tribes, the fact that the Lord struck that portion at Taberah (Num. 11:1) implies that the riffraff instigated the grumbling there too.

As expected, the divine King does not take kindly to insulting rejection of the heavenly bounty that he has daily provided. Ominously, he becomes "exceedingly angry" (11:10). Exacerbating the gravity of the situation is Moses' burnout. Whereas he interceded at Taberah with a prayer to God (11:2), he now offers a complaint of his own (11:11 — 15). Just as the people are sick and tired of manna, Moses is sick and tired of them!

Moses' bitter speech to the Lord forms a chiasm, with the people's unreasonable demand featured at the center:

a "Why have I not found favor in your eyes[2] that you put the burden of all these people on me? (11:11)

b Why do you tell me to carry [Qal of *ns'*] them in my arms, as a nurse carries [Qal of *ns'*] an infant …? (11:12)

c Where can I get meat to give [Qal of ntn] to all these people? (11:13)[3]

c' They keep wailing to me, 'Give [Qal of ntn] us meat to eat!'

b' I cannot carry [Qal of *n'*] all these people by myself….(11:14)

a' Put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes." 11:15)

This is the same Moses who earlier pleaded for Israel's life, even if it meant blotting his own name out of God's book (Ex. 32:32). Now the Lord has two problems on his hands: Moses as well as Israel.

The Lord first addresses Moses' need, telling him to gather[4] seventy elders (11:16) so that they can be empowered to help him carry (Qal of n?, cf. Moses' speech above) the burden of managing the people (11:17). Whereas Jethro earlier advised Moses to delegate judges for handling disputes between the people (Ex. 18:13—26), here it is the Lord who takes initiative to make tribal elders an extension of Moses and a buffer between him and their people.

Turning to the people's craving for meat, God commands that the people sanctify themselves (Hithpael of *qds*, 11:18). Such "sanctification" includes washing their clothes and abstaining from sexual relations (Ex. 19:10—11, 14—15) along with bathing (cf. Lev. 15:5—11, 21—22, 27, Num. 19:19) in preparation for a special encounter with God the next day (cf. Josh. 3:5, 7:13). It sounds as though the Israelites are to enjoy sacrificial meat, but their wish come true will turn to punishment that fits their crime when they will have it coming out their noses (we would say "coming out their ears", 11:19—20).

Sharing the Spirit. When the Lord puts the Spirit on seventy elders, they temporarily prophesy (11:24—25). The text does not say what this prophesying entails (see Bridging Contexts section). Also unexplained is the reason why two elders remain in their camping place rather than going to the sanctuary, where Moses and the other elders are. Nevertheless, the Spirit finds them where they are (11:26). Their prophesying alarms Joshua, who is apparently concerned that leadership extending to the elders should be associated with Moses at headquarters, rather than getting out of control (11:27—28).

Moses recognizes that the Spirit transcends his control and the people cannot

have too much of this divine power. Abraham Heschel observes, “The spiritual is not something we own, but something we may share in. We do not possess it, we may be possessed by it.”[5] Rather than being jealous of the spiritual gifts granted to others, Moses rejoices and desires the best for all of God’s people.

Quail. Having answered Moses’ need by putting his Spirit (ruah) on the elders, the Lord delivers fresh meat to the people by airmail, sending a literal wind (also *ruah)* that blows quail in from the sea (11:31, cf. Ps. 78:26—31). He has sent them quail before (Ex. 16:13), but this time the birds come in prodigious quantities. The wind brings “them down all around the camp to about three feet above the ground, as far as a day’s walk in any direction.”

Some interpreters understand “about three feet [lit., two cubits] above the ground” to describe the depth to which the quail pile up on the ground (e.g., NASB, NRSV). If this were the case, their quantity would be unbelievable. Depending on variables such as how many miles are included in “a day’s walk in any direction,” the number of birds would likely be in the billions or trillions. However, the biblical text simply says that the wind “left” (nts, cf. 1 Sam. 17:20, 22) the quail around the camp about two cubits “above/on” (preposition *‘al)* the surface of the land. This can as easily mean that the wind impels the quail to within reach of the Israelites and leaves them there just above and on the ground, where they can readily be caught and slaughtered.

The people greedily gather (Qal of *’sp)* quail around the clock all day, all night, and all the next day and spread them out around the camp, presumably to cure by drying, so that their ten+ *homers* of quail each (Num. 11:32) can last for the next month, as the Lord promised (11:18—20). The early biblical *homer* (originally “donkey load”) was a dry measure of capacity now estimated at between 100 and 200 liters, probably closer to the smaller end of this range.[6] If so, six hundred thousand men (11:21) probably collect more than thirty-five bushels each, for a total of more than twenty-one million bushels. Undoubtedly women and children help with the gathering process, but they may have shared in the ten *homers* minimum that belonged to their men. Even if there were only five birds per bushel (a low estimate, given their relatively small size), there would be a total of more than 105 million birds, still a flock of staggering proportions that would have occupied a vast area while in full flight before becoming bogged down and concentrated around the Israelite camp.

The influx of quail in the biblical story is related to a natural phenomenon. Large numbers of quail migrate across the Sinai Peninsula from Africa on their way to Europe and Asia. Since these birds have relatively heavy bodies and do not fly well, they partly depend on prevailing winds to assist their flight, and

they become exhausted by long journeys.[7] At the beginning of the fourteenth century A.D., the Arab writer Al-Qazwini described how people living near Gaza slaughtered many such quail and preserved them with salt.[8] During the 1900s, Arabs living in the northern Sinai used nets to catch one to two million low-flying quail.[9]

In Numbers 11 the quail come from the sea, as we would expect, but three unusual elements signal divine intervention: The arrival of quail is timed to serve as the Lord's answer to the Israelites' demand for meat, the wind that carries the flock is from the Lord, and the number of birds is miraculous.[10]

The people's indulgence for a month until quail comes out their noses (cf. 11:20) is interrupted. Before the meat is "cut off" (krt, i.e., runs out, cf. Joel 1:5, 16),[11] God's anger (lit., "nose") burns against them and he strikes them (Hiphil of nkh) a great blow *(makkah.* Num. 11:33). This can be called a divine "plague,"[12] which may involve sickness, such as a form of bacterial food poisoning that induces vomiting (possibly including out the nose).[13] However, similar language in 1 Samuel 6:19 seems to describe a more sudden fate for the people of Beth Shemesh who presume to look into the ark of the covenant.

Whatever the precise nature of the "plague" resulting from quail, its acute onset is deadly, as implied by the name given to the place: Kibroth Hattaavah ("the graves of craving," Num. 11:34). Like a number of other stages along the Israelites' itinerary (cf. ch. 33), the location of this site has been lost.

Bridging Contexts

DIVINE HELP FOR "burned-out" pastors. As Moses sits trying to enjoy his manna in the cool of the evening, all he can hear is tented subcommittees wailing and carrying on about garlic and onions like a bunch of spoiled children. As the "children" of Israel indulge in paroxysms of self-pity, the shepherd/pastor of his people not infrequently hears his own name mentioned disparagingly as the source of all their troubles. Moses thinks: *Forget this, Lord! Transfer me to another district! Anywhere will do, even a permanent position in a church cemetery, but not here!*

In the Bible the Lord is hard on some kinds of people, but he is remarkably gentle and encouraging to stressed and burned-out pastors. For instance, after the traumatic golden calf episode, the Lord graciously granted Moses' request to experience a more intimate glimpse of his glory (Ex. 33:18—23, 34:5—8). At Kibroth Hattaavah, God does not berate Moses for his negative reaction to complaints. Instead, he addresses the problems that have brought undue pressure to bear on Moses.

There are other examples. When Jezebel threatened Elijah, he fled for his life all the way from northern Israel into the desert south of Beersheba in Judah (1 Kings 19:3—4). As Moses had done centuries before (Num. 11:15), he prayed that he might die (1 Kings 19:4). Rather than rebuking Elijah for his faithless despair and for abandoning his post of duty, the Lord twice sent an angel with food and water, and then just let him sleep (19:4—8). When he sought refuge at Horeb, the mountain of his spiritual roots, God asked him one simple question: "What are you doing here?" (19:9). Then the Lord taught him the power of a "gentle whisper," recommissioned him, gave him an associate, and sent him back home to minister (19:11—18).

Depressing decay characterized spiritual and moral conditions throughout Isaiah's parish of Judah (Isa. 1—5). To make the future look even more bleak, King Uzziah finally died of his scaly-skin disease (6:1, cf. 2 Chron. 26:19—23). In that year, when the weakness of human leadership was in the headlines, the Lord gave Isaiah a vision that changed his life (Isa. 6). He gazed on the blazing glory of God on his throne and heard the antiphony of shining seraphim calling "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (NRSV). He felt the seismic shaking of the

floor beneath him as swirling smoke filled the temple, leaving him with no doubt at all about who was really in charge. Like Moses, he never lost sight of his vision of the Lord. “The Holy One of Israel” was his guiding light and undying theme.[14]

Early prophecy and divine control. The first occurrence of the word *nab?* (“prophet”) in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 20:7, where Abraham is called a prophet. Here the Lord speaks to Abimelech, king of Gerar, and tells him to return Sarah to Abraham, “for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live.” A prophet has a special line of communication to God.

The next instance of *nabi’* is in Exodus 7:1, where the Lord says to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet *[nab?]’* (Ex. 7:1). Although Moses will be the prophet in relation to God, who will tell him what to say and do, Aaron will be like Moses’ prophet in the sense that he will be his spokesperson. Again, a prophet is one who has special access, which in this case enables and authorizes him to relay messages to others. The prophetic spokesman is under control of the authority of the one who gives him his message. Notice that the “forthtelling” of such a spokesman can include “foretelling,” but it is not limited to prediction of the future.

Following the career of Moses, whose prophetic gift involved unique face-to-face interaction with God (Num. 12:8, Deut. 34:10), the Lord raised up other spokespersons. In Judges 6:8—10 we find the first of many instances of a prophet announcing a “covenant lawsuit” against apostate Israelites for violating their binding relationship with the Lord (cf. 2:1—3).

Establishment of the Israelite monarchy increased the need for prophecy, in order to maintain the Lord’s ultimate sovereignty over his people. After Samuel anointed Saul as the first king, God used the gift of prophecy on him in an unusual way (1 Sam. 10:9—10): “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets [plural of *nabi']* met him, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying [Hithpael of nb^{J}].” An even more striking phenomenon occurred later when Saul was trying to capture David (1 Sam. 19:23—24):

> So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel’s presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

The primary point of this kind of early Israelite prophecy was not the content of what Saul said or did as a prophet (unlike later "classical" prophecy by Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.), but simply the fact that the Lord exercised full control over him. Similarly, the point of prophesying (Hithpael of nb^{J}) on only one occasion by seventy elders chosen by Moses (Num. 11:24—26) is not the content of their utterances but the fact that the Lord authorizes them to be under his control and to be accountable to him as his representatives. Whatever they say when prophesying, they are speaking God's words, not their own. The fact that Eldad and Medad prophesy "outside the box" of human expectation buttresses the point that it is God who is in control.

With a council of "prophets" in the Israelite camp, Moses will no longer be alone in bearing responsibility for representing God's will to the people. Even if the Israelites do not like what they are hearing, confirmation of Moses' message by a divinely authorized delegation from among the people will (hopefully) prevent them from singling Moses out as the sole "lightning rod" for their vexation.

Contemporary Significance

FREEDOM TO COMPLAIN. At Kibroth Hattaavah, the Israelites are to sanctify themselves for a special encounter with God (Num. 11:18, cf. Ex. 19:10, Josh. 3:5, 7:13), as if they will enjoy a sacrificial meal (cf. 1 Sam. 16:5). Instead, they become the victims[15] through a Kamikaze ("divine wind") incursion of quail. The grousing people get graves instead of gravy. They have asked for it, but it is not good for them. Insisting on having one's own way and disregarding expressed or implied warnings from the divine "Surgeon General," rather than praying "your will be done" (Matt. 6:10), can be hazardous to one's health. God just might give you what you want![16]

At least the Lord listens when the Israelites complain. We don't hear about them complaining to Pharaoh when they were in Egypt, all they could do was groan. Undoubtedly grumbling to him was out of the question, as it was for people who lived in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. When my wife and I were in Iraq for three months in 1989, we didn't hear a single negative word about him. It would have been easy to get the impression that Saddam was a wonderful person, if we didn't know that he tortured anyone who complained.

Modern Israel is different. An Israeli friend told me about a Russian Jew who was allowed to emigrate to Israel during the Soviet period, when this was a rare occurrence. When he landed at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, a reporter met him. First the reporter asked, "How was life in Russia?"

> The new emigrant replied, "I do not complain."
> Another question ensued: "How was the housing situation in Russia?"
> "I do not complain."
> "What about working conditions?"
> "I do not complain."

Exasperated, the reporter demanded, "If you don't complain about life in Russia, why do you come to Israel?"

The Russian retorted: "Because in Israel I can complain!"

Freedom allows for the possibility of complaining. If the ancient Israelites had stopped to think about it, they could have said: "Wait a minute, what are we

doing? We're complaining. Would we have done that in Egypt? Never! Why not? Because we were scared to death, that's why, even (or especially?) when they were killing our baby boys. But now the very fact that we are griping proves that we are free! Isn't this freedom worth the temporary price of some dietary boredom?"

At Kibroth Hattaavah the Lord comes down hard on the grumbling of the Israelites. So how is he different from Pharaoh? When they first complained about bitter water, he did not punish them but simply met their needs by making the water sweet (Ex. 15:23—25). When they complained about not having food, he gave them manna (Ex. 16).

God knows that faith has a "learning curve." After giving the Israelites evidence on which to base their trust, he then expected them to trust him more and held them accountable for the quality of their faith in his beneficence. After a year of living in total dependence on him, they knew where to get help when they needed it. When grumbling about food arose again, it was not simply complaining, it was rebellious refusal to trust the Lord. He had to cure them of this attitude in a desert "boot camp" (or "sandal camp"?) because they could not survive a military assault on fortified Canaan without implicit trust in miracles that only he could provide.

Complaining is alive and well today, especially with regard to little aggravations, inconveniences, aches, and pains. Obviously there is a place for directing legitimate grievances to those who have caused our problems or can do something about them, whether they are other people or God (cf. Job, many psalms, and Habakkuk). But grumbling behind someone's back is destructive. This includes unfocused complaining, which implicitly implicates God as the ultimate Cause and denies that he cares about every aspect of our well-being (Luke 12:6—7).

Instead of simply complaining, which tends to depress ourselves and others, we can accomplish something positive if we take our complaints directly to God in prayer, believing that he will hear us (cf. Ps. 142:1—3). A complaint to God that is a petition of faith can end up strengthening the faith of others when the Lord answers the prayer (cf. 142:7).

Another medicine for negative feelings that generate complaining is to keep things in perspective by remembering blessings already received.

You came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. She came home grumpy because the day care forgot to give your five-year-old her throat medicine…. So there you sit at the dinner table— cranky and grumpy—with little Emily. Emily folds her hands to pray….

"God, it's Emily. How are you? I'm fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I

don't know why. We've got birds and toys and mash potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it's just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen."

The prayer is answered before it's finished, you both look up in the middle and laugh at the end and shake your heads and say you're sorry. And you both thank God for the little voice who reminded you about what matters.[17]

1. Manna was introduced in Ex. 16. For detailed discussion of theories regarding the name and nature of this food, see P. Maiberger, "man," *TDOT*, 8:389—95.

2. Author's translation here.

3. Author's translation here.

4. Notice the correspondence in Heb.: "gather" *'sp*, v. 16) in response to the "riffraff/gathering" *('asapsup*, v. 4).

5. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Noonday, 1955), 416.

6. M. A. Powell, "Weights and Measures," in ABD, 6:903—4. For the *homer* as a priestly dry measure of 117.5 liters (about 3.5 bushels), see S. Rattray, "The Biblical Measures of Capacity," in J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, 895.

7. See, e.g., Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 217, J. Wilkinson, "The Quail Epidemic of Numbers 11:31—34," *EvQ* 71 (1999): 196—97.

8. J. Gray, "The Desert Sojourn of the Hebrews and the Sinai-Horeb Tradition," *VT* 4 (1954): 148.

9. Wenham, *Numbers*, 109, cf. Gray, "The Desert Sojourn," 148—49.

10. Cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 91, Wilkinson, "The Quail Epidemic," 208.

11. With the Targums and the LXX. Some interpret *krt* here as cutting, i.e., chewing, between teeth (e.g., BDB, 504, NASB, NKJV, NJPS).

12. Of *makkah* with reference to divine punishments, such as plagues, see also Lev. 26:21, Deut. 28:59, 61, 29:22, 1 Sam. 4:8. The Hiphil of *nkh* + *makkah* can also refer to a military force inflicting severe defeat (e.g., Josh. 10:10, 20).

13. Wilkinson, "The Quail Epidemic," 201—8, cf. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 219.

14. "The Holy One of Israel" occurs in all major portions of Isaiah (1:4, 5:19, 24, 10:20, 12:6, 17:7, 29:19, 30:11, 12, 15, 31:1, 37:23, 41:14, 16, 20, 43:3, 14, 45:11, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 54:5, 55:5, 60:9, 14), serving as a major factor in unifying the book.

15. Budd, *Numbers,* 128. For human beings as metaphorical victims of sacrifice, see Jer. 46:10, Ezek. 39:17, 19, Zeph. 1:7.

16. See the Bridging Contexts section of Num. 22, regarding Balaam.

17. M. Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 116—17.

Numbers 12

MIRIAM AND AARON began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. [2]"Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.

[3](Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

[4]At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. [5]Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, [6]he said, "Listen to my words:

"When a prophet of the LORD is among you,
I reveal myself to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams.

[7]But this is not true of my servant Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.

[8]With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant Moses?"

[9]The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

10When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—
leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had
leprosy; 11and he said to Moses, “Please, my lord, do not hold against
us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12Do not let her be like a
stillborn infant coming from its mother’s womb with its flesh half
eaten away.”

13So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, please heal her!”

14The LORD replied to Moses, “If her father had spit in her face,
would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her
outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.”
15So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the
people did not move on till she was brought back.

16After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of
Paran.

Original Meaning

SIBLING RIVALRY. NOBODY can hurt you like your own family members. At Kibroth Hattaavah Moses was upset when the people grumbled about food (Num. 11), but at Hazeroth it is Miriam and Aaron who speak against Moses (ch. 12). They hit him in a sensitive spot by criticizing him "because of the Cushite woman he had married: 'He married a Cushite woman!'" (NJPS).[1]

Elsewhere the only wife of Moses is Zipporah, daughter of a Midianite (Ex. 2:16—22, 4:25, 18:1—6) and therefore related to the Israelites as a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 25:1—2). Unless Moses married a second woman from the Sudan (Nubia) or Ethiopia,[2] for which there is no clear evidence, why would Zipporah be labelled a "Cushite" here? We don't know for sure, but some possibilities include: (1) Miriam and Aaron make an ethnic slur by likening Zipporah's darker skin to that of an African (cf. Jer. 13:23). (2) Zipporah is of mixed Midianite-African ancestry. (3) "Cush" in this context is a place in Midianite territory (cf. "Cushan" in Hab. 3:7).

If the wife in question is Zipporah, why would the objection of Miriam and Aaron against her arise so long after she became Moses' wife? After remaining with her father during the tumultuous upheaval that brought the Israelites out of Egypt, Zipporah reentered Moses' life fairly recently when Jethro brought her to Moses, along with their two sons, as the Israelites were in the desert approaching Mount Sinai (Ex. 18:1—6).

In any case, Miriam and Aaron are irritated at Moses' non-Israelite wife, but this is only the outer symptom of a deeper grievance: They feel that Moses is unduly dominating their prophetic triumvirate (Num. 12:2). By lowering him a notch or three through criticism, they attempt to bring him down to their status. Why now? Moses has just appointed seventy elders to receive the prophetic gift and share responsibility with him (11:24—26), thereby decentralizing power away from Miriam and Aaron. Although the arrangement is the Lord's idea (11:16—17, 24), Miriam and Aaron can easily associate it with an earlier initiative to relieve Moses by decentralizing judicial responsibility, which was sponsored by Jethro, Zipporah's father (Ex. 18:13—26). Who would have a greater interest in reducing Moses' burden now more than the "first lady" of

Israel (whether Zipporah or another wife)?

“First lady"? That may explain why Miriam is mentioned before Aaron as the instigator of criticism (12:1). With her brothers, she was a leader of the Exodus (Mic. 6:4). It was “Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister,” who took a tambourine and led all the Israelite women in a song of triumph at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20—21). Now she likely feels displaced, perhaps by one who has never experienced the horrors of slavery and the trauma of leaving Egypt.

While Moses does not defend himself, the Lord takes decisive action, summoning a family conference at the “Tent of Meeting” (12:4). He does not deny the claim of Aaron and Miriam to prophetic inspiration (12:6, cf. v. 2), which is supported by the fact that he is speaking to them. But Moses is more than a prophet. As the Lord’s “house-servant,” he has experienced more intimate access to God than any other human being (12:7—8, cf. Ex. 33:18— 23, 34:4—8)[3] and is an active participant in dialogue with him.[4] Miriam and Aaron should be afraid to speak against Moses (Num. 12:8), which is tantamount to speaking against God.

When the divine warning is punctuated by Miriam’s case of white scaly skin disease (cf. Lev. 13), Aaron undoubtedly remembers the way Moses produced and reversed such disease on himself as a sign of divine power (Ex. 4:6—7). Assuming that Moses is angry, Aaron implores him for forgiveness and for healing for Miriam (Num. 12:11—12). However, all Moses can do is to cry out for the Lord to heal her (12:13). It is ironic that Aaron and Miriam, who are supposed to be prophets, are utterly dependent on the intercession of Moses, just as King Abimelech and his household needed the prayer of Abraham, a prophet, on their behalf (Gen. 20:7, 17).

Because the Lord has disgraced Miriam, who apparently was more at fault than Aaron,[5] it takes some time to restore her. A quick fix would trivialize the gravity of the situation. During the week of delay, all Israelites have plenty of opportunity to reflect on the deadly “leprosy” of rebellion against God’s leadership through Moses (12:15). Many years before, big sister Miriam had waited for baby Moses (Ex. 2:4), now he waits for her.

The humblest? Numbers 12:3 parenthetically informs us that Moses was the most *’anaw* man on earth. English versions generally render this word as “humble.” Moses’ humility, which he showed from the time of his call (Ex. 3:11, 4:1, 10, 13), is remarkable considering the towering authority of his leadership. Granted that he is capable of vesuvian righteous indignation, such as when he smashed the tablets of the Decalogue at Sinai in response to the golden calf party (Ex. 32:19), this does not detract from his humility because he submits his

personal ego to God's will.[6] Moses is the epitome of a "servant leader." He can safely be entrusted with powerful leadership because he is humble before God and therefore willing to follow divine leading (cf. Ps. 22:26, 25:9).

For those who believe the traditional view that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, Numbers 12:3 raises a question: If Moses wrote that he was the humblest man on the face of the earth, wouldn't this constitute a boast that would invalidate his humility? We understand the boxing champ Muhammad Ali, who resides in Berrien Springs, Michigan, a few miles from my home, when he claims the epithet "The Greatest." But "The Humblest" is a different matter. So it can be argued that the explanation in Numbers 12:3 was written by an editor of the Pentateuch, not by Moses himself (cf. Gen. 12:6, Deut. 34).

Elsewhere *'anaw* refers to those who are poor, needy, socially weak, afflicted, and/or humiliated (e.g., Isa. 61:1, Amos 2:7). While Moses was a powerful leader and in this sense was not socially weak, he was afflicted by his people and, at Hazeroth, was ill-treated and humiliated by his own sister and brother (Num. 12:1—2).[7] Thus, in addition to the idea that Moses lacks arrogance, despite sibling surmisings to the contrary, it appears that at least part of the point in 12:3 may be that he is so bowed down and burdened that he is unable to stick up for himself, which explains why the Lord has to step in to defend him.

Bridging Contexts

THE ROLE OF MOSES. The relationship between prophecy and Moses' unique role binds Numbers 11 and 12 together. Unlike any prophet before or after him, Moses converses face to face with the Lord, "as a man speaks with his friend" (Ex. 33:11, cf. Deut. 34:10). It is not surprising that his special access to God is matched by extraordinary humility and integrity (cf. Isa. 57:15, Matt. 5:8).

As God's messenger, Moses plays a crucial role in making theocracy work by conveying the divine will to the Israelites. The Lord is the religious and civil leader of Israel through Moses. Other prominent roles of Moses that are based on his intimate connection with God include miracle-working deliverer (e.g. Ex. 3:10, 4:1—9, 7:8—21), highest judge (Ex. 18:13—26, Deut. 1:17), founder of the Israelite ritual system (Ex. 40, Lev. 8), and intercessor (Ex. 32:11—14, 31—33, 33:12—17, Num. 14:13—19). Other biblical individuals perform some of the same functions as Moses, but none comes close to matching his foundational and comprehensive leadership as the "father of his country."

Like snow. Miriam's is the first biblical case of scaly skin disease *(sara'at)* as a devastating, socially stigmatizing divine punishment by which outer decay reflects inner moral "leprosy." Later Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was struck with this disease when he deviously took presents from Naaman (2 Kings 5:27), and King Uzziah was similarly afflicted when he refused to give up his attempt to encroach on priestly function by burning incense (2 Chron. 26:19—21).

Ancient Mesopotamians also viewed a kind of skin disease as divine punishment. Part of an Old Babylonian omen text reads: "If the skin of a man exhibits 'white pusu-areas,' or is 'dotted with nuqdu-dots,' such a man has been rejected by his god and is (to be) rejected by mankind."[8] Here the reason for the social stigma is crystal clear: Out of respect/fear for the deity, other human beings are duty bound to acknowledge the divine rejection by shunning the diseased one. You cannot be Someone's friend if you continue to be on good terms with his or her enemy!

In Israel, scaly skin disease was viewed in terms of death, with flesh decomposing on a person before he or she was even dead. Thus Aaron begs Moses on behalf of Miriam: "Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away" (12:12). This powerful

connection with mortality explains the severity of the ritual impurity generated by the affliction (Lev. 13—14, Num. 5:1—4).

Miriam's deathly disease turns her skin flaky and/or white "like snow" (Num. 12:10, cf. Ex. 4:6, 2 Kings 5:27).[9] It is intriguing that David's penitential psalm refers to snow along with hyssop in a context of moral cleansing: "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean, wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7, cf. Isa. 1:18). Hyssop, a small plant (cf. 1 Kings 4:33), was not used in any Israelite ritual for cleansing persons from expiable sin, let alone from the capital offense of adultery that David committed (cf. Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:22). Hyssop does appear in two cleansing rituals to remedy physical ritual impurity: purification from scaly skin disease (Lev. 14:4, 6)[10] and from corpse contamination (Num. 19:6, 18). Placement of Miriam's obituary in Numbers 20:1 immediately following the prescription for purification from corpse contamination in chapter 19 underscores the connection between the two kinds of defilement. Following her restoration from skin disease, the next time we hear of her is when she dies.[11]

In light of the intimate linkage between the two evils treated with hyssop, David portrays his moral state in physical terms that are strikingly appropriate: He is morally "leprous" and deserves to die (become a corpse) for adultery and for having arranged for the death of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband (2 Sam. 11 — 12). The ideas of scaly skin disease and corpse contamination evoked by "hyssop," combined with David's acknowledgment that he was "sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5), forge a strong link with Aaron's plea for Miriam: "Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away" (Num. 12:12). However, whereas Moses prays that God will heal Miriam from impure disease that made her skin "like snow" (vv. 10, 13), David ironically prays that his cleansing with hyssop from moral "leprosy" will make him "whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7)!

Contemporary Significance

SKIN AND RACISM. The fact that Moses' wife is described as "Cushite" only in the context of derogatory talk regarding her by Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12:1) suggests that they look down on her for having darker skin (cf. Song 1:6). While a racial slur is only on the "skin" of an underlying issue of status and control, the Lord's punishment of Miriam indicates that he takes her xenophobia seriously by making her skin flaky and/or ghastly white (Num. 12:10). It is as though he were saying to her: "Miriam, if you can't get used to the idea that dark is beautiful, see if you like your own skin, which pales by comparison!" After wishing to socially exclude Moses' wife, Miriam herself is physically excluded from the Israelite camp.[12]

Although we should not hasten to import all of our modern conceptions of racism into the context of ancient Israel, which incorporated many kinds of foreigners throughout its history, it seems clear that a kind of racism does have a negative impact within the complex social dynamics reflected in Numbers 12. God's devastating reaction implies that he regards such an attitude as intolerable moral "leprosy."

What is so bad about racism? As in the story of Miriam and Aaron, it is always about status and control, and it is always an insult to God. Granted that not every victim of racism is married to a prophet or leader of a community like Moses, still, putting someone down for his or her intrinsic genetic nature has the goal of boosting oneself and implies that God makes inferior products in his image (cf. Gen. 1:26). Racism is also a grossly unfair low blow for exactly the same reason that it is attractive to those who are attempting to get the upper hand at any cost: People are born with their race and cannot change it (Jer. 13:23).

One test of an attitude is its "fruit," that is, results (cf. Matt. 7:16—18, Gal. 5:22—23). Unfortunately, following racism to its logical results is not a theoretical exercise. Adolf Hitler expressed his worldview: "All who are not of good race in this world are chaff."[13] Acting in full consistency with this attitude, he devised a monstrous machine to systematically marginalize, exploit, and finally annihilate those (in his estimation) miserably valueless excuses for human beings who did not measure up to his twisted and self-serving notion of

“good race,” which was arbitrarily defined in terms of likeness to himself.

Just because we do not engage in genocide like Hitler, “ethnic cleansing” like Slobodan Milosevic, or fanning the flames of white supremacism like former Ku Klux Klan wizard David Duke does not necessarily mean that we have no racism to overcome. Racism is natural in a sinful world and respects no boundaries. It preys on any racial group in the world and can quietly flourish and spread like “leprosy” under the beautiful surface of a Christian business, school, or church (cf. Lev. 14:43—44). Combatting it requires continual vigilance. Anyone who claims to be exempt from the potential of a problem in this regard should read Numbers 12:1, where even Miriam and Aaron fail.

No doubt Moses’ wife would have endorsed the words of Martin Luther King: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”[14]

Powerful humility. Mention the word “genius,” and the name Albert Einstein invariably pops up. His colossal intellect conceived entire branches of science and laid the theoretical foundation for many new technologies. If anyone had the right to intellectual pride, he did. However, like Moses (Num. 12:3), he was a remarkably humble man. Einstein wrote:

> Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolized. It is an irony of fate that I myself have been the recipient of excessive admiration and reverence from my fellow-beings, through no fault, and no merit, of my own. The cause of this may well be the desire, unattainable for many, to understand the few ideas to which I have with my feeble powers attained through ceaseless struggle.[15]

Einstein’s humility makes him all the more admirable. Living in an age that spawned some of the most Olympian egos in modern history, he steadfastly refused to put on airs. When playing his violin to the accompaniment of pianist Artur Schnabel, he was not annoyed when Schnabel admonished him, the world’s greatest mathematician, “Count, Albert, count!” Nor did he project an important image through his appearance, preferring to walk around Princeton without socks and let his hair look like the result of an experiment with static electricity.

Humility provides integrity with credibility. We can admit that Einstein was obsessive, which was hard on his first marriage. But because he was so unconcerned with promoting himself, we accept his wise and frank pronouncements on a wide range of issues as expressing genuine concern for the

welfare of Planet Earth and its human inhabitants. We don't ask, as we would regarding a proud and selfish person, "What does he stand to gain at the expense of others?" So, like Moses, Einstein has become much more of a leader than he would have if he had been bent on asserting his personal power and status.

Moses and Einstein didn't waste energy or time trying to get everyone to think they mattered relatively more than the people around them. They were too busy changing the world for the benefit and empowerment of others. We will be light years ahead if we follow their example and the counsel penned by Thomas à Kempis: "Let nothing that you have achieved seem of great importance … save that which is everlasting."[16]

1. Taking *ki* here to introduce the direct speech, as in Gen. 21:30, 29:33, Ex. 3:12. The NIV reads *ki* as introducing an explanation: "… for [ki] he had married a Cushite."

2. So D. Adamo, "The African Wife of Moses: An Examination of Numbers 12:1—9," *AfTJ* 18 (1989): 230—37, B. P. Robinson, "The Jealousy of Miriam: A Note on Num 12," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 428—32, Levine, *Numbers 1—20,* 328.

3. In a broader sense Jacob and the Israelites saw God face to face (Gen. 32:30, Deut. 5:4, cf. Num. 14:14—lit., "eye to eye").

4. N. G. Cohen, **"'b** … "QT: An 'Enthusiastic' Prophetic Formula," *ZAW* 99 (1987): 221—23.

5. With Robinson, "The Jealousy of Miriam," 430—32, and P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *BRev* 5 (1989): 21—22, notwithstanding the contention of N. Graetz that Miriam was no more responsible than Aaron, but was discriminated against because she was a woman ("Miriam: Guilty or Not Guilty?" *Judaism* 40 (1991): 184—92.

6. Cf. S. Dawes, "Numbers 12.3: What Was Special About Moses?" *BT* 41 (1990): 338—39.

7. Cf. C. Rogers, "Moses: Meek or Miserable?" *JETS* 29 (1986): 257—63.

8. VAT 7525 col. II, lines 42—45, transl. J. V. Kinnier-Wilson, "Leprosy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *RA* 60 (1966): 50.

9. E. V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," *PEQ* 107 (1975): 103.

10. See also 14:49, 51, 52 in the ritual for a fungous house.

11. Trible, "Bringing Miriam," 23.

12. Robinson, “The Jealousy of Miriam,” 431—32, Trible, “Bringing Miriam,” 22.

13. In M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 854.

14. Ibid.

15. A. Einstein, “My Views,” in E. Knoebel, *Classics of Western Thought: Volume III—The Modern World*, 4th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 3:538.

16. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, transl. L. Sherley-Price (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 96.

Numbers 13

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Send some men to explore the land of
Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe
send one of its leaders.” 3So at the LORD’S command Moses sent them
out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.
4These are their names:

from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur;

5from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;

6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;

7from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph;

8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun;

9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu;

10from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi;

11 from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi
son of Susi;

12from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli;

13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael;

14from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi;

15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

16These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.)

17When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. 18See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. 19What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? 20How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)

21So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. “They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, She-shai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. 24That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. 25At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

26They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

30Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

31But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack

those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Original Meaning

NUMBERS 13 AND 14 recount a major turning point in the desert journey of the Israelites: the expedition of scouts and the impact of their reports on the willingness of the people to trust the Lord's promise that he will give them the Promised Land. As the Israelites are rapidly approaching the southern border of Canaan and camp at Kadesh, in the Desert of Paran (Num. 12:16, 13:26, Deut. 1:19—Kadesh Barnea), the Lord instructs Moses to send a chieftain from each tribe (except Levi) to explore the land (Num. 13:1—2). Deuteronomy 1:22—23 describes the idea of scouts as originating from the people. The two accounts are not mutually exclusive. Undoubtedly Moses would have approached the Lord for approval regarding any such undertaking if members of the community suggested it. Numbers and Deuteronomy single out different aspects: divine and human initiative, respectively.[1]

The itinerary of the twelve scouts includes the old city of Hebron (Num. 13:22),[2] near which is the cave of Machpelah, the burial place of Sarah, Abraham, and Jacob/Israel (Gen. 23:19, 25:9, 50:13). When the chieftains return to the community, they stage a much anticipated "show and tell." "Pomegranates and figs" provide material confirmation of the land's superlative agricultural quality, as encapsulated in the expression "flow with milk and honey" (Num. 13:23, 26—27). Most impressive is a gargantuan "cluster" *('eskol)* of grapes that two scouts carry between them on a pole (13:23), the way Kohathite Levites carry sacred objects belonging to the sanctuary (4:6, 8, 11, 14, 7:9).

Rather than climaxing their report with the attractive agricultural portion in accordance with the order of Moses' instructions for their investigation (13:18—20), the scouts quickly move over agriculture to dwell on the human demographics of Canaan.[3] Matching the abundant and sizeable fruits are numerous and powerful peoples with large, fortified cities (13:28). "The Amalekites live in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan" (v. 29).

J. A. Beck points out the narrative tension created by the fact that ten of the chieftains, who have been chosen because of their credibility with the Israelites, violate their mandate by deliberately distorting data to effectively persuade their

people that they cannot enter the Promised Land. Moses commissions them to go "up through the Negev and on into the hill country" (13:17), which is the focus of his interest. Archaeologists have found much of that hill country was sparsely settled at this time (Late Bronze period) and had few fortifications. So we expect the scouts to say that this territory should be easy to take. But they have expanded the geographical scope of their report to include heavily populated valley regions "near the sea and along the Jordan" and thereby make it sound as though the entire land of Canaan is densely occupied and impenetrable.[4]

As the people's euphoria vaporizes, there is an uproar. Observe how Caleb, the scout from Judah, needs to silence the people before telling them that they can and should go up and take the land (13:30).

At this point the biased attitude of the other scouts bursts into the open as they categorically contradict Caleb and defame the land they have earlier praised, claiming that it "devours those living in it" (13:31—32). If they are saying that Canaan is an unhealthy place, they are contradicting themselves. How can its inhabitants be so big and strong if the land devours them? Perhaps they mean that the land metaphorically devours its people through war (Ezek. 36:13—14, cf. vv. 1—7, 10, Lev. 26:38, Num. 14:3) because it was a "land bridge whose city-states were either fighting each other or stemming invasion from Asia or Africa."[5] But if the people of Canaan are decimated and weakened by war, how can they be so numerous, prosperous, and secure as to pose an insurmountable obstacle to the Israelites?

To drive a final nail in the coffin of hope, the ten scouts volunteer a category of information regarding which Moses has not asked: the physical size of the inhabitants of Canaan.[6] The most intimidating aspect of Canaan is the (undoubtedly exaggerated) generalization that "all the people we saw there are of great size" (13:32). To traumatize overwrought imaginations, the chieftains describe some of the giants as Nephilim (v. 33), descended from the mighty men of renown who lived before the Flood (Gen. 6:4). It is not clear how the Israelites suppose that the line of antedeluvian Nephilim have survived the Flood (cf. 7:21—23). Details aside, they readily buy the idea that the Canaanite giants are a vastly more powerful class of human beings than they are and succumb to catatonic terror.

Bridging Contexts

DOGGED DETERMINATION. Caleb was born a slave in Egypt, and his name meant "dog." But God has set him and his people free. Most Israelites of Caleb's generation never quite get the hang of what freedom is all about. They think freedom is milk and honey and that Moses is supposed to lead them quickly and comfortably into paradise. But when obstacles loom on the horizon, their freedom becomes chaos and they miss their unadventurous life of slavery because they are still slaves at heart.

Caleb, by contrast, realizes that freedom means to serve a new, divine Master. Other Israelites look around and gripe, but Caleb is saved from cynicism as well as from sin.[7] He looks up to the radiant divine cloud and praises the Lord, who has set him free. He lives in the same environment as the others, but he views it with a different perspective. As the German statesman Konrad Adenauer sagely observed, "We all live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon."[8] Caleb is like a much later man of courage amidst adversity who declared, "I don't let nobody blow no black smoke on my blue skies!"[9]

Sooner or later, Caleb's worldview is bound to collide with that of other members of his community. It happens at Kadesh, when he returns from scouting Canaan with eleven other chieftains. Ten scouts accentuate the negative: numerous powerful people, fortified cities, giants. All of a sudden the fabulous Promised Land seems unpromising. The Israelites quail with qualms and grouse: "The LORD hates us, so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us" (Deut. 1:27). First John 4:18 says that "perfect love drives out fear," but in their case, perfect fear drives out their trust in God.

When the clamor of complaining crescendos, Caleb steps forward and calls for the people to hush (Num. 13:30). He urges, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Let's roll!

Isn't it unrealistic to say, "We can certainly do it"? Caleb knows what the inhabitants and fortifications of Canaan are like because, unlike most Israelites, he has seen them. He is aware that his people lack the personnel, resources, infrastructure, and budget to overcome the obstacles on their own. But when Caleb says, "We can certainly do it," he includes God in the word "we" because

the Lord is with his people. “Faith is the grit in the soul that puts the dare into dreams.”[10]

So why doesn’t Joshua, the scout from Ephraim (13:8, 16), also make a speech at this time? He agrees with Caleb (14:6—9), but because he is Moses’ assistant (11:28), everyone knows he has vested interests. Caleb, however, could easily have sided with the majority.[11]

Theocracy, not majority, rules Caleb’s heart. Democracy may apply to other kinds of situations, but not even a landslide vote shakes his dogged determination to follow the Lord.

> If Caleb’s courage kindled a spark of hope for one brief, shining moment, it was quickly quenched when the oral majority took over the podium and began to filibuster. Determined to depress, they characterized Canaan as a jurassic park inhabited by humansauruses (Nephilim), who made them look like grasshoppers (13:33).[12]

In the opposing attitudes of Caleb versus the ten scouts, we see two basic orientations that are exemplified throughout the Bible: faith in the Lord to overcome impossible odds versus lack of belief that makes people think they must save themselves. Faith is courage that conquers. Disbelief is cowardice that correctly assesses the impossibility of a situation but fails to take God into account, thereby snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory. Can human beings be saved from evil? Impossible! True in human terms, but as the angel Gabriel said to the virgin Mary, “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

Even if victory is eventually achieved, cowardice and failure to seize a crucial opportunity along the way can radically increase the cost of success. After rejecting their blueprint for rapid victory, the Israelites did finally conquer Canaan (see the book of Joshua), but only after unnecessary years of misery and thousands of deaths.

Similarly, timid Union General George McClellan postponed Union victory in the American Civil War at the cost of many lives. Two of his soldiers discovered a copy of Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s battle plans wrapped around cigars that a Confederate officer had lost. With this astounding luck and a numerical advantage of 80,000 troops against Lee’s 45,000, McClellan could quite easily wipe out the five parts into which Lee’s army had divided by attacking them separately. With the blueprint to rapid victory in hand, McClellan nevertheless moved slowly because he was convinced by the false report of his spies that he was outnumbered. This gave Lee time to regroup most of his force in a strategic location along high ground east of Sharpsburg, Maryland. The

result was the bloody battle of Antietam, which included the deadliest day in American history, with 6,000 killed or mortally wounded and 16,000 injured.[13]

Contemporary Significance

THE POWER OF positive believing. A man driving by a cornfield stopped to chat with the farm boy who was working there, and the following exchange ensued: "It looks like all your corn is turning yellow." "Yes," said the boy, "we planted yellow corn."

"Well," said the man, "It looks to me like you're not going to get but about half a crop."

"That's right," said the boy, "we planted on halves."

In anger the man shouted, "You are not far from a fool, are you, son?"

"No sir," he said, "just a fence between us."[14]

They were looking at the same corn, but the boy was inside the fence and the man was outside. Having participated in planting a certain way, the boy trusted in a corresponding reward. The man, by contrast, was bent on promoting the weakness of negative thinking.

A farmer cannot expect God to bless efforts that are not performed, but without God's power, no amount of plowing, planting, watering, fertilizing, and weeding can produce a crop (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6—7). Similarly, an elderly Christian woman prayed every day, "Lord, if you'll furnish the grace, I'll furnish the grit."[15]

For the person of faith, obstacles are temporary because God is real. For the disbeliever, obstacles are permanent because God is not real enough. Thus, the key to exegesis of exigencies is an existential question: Is God real to me? Do I believe, act, and live as if he is alive?

In an open letter to God, Philip Yancey asked: "Do I act as if you are alive?" He responded:

> Sometimes I treat you as a substance, a narcotic like alcohol or Valium, when I need a fix, to smooth over the harshness of reality, or to take it away. I can sometimes ease off from this world into an awareness of an invisible world, and most of the time I truly believe it exists, as real as this world of oxygen and grass and water. But how do I do the reverse, to let the reality of your world—of *you*—enter in and transform the numbing sameness of

my daily life, and my daily self?[16]

Do we have evidence that God is real? In Scripture we have an accumulated record of divine activity, including descriptions by human beings who experienced it. Most impressive is the testimony of eyewitnesses regarding the incarnate Christ (1 John 1:1).

What about something that we can personally experience? Paul cites the evidence of creation as basic for all inhabitants of Planet Earth: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20, cf. Ps. 19:1, Heb. 11:1—3). If God is really our Creator (cf. Rev. 14:7), those who trust in the Lord can claim the motto of French World War I hero Marshal Ferdinand Foch: "There are no hopeless situations, there are only men and women who have grown hopeless about them."[17]

If God is really our Creator, he can answer Yancey's question by bringing his reality into the "numbing sameness" of our daily lives and recreating our attitudes. The key to this transformation is accepting the influence (i.e., the flowing in) of his Spirit, who gives us "the washing of rebirth and renewal" (Titus 3:5) and who pours God's love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We may never experience a dry path through a body of water, food from the sky, or an awesome voice from the top of a mountain. But if we pray to treat someone with more unselfish love than yesterday and if that prayer is answered, we have the most important miracle of all.

George Herbert wrote:

> Then have we too our guardian fires and clouds,
> Our Scripture-dew drops fast:
> We have our sands and serpents, tents and shrouds,
> Alas! Our murmurings come not last.
> But where's the cluster? where's the taste
> Of mine inheritance? Lord, if I must borrow, Let me as well take up their joy, as sorrow.[18]

1. Cf. the book of Job, which demonstrates that causality can be complex. The suffering that Job assumed to have come from God, the ultimate Cause, actually came from Satan, whom God permitted to test him

(see esp. Job 1—2).

2. It was even older than Zoan, i.e., Tanis, the capital of Egypt (v. 22b, see N. Na'aman, "Hebron Was Built Seven Years before Zoan in Egypt [Numbers 13:22]," *VT* 31 [1981]: 488— 92). On the geography of the scouts' itinerary, which would take about forty days on foot, see Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* 235—38.

3. "Moses asked about the population density, hydrology, urbanization, and agricultural quality. But the spies' answers were in this order: hydrology, agricultural potential, urbanization, and population density" (J. A. Beck, "Geography and the Narrative Shape of Numbers 13," *BSac* 157 [2000]: 279).

4. Ibid., 273—80.

5. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 107.

6. Beck, "Geography," 280.

7. Compare J. N. Griffith, *Looking Up* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1993), 34.

8. Quoted in J. C. Maxwell and J. Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 72.

9. Griffith, *Looking Up*, 63.

10. M. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 44.

11. Cf. Wenham, *Numbers,* 125.

12. R. Gane, "Caleb's Finest Hour," *CUD* 13 (2001): 24.

13. J. M. McPherson, "Antietam, Battle of [1862]," in J. W. Chambers, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 32.

14. Griffith, *Looking Up,* 20.

15. Ibid.

16. P. Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 17.

17. Quoted in Maxwell and Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence,* 67.

18. George Herbert, in R. Atwan & L. Wieder, eds., *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by The Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 148.

Numbers 14

THAT NIGHT ALL the people of the community raised their voices
and wept aloud. 2All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron,
and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt!
or in this desert! 3Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let
us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder.
Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4And they said to
each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

5Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite
assembly gathered there. 6Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of
Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore
their clothes 7and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we
passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8If the LORD is
pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk
and honey, and will give it to us. 9Only do not rebel against the LORD.
And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will
swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do
not be afraid of them.”

10But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory
of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. 11The
LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with
contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all
the miraculous signs I have performed among them? 12I will strike
them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a
nation greater and stronger than they.”

13Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By
your power you brought these people up from among them. 14And
they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already

heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. 15If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 16‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’

17“Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared: 18‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’ 19In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

20The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. ’'Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, 22not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— 23not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. 24But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. 25Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.”

26The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 27“How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. 28So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: 29In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. 31As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. 32But you—your bodies

will fall in this desert. [33]Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. [34]For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' [35]I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die."

[36]So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it—[37]these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. [38]Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

[39]When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. [40]Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised."

[41]But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD'S command? This will not succeed! [42]Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, [43]for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword."

[44]Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD'S covenant moved from the camp. [45]Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

Original Meaning

PERSUADED BY THE NEGATIVE SCOUTS (13:31—33) that it is hopeless to attempt to conquer Canaan, the Israelites conclude that the Lord is their enemy and their best option is to mutiny against Moses and return to Egypt (14:3—4). With Moses and Aaron prostrate (14:5), apparently in a position of silent petition to God (cf. 16:4, 22, 45, 20:6), Joshua and Caleb take over the defense (14:6—9). Their argument that the "protection" (lit., "shadow/shade", cf. Isa. 30:2—3)[1] of the people of Canaan is gone may allude to God's promise to Abraham: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16). If so, Joshua and Caleb are saying that God's protective mercy on the inhabitants of the land (referred to as Amorites in Gen. 15) is finished and the time for Israel to receive Canaan has arrived.

Joshua and Caleb employ wise strategy. Motivational writers J. C. Maxwell and J. Dornan advise:

> Some people are resilient and willing to keep trying in order to succeed, even when they don't see immediate progress. But others aren't that determined. Some will collapse at the first sign of trouble. To give them a push and inspire them, you need to keep showing your confidence in them, even when they're making mistakes or doing poorly.[2]

Nevertheless, the two faithful scouts get nothing for their trouble except talk of stoning them, which likely threatens Moses and Aaron too (v. 10, cf. Ex. 17:4).[3]

The murderous threats transgress the bounds of tolerable free speech. Preempting their fulfillment, "the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting" (14:10b), undoubtedly turning rampaging rage into trembling terror. Although the mob constitutes the collective "defendant," God says nothing to them (contrast 12:4—8). Rather, he addresses Moses to announce their sentence: death and replacement with a better nation descended from Moses (14:11—12).

Moses has heard the Lord talk like this before, after the golden calf fiasco (Ex. 32:9—10), but then he was alone on Mount Sinai. This time the high drama

occurs while Moses is in the middle of the camp, likely in the outer sanctum of the tabernacle (cf. Num. 7:89),[4] with people all around the sanctuary. He has been unable to speak up for himself, but now he finds his voice to plead for the lives of those who have heaped abominable abuse on him (14:13—19).

The Lord does indeed forgive (Qal of slh) the Israelites as Moses asks (14:20), namely, in the sense of preserving the corporate covenant relationship by not destroying all of them at once (14:15). However, merciful amnesty for the nation by no means rules out capital condemnation of a significant number of rebels, as God states in a formidable exception clause that he sets in concrete by swearing an oath (14:21).[5] Moses has begged the Lord to pardon (Qal of *n'*) his people (14:19), but on the way from Egypt they have tested (Piel of nsh) him "ten times" and spurned (Piel of n') him. So the Lord swears by his *life* that the people (i.e., the adult generation) who have *seen* his glory, which fills the whole earth, will *die* in the desert without *seeing* the Promised Land (14:21—23, cf. Deut. 1:35).

Notice how sounds and meanings of words contribute pungent irony to conceptual contrasts in this passage. (1) Hebrew words containing *n* + sibilants link the positive benefit that Moses desires for the Israelites (pardon) to their history of negative response (testing, spurning), which makes them unworthy because they have already repeatedly repaid the Lord evil for good. (2) God's life and the people's vision are in contrast to their death without seeing. Rejection of the living deity whose glory they have beheld is rejection of life and land.

"Ten times" (Num. 14:22) appears to be idiomatic for "[too] many times" (cf. NJPS).[6] Similarly, Jacob was fed up that Laban attempted to cheat him by changing his wages (lit.) "ten times" (Gen. 31:7, 41).[7] Ironically, the Lord has graciously given the Israelites his glorious "Ten Words," that is, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, 10:4), but they have repaid him with ten tests of patience.

There is an exception to the exception: Although Caleb belongs to the condemned generation, he will permanently enter Canaan because he has completely followed (lit., "filled after") the Lord (14:24). Later God also includes Joshua with Caleb (14:30).

Accepting the Israelites' own decision to return toward Egypt rather than appropriate their own territory (14:3—4), the Lord orders them back into the desert along the way leading to the Red Sea (14:25). They refuse to live in the Promised Land, so they will suffer their just deserts by dying in the unpromising and uncompromising desert.

In his next divine speech, the Lord specifies how the adult generation will meet its demise (14:26—35). This speech is artistically constructed:

The LORD *said* [Piel of dbr] to Moses and Aaron: (v. 26)

> "*How long* will this wicked community grumble against me? … (vv. 27—28)
>
> In this desert *your bodies will fall* … (vv. 29—30)
>
> *As for your children* that you said would be taken as plunder … (v.31).
>
> But you—*your bodies will fall* in this desert (v. 32).
>
> *Your children* will be shepherds here for forty years … (v. 33).
>
> For *forty years*—one year for each of the forty days … (v. 34)
>
> *I, the* LORD, *have spoken* [Piel of dbr] … (v. 35)

To make the punishment fit the crime, the Lord will bring on the Israelites the very thing they wished for when they grumbled against him. Their corpses will fall in the desert (14:29, cf. v. 2), but not all at once, so that the Lord will accomplish his goal of purifying Israel without damaging his own reputation (see further below).

On Mount Moriah the "angel of the LORD" had called to Abraham from heaven (Gen. 22:16—18):

> "I swear by myself, declares *[ne'um]* the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Now, because Abraham's descendants have refused to obey and entrust the welfare of their children to him (cf. Num. 14:3), the Lord swears again, but this time the reverse: "As surely as I live, declares *[ne'um]* the LORD" (14:28), they will be decimated rather than multiplied and will not take possession of the

promised cities and land of their enemies (14:29—35).[8]

Those who will die without seeing Canaan are the grumblers who were earlier included in the military census (men twenty years of age and older), not including the Levites (14:29). To be counted is to be accountable. The text does not specify the fate of adult women, but it appears that they are to die in the desert along with their husbands.[9] Ironically, the children whom the men regarded as helpless (14:3) will be the only ones to survive (14:31). Nevertheless, for forty years they will bear (Qal of *n'*) the result of their parents' unfaithfulness (lit., "immoralities") to God by being shepherds in the desert rather than enjoying the Promised Land (14:33). They could plaintively query, as Benji Oliver did when his family's house burned to the ground in St. Helena, California, on Christmas Day of 2001, "Are we homeless now?"

Like the Israelites' punishment of exclusion from the land they have spurned, the duration of bearing (Qal of *n'*) their cupability *('awon)* and experiencing the Lord's hostility in the desert will exquisitely fit their crime: forty years, one year for each of the days that the scouts explored hostile territory (14: 34, cf. 13:25). Thus the Lord answers his own question, "How long will this wicked community grumble against me?" (14:27).

Through a divine plague, the ten spies who were the catalyst for rebellious grumbling have the distinction of being the "firstfruits" of extinction (14:36—37). After mourning their fate (14:39), which kills any doubt as to the seriousness of the Lord's intentions, the Israelites arise the next morning, confess their sin, and insist they are ready to go into Canaan (14:40).

Here is confession without repentance. Martin Luther accurately characterized repentance: "To do so no more is the truest repentance"[10] (cf. Isa. 55:7). However, the Israelites are hardly turning from rebellion to cooperation with God. Before they were unwilling to go where he led. Now they want to go where he is no longer leading.

At least the Israelites vindicate God by admitting that he has been right and they have been wrong. However, their faithlessness has disqualified them, and they have lost their opportunity. Attempting to seize back the opportunity now would be another act of rebellion. Two wrongs don't make a right. Thinking they have turned around, they are still on the road to failure, as Jason Kidd confidently put it when he was drafted to the Dallas Mavericks, "We're going to turn this team around 360 degrees!"

The Israelites were afraid to enter Canaan with God on their side, but now they boldly go without him,[11] as if they can do it by themselves. Here is a classic case of salvation by human works arrogantly attempting to take the place of

salvation by grace through faith, as if human beings are greater than God. This isn't courage, it is stupidity.

With their *esprit de corpse* (rather than *esprit de corps)*, the Israelite soldiers already doomed to die in the desert only succeed in hastening their demise. Instead of enjoying a "mountaintop experience" in the hill country, they get themselves bashed in pieces (Hiphil of *ktt)* by the Amalekites and Canaanites all the way down to a place subsequently called Hormah (14:45). The place receives this name decades later when the Israelites devote (Hiphil of hrm) Arad to the Lord for total destruction (Num. 21:1—3). Thus, for an audience of a Torah reading, the ignominious Israelite retreat "to Hormah" likely evokes the idea that they are battered to destruction. If the people of the land fear the Israelites, who previously defeated Amalek (Ex. 17:8—16), their victory over Israel will give them confidence, making an Israelite conquest much more difficult.

Bridging Contexts

HOW TO FORGIVE a nation of rebels. On Mount Sinai, Moses effectively appealed to the Lord's concern for his own reputation in the estimation of the Egyptians (Ex. 32:12). There he cited the Lord's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel/Jacob that their descendants would be numerous and inherit the land of Canaan (v. 32:13).

At Kadesh, Moses' intercession follows a similar trajectory, but in expanded form and with even greater force. Again he mentions the Egyptians (Num. 14:13), but this time he also forecasts the inevitable attitude that those dwelling in Canaan will have when they hear that the Lord has slaughtered the Israelites: "The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath" (14:16). Thus Moses seeks to make the Israelites' faithlessness less relevant: They are to be installed in Canaan to show that the Lord can do it after all.[12]

Having reminded the Lord of his need to demonstrate his power by acting on behalf of the Israelites, Moses appeals to a second aspect of God's strength (koah, 14:17, cf. Nah. 1:3), which should restrain him from acting against them: his mercifully patient love. Rather than citing any redeeming or redeemable quality of his miserable people, Moses clings to God's own declaration of his character on Mount Sinai as the basis for hope (Num. 14:17— 19, cf. Ex. 34:6—7). He concludes with the plea for God to forgive the Israelites' culpability in accordance with the greatness of his love *(hesed),* as he pardoned them ever since they left Egypt (Num. 14:19). As when he interceded following the Israelites' sin with the golden calf, "Moses' insistence that God change was clearly based on his conviction as to what is unchangeable in God, namely his unwavering intention to save."[13]

Here forgiving (Qal of slh) culpability *('awon)* and pardoning (Qal of *ns'*, i.e., lit., bearing [understood *'awon]* for them) are functionally equivalent. In the sacrificial system, priests bear (Qal of *n'*) culpability *('awon)* by eating purification offering meat (Lev. 10:17). In this way they participate in the process of reconciliation that the Lord completes when he forgives (Niphal of slh) faulty but nondefiant and repentant sinners (e.g., 4:20, 26, 31, 35). When the

Lord bears culpability, however (Ex. 34:7, cf. Num. 14:19), this is not prerequisite to forgiveness. It *is* forgiveness, which implies that when he pardons, he bears some kind of cost.[14]

One obvious price of pardon is the Lord's need to continue his relationship with faulty people (14:11—12, 19, 34). There is another price. By forgiving the Israelite nation on the corporate level in terms of continuing its existence (14:20), the Lord acts according to his mercy (Ex. 34:6—7a, Num. 14:18a). Consequently, however, he bears the problem that this very mercy can damage his reputation for justice (Ex. 34:7b, Num. 14:18b), because Israel includes sinners who will not submit to his sovereignty.

God's solution is to purge the disloyal from Israel, thereby absolving his reputation of a cost of mercy (cf. comments on Lev. 16, 23:26—32). Thus his forgiveness does not include forgetting the wrong or erasing all of its consequences.[15] He absolutely refuses to bestow the Promised Land on rebels, who will only use it to defame his Name.

The common denominator between forgiveness of the nation and punishment of rebels among them is the Lord's concern for his reputation of mercy and justice. It is important to stress that the concept of God's protecting or clearing his reputation has to do with the fact that he addresses real or potential human perceptions regarding him. This does not imply any actual defect in his character.[16]

A serving time. The Israelites have trouble walking with God. They tend to lag behind, rush ahead, or "bark up the wrong tree." It takes time for God's people to learn to stay with him. So he trains them for forty years by leading them around in the desert, away from distractions.

> … in deserts people can hear and brood upon things not easily heard or thought about in busy cities, where people are usually busy, surrounded by noise, and steeped in self-importance. Sometimes in cities the shrillness of the public life is so great that the whispering voice of God cannot be heard.[17]

Another advantage of desert life is its requirement of dependence on God. Without his mercy, his people cannot survive there.[18]

Staying with the Israelites in the desert for forty long years is Caleb. During his life he does some heroic things, like standing up to the entire Israelite assembly at Kadesh (Num. 13:30, 14:6—9) and hounding the Hebron giants out of town when he is an old man (Judg. 1:20). Because he wholeheartedly follows

the Lord (Num. 14:24), giants are his natural prey! However, I suggest that Caleb's "finest hour" is his heroic wait of four decades.

Through their faithless folly, Caleb's people have cheated him out of forty precious years of life in the Promised Land. Instead of enjoying the shade of his vine or fig tree while eating their fruit, he treks around the arid, trackless desert, going nowhere in particular, while his colleagues add to the dust one by one and Israel grows another army. Caleb doesn't need decades of extra training, he is ready to roll. If anyone has a right to complain or contemplate military free-lancing, it is Caleb. However, rather than grumble or rumble off to conquer Canaan all by himself, this man of action patiently sticks it out with the Lord and his faulty people.

So what does Caleb do with the time he spends wandering in the desert? From the facts that the next generation is ready to enter Canaan and Othniel, his son-in-law later, emulates his exploits (Judg. 1:12—13, 3:9—10), we gain a strong impression that Caleb plays a key role in educating the next generation to do as he has done: wholeheartedly follow the Lord, expect great things, and trust God to provide. It is a time of serving, not just serving time.

Contemporary Significance

EPIDEMICS OF ATTITUDE. Just a short time before the scouts return to the main camp at Kadesh (from the root *qds,* referring to holiness), the Israelites are a well-organized army of the Lord, cooperating together and bound for the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Now they turn into a mutinous mob, and even those they have honored and trusted turn on them. How can there be such a radical shift in the attitude of so many people, apparently all at once? M. Glad-well explains this as the "Tipping Point":

> These three characteristics—one, contagiousness, two, the fact that little causes can have big effects, and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment—are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade-school classroom or the flu attacks every winter. Of the three, the third trait—the idea that epidemics can rise or fall in one dramatic moment—is the most important, because it is the principle that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into why modern change happens the way it does. The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point.[19]

Just as modern fads sweep through society because people exert strong influence on each other, the negativity of naysaying Israelite scouts is wildly contagious to people who share a lack of adequate trust in God. A mere speech reporting powerful peoples, fortified cities, and giants (13:28—29) has an explosive effect, kindling a firestorm of fear and fury in one dramatic moment.

How do we protect ourselves and others from negative tipping points, such as giving in to temptation and strife, and promote positive ones, such as decisions to wholeheartedly follow the Lord? Here are a few tips:

- Foster a healthy influence on others, especially with regard to attitudes or attitude-shaping pieces of information that can be passed on without control from one person to another (e.g., avoiding gossip, slander, paranoia, or sensationalism).

- Critique influences on you, no matter how compelling they look. Don’t allow them to lead you to make damaging choices.
- Keep things in perspective and don’t run or jump just because all the other lemmings do.
- Be aware of spiritual, social, intellectual, and emotional environments that provide fertile ground for sudden change, whether for better or for worse.
- Maintain personal anchor points of faith and ethics to hang on to when everything else seems to be shifting fast.

When nothing is moving, let alone tipping in a positive direction, it is easy to tip into frustration. When we feel as though we are in a “holding pattern,” without signs of measurable progress, perhaps our situation is like Caleb’s prolonged desert experience. Rather than writing the time off as wasted, we can prepare for victory of biblical proportions by teaching precious people how to follow God all the way, in spite of distractions like giants, fortified obstacles, and other tribulations, to the place where “the Lamb … will be their shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17).[20]

Intercession. Does prayer on behalf of others make a difference? Is it “an activity that can initiate unilateral divine activity that would not have taken place if we had not utilized our God-given power of choice to request his assistance"? [21] To cite a specific example, what would have happened if Moses had *not* interceded for the Israelites at Kadesh (Num. 14:13—19)?

The biblical text indicates that Moses’ prayer indeed made a profound difference. Just before his speech, the Lord expressed grim resolve to administer genocide (14:12). Immediately afterward, God was talking about forgiveness (14:20). Although he qualified this forgiveness by spelling out dire consequences for many, this was a far cry from his deadly intention to wipe out the entire nation.

Notice the delimitations of Moses’ petition. He did not ask God to coerce the Israelites by converting them against their will. What he requested was for the Israelite nation to continue and so have further *opportunity to choose* loyalty to the Lord.

If we petition God to forgive someone else, as Moses did and as Jesus did when he prayed for those who crucified him (Luke 23:34), we are asking that the Lord give them the opportunity to make a better choice. If we are praying for those who have wronged us, as Moses and Jesus did, our plea includes the idea that we relinquish our right to divine retributive justice on our own behalf. In

other words, “Lord, I am not pressing charges. Please don’t punish for my sake.”

God provides for the good of everyone (Matt. 5:45), gives each person at least some spiritual “light” (John 1:9, Rom. 1—2), sacrificed his Son to save all who believe (John 3:16), and does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But intercessory petitions on behalf of others can still make a difference in their lives. There is “no necessary incompatibility in affirming both that God always seeks what is best for each of us and that God may at times wait to exert all the noncoercive influence that he can justifiably exert on a given person until requested to do so by another person.”[22]

1. See Levine, *Numbers 1—20*, 364.

2. Maxwell and Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, 69—70.

3. Milgrom takes “them” in “the whole assembly talked about stoning them” (v. 10) as referring to Moses and Aaron (cf. v. 5, *Numbers,* 109).

4. So Milgrom, ibid.

5. K. Sakenfeld, “The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14,” *CBQ* 37 (1975): 325—27.

6. For instances of Israel explicitly testing (Piel of *nsh)* the Lord, see Ex. 17:2, 7, Deut. 6:16, Ps. 95:8—9. The Lord also tested Israel: see Ex. 15:25, 16:4, 20:20, Deut. 8:2, 16, cf. 33:8, of God’s testing Aaron at Massah = the waters of Meribah.

7. Cf. Neh. 4:12, Job 19:3.

8. Aside from introductions to Balaam’s oracles in Num. 24 (vv. 3, 4, 15, 16), *ne’um* appears in the Pentateuch only in the opposing contexts of Gen. 22:16 and Num. 14:28. Also notice the contrast between Ex. 6:8 and Num. 14:30.

9. Cf. chs. 27, 36, where there is no Mrs. Zelophehad.

10. In M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 863.

11. Notice the alliteration in v. 44: The ark and *Moshe* (Moses) did not depart (Qal of mws) from the midst of the camp.

12. For a similar idea in Ezekiel regarding God’s postexilic restoration of the Israelites, in spite of their lack of repentance, see B. Schwartz, “Ezekiel’s Dim View of Israel’s Restoration,” in M. Odell and J. Strong, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (SBLSymS 9, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 43—67.

13. D. Gowan, “Changing God’s Mind (Exodus 32:7—14),” in F. C. Holmgren and H. E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions*

by Jewish and Christian Scholars (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 104.

14. Cf. G. Olafsson, "The Use of nP in the Pentateuch and Its Contribution to the Concept of Forgiveness" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1992), 208, 274—75.

15. Cf. the suggestion of Y. Muffs on 14:20 that "the author does not imply a total forgiveness, but rather the divine resolve to bear the sin of a sinful generation until the time He actually punishes them, in other words, until they die a natural death" *(Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992], 22).

16. R. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming), ch. 16.

17. G. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 59, speaking of John the Baptist's preparation in the desert.

18. Ibid., 60.

19. M. Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 9.

20. Gane, "Caleb's Finest Hour," 25.

21. C. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, and D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 162.

22. Ibid., 161.

Numbers 15

THE LORD SAID to Moses, [2]“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘After you enter the land I am giving you as a home [3]and you present to the LORD offerings made by fire, from the herd or the flock, as an aroma pleasing to the LORD—whether burnt offerings or sacrifices, for special vows or freewill offerings or festival offerings —[4]then the one who brings his offering shall present to the LORD a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil. [5]With each lamb for the burnt offering or the sacrifice, prepare a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering.

[6]“"With a ram prepare a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a third of a hin of oil, [7]and a third of a hin of wine as a drink offering. offer it as an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

[8]‘When you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, for a special vow or a fellowship offering to the LORD, [9]bring with the bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil. [10]Also bring half a hin of wine as a drink offering. It will be an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [11]Each bull or ram, each lamb or young goat, is to be prepared in this manner. [12]Do this for each one, for as many as you prepare.

[13]“"Everyone who is native-born must do these things in this way when he brings an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [14]For the generations to come, whenever an alien or anyone else living among you presents an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, he must do exactly as you do. [15]The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the alien shall be the same before the LORD? [16]The same laws and

regulations will apply both to you and to the alien living among you.'"

17The LORD said to Moses, 18"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land to which I am taking you 19and you eat the food of the land, present a portion as an offering to the LORD. 20Present a cake from the first of your ground meal and present it as an offering from the threshing floor. 21Throughout the generations to come you are to give this offering to the LORD from the first of your ground meal.

22"'Now if you unintentionally fail to keep any of these commands the LORD gave Moses—23any of the LORD'S commands to you through him, from the day the LORD gave them and continuing through the generations to come—24and if this is done unintentionally without the community being aware of it, then the whole community is to offer a young bull for a burnt offering as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, along with its prescribed grain offering and drink offering, and a male goat for a sin offering. 25The priest is to make atonement for the whole Israelite community, and they will be forgiven, for it was not intentional and they have brought to the LORD for their wrong an offering made by fire and a sin offering. 26The whole Israelite community and the aliens living among them will be forgiven, because all the people were involved in the unintentional wrong.

27"'But if just one person sins unintentionally, he must bring a year-old female goat for a sin offering. 28The priest is to make atonement before the LORD for the one who erred by sinning unintentionally, and when atonement has been made for him, he will be forgiven. 29One and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally, whether he is a native-born Israelite or an alien.

30"'But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. 31Because he has despised the LORD'S word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.'"

32While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. 33Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, 34and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. 35Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole

assembly must stone him outside the camp.” 36So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.

37The LORD said to Moses, 38“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. 39You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. 40Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. 41I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.'”

Original Meaning

"EYE" OF THE "HURRICANE." After the breathtaking narrative of the previous chapter, the ritual legislation of Numbers 15 provides an eerie calm. We are really in the tranquil "eye" of a narrative "hurricane" that will strike again with full fury in chapter 16. Temporary suspension of the story points beyond the present crisis. The very fact that the Lord is willing to continue as Israel's Lawgiver and accept sacrificial gifts from the people is a good sign. So is explicit application of these laws to future life in the Promised Land (15:2, 18), where they can offer him its products, such as grain and wine (15:2—21). Whenever God actually commanded this legislation, its placement in chapter 15 affirms his promise to bring the younger generation into Canaan (14:31).[1]

So why does chapter 15 intervene between chapters 14 and 16, thereby interrupting the narrative flow? After divine condemnation of the adult generation pronounced in chapter 14, chapter 15 implicitly emphasizes God's grace in giving the younger Israelites hope for the future. It also highlights the need for loyalty to him by making a drastic contrast between inadvertent sin, for which he offers a sacrificial remedy leading to forgiveness, and defiant sin, for which there is only terminal condemnation (15:22—31, see Bridging Contexts section). This chapter, with its thematic balance between God's justice and mercy and its strong warning against disloyalty, simultaneously makes Korah's revolt (ch. 16) appear more shocking and unreasonable to the listener/reader and places the Lord in a better light than if the narrative moved directly from one rebellion and divine judgment (ch. 14) to the next (ch. 16). Framed by reports of conflict in the surrounding chapters, chapter 15 forms the central focal point of an introverted structure that embraces Numbers 1—21 (see the introduction).

Sacrificial accompaniments and first dough. Numbers 15:1 — 16 formulates a general rule: Grain and wine offerings must accompany every sacrificial gift *('isseh)* that is a burnt offering or "sacrifice." The word "sacrifice" *(zebah)* here does not refer to sacrifices in general but to the class of sacrifices that includes well-being offerings, from which offerers are permitted to eat (see comments on Lev. 3, 7). The fact that grain and wine accompaniments are included in a sacrificial food gift *('isseh)* that is "an aroma pleasing to the Lord"

(Num. 15:10, cf. v. 7) implies that they are burned on the outer altar.[2]

A purification offering does not require accompaniments because it is a mandatory token debt payment, not a gift *('isseh*, see comments on Lev. 4). Neither does a reparation offering need grain and wine, in spite of the fact that it is called a gift *('isseh*, Lev. 7:5), presumably because it is mandatory.

Numbers 15:4—12 specifies in ascending order the amounts of the grain offerings, including semolina flour and oil, and drink offerings of wine that must accompany each flock animal (sheep or goat), ram, or bull in accordance with its size/value:[3]

Animal	Semolina (flour)	Oil	Wine
sheep/goat	one tenth *ephah*	quarter *hin*	quarter *hin*
ram	two-tenths *ephah*	third *hin*	third *hin*
bull	three-tenths *ephah*	half *hin*	half *hin*

The same rules for sacrificial accompaniments apply to resident aliens (15:13 — 16). Verses 15—16 emphasize remarkable equality: Resident aliens share the same legal status before the Lord as other Israelites.

Verses 17—21 present another law that applies when the Israelites enter the Promised Land (cf. v. 2). When they eat the bread of the land, they must set aside a dedication/gift *(terumah)* and present it to the Lord via his priest: a loaf from the first bread-making vessel? or dough? *('arisah)*[4] of each new harvest. Because it is processed dough from ground grain rather than standing grain, this firstfruits offering (cf. Lev. 2:14—16, Num. 18:12—13) applies to both nonfarmers and farmers.[5] Ezekiel 44:30 supplies a motive for acknowledging God's provision in this way: "so that a blessing may rest on your household."

Forgivable versus unforgivable sin. Numbers 15:22—29 reiterates part of the Leviticus 4 legislation regarding purification offerings for inadvertent sins of the community or of a common individual. The text goes on to contrast such expiable inadvertence with defiant ("high-handed") sin, for which there is no sacrificial remedy, but only the divinely administered terminal punishment of being "cut off" (15:30—31).

Numbers 15:22—31 presents two notable differences to Leviticus 4. (1) Instead of a purification offering bull (Lev. 4:14), the community must now sacrifice a burnt offering bull, with its grain and wine accompaniments, in addition to a male goat for a purification offering (Num. 15:24). Some rabbis have argued that the Numbers 15 purification offering for the community functioned alongside the Leviticus 4 procedure to remedy other kinds of sins,

such as violation of performative ("Thou shalt …") rather than prohibitive commandments ("Thou shalt not …"), or idolatry, which in effect breaks all of the commandments.[6] However, there is no clear evidence for such a synchronic distinction between the scope of the Leviticus 4 and Numbers 15 rituals,[7] and it is hard to see how the community could inadvertently commit idolatry.[8] So we must consider the diachronic possibility that Numbers 15 modifies the prescription for expiation of an inadvertent fault by the community.

What difference does the modification make? The most obvious one is that Numbers 15 distances the purification offering of the community from that of the high priest, both of which call for bulls in Leviticus 4. Why change the ritual in this way? The text does not say. Perhaps the answer lies in the relationship between Numbers 15 and its narrative context, where sins of the community that include conflict with the high priesthood feature so prominently (chs. 14, 16—17).[9]

(2) The other notable difference to Leviticus 4 is the fact that Numbers 15:30—31 explicitly condemns defiant sinners to the terminal punishment of extirpation ("cutting off"), without any opportunity for the sacrificial expiation that applies in the previous verses to inadvertent sin (15:22—29). This contrast warns those tempted to rebellion against God that there is a point of no return.[10] By their own choice, human beings can permanently and irrevocably destroy their relationship with him.

Defiant sin is the spiritual equivalent of jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. If biblical warnings sound harsh, they are to prevent that from happening. A story goes that a man climbed onto the railing along the edge of the Golden Gate Bridge, about to end his life. A police officer dispatched to the scene attempted to dissuade him from taking the plunge. After hours of unsuccessfully attempting to convince the man that he had all kinds of positive reasons to keep on living, the policeman became frustrated. Pulling out his pistol, he pointed it at the man's head and threatened to blow his brains out if he didn't get down from the railing. The man got down.

Apparently to illustrate inexpiable sin, 15:32—36 places the brief narrative of a man scrounging for firewood on Sabbath within the legal setting of Numbers 15. This happened sometime during the period when the Israelites were in the desert (15:32), where the climate was warm and the people had manna to eat (Ex. 16:35). So a fire for warmth or cooking would not have been urgent even if it were not Sabbath. It looks as though this man was going out of his way to violate the Sabbath command of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:8—11), of which the people were reminded every weekend when they received a double portion of

manna on Friday and none on the Sabbath (16:22—30).

The Ten Commandments do not specify punishments. Thus, as in the case of the blasphemer, the penalty for breaking the Sabbath was not clear, so the offender was kept under guard pending a divine oracle (Num. 15:34, cf. Lev. 24:12). Again, the divine verdict communicated to Moses was death outside the camp through stoning by the community (Num. 15:35—36, cf. Lev. 24:14, 23).

Tassels. In Exodus 20 the Sabbath commandment begins: "Remember the Sabbath day" (20:8). The fate of the wood-gatherer would help the people in remembering that law. In addition, Numbers 15:37—41 prescribes an ongoing strategy to jog their memory regarding all of his commandments: tassels on their garments to help them obey and be consecrated to the Lord rather than exploring (Qal of *twr)* and committing (spiritual) promiscuity (Qal of *znh)* by going wherever their hearts or eyes should lead them (15:39).

Here there are striking verbal connections to chapters 13—14, where the scouts' report of what they saw when they explored (Qal of *twr,* 13:2, 16, 17, etc., 14:34) led the Israelites to the "promiscuity" *(zenut,* 14:33) of unfaithfulness to God. The people needed to learn to trust and obey the Lord, walking by faith rather than by their sensory perceptions (eyes) as processed through their cognitive and emotional faculties (hearts).

A violet *(tekelet)* cord *(petil)* attached to the tassels (15:38)[11] is to symbolize consecration of the Israelites to the Lord (15:40) as a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). Violet was a color of royalty because only royalty could afford this kind of dye, which "was extracted from the gland of the *Murex trunculus* snail found in shallow waters off the coast of northern Israel and Lebanon … 12,000 snails yield only 1.4 grams of dye."[12] Violet was also connected with the priesthood because it was used in the priestly garments (28:5, 6, 8, 15, 31, 33).[13] In fact, aside from the violet cord on the tassels *(sisit)* in Numbers 15:38, violet cords only appear in the context of the high priest's ornate vestments, connecting the breastpiece to the ephod (Ex. 28:28, 39:21) and the gold plate (sis) inscribed "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (NKJV) to the turban (28:36— 37, 39:30—31).

Bridging Contexts

THE LORD'S "MEAL." Sacrificial accompaniments of grain and drink (15:1 —16) made an offering to the Lord a complete meal, just as human beings generally do not eat meat by itself. Compare Genesis 18:5—8, where Abraham provided bread cakes, curds, and milk for his guests along with meat from a calf. He did not immediately recognize that his three guests were of heavenly origin and one of them was the Lord himself (18:1, 13, 17, 20, etc.). What he thought was mundane hospitality turned out to be a sacrifice!

Other ancient Near Eastern meals for deities could also include meat, grain items such as bread, and drink. For example, during the Hittite ninth year festival of the god Telipinu the following ritual takes place: "On the fifth day, at dawn, they slaughter 10 bovines and 200 sheep. They set [the choice meat portions] likewise. [They] s[et] thick breads, livers and hearts likewise. He libates [beer, (another kind of) beer,] and wine likewise."[14]

The law of sacrificial accompaniments in 15:1 —16 helps us to better understand the Passover meal in the time of Christ and the way he transformed it into the service we now know as "the Lord's Supper" or "communion" (Matt. 26:26—28). The bread Jesus used to represent his body was unleavened Passover bread (cf. Ex. 12:8). Exodus 12 does not specify wine in the directions for the original Passover, but by Jesus' day the service included wine as an additional accompaniment to the Passover lamb. This makes good sense. Since the Passover sacrifice was a *zebah* ("sacrifice") eaten by the offerer (Ex. 12:27), the law of Numbers 15:1—16 required grain and wine accompaniments when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land.

Today we remember Christ's sacrifice by partaking of what were accompaniments in the Passover service: bread and wine. By not eating a lamb, we acknowledge that our Lamb has come (1 Cor. 5:7, cf. John 19:36, referring to Ex. 12:46). From the sides, bread and wine point to the center, the sacrificial body and blood of Christ (Matt. 26:26, 28).[15]

The spectrum of moral faults. By investigating the scope and limits of sacrificial expiation leading to divine forgiveness, we can better understand the nature of various categories of sins and God's attitude toward them.[16] In 15:22—

31 there is a sharp contrast between sacrificial expiation + forgiveness for inadvertence (vv. 22—29) and extirpation for defiance (vv. 30—31).[17] Although the death of a defiant sinner may accomplish a kind of expiation (also *kipper)* for the community by purging him or her from it (25:13), defiance and expiation + forgiveness to benefit the offender are mutually exclusive.[18] A "highhanded" sinner could not receive reconciliation with God through the system of ancient Israelite animal sacrifices (but see below). Sacrificial expiation prerequisite to forgiveness is a privilege, not an inalienable right.

Some interpreters assume that the two categories of sin in Numbers 15:22—31—expiable inadvertent and inexpiable defiant—are intended to embrace the entire spectrum of moral faults. This would imply that the "highhanded" category (vv. 30—31) must include all wrongs that are not inadvertent, that is, all deliberate/intentional/advertent sins.[19]

חטאת

Aside from the problem that barring all intentional sinners from opportunity for reconciliation with God appears unreasonably harsh, this idea contradicts other texts where at least some deliberate sins are expiable, whether through a purification offering (Lev. 5:1, 5—6) or a reparation offering (6:1—7, Num. 5:5—8).[20]

A. Schenker resolves the apparent tension between Numbers 15:22—31 and other passages by distinguishing between two kinds of *deliberate* sins. His criterion is the manner in which they are committed, which reflects the attitude of the wrongdoer. By contrast with simple deliberate lapses, "highhanded" wrongs are defiant, "in your face" offenses against God's rule that are committed openly, boldly, and shamelessly, as the Israelites "high-handedly" departed from Egypt and Pharaoh's rule (Ex. 14:8, Num. 33:3).[21]

inadvertent: expiable	nondefiant deliberate: expiable	"high-handed" = defiant: inexpiable

This approach implies that Numbers 15:22—31 contrasts the least severe inadvertent category (vv. 22—29) with the most severe defiant category (vv. 30—31), but it does not contradict expiation for the intermediate class of nondefiant deliberate sins because it simply does not cover the mid-range of the sin spectrum. Therefore, there is no real contradiction between Numbers 15 and the other passages.

My conclusion basically coincides with that of Schenker,[22] but I would make

two qualifications. (1) We must depend on Leviticus 5:1, 5—6, 6:1 —7 and Numbers 5:5—8 for specification of "nondefiant deliberate" sins expiable by mandatory purification or reparation offerings preceded by voluntary confession and any required reparation. (2) In Numbers 15:30—31 the "high-handed" defiance of a sinner is in relation to God. What is open, bold, and shameless to him is not necessarily apparent to other human beings. For example, Achan's offense was secret in relation to the community, but with the Lord's intervention he suffered the fate of an irrevocably condemned defiant sinner (Josh. 7). The success of concealment from other people does not mitigate a moral fault!

The fact that defiance is the factor that tips a sin over the edge into the inexpiable category is highly significant. Defiance is personal disloyalty and an affront against the Lord (15:30), it is rebellion against his authority and covenant.[23] From passages in which *yad* ("hand") is combined with the verb *rwm* ("rise/raise", Ex. 17:11, Deut. 32:27, 1 Kings 11:26—27, Mic. 5:9), C. Labuschagne finds that the expression "high-handed(ly)" is associated with human "strife, rebellion and fighting…. The origin of the expression is without any doubt the physical gesture of the raised hand, with or without a weapon in it, which indicates that one is triumphantly determined to fight and to win."[24]

The negative connotation of raising the hand is also prominent in the Akkadian letter YOS 3.25: "Why in the world did you lift your hand against the king …?"[25] While even nondefiant faults bring loyalty into question and damage the divine-human relationship,[26] such sins are not rebellious in the same sense. The Lord can work with those who are faulty, but not with those who refuse to be loyal. For him, loyalty is the bottom line.

The point of 15:22—31 is not to divide the range of moral faults down the middle, but rather to highlight the severity due to those who rebel against God by contrasting it with the leniency available to sinners at the other end of the spectrum. This implied warning is pointedly placed between accounts of communal revolt in chapters 14 and 16 and immediately before the narrative of an individual's inexpiable offense (15:32—36).[27] The law-narrative connection implies that a sin is not simply an abstract theological entity. Rather, every act of sin is a sad story with a relational context.

Contemporary Significance

WHEN IS BAD TOO BAD? Am I too bad for God to save? Have I committed a sin too great for him to forgive? We have found that defiant ("highhanded") sins were too serious to be handled by the ancient Israelite system of *animal sacrifices* (Num. 15:30—31). Does this mean that God cannot forgive us if we have sinned defiantly? The story of King Manasseh will help us to answer this important question.

If anyone sinned with a "high hand," it was Manasseh. Of all kings of Judah and Israel, he was the "baddest of the bad." In some ways he makes Saddam Hussein look like a nice guy. He shed lots of innocent blood, engaged in occult, and promoted all kinds of abominable apostasy (2 Kings 21, 2 Chron. 33). He sponsored idolatry so enthusiastically that he even spat in God's face by placing a symbol of the goddess Asherah in the temple (2 Kings 21:7, cf. 2 Chron. 33:7), probably in the Most Holy Place in place of the ark of the covenant (cf. 2 Chron. 35:3)![28] Just for sacrificing his son(s) (2 Kings 21:6, 2 Chron. 33:6) Manasseh would have been terminally condemned by God to being "cut off" (cf. Lev. 20:3).

After the Lord's appeals to Manasseh and his people were of no avail (2 Chron. 33:10), it is not surprising that "the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon" (33:11). He had it coming, and that's obviously the end of his story, right? Wrong! The next two verses are among the most remarkable in the entire Bible:

> In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea, so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God. (2 Chron. 33:12—13)

After all this miserable monarch had done, "the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea"! Can there be any more stunning assurance of God's relentless compassion? Whereas all the prophetic reproofs God had sent

Manasseh fell on deaf ears, miraculous mercy pierced the darkness of his soul, and he finally realized that the Lord alone—not Asherah, Baal, Molech, or the host of heavenly bodies—is God. Lest we suspect that Manasseh's repentance was not genuine, he tried to undo the evil that he had perpetrated (2 Chron. 33:15—16).

Rather than having his descendants cut off as he deserved, Manasseh's line continued. In fact, it was a distinguished line: "Manasseh the father of Amon … Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matt. 1:10—16).

So how did the Lord forgive Manasseh? There was no animal sacrifice that he could offer to receive expiation for what he had done. So God went beyond the bounds of the ritual system to forgive Manasseh directly when he repented, without the prerequisite ritual expiation.[29] This agrees with Ezekiel 18:21, where the Lord promises amnesty to the wicked who repent, with some texts expiation (verb *kipper)* is solely a divine act, not the result of human ritual performance (Ex. 32:30, Ps. 65:3, 78:38, 79:9, Dan. 9:24).[30]

Only one sacrifice could save a person like Manasseh: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, emphasis supplied). "Whoever" means absolutely "whoever," without qualification. The sacrifice of God's Son is more powerful than animal sacrifices. Paul preached "that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38—39). The sacrifice of Christ, whose human father was Joseph, a descendant of Manasseh, reached back through history and snatched the contrite king from hell.

Returning to the original question—Am I too bad for God to save?—the answer is: If he could save Manasseh, he can save anyone who repents. In fact, repentance is a gift from God (Acts 5:31), so he can save anyone who only chooses to accept this gift.

The fact that God is incredibly merciful should bring hope to *any* sinner who desires salvation. However, it should not lead any to suppose that it is safe to presume upon his grace by stubbornly sliding down the slippery slope of apostasy with assurance that the gravity of depravity can be reversed at any time with a simple hop onto the "chair lift" to heaven. Going down does not make it easier to get back up. "It does not soften the heart, increase the likelihood of faith, or amplify the voice of God speaking through con-science."[31] The problem is not for God to be willing to forgive, but for a sinner to want to be forgiven.

A Jewish story vividly illustrates the principle that God does everything he can to save people (cf. Isa. 5:1—6):

> Three rabbis in a rowboat were floating in a quiet lake. Suddenly a fierce storm hit, the lake's waters becoming a roaring current heading towards a dangerous waterfall. A man along the shore spotted the rabbis and offered them a rope. They refused, answering in unison, "God will save us."
>
> Then a helicopter came, and lowered down a ladder so the rabbis could climb to safety. Again they refused, shouting, "God will save us."
>
> Finally, Coast Guard motorboats pulled up to help them, and once again… "No, God will save us."
>
> The rowboat crashed over the waterfall as the rabbis cried: "God, why didn't you save us!" The answer came from the heavens, *"I sent a man with a rope, then a helicopter, finally Coast Guard boats … what else did you expect me to do?!"*[32]

Loyalty as God's "bottom line." The concept that loyalty is God's bottom line makes a big difference in the way we relate to him. He does not reserve salvation for perfect people who have never sinned. It is too late for that because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He knows that his people are faulty: mortal, weak, prone to fall, and unable to make themselves perfect. So he does not judge them on the basis of whether they have faults or not. Rather, what he requires is loyalty to himself, the only One who can heal their faultiness.

We have found the principle of loyalty at the Israelite sanctuary. The Lord provided ritual remedies for the imperfections of his people as long as they were loyal to him. However, if they defied him, spurned his remedies, or failed to demonstrate loyalty on the Day of Atonement, they were condemned (Lev. 23:29—30, Num. 15:30—31, 19:13, 20).

Loyalty as the criterion for maintaining a healthy relationship to the divine King is strikingly paralleled and illuminated by the need for personal loyalty to a human king.[33] David rewarded Barzillai and his family, who aided the king when he fled from Absalom (1 Kings 2:7, cf. 2 Sam. 17:27—29, 19:31 —32). David also forgave Mephibosheth, who was loyal to him but whose loyalty was put in question through no intention of his own (19:24— 30, cf. 16:1—4). By contrast, King Solomon punished Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, and Shimei for disloyalty after granting them provisional amnesty (1 Kings 2:13—46, cf. 1:5—53, 2:5—6, 8—9).[34]

Loyalty is a matter of relationship, not simply of performance. Obviously

what we do to other people or to God reveals our attitudes in ways that help to shape our relationships with them, but the focus is on the health of the relationship rather than on some kind of objective scorecard. So there is no point comparing with someone else's score, as a certain Pharisee did with smug reference to a tax collector (Luke 18:9—14). God's ideal for each of us, as exemplified by Christ and empowered by his Spirit (e.g., 2 Cor. 3, Phil. 2:5, 1 Peter 2:21), is far above what we could deduce by looking around at each other.

A story goes that one evening two buddies were relaxing by a campfire in the mountains. One glanced up and yelled that a bear was coming. The other started putting on his running shoes. Surprised, the first queried, "Why are you doing that? Do you think you can outrun a bear?" His erstwhile "friend" calmly replied, "I don't need to. I've only gotta outrun you!" God doesn't function like a bear. To put it another way, he doesn't grade "on the curve."

Rather than fixating on others or on our own faults—the discouraging wind and waves that make us sink, as Peter did when he was walking on the water (Matt. 14:30)—the key to victorious living is simply to loyally keep on following God all the way, as Caleb did (see comments on Num. 13—14). If God wants to lead us to perfection of character, he can do it, but it is up to him. In Ephesians 5 it is Christ who "loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (5:25—27, cf. Rev. 19:8). Our role is not to cleanse ourselves by our own efforts, but to accept and keep on accepting the gift of cleansing.

1. On the function of law in Num. 15 within its context between the preceding and following narratives, see Olson, *The Death of the Old,* 170—74.

2. Never on the incense altar (Ex. 30:9).

3. An *ephah* = 11.75 liters, about a peck, and a *hin* = 1.17 liters, about a quart (S. Rattray, "The Biblical Measures of Capacity," in Milgrom, *Leviticus i — is,* 895—98).

4. Although scholars have not settled on the definite meaning of this word, it clearly refers to some aspect of the bread-making process.

5. See Milgrom, *Numbers,* 121—22.

6. On Num. 15:22 see, e.g., Ibn Ezra (performative) versus Ramban (idolatry).

7. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie,* 264—69.

8. Wenham, *Numbers,* 130.

9. For more detailed analysis and interaction with scholarly theories, see Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 4.

10. Cf. Wenham, *Numbers,* 130.

11. Here is the fortieth and last occurrence of the word *tekelet* in the Pentateuch.

12. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 127.

13. Violet was also used for the sanctuary fabrics (Ex. 26:1, 4, 31, 36, 27:16), including those that covered sacred objects when they were transported (Num. 4:6, 7, 9, 11, 12).

14. Tablet 14 Rev. IV 23'—25', author's transl. (Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure,* ch. 6). Another example is the second (afternoon) regular meal for Bel/Marduk, the city god of Babylon, on the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year festival of spring (see ibid., ch. 5, cf. *ANET,* 334).

15. See Gane, *Altar Call,* 166.

16. For a fuller discussion, see R. Gane, "Numbers 15:22—31 and the Spectrum of Moral Faults," in G. Klingbeil, ed., *Inicios, paradigmas y fundamentos: Estudios teologicos y exegeticos en el Pentateuco* (River Plate Monograph Series in Biblical and Theological Studies 1, Libertador San Martin: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2004), 149—56.

17. Cf. Ps. 19:12—13, J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1996), 341.

18. K. Koch, "Sühne und Sündenvergebung um die Wende von der exilischen zur nachexilischen Zeit," *EvT* 26 (1966): 331—32.

19. So, e.g., G. A. Anderson, "The Interpretation of the Purification Offering **(????)** in the *Temple Scroll* (11QTemple) and Rabbinic Literature," *JBL* 111 (1992): 19, 30—31.

20. See, e.g., P. Saydon, "Sin-Offering and Trespass-Offering," *CBQ* 8 (1946): 397.

21. A. Schenker, "Das Zeichen des Blutes und die Gewissheit der Vergebung im Alten Testament," *MTZ* 34 (1983): 205, idem, "Interprétations récentes et dimensions spécifiques du sacrifice *hattat*," *Bib* 75 (1994): 65, 69, idem, *Recht und Kult,* 121.

22. See Gane, *Cult and Character,* ch. 9.

23. A. Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Liteature of the First Century* (LBS: New York: KTAV, 1967), 307—8, 456, R. K. Harrison, "Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary" *(TOTC,* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980), 31, 172.

24. C. Labuschagne, “The Meaning of *b^{e}yad ram a* in the Old Testament,” *Von Kanaan bis Kerala* (Festschrift for J. P. M. van der Ploeg, AOAT 211, Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchener, 1982), 146, cf. 145, 148.

25. Transl. A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), 190.

26. Cf. K. Kinghorn, “Biblical Concepts of Sin,” *WesTJ* 1 (1966): 22, 25—26.

27. Cf. Wenham, *Numbers,* 130—31, Budd, *Numbers,* 173—74.

28. M. Haran, “The Disappearance of the Ark,” *IEJ* 13 (1963): 50—51. The fact that Manasseh was a vassal of Assyria does not excuse him. Second Kings 21 and 2 Chron. 33 do not mention Assyrian imposition of idolatry (R. Gane, “The Role of Assyria in the Ancient Near East During the Reign of Manasseh,” AUSS 35 [1997]: 31) and deities worshiped in Judah during Manasseh’s reign were Canaanite and Aramean rather than Assyrian (M. Cogan, “Judah under Assyrian Hegemony: A Reexamination of Imperialism and Religion,” *JBL* 112 [1993]: 411).

29. Cf. Gane, *Altar Call,* 42, 149—50, 212. On direct forgiveness, see also A. P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 130.

30. F. Maass, **“?23** *kpr* pi. to atone,” *TLOT,* 2:631.

31. Gane, *Altar Call,* 213.

32. A. Stanley Kramer, *Three Rabbis in a Rowboat: The World’s Best Jewish Humor* (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 28.

33. Cf. Gane, *Altar Call,* 191—95. For detailed analysis, see idem, *Cult and Character,* ch. 16.

34. David had pardoned Shimei (2 Sam. 19:18—23) for cursing him (16:5—13), but later he did not regard him as worthy of clemency (1 Kings 2:8—9).

Numbers 16:1—35

Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and
certain Reubenites—Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of
Peleth—became insolent 2and rose up against Moses. With them were
250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been
appointed members of the council. 3They came as a group to oppose
Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The whole
community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them.
Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?”

4When Moses heard this, he fell facedown. 5Then he said to Korah
and all his followers: “In the morning the Lord will show who belongs
to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him.
The man he chooses he will cause to come near him. 6You, Korah, and
all your followers are to do this: Take censers 7and tomorrow put fire
and incense in them before the Lord. The man the Lord chooses will
be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!”

8Moses also said to Korah, “Now listen, you Levites! 9Isn’t it
enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest
of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the
work at the Lord’s tabernacle and to stand before the community and
minister to them? 10He has brought you and all your fellow Levites
near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. 11It is
against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together.
Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?”

12Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab.
But they said, “We will not come! 13Isn’t it enough that you have
brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in
the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? 14Moreover, you
haven’t brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us

an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come! ”

15Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, “Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them.”

16Moses said to Korah, “You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. 17Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also.” 18So each man took his censer, put fire and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 19When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire assembly. 20The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 21“Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.”

22But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, “O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?”

23Then the LORD said to Moses, 24“Say to the assembly, ‘Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'”

25Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. 26He warned the assembly, “Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.” 27So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

28Then Moses said, “This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: 29If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. 30But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt.”

31As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart 32and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their

households and all Korah’s men and all their possessions. 33They went
down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth
closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the
community. 34At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled,
shouting, “The earth is going to swallow us too!”

35And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who
were offering the incense.

Original Meaning

FIGHTING WORDS. Numbers 16 is the most dramatic chapter in a book that is by no means lacking in drama. The Lord's sentence on the adult generation of Israelites (ch. 14) only temporarily quells notions of revolt. In chapter 16 the "hurricane" of rebellion slams back with climactic force (cf. comments on ch. 15).

The Israelites have previously talked about choosing someone to replace Moses and Aaron (14:4). Now Korah announces his candidacy. A Kohathite Levite, he is closely related to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. With Korah are Dathan, Abiram, and On from the tribe of Reuben (16:1), the oldest son of Jacob/Israel (cf. Gen. 29:32). Since the Reubenites and Kohathites both camp on the south side of the tabernacle (Num. 2:10, 3:29), the tents of the rebel leaders are close to each other.

Backed up by a formidable group of 250 reputable chieftains, Korah and his associates confront ("took [NIV 'became insolent,' but cf. text note] … and rose up … and came as a group against") Moses and Aaron (16:1—3a) with the fighting words: "You have gone too far![1] The whole community is holy…. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD'S assembly?" (16:3b). The fact that the verb "took" (Qal of *lqh)* in verse 1 has no object has disturbed interpreters for centuries. What does Korah take, along with his associates? The text does not say.[2] However, each instance of the same verb in the rest of the story has one or more censers as its object (16:6, 17, 18, 39, 46, 47). The last occurrence (16:47) has Aaron's censer as the contextually implied object, but the word for "censer" is not expressed, just as "took" has no object in verse 1. So it appears that the lack in verse 1 is an intentional literary strategy to get the reader/listener thinking about what Korah wants to take, which we find out later is the censer of Aaron that represents his high priestly function.[3]

Korah & Co. have armed themselves with a kind of covenant theology. As the Lord himself said, the whole nation is holy (Ex. 19:6). So how can Moses and Aaron claim higher status and presume to condemn others? The assault on their leadership is mounted by a bloc of factions, whose various political interests and dissatisfactions converge in backlash against condemnation of the adult

Israelites,[4] which Moses communicated to them (14:39). This time the rebels are not a disorganized mob venting riotous indignation. They are well-organized leaders who are, humanly speaking, qualified to run the nation.

Deadly challenge. Moses responds by challenging the rebels to burn incense in order to test their claim to holiness on a par with that of the Aaronic priests (16:5—7). It is supposed to work like the ritual "litmus test" for a suspected adulteress (see comments on 5:11—31) in the sense that variable results will depend on variable states of persons who come in contact with certain kinds/degrees of holiness.

The test proposed by Moses is deadly dangerous, and his warning (16:7, echoing v. 3) is no empty threat. Even though Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were authorized priests, they perished for offering incense with unauthorized fire (Lev. 10:1—2). What will happen to someone who offers incense if the Lord has not chosen him? He who plays with fire gets burned by it (cf. Num. 3:10, 38—death for encroaching on priestly service)!

Rebuking the rebel Levites with laser-like focus, Moses inversely mirrors the introduction of Korah & Co.: "Is it (too) small for you …?" (16:9, lit. transl.). Is their special work for the Lord so insignificant that they should also seek the priesthood (vv. 9—10)? Moses' punch line hits the proverbial nail on the head: "It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together" (v. 11). At issue is theocratic leadership of the community.

Refusing Moses' summons, Dathan and Abiram send an insulting message that begins with language like that which Moses used on Korah: "Is it (too) small that you have brought us up …?" (16:13, lit. transl.). As far as they are concerned, Moses is the problem blocking the way to real progress, as Lucy rails at Charlie Brown:

> You, Charlie Brown, are a foul ball in the line drive of life! You're in the shadow of your own goal posts! You are a miscue! You are three putts on the eighteenth green! You are a seven-ten split in the tenth frame…. You are a missed free throw, a shanked nine iron and a called third strike! Do you understand? Have I made myself clear?[5]

Dathan and Abiram query: "Will you gouge out the eyes of these men?" (16:14). The two probably include themselves among "these men" (cf. 1 Sam. 29:4, where "the heads of these men" [NASB] means "the heads of our own men" [NIV], including ourselves).[6] Gouging out eyes would be severe punishment inflicted by an enemy (cf. Judg. 16:21, 1 Sam. 11:2, 2 Kings 25:7, Jer. 39:7, 52:11). Where do Dathan and Abiram get the idea that Moses himself might be

planning to take such vindictive action?—from his announcement of the Lord's decision that they would not see the land of Canaan (cf. 14:23)?

Moses has put up with a lot in the past, but the outrageous defamations hurled at him by Dathan and Abiram turn him into an anti-intercessor (16:15). This is the only place where the Pentateuch says that Moses was "*very* angry."[7]

Swallowing those who fail to swallow their pride. It is surprising that Korah & Co. show up at the court of the sanctuary the next day for an incense duel with Aaron (16:18). Apparently ambition blinds them to their peril. Predictably, their invocation is provocation. Incensed, the Lord serves notice that he is about to finish off "this assembly," that is, the entire Israelite community (16:20—21).[8]

Rather than getting out of the Lord's way, Moses and Aaron desperately attempt to intercede. Their question of theodicy (justification of God)— "Will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?" (16:22)—is reminiscent of Abraham's plea for Sodom (Gen. 18:25). In response, the Lord commands Moses to save the majority of the people by isolating the rebel leaders (Num. 16:23—24). To do this, Moses goes to the Reubenite encampment of Dathan and Abiram, who have not been willing to come to him (16:25—27, cf. vv. 12, 14).

Whereas the incense test is between Aaron and the Levites who challenge him over the priesthood, now Moses proposes a test of his own divinely mandated leadership, to which Dathan and Abiram have directed their barbs (16:12—14). This challenge consists of a conditional funeral oration: If the rebel leaders die natural deaths, Moses' commission from the Lord will be invalidated. If, however, God will (lit.) "create a creation" (noun + Qal of *br')* by having the earth swallow them alive, the Israelites will know that these rebels have "treated the LORD with contempt" (16:29—30). In the Bible only God can create (br'). Ironically, this present unprecedented miracle of creation will be for destruction.

The rebels have opened their mouths against the Lord and sought a higher place, but now the earth opens its mouth to gulp them down to a lower place. Loss of any innocent family members who belong to them, such as young children, is punishment on the rebels themselves, not on the innocents.[9] Korah's men (apparently Levites who have joined him in grasping for the priesthood and whose tents are in the Levite area not far away) likewise descend (16:31 —33).

The seismic swallowing is all over in seconds. Beholding this horrifying spectacle, like a vision from Dante, and hearing the shrieks of the perishing just before they are muffled and silenced by the heavy crunch of earth closing back over them like slabs over graves, the Israelites run for their lives lest pits of perdition await them too (16:34).

Now that Moses and Aaron are separated from the 250 wannabe priests, who have flunked their test, these men receive their “F” = Fire (16:35), as would be expected from the demise of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2).[10] Grasping at the supernal, their fate is infernal. As Magonet puts it, “ironically, while those who sought earthly power go down living into the earth, those who sought spiritual power, go up as a burnt offering to heaven.”[11] Since the Israelite adults are already condemned to die in the desert, some of them have presumably thought they had nothing more to lose by further provoking the Lord. Think again!

Bridging Contexts

"AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY." Access to an area is limited in proportion to how special it is. If it is a Junior High School furnace room, restrictions may not be too severe, but if it is a nuclear reactor, even employees can count on a thorough security check every day when they come to work.

Some areas, such as the White House and Buckingham Palace, are special because they house special people. Entrance is strictly controlled. You are not permitted to simply stroll up to the President or Queen anytime you wish and strike up a conversation. Several years ago a mentally unbalanced man wandered into the Queen's private quarters, to the embarrassment of her security forces. Unflustered, she chatted with him to keep him calm, but only until her guards arrived and whisked him away.

If human beings can make places special, what about the divine King? His earthly dwelling in the Israelite camp had authorized personnel (i.e., priests) who were permitted to approach him in certain ways. Others were unauthorized. The Levites enjoyed closer access than other Israelites, but the door of priestly officiation, including burning incense to the Lord, was closed to them. Without the protection of authorized sanctity, Israelites could not survive if they attempted to act as priests any more than firefighters, astronauts, and experts who work with radioactive materials can survive without adequate protection.

Usurping prerogatives of authorized personnel can also be deadly to other people. In the process of destroying themselves, Korah & Co. nearly triggered a catastrophic "meltdown" that could have wiped out their entire nation (Num. 16:20—21). The law that a person who attempted to encroach on priestly officiation should be killed (3:10, 38), that is, by the priestly guard, addressed precisely this danger by calling for lethal preemption of an act that would bring calamity on the community.[12] This may sound severe, but perhaps it is a bit more comprehensible in our post-9/11 world: It would be like shooting a suicide attacker before he managed to detonate his bomb or fly into his target.

Moses not only fails to prevent Korah's brigade of martyrs from offering incense and thereby endangering the community, he commands it (16:5—7, 16—17)! It is practically impossible to imagine that Moses would have initiated this breach of sacred protocol on his own authority. We can only assume that the

command has come from the Lord. As at Kibroth Hattaavah, people get what they want and take the consequences (ch. 11). Some insist on finding things out the hard way. Unfortunately, sometimes that is the last mistake they ever make.

Why does God do things that appear contrary to love? This question is a problem because the Bible proclaims that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and his law is based on love (Matt. 22:36—40). We are dealing here with *theodicy,* that is, justification of God's character.

Let's begin with some factors that at least partly explain God's rigorous treatment of the Israelites. (1) Because they have enjoyed special opportunities for faith by experiencing and benefiting from mighty miracles, such as the plagues on Egypt, deliverance at the Red Sea, manna, and the theophany on Mount Sinai, the Israelites of the Exodus generation have a high level of responsibility to be loyal to the Lord, who has redeemed them from slavery to be his special nation (e.g., Ex. 19:6). Thus, disloyalty is especially serious.

(2) With God's tabernacle in their midst, the Israelites are privileged with special proximity to his holy Presence (cf. Ex. 25:8). Being that close to awesome divine power is potentially dangerous, especially to those who are not careful to observe the regulations that protect them.

(3) Many years of slavery in a pagan country have taken their toll on the spiritual and moral sensitivity of the Israelites, so they need a firm hand to teach them the difference between right and wrong and to show how to live in harmony with the Lord. The fact that God does not come down as hard on our sins in the present life does not mean that he has revised his attitude toward sin.

Tough discipline is one thing, but what about God's destruction of human life, such as that which he accomplished by the great Flood, fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, plagues on the Egyptians, death on rebellious Israelites, and divinely sanctioned and empowered genocide against the Canaanites by the Israelites? Since divine retributive justice is more prominent in the Old Testament than in the New Testament, many people do not feel as comfortable with God in the former. However, divine justice is also present in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 5:1 — 11, 13:8—11), and the magnitude of retribution prophesied in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev. 14:9—11, 19, 20, 16:1—21, 20:9—15) eclipses anything in the Old Testament. God is the same, and the question about his character is relevant to both Testaments.

The first thing to understand about God's justice is that it is part of his love. You cannot love someone without providing justice. What use is mercy when your rights are being violated? Justice is the aspect of love that protects the boundaries of well-being around each individual. The close connection between love and justice in the Bible is supported by various passages. (1) In Hosea

10:12 and Proverbs 21:21, *hesed* (“loving-kindness”) is linked to *sedatjah* (“righteousness/rightness”). (2) In Micah 6:8 and Hosea 12:6, *hesed* is closely associated with *mispat* (“justice”). (3) God shows *hesed* to people by saving them from unfair disadvantages that come from enemies and other troubles. For example, in Psalm 21:7—8, God’s *hesed* for the Israelite king helps him to be successful against his enemies.

Psalm 21 uncovers a crucial concept: God helps his people by delivering them from oppression. Ultimate deliverance will take place at the final destruction of the wicked by fire (Rev. 20). The only way God can give love, including justice, to his people is by removing those who are hurting them. He cannot help everyone, not because he wants anyone to perish (Ezek. 18:32, John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:9), but because many choose to reject the salvation he freely offers to all.

When the Lord destroys the wicked, it is his “strange work [act]” (Isa. 28:21) because he would rather not have to do it. Holding our breath in his hands (Dan. 5:23), he is our life-support system. To those who choose to pull the plug on their own life support, he gives time to change their minds. To those who drag their lives into the “trash,” he gives a second chance, a dialogue box that says: “This God-given and God-redeemed life has mega-value. Are you sure you want to remove it permanently?”

Contemporary Significance

THAT SINKING FEELING. Occasionally a piece of ground in Florida collapses into a massive pit called a "sinkhole." A sinkhole develops when an underground stream dries up during a drought and fails to continue supporting the ground above it. Anything on the ground, such as pavement, vehicles, or even buildings, can slide into the hole. Needless to say, not being able to trust the earth beneath your feet is unsettling. G. MacDonald draws an analogy:

> There are many people whose lives are like one of Florida's sinkholes. It is likely that at one time or another many of us have perceived ourselves to be on the verge of a sinkhole-like cave-in. In the feelings of numbing fatigue, a taste of apparent failure, or the bitter experience of disillusionment about goals or purposes, we may have sensed something within us about to give way. We feel we are just a moment from a collapse that will threaten to sweep our entire world into a bottomless pit. Sometimes there seems to be little that can be done to prevent such a collapse. What is wrong?[13]

MacDonald goes on to point out that under the surface of our lives is an inner space, our private world, and "if neglected this private world will not sustain the weight of events and pressures that press upon it."[14] An underground stream dries up gradually, but a sinkhole occurs rapidly. Similarly, neglect of inner order and strength over a period of time can result in a sudden depression. A surface veneer of accomplishments and success may look impressive, but it is not sufficient to sustain its own weight if life has a hollow core.

With Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, symbolic and literal sinkholes come together. With impressive credentials, forceful personalities, and powerful political support, they are outwardly strong. But beneath the visible surface, by contrast with Moses, they lack the support of a spiritual connection to Israel's God. They are already sunk before they literally sink.

It is easy to point at Korah & Co. with horror and disgust, affirming that we would never have a falling away as they did. Indeed, the drama of their last moments would be a tough act to follow, but the subsurface cause of their failure

gives us pause because we too can neglect the private inner world where our spiritual connection to God resides. Rather than wait for that sinking feeling, when we do something irreparably stupid, it is better to replenish our subterranean aquifers from the Source that supports the ground of our being.

Confidence in leaders. One day, Confucius was asked by one of his disciples about the ingredients of good government. His answer: "Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people."

"But," asked the disciple, "suppose you had no choice but to dispense with one of those three, which would you forego?"

"Weapons," said Confucius.

His disciple persisted: "Suppose you were then forced to dispense with one of the two that are left, which would you forego?"

Replied Confucius, "Food. For from of old, hunger has been the lot of all men, but a people that no longer trusts its rulers is lost indeed."[15]

The Israelites were lost indeed because they did not trust their leaders—Moses, Aaron, and above all, the Lord. Without the Lord, their time of freedom in the desert would be nothing but the long, hard, blood-stained road from Egypt to Egypt. After all the liberty and divine blessings they had enjoyed, they preferred their old, predictable life of grinding bondage under Pharaoh, who gave them a short leash and a long lash.

It is easy to mistrust a leader because no leader can satisfy the interests of every individual in a group. If my concept of an adequate leader is someone who will watch out for *my* specific interests, I am bound to be disappointed. But there is hope for trust if I can subsume my interests under those of the group. A good leader seeks *our* best good.

Moses was watching out for the well-being of Israel, all right, but he defined Israel as a unified nation under God rather than a mere collection of individuals and groups. The infant nation could only survive if this unity were maintained, so disruptive rebellion had to go. Unfortunately, discipline of divisive individuals proved to be a "Catch—22": It was necessary to maintain unity, but when the community did not accept it, the discipline itself was divisive.

Exercising wise discipline is one of the most difficult tasks of a leader. However, rather than putting all the onus on him or her, a community should accept responsibility to understand the relevant issues and support a minister who seeks to administer redemptive discipline according to God's principles. One pastor sought to do this in a clear case, but his congregation refused to back him because there had never been such an attempt in that church in living memory. Rather than coming together on their knees to follow biblical teaching to a higher level of corporate commitment, they were stuck in their artificial

tradition, as if their mistake was somehow sanctified by repetition.

Naturally, there are always people who think they can do a better job than a given leader. It is much easier to theorize how one would do things than to deal with actual complexity and stress, which involves a constantly changing stream of cause and effect in real time.

In Angwin, California, a woodpecker was vigorously working on the base of a Ponderosa pine tree. Along came a blue jay, which arrogantly chased the woodpecker away. Then the jay commenced pecking in the very spot where the woodpecker had been boring for insects. However, because the blue jay lacked the right equipment—a jackhammer beak—he soon gave up and flew away. The lesson was clear: Don't criticize others and try to shove them aside when they may be doing better than you could!

1. Lit., "Is it [too] much for you …?"

2. For a summary of proposed solutions, see Milgrom, *Numbers*, 312—13.

3. Cf. Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," 22.

4. Ibid., 16.

5. Comic strip *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz, cited by Maxwell and Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, 67.

6. See Levine, *Numbers 1—20*, 414.

7. Only this verse and Ex. 32:19 (the golden calf episode) refer to Moses' anger by the Qal of hrh, which usually describes God's wrath (e.g., Ex. 32:11, Num. 11:1, 10, 33, 12:9). Elsewhere Moses' anger is expressed with the verb *qsp* (Ex. 16:20, Lev. 10:16, Num. 31:14).

8. With M. Noth here *(Numbers* [OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968], 126—27), against the interpretation of A. Noordtzij, that the "assembly" here consists of the Israelite representatives and leaders rather than the entire community *(Numbers*, transl. E van der Maas [BSC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 149).

9. See D. Daube on what he terms "ruler punishment," in which a guilty person's punishment involves "taking away or damaging his free subjects" *(Studies in Biblical Law* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1947], 163). For example, the first infant son of David and Bathsheba died as part of David's punishment for adultery (2 Sam. 12:13—23).

10. Later in history, unauthorized King Uzziah is also punished when he tries to offer incense, but he is smitten with scale disease rather than divine fire (2 Chron. 26:19—21).

11. Magonet, “The Korah Rebellion,” 21.

12. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 342—43.

13. G. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 13.

14. Ibid., 14.

15. Confucius, *The Analects* 12.7, cited in M. P. Green, ed., *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 215.

Numbers 16:36—17:11 (Heb. 17:1—26)

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 37"Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take the censers out of the smoldering remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy—38the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the LORD and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."

39So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned up, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar, 40as the LORD directed him through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the LORD, or he would become like Korah and his followers.

41The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the LORD'S people," they said.

42But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, 44and the LORD said to Moses, 45"Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." And they fell facedown.

46Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started."

47So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. 48He stood between

the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. 49But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. 50Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped.

17:1The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff. 3On the staff of Levi write Aaron's name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe. 4Place them in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony, where I meet with you. 5The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites."

6So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron's staff was among them. 7Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the Tent of the Testimony.

8The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. 9Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the LORD'S presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each man took his own staff.

10The LORD said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die." 11Moses did just as the LORD commanded him.

Original Meaning

MESS AND "MARTYRS." The incineration of the 250 chieftains (Num. 16:35), "who sinned at the cost of their lives" (16:38), created a problem. While the men were perishable, their censers were not. These objects were consecrated by the same divine fire that consumed those who wielded them. Therefore they had to stay at the sanctuary, but what could be done with them?

God's solution is to have Eleazar, son of Aaron, retrieve the censers from the charred human remains and have them hammered out as a supplementary plating to overlay the outer altar. This plating will serve as a warning to any inclined to freelance priestly activities (16:36—40). Eleazar is in charge of the Levites responsible for guarding the sanctuary (3:32). The Lord has done the dirty work of executing encroachers for him (cf. 3:10, 38), but Eleazar still has to clean up the mess afterward.

When the Israelites deliberately attribute the work of God to the powers of darkness, as if Moses and Aaron have killed the rebels (16:41) by some sort of black magic, there is nothing more he can do to shape their attitudes through further works of mercy or discipline. They have cut off his avenue of appeal (cf. Matt. 12:24—32, Heb. 10:26—27). So this time the fuse to divine nuclear fusion is exceedingly short.

Moses and Aaron fall on their faces (16:45b). They have been doing that a lot lately (see 14:5, 16:4, 22). But now there is no time even for a short prayer of intercession. Moses perceives that the Lord's cup of retributive justice has already overflowed, even though he and Aaron have not gotten out of the way. Only Aaron's rapidly mobile mediation with incense saves the community from extermination (16:46—48).

The precise nature of the divine "plague" is not stated, but the aftermath shows a high body count. In the short time it takes for Aaron to grab a censer, put coals of fire and incense on it, and hurry to the people, 14,700 people perish (16:49).

Chief of staffs. By a process of elimination (including termination) and affirmation, it is now crystal clear that Aaron is the man whom God has chosen to approach him as priest and therefore ritual intercessor for the Israelites (cf. 16:5). To put the final nail in the coffin of opposition to his divine election, the

Lord sets up one final test, this time a peaceful one. Moses is to place the official (not freshly cut) wooden staff belonging to the chief of each of the twelve tribes, along with Aaron's staff for the tribe of Levi, in the tabernacle in front of the "Testimony," that is, the law tablets in the ark (cf. Ex. 25:16, 21, 34:29, 40:20). Here at the place of divine communication (cf. 25:22), the staff of the man whom the Lord has chosen as priest will miraculously sprout (Qal of *prh,* Num. 17:1 —5). This test is appropriate partly because the word for staff *(matteh)* can also be used for "tribe" (e.g., 1:4, 21, 23, 25, 27, etc.).

As can be expected, it is Aaron's staff that sprouts. There is no doubt that it is Aaron's because his name is written on it (17:3). The extent to which the Lord abundantly emphasizes his choice is startling: Aaron's staff has also blossomed and produced *ripe almonds,* all overnight (17:8)! Although live almond trees can blossom overnight, this dead stick goes far beyond the call of duty.[1] Like manna, of which Moses also deposited a sample in front of the "Testimony" (Ex. 16:34), this must be the work of the holy Creator-in-Residence. It shows that he has bestowed his holiness, which is integrally linked to life and fruitfulness, on whom he wishes. "The message was clear: just as God could make an apparently dead rod miraculously bear fruit, so he could elect a line of descendants like any other and enable it to render priestly service fruitfully."[2]

Aaron's staff has produced a *sis* ("blossom", 17:8). This happens to be the same word that describes the golden diadem worn by Aaron on the front of his high priestly turban, on which are inscribed the words, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36, 39:30, Lev. 8:9, NKJV). The miracle appropriately designates the man of the *sis.*

Why almonds? The cups of the golden lampstand in the tabernacle were "shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms" (Ex. 25:33—34, 37:19—20). The Hebrew word for "almond" is derived from *šqd,* and the verb *šqd* means "watch/be awake." The connection is that the almond tree blossoms in the spring before other trees. Watchfulness is the point of the sanctuary lamps burning all night (Ex. 27:21, Lev. 24:3). The Lord is constantly awake and vigilant (cf. Ps. 121:4). Jeremiah's first vision and its interpretation make an explicit connection between "almond(-tree)" and the Lord's "watching": "The word of the LORD came to me: 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' 'I see the branch of an almond tree (saqed),' I replied. The LORD said to me, 'You have seen correctly, for I am watching [Qal of *scd]* to see that my word is fulfilled'" (Jer. 1:11—12).[3]

After Moses convenes a "staff meeting" to show the results, he returns Aaron's staff to its location in front of the "Testimony" as a "safekeeping"

(mismeret, cf. Ex. 16:23, 32—34, Num. 19:9).[4] It will remain available as a "sign" from the vigilant Lord to warn those inclined to rebellion so that they will not die (Num. 17:9—11).

Bridging Contexts

INCENSE AND INTERCESSION. Burning incense *(qetoret)* sweetened the atmosphere inside God's earthly residence at the times when he received his regular burnt offerings, which constituted his token gifts of food (Num. 28:1—8) and were made to smoke (Hiphil of *$r*, Lev. 1:13) on his outer altar as a "pleasing aroma" to him (Num. 28:2, 6, 8). The role of incense in providing a pleasant domestic odor, especially at mealtime, was analogous to the nonritual use of other kinds of incense in ancient Israel.[5]

Numbers 16:46—48 indicates that ritual incense could also have an expiatory function. Aaron carried incense in a censer outside the tabernacle to expiate for *(kipper 'al)* the Israelites so that a lethal outbreak of divine wrath would halt. This case suggests the possibility that regularly sweetening the atmosphere inside the tabernacle may also have had some kind of expiatory function, mitigating the invasive "stench" of Israel's pollution to the Lord, who dwelt with his people "in the midst of their uncleanness" (Lev. 16:16).

Unlike the incense of the 250 chieftains, which they intended for their own self-enhancement, Aaron's incense served to make intercession on behalf of others. An acceptable offering of incense or intercessory prayer to God is outgoing, not simply to perfume the one who offers it.

The beginning of Numbers 16:48 is chilling: Aaron literally "stood between the living and the dead." Where the fragrant incense went, it stopped death dead in its tracks and people stayed alive. It was not simply a "pocket full of posies" to cover up the stench of death. Where the incense did not reach, however, people perished. Aaron's incense was a life-and-death matter. The mutinous but mortal Israelites desperately needed the priestly intercession of the very one whom they had accused of murder and implicitly condemned to death (16:41).

Today we do not use ritual incense for priestly mediation as Aaron did. However, a vital role of Christians as part of God's "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9) is to make intercession for others through prayer (Matt. 5:44, 2 Thess. 1:11, James 5:16).

Just as Aaron stood between the living and the dead, our intercession can have life-and-death consequences. "Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the

one who says it, our prayers do make a difference."[6] "It's not the words that matter or the length of the prayer or the tone of your voice or whether you stand or kneel or sit. What matters is that you really mean what you pray."[7]

Christ's priestly intercession. In the Apocalypse of John, incense in the heavenly temple represents the prayers of God's holy people (Rev. 5:8). Alternatively, or perhaps more precisely explaining the relationship between incense and prayer, an angel offers up "much incense" with their prayers on the golden altar before God's throne (8:3—4). As in the days of Aaron, and as in Second Temple times when the people prayed outside the temple when a priest burned incense inside (Luke 1:9—10), God's faulty people need and receive the incense of abundant intercession to accompany their prayers even when they are loyal to him. Without such intercession and the "pleasing aroma" of Christ's sacrifice, our prayers would be repulsive to God, and he would have no reason to acknowledge them.

In the New Testament, Christ is high priest in God's heavenly temple. He was not simply threatened, as Aaron was, he actually suffered death. In spite of this terrible wrong, he is now permanently alive and constantly makes intercession for human beings, whose sins against God contributed to his death (Heb. 7:25, cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

The concept that in his mediatorial role Christ serves as an advocate or defense attorney (1 John 2:1), who appears in God's presence on their behalf (Heb. 9:24), is puzzling at first glance. Is his Father so ancient of days (cf. Dan. 7:9) that he is forgetful and must be reminded of Christ's sacrifice every time we need forgiveness? Or does he become so enraged at our sins that he needs Christ to calm him down? Is his attitude toward us so antagonistic to Christ's desire to save us?

No, Christ does not need to change his Father's mind. The Father has loved us all along, to the extent that he gave his only Son to save us (John 3:16). However, he must maintain justice when he grants mercy or he will violate his own moral character of love (1 John 4:8). Christ's sacrifice makes it possible for God to be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26, NASB).

Christ's advocacy does not involve pleading in the sense of begging or nagging. Rather, he pleads in the sense that a defense attorney pleads in a court of law: by making a case through presentation of evidence. That which continually proves God's right to justly reconcile and restore us to himself is the cross event (cf. Rom. 5:1—2, 8:1—4), the crucial evidence for which Christ carries with him in his person (Rev. 5:6). So his very presence before the Father

constitutes advocacy on our behalf.

An essential function of an advocate is to enter the plea of a defendant. Christ said, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). To acknowledge Christ is to submit a plea of “guilty as charged and richly deserving the maximum penalty of the law, but accepting Christ as Lord and his sacrifice on my behalf as my only hope for mercy.”

In Revelation 3:5, Christ promises concerning one who overcomes: “I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” His name will not be blotted out because Christ has put his own life on the line, just as Moses did when he interceded for his people before God: “But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Ex. 32:32). Selfless advocacy of this magnitude goes way beyond an ordinary defense attorney’s call of duty!

Contemporary Significance

A DAMAGED WORLDVIEW. Any ministers who preach, teach, visit, mentor, and nurture their hearts out only to be rejected and attacked by the very ones they are trying to help can find encouragement in the fact that they are not alone. Moses, Aaron, and the Lord himself lost an entire generation of Israelites in spite of lavishing love, attention, and wise discipline on them. By the time we get to the end of Numbers 16, there is no doubt whatsoever that this generation is unsalvageable. No amount of positive or negative reinforcement can shake their firmly entrenched, narrow, faithless, and defeatist worldview.

How can a whole generation be so incorrigible? We know that individuals belonging to certain generations tend to think and react similarly because they have been shaped by shared historical circumstances. Margaret Mead has pointed out that major gaps between generations influenced by radically different experiences, especially the gap between people whose formative years were before World War II versus those who grew up after it, are not merely products of conflicts between youth and age as a result of adolescent rebellion. Such groups never get over their differences in perspective as long as they live. Those between whom the gaps appear simply become progressively older.[8]

Like modern "baby boomers," whose worldview has been shaped by events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate, the Israelites of the Exodus generation had difficulty trusting authority. They were damaged far more severely than we have been. Under Moses' leadership they did have some brief, shining moments, such as when they generously contributed abundant materials to construct the tabernacle (Ex. 35:21—29, 36:3—7). However, the brutal experience of bondage in Egypt made it difficult for them to rise above their preoccupation with basic physical survival or to place enough confidence in their leaders to carry them through crises.

The Lord worked wonders for the Israelites and provided them with physical liberty, but they were chronically unwilling to use it constructively. He gave them magnificent options so that they could break out into the open air of mental and spiritual freedom, but ultimately they clung to their melancholic, twisted perspective and treated his gifts as punishments.

I had trouble believing that such a defeatist worldview could exist until I met

Derek. He was homeless and walking on the beach at Ormond Beach, Florida, where my wife and I and our ten-year-old daughter were vacationing. My wife invited him in for breakfast, and we ended up entertaining him for the whole day. He seemed fairly normal at first and talked about looking for a college to pursue further education. We fed him, let him have a shower and a long nap, tried to help him find a job, prayed with him, and tried to encourage him in all kinds of ways. I gave him an entire set of clothes, including shoes and underwear, as well as some money.

As the long day progressed, Derek's deep psychological scars began coming to the surface. Aside from being finicky and fussy, which we thought was surprising for someone with so few options, he was paranoid about people in general. He always looked on the negative side of everything, was unable to make constructive decisions, and occasionally flew into unpredictable outbursts of anger. Like the children of Israel, he had been abused when he was younger.

When we dropped Derek off at a hospital that night, where he would seek treatment for a hand that had been injured some time before, we felt only sickening frustration. Having done our utmost to help him and give him hope, we left him apparently more unhappy than ever. This was only one day! What must it have been like for God, Moses, and Aaron to have this experience with their own people for decades? Given their refusal to accept divine transformation, the Lord could only wait for the next generation, whose outlook was not permanently damaged.

When my father served as a pastor in Trenton, New Jersey in the 1980s, he visited a man in hospital. The patient looked up and informed him, "Pastor, it's my apostate gland." That's what the Israelites seem to have had: an apostate gland. Refusing divine therapy that was their only hope, they chose to remain sick people.

With all his omnipotence and omniscience, God failed to satisfy the adult Israelites whom he so gloriously redeemed from bondage. His example teaches: Love people consistently and persistently with everything you have, but if they ultimately choose to reject you, let them go because you can't force them to be grateful or to love you in return. Like Moses, Aaron, and the later Hebrew prophets, we are accountable for the quality of the service we give, not the responses we get. If success is defined as doing what God wants us to do for others, whatever their choice may be, nobody can take it from us. Paul Tillich wrote:

> The question *cannot* be: How do we communicate the Gospel so that others will accept it? For this there is no method. To communicate the

Gospel means putting it before the people so that they are able to decide for or against it. The Christian Gospel is a matter of decision. It is to be accepted or rejected. All that we who communicate this Gospel can do is to make possible a genuine decision. Such a decision is one based on understanding and on partial participation.[9]

1. Compare J. Sturdy, *Numbers* (CBC, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 124.

2. B. Maarsingh, *Numbers: A Practical Commentary* (transl. J. Vriend, TI, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 63.

3. Compare R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 244.

4. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 144—5.

5. On nonritual incense, see K. Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (VTSup 38, Leiden: Brill, 1986), 90.

6. Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*, 102.

7. R. Pritchard, *And When You Pray: The Deeper Meaning of the Lord's Prayer* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 20.

8. M. Mead, "Family System and Society," in G. Pirooz Sholevar, ed., *Changing Sexual Values and the Family* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1977), 33—35.

9. P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture,* ed. R. C. Kimball (New York: Galaxy/Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 201.

Numbers 17:12 (Heb. 17:27)-18:32

THE ISRAELITES SAID to Moses, “We will die! We are lost, we are
all lost! 13Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD
will die. Are we all going to die?” 18:1The LORD said to Aaron, “You,
your sons and your father’s family are to bear the responsibility for
offenses against the sanctuary, and you and your sons alone are to bear
the responsibility for offenses against the priesthood. 2Bring your
fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you
when you and your sons minister before the Tent of the Testimony.
3They are to be responsible to you and are to perform all the duties of
the Tent, but they must not go near the furnishings of the sanctuary or
the altar, or both they and you will die. 4They are to join you and be
responsible for the care of the Tent of Meeting—all the work at the
Tent—and no one else may come near where you are.

5“You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the
altar, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelites again. 6I myself have
selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you,
dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. 7But only
you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything
at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the
priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must
be put to death.”

8Then the LORD said to Aaron, “I myself have put you in charge of
the offerings presented to me; all the holy offerings the Israelites give
me I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share. 9You
are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire.
From all the gifts they bring me as most holy offerings, whether grain
or sin or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons. 10Eat it
as something most holy; every male shall eat it. You must regard it as

holy.

11"This also is yours: whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it.

12"I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain they give the LORD as the firstfruits of their harvest. 13All the land's firstfruits that they bring to the LORD will be yours. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it.

14"Everything in Israel that is devoted to the LORD is yours. 15The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the LORD is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. 16 When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs.

17"But you must not redeem the firstborn of an ox, a sheep or a goat; they are holy. Sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. 18Their meat is to be yours, just as the breast of the wave offering and the right thigh are yours. 19Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring."

20The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

21"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting. 22From now on the Israelites must not go near the Tent of Meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin and will die. 23It is the Levites who are to do the work at the Tent of Meeting and bear the responsibility for offenses against it. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. 24Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the LORD. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.'"

25 The LORD said to Moses, 26 “Speak to the Levites and say to them:
‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your
inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD’S
offering. 27 Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the
threshing floor or juice from the winepress.
28 In this way you also will present an offering to the LORD from all
the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must
give the LORD’S portion to Aaron the priest. 29 You must present as the
LORD’S portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you.’
30 “Say to the Levites: ‘When you present the best part, it will be
reckoned to you as the product of the threshing floor or the winepress.
31 You and your households may eat the rest of it anywhere, for it is
your wages for your work at the Tent of Meeting. 32 By presenting the
best part of it you will not be guilty in this matter; then you will not
defile the holy offerings of the Israelites, and you will not die.'”

Original Meaning

AFTER THE LORD has unleashed his terrible swift sword against the Israelites (16:46—50), they are thoroughly traumatized and fear that they will perish, especially if they come near the tabernacle of his Presence (17:12—13). God allays their fears by altering the rules of engagement: The Levite tribe, including the priests, will henceforth bear the culpability of the sanctuary, and the priests alone will bear the culpability of their priesthood (18:1, cf. v. 23). This means that if one or more non-Levites violate the sanctity of the sanctuary, divine wrath will break out only against the Levites, in addition to the unauthorized persons themselves. The Levites were earlier designated to prevent such outbreaks from falling on the entire community (1:53), but now their incentive to stop a violator literally dead in his tracks (cf. 1:51) is to protect themselves.

Similarly, if a nonpriest (including a Levite) encroaches on a priestly prerogative, God will also hold the priests responsible (18:3) because it is up to them to ensure that this does not happen (18:7, cf. 3:10, 38). However, the Lord will no longer unleash his destruction against the whole community, as he threatened to do when the 250 unauthorized chieftains burned incense (16:21) and as he actually started to do when the Israelites sided with the rebels after what they viewed as "martyrdom" (16:41—50).[1]

In 18:7 Aaron and his sons "must guard their priesthood with regard to everything connected with the (outer) altar[2] and with respect to that which is within the (inner) veil" (my transl.). Two loci of priestly officiation are mentioned here—outer altar and inner sanctum—but not the outer sanctum. Because ordinary priests officiate in the outer sanctum but not the inner sanctum, where only the high priest can go once a year (Lev. 16), it has been suggested that in Numbers 18:7 "within the veil" means inside the outer veil, referring to the outer sanctum.[3] However, the word for "veil" here is *paroket*, which elsewhere only denotes the inner veil.[4] Another word *(masak)* is used for the screens/veils at the entrances to the tabernacle (e.g., Ex. 26:36—37) and the courtyard (e.g., 38:18).

In Numbers 18:7 the altar and inner sanctum represent the outermost and innermost areas of priestly officiation. So this combination can easily be

understood as a merism, which refers to the entire priestly domain, including the outer sanctum, by specifying its extremes.[5] Compare, for example, the expressions “near and far” (Jer. 25:26) and “far and near” (48:24), which include all the space between these extremes.[6]

The remainder of Numbers 18 reiterates and further details the portions of sacred gifts that belong to the priests and Levites. Placement of this legislation here accomplishes two things. (1) The Lord further affirms his choice of the Aaronic priests and the Levites who assist them. (2) The Lord rewards them for their potentially hazardous work at the sanctuary.

In lieu of a separate tribal territory in the Promised Land, the priests and other Levites will receive wages from the Lord consisting of agricultural tithes given to him (18:20—24) so that they can devote themselves to his service rather than spending all their time supporting themselves by farming. In this sense he will be their share and inheritance (18:20, cf. Gen. 15:1— “reward”). Jacob had said that Levi would be dispersed in Israel (Gen. 49:7), but the Lord turns this into a blessing. The priests will receive seven items as their perpetual entitlement:

1. Portions of most holy sacrifices (Num. 18:9—10, cf. Lev. 6—7).
2. Dedicated portions of sacred gifts (Num. 18:11), such as the breast and right thigh of holy (not most holy) well-being offerings (Lev. 7:30—36).
3. Firstfruits offerings of olive oil, new wine, and grain (Num. 18:12—13).
4. Every irrevocably devoted thing *(herem.* Num. 18:14, cf. Lev. 27:21, 28).
5. The meat of sacrificeable (clean domestic) firstborn animals (Num. 18:15—18).
6. Every portion set aside (noun and Hiphil verb from root *rwm)* from holy offerings given by the Israelites (18:19). Here this perpetual entitlement *(’*, lit., “eternal statute”) is also called a perpetual “covenant of salt.” Some have suggested that the latter expression, which emphasizes the binding nature of God’s promise to the priests, comes from the ancient Near Eastern practice of using salt in covenant-making ceremonies.[7] Levine, however, interprets this verse in light of the stipulation that salt be included with every sacrifice to the Lord. “What the present verse states is that the entitlements assigned to the priests in vv 8—19 have the same binding force as the rule requiring the salting of sacrifices stated in Lev 2:13.”[8]
7. A tithe (tenth) of the tithes received by the Levites (Num. 18:25—32).

Bridging Contexts

TITHES. A TITHE (i.e., a tenth that belongs to God) first appears in Genesis 14, where Abraham gave Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18), a tithe/tenth after his victory over four kings (v. 20). Later Jacob vowed that if the Lord would bless him, he would give him a tenth of everything that he (God) bestowed on him (28:20—22).

Whereas the patriarchal tithes were voluntary, in Leviticus 27:30—32 the Lord requires a tenth of all the agricultural produce of the Israelites. This passage does not say what is to be done with the tithes, but the fact that they are holy implies that they go to the sanctuary. Numbers 18 now specifies that the people are to give their tithes to the Levites, who perform the work of the sanctuary on their behalf (18:21—24, cf. Neh. 10:38), and the Levites in turn must give a tenth to the priests (Num. 18:25—32).

Whereas in Numbers 18 all tithes belong to the Levites and priests, in Deuteronomy 12:17—19 the Israelites themselves eat their tithes at the central sanctuary along with the members of their households and the Levites who dwell in their towns. Deuteronomy 14:22—27 reiterates this command to set agricultural tithes aside and eat them at the sanctuary, but it allows people to convert them into silver if necessary for easier transportation. If they choose this option, when they arrive at the area where the sanctuary is located, they are to use the silver to buy whatever they wish to eat so that they can rejoice there in God's presence.

> Deuteronomy 14:28—29 provides yet another tithe law:
>
> At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands [see also 26:12].

The relationship between requirements for the Israelites to give all tithes to the Levites (Num. 18:21—24), to eat them at the central sanctuary (Deut. 12:17—19, 14:22—27), and/or to deposit them in their towns (lit., "gates") every three

years (14:28—29, 26:12) confronts us with one of the more challenging problems in Pentateuchal law.[9] Unless we take the easy way out by attributing the tithe laws to different documentary "sources" or "redactions," there appear to be three different tithes that cannot be harmonized into one.

Years ago I was amused to hear a radio preacher apply all three tithes to modern Christians. He added them up to 30 percent of a person's income and conveniently provided his address for easy transfer to the Lord. This sounds like a way for preachers to retire early and well—if they don't provoke a trend toward ministerial malpractice suits. The fact is that if the Israelites gave 10 percent to the Levites every year, ate another 10 percent or its equivalent at the sanctuary every year, and gave another 10 percent every third year to the Levites and other economically disadvantaged persons, the average per year would amount to only 23.33 percent of their agricultural output. Furthermore, they were to eat the second tithe themselves, along with their Levite guests. The third tithe every third year went to "charity."

The second tithe was really a mandatory "celebration account" to ensure that the people would have the means for a first class occasion of thanksgiving at the Lord's sanctuary. The spiritual, culinary, social, and emotional highlight of the year was all wrapped up in the same event. Needless to say, this would tend to encourage a positive attitude toward God and recognition of his gifts.

Because tithes were holy, failing to give them to the Lord constituted sacrilege. This became a problem in the days of Malachi, who conveyed God's rebuke for robbing him by neglecting to bring tithes and offerings. The Lord challenged them to comply so that he could abundantly bless them (Mal. 3:8—10).

Contemporary Significance

STABLE SUPPORT FOR MINISTERS. The apostle Paul worked for a living as a tentmaker missionary/evangelist (Acts 18:3, 1 Cor. 9:6, 15, 17—18). However, in 1 Corinthians 9:13—14 he affirmed that Christian ministers have the right to receive material support from those whom they serve, just as the ancient priests and Levites received their sustenance from that which their people gave to God. Similarly, Christ instructed his disciples to accept support wherever they went to minister (Luke 10:7). The principle was the same as in Numbers 18: It is only fair for those who spend their time serving others to receive support that makes it possible for them to continue this work.

The benefits provided by ministers are intangible because they have to do with promoting the health of the divine-human relationship. However, these benefits are real, with tremendous consequences for this life and the life to come, and should be regarded as such. Paul asked rhetorically: "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?" (1 Cor. 9:11). In modern times, when we pay counselors and psychologists to help us with our intangible but real interpersonal problems, it is not difficult to understand that ministers should receive wages too.

The New Testament does not specify a tithe as a means of support for the Christian ministry. However, it is easy to see how the tithe principle could be applied for maintaining a stable source of support for the Lord's work. Since most of us are not farmers, our income consists of money rather than net agricultural produce (not including seed for replanting). So we can give a tenth of our net money income and take God up on his offer to bless us (Mal. 3:10).

Some Christian denominations encourage payment of tithe or even require it, just as it was required for ancient Israelites. Some Christians who feel that God has especially blessed them voluntarily add a second tithe, which they also give to their churches. Some set aside a portion of their incomes for helping disadvantaged people, as the Israelites were to do every third year (Deut. 14:28—29, 26:12).

I have never heard of Christians consciously setting aside a percentage of their incomes for generous religious-social rejoicing as the Israelites were to do with their second tithe (Deut. 12:17—19, 14:22—27). It would be fascinating to

experiment with application of this concept, not forgetting to invite our ministers as the Israelites were to include their Levites (12:18—19, 14:27), and see what happens to attitudes toward God.

1. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 145, 424.

2. Without qualification, “the altar” denotes the outer altar.

3. J. D. Livingston, “A Critical Study of the Greek Words Translated ‘Veils’ and an Application to the Book of Hebrews” (M.A. thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1949), 34—36, 39—45.

4. R. Gane and J. Milgrom, **“’** *paroket,” TDOT,* 12:95—97.

5. See also Lev. 21:23, if NJPS is correct in rendering, “but he shall not enter behind the curtain,” i.e., into the Most Holy Place.

6. R. Gane, “Re-Opening Katapetasma ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 6—7 n. 5.

7. E.g., M. Weinfeld, *’,”* in *TOOT,* 2:263, Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament,* 122.

8. Levine, *Numbers i-20,* 449.

9. Compare Levine, *Numbers,* 450—51, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 432 —36.

Numbers 19

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron: 2“This is a requirement of
the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you
a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a
yoke. 3Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp
and slaughtered in his presence. 4Then Eleazar the priest is to take
some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the
front of the Tent of Meeting. 5While he watches, the heifer is to be
burned—its hide, flesh, blood and offal. 6The priest is to take some
cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning
heifer. 7After that, the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself
with water. He may then come into the camp, but he will be
ceremonially unclean till evening. 8The man who burns it must also
wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he too will be unclean till
evening.

9“A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put
them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be
kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is
for purification from sin. 10The man who gathers up the ashes of the
heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till
evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for
the aliens living among them.

11“Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for
seven days. 12He must purify himself with the water on the third day
and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify
himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean. 13Whoever
touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the
LORD’S tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel. Because
the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean; his

uncleanness remains on him.

14“This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days, 15and every open container without a lid fastened on it will be unclean.

16“Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days.

17“For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. 18Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. 19The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean. 20But if a person who is unclean does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, and he is unclean. 21This is a lasting ordinance for them.

“The man who sprinkles the water of cleansing must also wash his clothes, and anyone who touches the water of cleansing will be unclean till evening. “Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening.”

Original Meaning

CLEANSING FROM THE IMPURITY of death. Needless to say, the primary source of corpse contamination was the dead body itself. Because the person was dead, the body could only convey ritual impurity to other persons or objects within the enclosed space where it was located or if someone touched it out in the open (19:14—16, 18).[1] Even though ritual impurity contracted from a corpse by a live person was secondary, it was serious.[2] This makes sense in light of the rationale underlying the ancient Israelite system of physical ritual impurities: Mortality involved in the birth-death cycle of human beings is opposed to divine holiness, which is characterized by life (see comments on Lev. 12). What could represent mortality more than a corpse?

At first glance it is peculiar that the full prescription for remedying the prominent impurity of corpse contamination does not appear until Numbers 19, after several passages have referred or alluded to the problem of this kind of impurity (Lev. 10:4—5, 21:1—4, 11, Num. 6:6—7, 9—12, 8:5—21) and Numbers 8:7 has even mentioned the "water of purification." However, aside from the fact that the theme of ritually impure death in chapter 19 balances the same theme in chapter 12 (Miriam's deathly "scaly skin disease", esp. 12:12) within the overall structure of the book of Numbers, placement of the remedy for corpse contamination in chapter 19 is appropriate in view of the expanding prominence of death in the narrative. By now thousands of Israelites have perished by divine judgments, and the entire adult generation of non-Levites is doomed to die in the desert, except for Caleb and Joshua.[3] "Eleazar" and "burning" *(serepah)* provide verbal links between the ritual for corpse impurity in 19:4—6 and the aftermath of revolt in 16:37.

The fact that corpse contamination was considered such a powerful impurity posed a problem for remedying it: The impure person could not come to the sanctuary in order to sacrifice a purification offering, so ritual decontamination had to take place outside the sacred precincts.[4] Also, because priests were to avoid corpse contamination (Lev. 21:1—4, 11), the purification rite needed to be administered by a layperson.[5]

To remedy corpse contamination subject to these constraints, Numbers 19

prescribes a unique procedure consisting of two parts. (1) An unusual ritual outside the camp, labeled “a purification offering” (NRSV, 19:9, cf. v. 17)[6] and officiated by a priest, involved burning a reddish cow, thereby producing a supply of ashes to be stored for future use (19:1 —10a).

(2) When an Israelite needed cleansing, a few of the ashes were mixed with water as a “ready-made, instant” purification offering,[7] and a layperson sprinkled them on the affected individual (19:10b-22). This economical approach had the additional advantage that it spared grieving Israelites the burden of expensive sacrifices after they had just buried their dead.[8]

Red cow purification offering. Verses 1—10a provide instructions for acquiring sacrificial ashes. The victim supplied by the community is to be female, like other purification offerings for the benefit of individual commoners (e.g. Lev. 4:27—35). It must be a cow, the largest female sacrificeable animal, so that it will supply a maximum quantity of ashes. It must be reddish to evoke the color of blood (see below). Like other sacrificial victims, it must be unblemished. Additionally, even though the ritual is outside the camp, the cow must not have been used as a work animal (19:2, cf. Deut. 21:3).[9]

The son of the high priest is to supervise the sacrificial slaughter (Qal of *sht*—slit the throat) of the cow (Num. 19:3)[10] and then “take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting” (19:4). Since the ritual is performed outside the sacred precincts, this gesture establishes symbolic interaction with the sanctuary in order to make the procedure a sacrificial one.[11]

Next the priest must supervise incineration of the entire cow (19:5), which is burned more completely than any other Israelite sacrifice, including the burnt offering, of which the hide was saved for the priest (Lev. 7:8). The verb for “incinerate” here is *srp* (Qal), which appears elsewhere in purification offering contexts as the method by which to dispose of unused animal parts outside the camp (Lev. 4:12, 21, 6:30, 8:17, 9:11, 10:16, 16:27).

Into the midst of the fire where the cow is burning, the priest must toss cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson yarn (Num. 19:6). The reddish hide of the cow, cedar wood, and crimson yarn emphasizes the color red. This is in keeping with the fact that the ashes contain blood, and when they are later mixed with water, the liquid will function like blood.[12]

Not only is hyssop an ingredient of the ashes (19:6), but laypersons are to mix the ashes with “living"/fresh water and use hyssop to sprinkle it (19:18, cf. v. 17). Compare the Passover ritual, in which hyssop was a kind of “paintbrush” for applying blood to the entrance of a house (Ex. 12:22). Similarities are

striking between cleansing from corpse contamination and the first-day ritual to treat a person or house for the ritual impurity of "scaly skin disease," in which hyssop, along with cedar wood and crimson yarn, was dipped into a mixture of blood and "living" water, which was then sprinkled on the person/house undergoing purification (Lev. 14:4—7, 49—52). "Scaly skin" disease, like corpse contamination, was closely connected with death (see comments on Num. 12).

After incinerating the cow, a ritually pure lay assistant must gather the sacrificial ashes and deposit them in a pure place outside the camp, to be kept for use in the "water of lustration/sprinkling" (19:9, cf. vv. 13, 20—21, 31:23). The word for "lustration" here is *niddah* (cf. 31:23), which elsewhere usually refers to menstrual impurity (Lev. 12:2, 5, 15:19—20, 24—26, 33, 18:19) but can also be used as a metaphor for moral impurity (20:21). Apparently the connection between menstruation and sprinkling for corpse contamination is the idea of spattering blood or its equivalent.[13] Earlier in connection with decontaminating the Levite work force we encountered the same sprinkled mixture as "water of purification" *(*' Num. 8:7).

Applying ash water. Numbers 19:10b—22 outlines the procedure and rules for applying the "water of lustration" to individual corpse-contaminated persons, whether Israelites or resident aliens, and explains how this form of impurity is contracted. Anyone who touches the dead body of a human being incurs a seven-day impurity (19:11), from which the polluted individual is obligated to have himself or herself purified (Hithpael of *ht,)* to a state of ritual purity (Qal of thr) by means of the ash water on the third and seventh days (19:12). After the sprinkling on day 7, cleansing also requires laundering clothes, bathing, and waiting until evening (19:19).

Remaining in a state of impurity by neglecting the ritual will have the grave consequence of (automatically) defiling (Piel of *tm,)* the Lord's tabernacle, for which the culprit will suffer the divine penalty of being "cut off" (19:13, 20, cf. Lev. 20:3). The ashes are available at no charge and the procedure is quick and easy, so there is no excuse for noncompliance.

Corpse contamination is so virulent that if a dead body is located in a tent, that is, in an enclosed dwelling space, any person or lidless vessel is defiled simply by being in the same space (19:14—15). Out in the open the effect is less intense: Pollution requires actually touching a corpse, human bone, or grave (19:16).

Purification of contaminated persons and spaces involves first mixing some ashes of the red cow with "living water," that is, fresh water (19:17). "Living water" is appropriate, given that the ritual is to remedy association with death.

Next, a ritually pure person will apply the “water of lustration” by dipping hyssop in it and sprinkling whatever dwellings, their contents, and/or persons need purification (19:18).

Bridging Contexts

LEAPS IN SPACE AND TIME. Among Israelite sacrifices, the ritual for corpse contamination that consists of the red cow ritual and application of its ashes is unique in several important ways, of which we list and discuss four at the outset and two more later on. (1) Burning the cow and gathering its ashes outside the camp makes the priest and his lay assistants ritually impure, so that they are required to undergo ablutions and be impure until evening (19:7—8, 10). Apparently priests were immune to defilements removed by other purification offerings, which were performed within the sacred compound.

(2) Whereas the "water of lustration" purifies an impure person, it defiles a pure person (19:21—22).

(3) The purification offering of the red cow is performed *before* any part of the cow (i.e., ashes) comes in contact with impure persons.

(4) In other purification offerings, the blood is never directly applied to persons. However, the "water of lustration," which contains and functions like purification offering blood, is directly sprinkled on a corpse-contaminated individual.

The combination of factors (3) and (4) helps us to understand (2)—why a pure person who sprinkles the cleansing liquid on an impure person becomes impure. In Leviticus 6:27, we found that there was a mitigated sense in which the blood of a purification offering contaminated because it carried defilement removed from the offerer. The blood was already carrying the pollution from the moment of slaughter because it came from the offerer's animal. This at least partly explains why the blood was not sprinkled on the offerer: It was already carrying his or her defilement.

The difference in Numbers 19 is that the corpse-contaminated individual has no contact with the red cow before the ash water is sprinkled, so it can be directly applied to the person as a ritual "sponge" to absorb impurity. However, because the water carries contamination from the person being purified, it makes other people impure.

The person who sprinkles the ash water most likely does not contact any of it after it lands on the person receiving purification. So how does the sprinkling activity pollute the former?[14] Related to this, "anyone who touches the water of

cleansing will be unclean till evening" (19:21) does not restrict such contact to water that has already contacted the hitherto corpse-contaminated individual. So the "water of lustration" can pollute a ritually pure person even before it is sprinkled on an impure person (1) as if the sprinkling had *already* occurred and (2) as if "absorption" of defilement by some of the water affected *all* of it, "part for all."

Elsewhere in Israelite ritual, we have seen ritual disregard for physical constraints of space through the "part for all" principle.[15] What sets the procedures for corpse contamination apart is the fact that they ignore relative chronology in order to economically use one purification offering for many later applications. Paradoxically, the cleansing water acts on everyone but the corpse-contaminated person as if it were already carrying defilement from that person. This time warp explains why the burning of the red cow defiles ritual participants "prospectively, before actual use in purification."[16] The cow is regarded as if parts of it in the form of rehydrated ashes have already contacted contaminated individuals so that the whole cow has absorbed their impurity.[17]

It is as though the pollution is transmitted back through time and space to the cow's incineration, where the evil is destroyed. As with disposal of the purification offering carcasses on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:27—28), incineration of the cow takes place outside the camp. It destroys a ritual "sponge" that is polluted because part of the same animal is applied in liquid form (blood/ash water) to something/someone in order to remove contamination, and one or more persons who participate in the burning are rendered impure.

Rather than trying to contort our brains around the paradox of the red cow ritual in terms of Newtonian or even Einsteinian physics, we should simply remember that we are dealing with the conceptual, symbolic world of ritual, which is not bound by mundane material constraints.[18] The red cow ritual is a unique instance of the "part for all" principle in that the victim's unity transcends not only a gap in space but also in time. G. André explains: "Clearly the uncleanness that the ashes are meant to remove is associated with them proleptically."[19] The bottom line is that the impurity affecting those who burn the red cow comes from the individuals on whom the "water of lustration" will later be sprinkled, the impurity does not represent excessive holiness.[20]

Here are two more ways in which the red cow ritual remedy for corpse contamination is unique. (5) Because it is the only Israelite expiatory sacrifice that is performed outside the camp,[21] it is the only purification offering in which blood manipulation consists of a gesture (sevenfold sprinkling) toward the sanctuary *from a distance* (19:4) rather than direct application of blood to part(s)

of the sanctuary itself.

(6) Decontamination from corpse impurity that includes applying the "water of lustration" is the only ritual cleansing that clearly prevents defilement of the sanctuary *from a distance* (19:3, 20).

The uniqueness of these factors involving distance supports the argument that "automatic" pollution of the sanctuary from a distance is limited to some extreme cases (see comments on Lev. 20): wanton neglect to be purified from corpse contamination (here in Num. 19:13, 20) and sacrificing one's child to the god Molech (Lev. 20:3). Both of these are punishable by the terminal penalty of being "cut off," with no opportunity for subsequent sacrificial expiation prerequisite to forgiveness. So there is no warrant for importing the automatic/aerial dynamic of defilement to cases of sin that could be remedied by outer altar or outer sanctum purification offerings for the benefit of the offenders (see comments on Lev. 4).[22]

Even the red cow ritual did not purge the sanctuary or its sancta from corpse impurity that had already defiled it from a distance.[23] Such defilement of the sanctuary occurred *only* if sprinkling the ash water was *not* performed, in which case illegally prolonged impurity was compounded by wanton moral fault.

Contemporary Significance

PAST DEATH, PRESENT ASSURANCE. In the summer of 1999, an Iron Age Ammonite cistern was excavated by archaeologists from Andrews University at Tell Jalul, near Amman, Jordan. Interest mounted as one skeleton after another was found, eventually totaling fourteen in number. They were in all sorts of positions and obviously had been simply tossed in the cistern because of some kind of tragic circumstances.

Matthew, a college student, was the volunteer doing most of the work in the cistern. Partway down, a beautifully preserved skull was found upside down, and was temporarily left in the dirt for photographs. Then Matthew and Dave, another volunteer working in an adjacent area, had a bright idea: They would spend the night in the cistern in order to enjoy the macabre ambiance. So when the digging part of the day came to an end, they secretly stayed behind rather than getting on the bus.

To optimize the experience, Dave had brought his didgeridoo, a six-foot long hollow wooden pipe used by Australian aborigines as a musical instrument. Dave plays it well, producing a continuously sepulchral sound that resonates with particularly impressive mournfulness in enclosed spaces, such as rock tombs at Petra—and cisterns.

Now Matthew and Dave had not troubled the director (Randy Younker) or area supervisor (my wife) by asking permission, so nobody knew they were there. However, they were not alone at the site. There was a Jordanian guard armed with a pistol and an M16 assault rifle, whose job it was to ensure that none of our equipment was stolen.

When the guard detected sounds coming from the cistern, he left his canvas tent with weapons in hand. Approaching in the starlight, ready to shoot, his ears picked up the strangely muffled tones of the didgeridoo. Knowing that there were skeletons down there and assuming that he was hearing the spirits of the ancient dead, he was seized by unearthly dread and fled in terror. An M16 was no match for a didgeridoo! Death in the past provided Matthew and Dave with a safe night in the present.

Death of a red cow in the past gave Israelites ongoing assurance that they could be freed from their corpse contamination.[24] The cow provided an *ongoing*

*s*upply of ashes to be mixed with "living water" and sprinkled on many impure persons whenever burial or other contact with the dead occurred. There was no need to bring an animal to the sanctuary and sacrifice it as a purification offering. The sacrifice had already taken place, all that was needed was to apply its benefit.

Hebrews 9:13—14 speaks of another death that provides assurance:

> The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Here "the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean" refers to application of ash water, functioning like blood, from the red cow/heifer. If this procedure could effect cleansing from ritual impurity, which was associated with mortality, how much more does the once-for-all death of the Son of God make abundant *ongoing* provision for cleansing us morally, spiritually, and ultimately from mortality itself (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51—54), by his blood?

How can a Galilean carpenter die in Jerusalem two millennia ago for the past *and future* sins and mortality of billions of people all over the world, many of whom have not even been born, let alone sinned? This quantum leap sounds strikingly similar to the space-time paradox of the red cow sacrifice, which was affected by future and distant impurities. To borrow the logical structure of Hebrews 9, we can say: A red cow bore ritual impurity from future application of its ashes to corpse-contaminated persons. How much more, then, did Christ bear sin and mortality from future application of his blood to faulty people who are "nothing but dust and ashes" (cf. Gen. 18:27)? If a red cow could do it, Christ can accomplish this on a vastly grander scale.

Even if an Israelite contracted corpse contamination years after a red cow was burned, he or she could count on purification because the effect of the sacrifice was continuously available. In fact, applying the ashes resumed and continued the ritual process that began with burning the cow. The process was a unit of constant efficacy, no matter how long or short the time that interrupted it. The ashes were not like a medication that gradually grows weaker until it expires.

Similarly, the cleansing effect of Christ's sacrifice, which "brings life for all men" (Rom. 5:18), is continuously available today with no less potency than it had many centuries ago. In a vision, the apostle John saw in God's heavenly

sanctuary “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). This metaphorical depiction makes the point that the benefits of his sacrifice are always fresh, as if he were dying right now.

It was not enough for the Israelites to have the sacred ashes available in a jar outside the camp any more than medicine in a bottle in a modern cabinet can achieve the purpose for which it is intended if it only sits there. The remedy had to be applied to the problem. Similarly, Christ’s sacrifice is intended to “cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). This can only take place if we allow the life-giving benefit of his sacrifice to be applied to us (cf. v. 13) whenever we need it. If we choose to forego this application, his provision will still help many others who accept it, but not us, we will continue to bear the consequences of our evil (cf. Lev. 5:1b, John 3:18).

When the Israelites sinned or incurred impurity, God gave them adequate opportunity to avail themselves of his remedies. In the meantime, they were covered by corporate sacrifices on their behalf, including daily burnt offerings and additional burnt and purification offerings performed on Sabbaths, new moons, and annual festivals (Num. 28 —29). Having this opportunity available was no substitute for personally taking it. Similarly, Christ’s sacrifice has provided the only way out of our dilemma (Acts 4:12), with daily opportunities for restoration. His sacrifice is our only assurance, but it is “abundant provision” (Rom. 5:17) to give us life “to the full” (John 10:10). “He who has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12).

1. J. Milgrom, “Impurity Is Miasma: A Response to Hyam Maccoby,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 731, idem, *Leviticus 23—27,* 2460.

2. T. Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in C. L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399—400. On the rabbinic assessment of the corpse as “the Father of Fathers of Impurity,” see H. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (SBLDS 143, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 147—50.

3. R. Brown, *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land* (BST, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 161.

4. Compare the early stages of purification from scaly skin disease (Lev. 14:1—8).

5. Cf. F. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,

1990), 196, 199.

6. Not purification/sacrifice from *sin* (against NIV, NKJV, NASB, NJB). NJPS is more accurate— "It is for cleansing"—but still misses the fact that in ritual texts the verbless clause *hatta't hu'/hi'*, "it (is) a *hatta't*," is always the label for a particular kind of sacrificial ritual, i.e., the "purification offering" (Ex. 29:14, Lev. 4:24, 5:9, 11 — 12).

7. J. Philip, *Numbers* (ComC 4, Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 216.

8. Cf. Wenham, *Numbers*, 146.

9. Noth interprets this to mean that the animal was unprofaned by common work *(Numbers*, 140).

10. Contrast nonsacrificial slaughter by breaking the neck in Deut. 21:4.

11. On this ritual as a sacrifice, see, e.g., J. H. Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, transl. J. Martin (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980 [repr. of 1863]), 423, J. Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX)," *VT* 31 (1981): 63—68, against those who have maintained that the red cow is not a sacrifice, e.g., G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 59—60, S. Wefing, "Beobachtungen zum Ritual mit der roten Kuh (Num 19.1—10a)," *ZAW* 93 (1981), 349, 354.

12. Milgrom, "The Paradox," 63.

13. Levine, *Numbers 1—20*, 463—64, for another derivation of *niddah* —"that which makes one flee"—see Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 367.

14. See comments on Lev. 6:27 regarding the polluting quality of purification offering blood in relation to its contact with the altar.

15. See Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 8.

16. D. P. Wright, "Heifer, Red," ABD, 3:116.

17. Gane, *Cult and Character*, ch. 8.

18. Cf. J. Milgrom, "Confusing the Sacred and the Impure: A Rejoinder," *VT* 44 (1994): 557—58.

19. G. André and H. Ringgren, "'," *TDOT*, 5:333.

20. See further Gane, *Cult and Character*, ch. 8, against A. Baumgarten, "The Paradox of the Red Heifer," *VT* 43 (1993): 442—47.

21. The ritual in Deut. 21 for an unsolved murder is not a sacrifice (see D. P. Wright, "Deuteronomy 21:1—9 as a Rite of Elimination," *CBQ* 49 [1987]: 387—403).

22. Against J. Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *RB* 83 (1976): 393, Milgrom, *Leviticus i-i6*, 257.

23. Against Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering*, 124.

24. J. Malino misses this powerful line of application, becoming

sidetracked by the theory that the sacrifice represented a transition from magic to religion, and by the misconception that it had to do with morality ("The Ashes of the Red Heifer: Religious Ceremonies and Obedience to Torah [Numbers 19:1—22]," in Holmgren and Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Text,* 144—48), *673.*

Numbers 20

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the
Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was
buried.

2Now there was no water for the community, and the people
gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. 3They quarreled with
Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead
before the Lord? 4Why did you bring the Lord’s community into this
desert, that we and our livestock should die here? 5Why did you bring
us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs,
grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

6Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the
Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared
to them. 7The Lord said to Moses, 8“Take the staff, and you and your
brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before
their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the
rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”

9So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he
commanded him. 10He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in
front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we
bring you water out of this rock?” 11Then Moses raised his arm and
struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the
community and their livestock drank.

12But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust
in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you
will not bring this community into the land I give them.”

13These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled
with the Lord and where he showed himself holy among them.

[14]Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying:

"This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. [15]our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, [16]but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt.

"Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. [17]Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory."

[18]But Edom answered:

"You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword."

[19]The Israelites replied:

"We will go along the main road, and if we or our livestock drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We only want to pass through on foot—nothing else."

[20]Again they answered:

"You may not pass through."

Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful army. [21]Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them.

[22]The whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. [23]At Mount Hor, near the border of Edom, the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [24]"Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. [25]Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. [26]Remove Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be gathered to his people; he will die there."

[27]Moses did as the LORD commanded: They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community. [28]Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, [29]and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned for him thirty days.

Original Meaning

THIS IS A SAD CHAPTER. The deaths of Miriam at the beginning (20:1) and Aaron at the end (20:22—29) frame a dispute of the Israelites over water at Kadesh (20:2—13) and Edomite refusal to let the Israelites pass from Kadesh through their territory (20:14—21). The chapter is united by the location at Kadesh and the fact that Aaron dies at Mount Hor on the way around Edom for his failure with Moses regarding the water (20:24). The gloom of this chapter is only implicitly relieved by the fact that Israel and its high priestly office survive to trudge on toward better days.

Good-bye to Miriam. Miriam's obituary is a simple one (20:1). The year is lacking, so we do not know how long she lives after recovering from scaly-skin disease (ch. 12). The previous date recorded by the book of Numbers is that of departure from Mount Sinai: "On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year" (10:11). So Israel's arrival at the Desert of Zin in "the first month" (20:1) must have been in the third year or a later year. Verse 3 places the contention at Kadesh regarding water after the "brothers" of the Israelites "fell dead before the LORD"—that is, subsequent to Korah's revolt and its aftermath (chs. 16—17).

The younger generation would have referred to people of Korah's generation as "fathers" rather than "brothers" (cf. 27:3). So the fact that the Israelites speak of "brothers" identifies the speakers as members of the older generation, before they die in the desert.[1] It is not until the Israelites cross the Zered Valley after their detour around Edom and shortly before they enter Canaan that the older generation finally becomes extinct (Deut. 2:14, cf. v. 8, Num. 21:4). So we cannot rule out the possibility that Miriam's death and the trouble over water at Kadesh (Num. 20:1—5) occur late in the desert period.

The Israelites were already at Kadesh in the Desert of Zin/Paran when Moses sent the scouts (13:21, 26, Deut. 1:19), and they stayed there a long time (Deut. 1:46), through Korah's revolt and its aftermath. So it looks as though the arrival at Kadesh in the first month (Num. 20:1) speaks of return to the same place or arrival at another place with the same name.[2]

Another mention of Kadesh in 20:14 appears to seamlessly connect the events

concerning Edom and Aaron's death, which occur near the end of the forty years in the desert (cf. 33:38—39), to Miriam's death and the contention over water at the same location (20:1—13). This suggests that Miriam dies near the end of the desert sojourn.

Striking failure. At Kadesh the Israelites dispute (Qal of ryb) with Moses because there is no water (20:2—3). In Exodus 17:2 *ryb* refers to an earlier confrontation over water at Rephidim between the same two parties. This verb can denote verbal or physical contention/quarreling (e.g., Gen. 26:20, 31:36, Ex. 21:18), lodging a complaint (Judg. 21:22, Job 33:13), or pursuing a lawsuit (Prov. 25:8—9).

At Kadesh the grievance is grievous: "If only we had died [Qal of *gw']* when our brothers fell dead [Qal of *gw']* before the LORD!" (20:3). In other words, the Israelites regret that God did not slay them along with those who perished in the wake of Korah's revolt (chs. 16—17). The Lord was provoked enough on that occasion, but he spared them on account of the intercession of Moses and Aaron (16:20—24, 44—50), whom the people now accuse of abusing their God-given (and therefore legal) responsibility to take care of his community (20:4—5). Notice that although the Israelites primarily dispute with Moses (20:3), they also oppose Aaron (20:2) and frame their demand in plural address: "Why did you [plural, i.e., Moses and Aaron] bring the LORD'S community into this desert …?" (20:4).

As at Rephidim (Ex. 17:5—6), the Lord instructs Moses to take the staff (i.e., his, not Aaron's, staff)[3] to a rock so that water will come out of it (Num. 20:7—8). At Rephidim Moses struck the rock (Ex. 17:6), but this time, even though he will have his staff in hand as a reminder of the earlier miracle, he and Aaron are to merely speak (plural) to the rock (Num. 20:8). This will be an even greater miracle, as there is no possibility that a physical blow will simply dislodge the natural plug to an aquifer.[4]

Moses follows the divine directions up to a point (20:9—10a). However, apparently the sight of all those recalcitrant people gathered in front of the rock is too much for Moses. Uncharacteristically "losing it," he angrily lashes out verbally and then physically, whacking the rock with his staff—not just once, but twice (20:10b—11a).

While a lot of water gushes out for the people and their livestock, it is not the miracle God intended. Aaron did not participate in the miracle and thereby affirm his coleadership, and Moses spoke to the people instead of the rock, which he struck. The Hebrew text implicitly emphasizes the gravity of his disobedience: To strike the rock, Moses lifted (Hiphil of rwm) his hand *(yad),*

which held his staff (20:11a). This is the language of sinning with a "high/lifted hand" (yad *ramah* = Qal of rwm), that is, defiantly (see 15:30).

Although Moses has sinned in the heat of the moment, apparently without premeditation, it is a grave offense committed in full view of the community to which he is supposed to be an example. For this failure, God denies Moses and Aaron the privilege of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land (20:12, cf. 27:12—14).[5]

No way! Back at Kadesh to have another shot at entering the Promised Land, this time from the east, the Israelites need to pass through Edom, which lies directly in their path. Although Moses diplomatically appeals to the sympathies of the Edomites as relatives of the Israelites descended from Isaac through Esau (cf. Gen. 25, 36) and pledges to respect their resources, their king resoundingly refuses to grant them right of way (Num. 20:14— 21). This forces the Israelites to take a long detour around Edom (21:4) before they move into the territories of kings Sihon and Og (21:21—35) and then cross the Jordan River into Canaan (Josh. 3 —4). Moses' message to Edom in Numbers 20:14—17 comes at the beginning of a continuous stream of events leading to the Israelite conquest.

Deuteronomy puts the encounter with Edom in relative chronological perspective. Following their defeat by the southern inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 1:44—45, cf. Num. 14:45) and having spent a long time at Kadesh (Deut. 1:46), the Israelites "turned back and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea" (2:1a). After they killed a lot of time wandering around the hill country of Seir, the Lord commanded them to turn north (2:1b—3). However, he ordered them not to provoke the descendants of Esau (i.e., the Edomites) as they passed through their territory (2:1b—6). Deuteronomy obliquely refers to the detour, without mentioning the king's refusal (2:8). Shortly thereafter, the Israelites crossed the Zered Valley (2:13). Verse 14 summarizes: "Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them."

Numbers 20 skips almost everything that happens during the thirty-eight years as unworthy of mention. These are just dull decades of death in the desert.

Aaron too. Aaron dies at Mount Hor according to divine plan (20:22— 29), almost "with his boots on." Aaron's son Eleazar accompanies Aaron and Moses up the mountain so that Moses can transfer Aaron's high priestly garments to Eleazar after the people see Aaron for the last time, but before he actually breathes his last (20:27—28). Presumably this procedure avoids corpse contamination of the sacred vestments, and Moses, not the new high priest, buries his brother. This transfer of garments is all it takes to invest Eleazar with

his status (cf. Lev. 8).

When only Moses and Eleazar descend the mountain from their grim errand, the Israelites know that Aaron has expired (Qal of *gw'*, cf. 20:3),[6] and they mourn him for thirty days (20:29). Numbers 33:38—39 provides additional chronological information: Aaron dies at the age of 123 "on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt." So this is at the end of the desert wandering period.

Bridging Contexts

THE SIN AND PUNISHMENT of Moses and Aaron. Rather than the "Waters Of Wonder" (WOW!), the liquid bounty at Kadesh is negatively dubbed "the waters of Meribah"[7] because there the Israelites contended (Qal of ryb) with the Lord (20:13) when they contended with Moses (cf. 20:3). There Moses and Aaron failed to demonstrate enough trust (Hiphil of *'mn)* in the Lord to treat him as holy (Hiphil of *qds)* before the Israelites (20:12) by speaking to the rock rather than striking it. They likely believed in their hearts that the Lord could make water flow if they verbally addressed it, but because they did not follow through on such trust, it was functionally useless. Nevertheless, God reasserted his own holiness among the people (Niphal of *qds,* 20:13, cf. Lev. 10:3). Kadesh is a place of holiness, as its name indicates.

By not following directions, Moses acted as though the miracle was his own doing, in accordance with his words, "can/shall/should *we* bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10, emphasis supplied).[8] The Lord did indeed supply water for the benefit of the people, but by punishing Moses and Aaron, he corrected the dangerous misidentification regarding who was in charge. In this way he answered the same question by which the Israelites tested him at Rephidim: "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Ex. 17:7).

All of the personal hardships, risks, stresses, toil, and disappointments that Moses and Aaron have endured are eclipsed by the impact of their failure at the "waters of Meribah," which painfully prevents them from fulfilling their lifelong dream of entering the Promised Land (cf. Deut. 3:23—26). Why does the penalty also fall on Aaron? God commissioned them as a team for the job of speaking to the rock (Num. 20:8), in accordance with their mission of prophetic leadership. Moses commits the greater sin of commission, but Aaron, too, fails to speak to the rock. M. Margaliot points out that their punishment fits the crime: Having "repudiated their mission, they have forfeited their right to continue in it and were therefore not allowed to bring it to its successful conclusion."[9]

Unlike Miriam, Aaron does not simply die. The Lord specifies in advance when and where he will "be gathered to his people," and also why: because he and Moses have rebelled against God's command with regard to the waters of

Meribah (20:24—26). Here the verb for “rebelled” is *mrh,* which Moses earlier used to call the people “rebels” (20:10). Moses’ assessment of the people on that occasion was undoubtedly accurate, but by reacting the way they did, Moses and Aaron tragically became like them. Related to this idea is an implicit connection established by repetition of the Qal of *gw,* which refers to the death/expiration of rebels by divine agency in 20:3 (cf. 17:12—13) and again of Aaron’s death in 20:29.

The Israelites cast contempt on God’s holiness, but only Moses and Aaron suffered the penalty. This may seem unfair, but as the ones closest to the Lord, they bore the highest responsibility to preserve his reputation. When they failed in that, the culpability fell on them rather than the other Israelites (cf. Num. 18:1). They lived and died to serve their people.

From another angle, the premature deaths of Moses and Aaron drive home the sharp arrow of divine grace: The fact that they are justly penalized for their sin, which appears slight compared to the faithlessness of the others, highlights God’s amazing mercy toward the rest of his people, which provides them with opportunity and responsibility to obey in the future.

Moses and Aaron die before entering the Promised Land to show their people how to live and enter it. The Lord does not strike down these weary warriors as he did so many thousands of others. Rather, he calls them up mountains to receive them to himself. Even in their humiliation, he honors them.

Contemporary Significance

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD OF SERVANTHOOD. God's punishment of Moses and Aaron, who were unusually close to him, emphasizes that there is no excuse for transgressing the boundaries of divine principles and guidance. Smashing the tablets of the Decalogue at Sinai because the people had broken them by worshiping a golden calf (Ex. 32:19) was *righteous* indignation, but disobeying God's explicit instructions at Kadesh (Num. 20:7—11) was not righteous. Even when we are confronted with people who fully and unequivocally deserve hell and everything that goes with it, we have no right to personally dish out to them even a fraction of what they deserve without God's authorization. He has said: "It is mine to avenge, I will repay" (Deut. 32:35, quoted in Rom. 12:19, Heb. 10:30).

As God's servants, our job is to do what he says and let God be God. This is easier said than done. It can be excruciating to exercise such restraint. But we have a towering example in Christ. As the song goes, "He could have called ten thousand angels…." Nevertheless, "when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). The decision to do simply nothing under these conditions must have been Christ's greatest test of will.

By punishing Moses and Aaron, the Lord shows that no amount of human merit amassed through past obedience can atone for even one sin. Jesus said to his disciples, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10). To be responsible for living and responding to God at a high level as an example to other people is simply one of the duties and occupational hazards of being his servant.

1. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 164.

2. Cf … ibid., 164. On the problem of Kadesh, see Original Meaning section of Num. 33.

3. Cf. Ex. 17:5, M. Margaliot, "The Transgression of Moses and Aaron —Num. 20:1— 13," *JQR* 74 (1983): 210—11, against W. Propp, "The Rod

of Aaron and the Sin of Moses," *JBL* 107 (1988): 22—26.

4. Pockets of water collected in sedimentary rock would yield insufficient water (Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 157).

5. Against N. Helfgot, "'And Moses Struck the Rock': Numbers 20 and the Leadership of Moses," *Tradition* 27 (1993): 55—56.

6. Cf. 17:12—13, 20:3 of*gw'* as death inflicted by God. Outside Numbers it can denote natural death (Gen. 25:8, 17, 35:29, 49:33).

7. Called Meribah of Kadesh in 27:14, cf. Massah/Meribah as names for Rephidim in Ex. 17:7.

8. For various possible interpretations of these words, see Margaliot, "The Transgression of Moses and Aaron," 212—15.

9. Ibid., 224, cf. 225.

Numbers 21

When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev,
heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked
the Israelites and captured some of them. 2Then Israel made this vow
to the Lord: “If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will
totally destroy their cities.” 3The Lord listened to Israel’s plea and
gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them
and their towns; so the place was named Hormah.

4They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to
go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5they
spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you
brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread!
There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

6Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the
people and many Israelites died. 7The people came to Moses and said,
“We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray
that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for
the people.

8The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole,
anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” 9So Moses made a bronze
snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake
and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

10The Israelites moved on and camped at Oboth. 11Then they set out
from oboth and camped in Iye Abarim, in the desert that faces Moab
toward the sunrise. 12From there they moved on and camped in the
Zered Valley. 13They set out from there and camped alongside the
Arnon, which is in the desert extending into Amorite territory. The
Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. 14That

is why the Book of the Wars of the LORD says:

"… Waheb in Suphah and the ravines,
the Arnon [15]and the slopes of the ravines

that lead to the site of Ar and lie along the border of Moab."

[16]From there they continued on to Beer, the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people together and I will give them water."

[17]Then Israel sang this song:

"Spring up, O well! Sing about it,

[18] about the well that the princes dug, that the nobles of the people sank— the nobles with scepters and staffs."

Then they went from the desert to Mattanah, [19]from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, [20]and from Bamoth to the valley in Moab where the top of Pisgah overlooks the wasteland.

[21]Israel sent messengers to say to Sihon king of the Amorites:

[22]"Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway until we have passed through your territory."

[23]But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. [24]Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. [25]Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements. [26]Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon.

[27]That is why the poets say:

"Come to Heshbon and let it be rebuilt; let Sihon's city be restored.

[28]“Fire went out from Heshbon, a blaze from the city of
Sihon.

It consumed Ar of Moab, the citizens of Arnon’s heights.

[29]Woe to you, O Moab! You are destroyed, O people of
Chemosh!

He has given up his sons as fugitives and his daughters
as captives to Sihon king of the Amorites.

[30] “But we have overthrown them; Heshbon is destroyed
all the way to Dibon.

We have demolished them as far as Nophah, which
extends to Medeba.”

[31]So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites.

[32]After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, the Israelites captured its surrounding settlements and drove out the Amorites who were there. [33]Then they turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them in battle at Edrei.

[34]The LORD said to Moses, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.”

[35]So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land.

Original Meaning

NUMBERS 21 RECORDS a massive breakthrough. At last, after having experienced and induced all kinds of defeats, God's people begin to conquer territory—and they aren't even to Canaan yet! As is usually the case in real life, their fortune does not suddenly surge up for good without some serious setbacks. But they are gaining a tangible taste of success.

victory and venom. The Israelites backed down in the face of an armed threat from the Edomites (20:20—21). By contrast, they devote the Canaanites of Arad to the Lord for utter destruction (Hiphil of hrm),[1] thereby fulfilling a vow that invokes divine aid by faith (21:1—3). Why do they treat the people of Arad so differently? Unlike the Edomites, these Canaanites are not their relatives, inhabit part of the land promised to Israel, and actually attack first.

Hormah, the new name of Arad, derives from the root *hrm* and thus serves as a reminder of its demise. Ironically, it was to Hormah that the Amalekites and Canaanites had beaten the Israelites many years before when they presumptuously tried to storm the Promised Land without God (14:45). As Winston Churchill said in the House of Commons on June 10, 1941, "There is only one answer to defeat, and that is victory."[2]

Rather than occupying Arad/Hormah and penetrating Canaan from the south, as the earlier plan went before the ten scouts discouraged them at Kadesh (chs. 13—14), the Israelites now prolong their journey in order to enter the Promised Land from the east. Apparently this alteration of direction responds to a shift in the military landscape of Canaan that make its eastern defenses relatively more vulnerable at this time.

With all the extra travel, the Israelites become impatient (verb *qsr* + *nepes* = "became short of emotion", 21:4).[3] Complaining that their appetite *(nepes)* loathes (Qal of *qws)* manna (21:5),[4] they insult God as at Kibroth Hattaavah (11:6). This time instead of quail (cf. 11:31—33), he sends snakes that are fiery (root srp), apparently in the sense that their venom feels like fire, by which he has punished people on several occasions.[5] The invasion of reprehensible reptiles is like the plagues on Egypt, by which the Lord demonstrated his sovereignty over nature (Ex. 7—10). If the Israelites prefer to live in Egypt, they

will die like Egyptians.

Jesus said, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” (Matt. 7:9—10). But the Lord has already given his people “bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4, Neh. 9:15, John 6:31—32), which they now regard as contemptible (Num. 21:5). Perhaps some snakes will help them appreciate his bread!

When the Israelites confess their sin and call for help, God does not simply call off the serpents. Rather, he commands Moses to employ a visual antivenom (21:8), which Moses does by sculpting and displaying a snake *(nahas)* out of bronze *(nehoset,* 21:9). In light of other cultures, some have suggested that this effects a kind of magic: “one combats pernicious snakes by enlisting in the cause a more powerful snake, or, to be precise, an empowered snake capable of destroying the inimical one.”[6] Compare the fact that when the Philistines later captured the ark of the covenant and suffered divine plagues, they returned it to Israel with a “reparation offering” consisting of golden models of the tumors and mice/rats that had afflicted them (1 Sam. 6:3—11). It was the Philistines’ attempt to have an expiatory offering to the Lord target the evils that he had sent on them.

The bronze snake, however, is appointed by God, who alone is capable of healing his people. So although it is symbolic, it is not magical. Nor is it an offering to the Lord. Yet it does function like the Philistine models in the sense of acknowledging that a specific punishment has come from the Lord because of sin against him. Thus, to confront the serpent sculpture is to confront one’s own sin and its result. It is the spiritual equivalent of looking in the mirror. That unspoken confession is all it takes to live.

Obtaining water and land. Journeying northward, the Israelites pass Moab and then camped along the Arnon river in a desert area belonging to the Amorites, just to the north of Moabite territory (21:10—13). A quotation from the “Book of the Wars of the LORD” emphasizes that the Arnon formed the border of Moab, so the Israelites are outside Moab (Num. 21:14—15, cf. Judg. 11:18).[7] This lost historical source (cf. the “Book of Jashar” in Josh. 10:13, 2 Sam. 1:18) is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

Moving on, another potential crisis over water (cf. 20:2—13) turns into a refreshing example of divine-human cooperation when the Israelites dig a well *(be’er)* at the Lord’s direction (21:16— 18a). Stated in the imperative, the words “Spring up, O well!” (21:17) celebrate claiming the divine promise, as if to say: “We know you’re down there, water, so just go ahead and get on up here as God said you would!” This is only the second recorded occasion on which the

Israelites sing for joy when they receive divine assistance. The previous time also had to do with water, but it was at the Red Sea, where the Lord drowned Pharaoh's army (Ex. 14—15).

To proceed further north in order to reach the Jordan River and enter Canaan from the east, the Israelites ask to pass through the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites. Not only does Sihon punctuate his refusal to their diplomatic request with a military response as the king of Edom had (cf. 20:20), he comes out to attack Israel (21:23) as the Canaanite king of Arad had (21:1). Like the Canaanites, the Amorites are not related to the Israelites, who have no qualms about crushing them and seizing their domain. Although this is not part of Canaan, it is the first land that the Israelites occupy (21:25, 31). In fact, it eventually becomes a permanent part of their holdings (see ch. 32).

As supported by reference to some early poetry (a ballad? or taunt song?— cf. Isa. 14:4) about Heshbon, Sihon's capital city,[8] the king had earlier extended his border to the Arnon at Moab's expense (Num. 21:26—30). The fact that he ruled from the Arnon in the south to the Jabbok in the north when Israel defeats him and that Israel does not enter Ammonite territory (21:24, cf. Deut. 2:24—37) later becomes Jephthah's key argument in his dispute with the king of Ammon, who claims that the Israelites have taken the area between the two rivers from his people (Judg. 11:13, 15, 19—23).

Like Sihon, King Og of the fertile region of Bashan in the northern Transjordan greets Israel with his army and suffers a similar fate (21:33 — 35). According to other passages, he is a giant (Deut. 3:11, Josh. 12:4) and his people are Amorites (Deut. 4:47, 31:4, Josh. 2:10, 9:10).

Bridging Contexts

ULTIMATE ANTIVENOM. By using poisonous snakes and a visual antivenom (21:8—9), the Lord shifts the emphasis of his discipline from immediate corporal punishment and rapid corporate remedy to the individual experience of faith as the means to access the divine cure for the result of sin. Those who are bitten suffer fiery pain, which impresses them that sin has consequences leading to death (cf. Rom. 6:23). If they spurn the bronze serpent as they have said "yuck!" to the manna that God provided, they will simply go on dying. But they can escape death if they accept the remedy that the Lord has provided. The choice is theirs.

In Moses' bronze snake, the Lord simultaneously shows the Israelites their sin and his grace. "To see sin without grace is despair. To see grace without sin is arrogance. To see them in tandem is conversion."[9] The remedy is too easy, too good to be true, and defies natural laws of cause and effect. It does not make sense in human terms. That is precisely the point: By doing something that is humanly irrational, the people will show faith in the Lord's power and promise of healing, which is their only hope.[10]

It is appropriate that divine remedies, such as purification offerings, a bronze serpent, and a carpenter on a cross, are "foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18) because divine grace itself does not conform to human logic. Max Lucado writes:

I've never been surprised by God's judgment, but I'm still stunned by his grace.

God's judgment has never been a problem for me. In fact, it always seemed right. Lightning bolts on Sodom. Fire on Gomorrah. *Good job, God.* Egyptians swallowed in the Red Sea. *They had it coming.* Forty years of wandering to loosen the stiff necks of the Israelites? *Wouldve done it* myself.Ananias and Sapphira? *You bet.*

Discipline is easy for me to swallow. Logical to assimilate. Manageable and appropriate.

But God's grace? Anything but.[11]

Moses' bronze snake was preserved for centuries until King Hezekiah

destroyed it because the Israelites had made it an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4). Although it was gone, it was not forgotten. One night Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14—15). Thus Jesus identified himself as the ultimate antidote to the “snakebite” of mortality that results from sin (cf. Rom. 5:12—17). By looking at him, lifted up and dying for our sin, we see the depth of our fall, the fate we deserve, and the magnitude of his mercy. “The simple equation endures: the cure for snakes is a snake, the cure for human life is one man’s life, the cure for death is death. Nothing less will do.”[12]

It is deeply disturbing that Jesus identified himself with Moses’ snake, which symbolized sin and death. We would much prefer to think of him as the innocent “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The “snake” idea is even more repulsive when we remember the Genesis story of how a satanic serpent introduced sin and death into the world by instigating the disobedience of Eve and Adam (Gen. 3, cf. Rev. 12:9). However, rather than gently backing off the identification of Christ with sin, Paul jarringly rams it home: “God made him who had no sin to *be sin* for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21, emphasis supplied).

> Imagine that! In a sense, Christ *became* sin! He bore every evil passion and selfish degradation of the billions of people who have ever inhabited our planet. With that overwhelming deluge of misery collected upon Him and identified with Him as if He were the personification of all evil, He gave Himself up for destruction in order to wipe out all sin and all of its consequences.[13]

“He was not content to take our nature upon him, he took our iniquity upon him as well. He was not only ‘made flesh’ in the womb of Mary, he was ‘made sin’ on the cross of Calvary.”[14] He allowed himself to be identified with evil so that by dying he might destroy the sting of death (cf. 1 Cor. 15:56, Heb. 2:14) and so that by looking we might live. Scott Peck profoundly expresses the power of this kind of “tough love”:

> I cannot be any more specific about the methodology of love than to quote these words of an old priest who spent many years in the battle: “There are dozens of ways to deal with evil and several ways to conquer it. All of them are facets of the truth that the only ultimate way to conquer evil is to let it be smothered within a willing, living human being. When it is

> absorbed there like blood in a sponge or a spear into one's heart, it loses its power and goes no further."
>
> The healing of evil—scientifically or otherwise—can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required…. I do not know how this occurs. But I know that it does…. Whenever this happens there is a slight shift in the balance of power in the world.[15]

Basic training. At the beginning of Israel's history as an independent nation, the Lord employed several strategies to turn his people into a winning team. (1) He showed that he was a winner. By defeating Egypt (Ex. 7—14), he showed the Israelites that if they were on his team, they would be winners too.

(2) In simple, basic ways regarding practical matters such as food, water, and physical security, God emphasized the foundational principle that winning comes through trust in him.

(3) The Lord tested his people over their basic lessons by giving them opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned (e.g., Ex. 15:25—at Marah "he tested them").

(4) When the Israelites flunked a test, God repeated it until they could pass. Thus, they encountered lack of potable water at Marah (Ex. 15:23), Rephidim (17:1), Kadesh (Num. 20:2), and on the Red Sea road detour around Edom (21:5). Each time they faithlessly grumbled. Finally at Beer[16] they trusted the Lord (21:16—18). At Kadesh they refused to go with God into Canaan and then tried to take it by themselves, as a result of which they were beaten as far as Hormah (ch. 14). Decades later they came back to Kadesh (20:1, see comments on ch. 20) and were tested by an attack from the king of Arad, which became Hormah, but this time they relied on God and won (21:1—3).

After a series of tragedies in Numbers 20, chapter 21 shows what a transition from losing to winning looks like. After faith and victory against the king of Arad (21:1—3), there is a major relapse on the Red Sea road around Edom (21:4—5), which calls for discipline (snakes) and grace (21:6—9). So the transition to winning is bumpy. The next time there is a crisis, however, it turns into a positive experience worth celebrating when the Israelites find water at Beer (21:16—18).

Once they have passed their long "basic training," which should have lasted a fraction of the time, the Israelites are on a roll. Not coincidentally, it is soon after their triumph at the well that the Israelites win the lands of kings Sihon and Og (21:21—35). When they can trust the Lord to provide their daily needs, they are ready to trust him in battle. When they dig for his gift in a desert land, they are on the way toward receiving a Promised Land of their own.

Contemporary Significance

MOTIVATION TO BECOME a winning team. J. C. Maxwell and J. Dornan point out: “To really become motivated to succeed, people need to believe they can win.”[17] This is a process that takes time and mentoring.

John, like many of us, got a taste for winning when he was just a kid. He says,

> Growing up, I idolized my brother Larry, who is two and a half years older than I am…. Larry has always been a great leader and an excellent athlete. And whenever we played basketball, football, or baseball with the kids in the neighborhood, Larry was a captain.
>
> A lot of times when they picked teams, I would be one of the last picked, because I was younger and smaller than most of the kids. But as I got older, Larry began picking me more, and that always made me feel good, not only because it meant my brother cared about me, but because I knew that when Larry picked me, I was going to be on the winning team. You see, Larry was a fierce competitor, and he didn’t like losing. He always played to win, and he usually did. Together we put quite a few wins under our belts, and I came to expect victory when I played with my brother.[18]

Making a winner out of a younger brother is simple compared to mentoring a group of people who are already confirmed, experienced losers, who don’t even know what true winning is, and who want rewards without cooperating. Any leader faced with such a challenge, whether in a classroom, a church congregation, or another kind of organization, can pick up some useful tips from the way God managed to turn Israel into a winning team.

As in ancient times, a successful attitude is still crucial for success. Maxwell and Dornan compare what happens when people sense victory versus when they sense defeat:[19]

When People Sense Victory	When People Sense Defeat
They sacrifice to succeed.	They give as little as possible.
They look for ways to win.	They look for excuses.
They become energized.	They become tired.
They follow the game plan.	They forsake the game plan.
They help other team members.	They hurt others.

For an example of contrast between the two attitudes, consider Jesus' disciples. After undergoing basic training by participating in ministry, they experienced one of the most breathtaking transformations from a sense of defeat to one of victory ever recorded in history. When Jesus was betrayed, tried, and lifted up on the cross "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert" (John 3:14), his followers fled in various directions and cowered in fear (Matt. 26:56; John 20:19), one publicly denied him (Matt. 26:69—74), and others moaned in despair, saying, "we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). But when Christ strode from the grave and showed that he had conquered death to become the remedy of life for all humanity, those who believed in him were energized, united in mission, and willing to endure any hardship and pain as they carried the good news to the uttermost parts of the earth as he had commissioned them to do (Matt. 28; Luke 24; John 20—21; book of Acts).

Christ's victory is also for his modern disciples. When we truly sense that because Christ has already won, we who believe in him are all winners together, we too become energized, follow the game plan, and sacrifice rather than make up excuses. We too give generously, encourage rather than criticize, and assist others rather than vying with them to see who can become the greatest.

Notice that Maxwell and Dornan speak of a "game plan" and "team members" (see above). We do not obtain success for ourselves merely as isolated individuals. As it was in the days of Moses and of Peter, James, and John, discipleship necessarily involves a corporate component: To follow God is to participate in a winning team.

Like the victorious Israelites, we can come together to a refreshing "well," a source of life that God has given to sustain us through the "desert." At Jacob's well, Jesus promised a Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst" (John 4:13—14). At the final climax of the festival of Booths, when people were thinking about literal water for the coming agricultural year,[20] Jesus invited them: "'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were

later to receive" (John 7:37—39, cf. Rev. 21:6, 22:17).

Now here is something to sing about! "Spring up, O well!" Those who are willing to receive the refreshing gift of God's Spirit are ready for any battles with evil that may come on the way to their Promised Land. Trust in God to receive the cleansing empowerment of his Spirit is basic. We cannot go on without this experience. If we are still in "basic training," we will likely find ourselves repeatedly coming back to the same testing points from various angles until we learn to give up on our own strength and wisdom and to rely on God.

Even when we are on a roll, smaller challenges prepare for greater ones and our trust needs constant renewal. John Donne (born 1572) understood submission to the discipline of faith when he wrote:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God, for, you As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend, That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, and bend Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.[21]

1. Regarding *hrm* (dedication to God), see comments on Lev. 27:28—29. When the Israelites defeated the Amalekites decades earlier (Ex. 17:8—13), they did not devote them to utter destruction. However, the Lord later commissioned King Saul to carry out that kind of vengeance on them (1 Sam. 15).

2. W. Churchill, *Never Give In!: The Challenging Words of Winston Churchill*, compiled by D. Price and D. Walley (Kansas City: Hallmark Editions, 1967), 26.

3. Cf. Judg. 10:16, 16:16, Zech. 11:8.

4. Notice the chiastic relation between *qsr nepes* and *nepes qws*, linking the people's impatience to their revulsion toward the manna.

5. Lev. 10:2, Num. 11:1, 16:35, 39 (Qal passive participle of srp, referring to the rebels "who had been burned up"). On poisonous snakes in this region even today, see Noordtzij, *Numbers*, 186.

6. B. Levine, *Numbers 2i-36* (AB 4A, New York: Doubleday, 2000), 89.

7. On the route of Israel in relation to Moabite geography, see J. M. Miller, "The Israelite Journey Through (Around) Moab and Moabite Toponymy," *JBL* 108 (1989): 577—95.

8. For linguistic, historical, and archaeological details regarding this poem and Heshbon, with its environs, see Levine, *Numbers 1—36,* 101—9, 113—25, Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* 421—28. The Madaba Plains

Project, an archaeological consortium sponsored by Andrews University and other institutions, has been carrying out excavations in this region, including at Tall Hisban, formerly thought to be Sihon's Heshbon.

9. M. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 44.

10. Cf. J. D. Derrett, "The Bronze Serpent," *EstBib* 49 (1991): 321.

11. Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name*, 52.

12. P. J. Wilson, "Snake on a Stick," *ChrCent* (March 2, 1994): 223.

13. Gane, *Altar Call*, 77.

14. J. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1997), 92.

15. S. M. Peck, *People of the Lie* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 269.

16. Pronounced Beer, not like an alcoholic beverage.

17. Maxwell and Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, 70.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 70—71.

20. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, 2018.

21. J. Donne, *The Works of John Donne* (WPL, Ware, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 252.1.

Numbers 22

THEN THE ISRAELITES traveled to the plains of Moab and camped
along the Jordan across from Jericho. 2Now Balak son of Zippor saw
all that Israel had done to the Amorites, 3and Moab was terrified
because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with
dread because of the Israelites.

4The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to
lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."

So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5sent
messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near
the River, in his native land. Balak said:

> "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the
> land and have settled next to me. 6Now come and put a curse on
> these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then
> I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country.
> For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse
> are cursed."

7The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for
divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had
said.

8"Spend the night here," Balaam said to them, "and I will bring you
back the answer the LORD gives me." So the Moabite princes stayed
with him.

9God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?"

10Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me
this message: n'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of
the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I

will be able to fight them and drive them away.'"

12But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

13The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's princes, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

14So the Moabite princes returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

15Then Balak sent other princes, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. 16They came to Balaam and said:

"This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, 17because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me."

18But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God. 19Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the LORD will tell me."

20That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you."

21Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. 22But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.

24Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. 25When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again.

26Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. 27When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. 28Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

[29]Balaam answered the donkey, “You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.”

[30]The donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?”

“No,” he said.

[31]Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

[32]The angel of the LORD asked him, “Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. [33]The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her.”

[34]Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.”

[35]The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

[36]When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the Moabite town on the Arnon border, at the edge of his territory. [37]Balak said to Balaam, “Did I not send you an urgent summons? Why didn’t you come to me? Am I really not able to reward you?”

[38]“Well, I have come to you now,” Balaam replied. “But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth.”

[39]Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. [40]Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and gave some to Balaam and the princes who were with him. [41]The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, and from there he saw part of the people.

Original Meaning

THE MALEDICTORIAN. Moving to the steppes of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho (22:1), the Israelites are close to where they will enter Canaan. However, their perils east of the Jordan are not over yet. Chapters 22—24 record the dramatic story of Balak's attempt, unbeknown to the Israelites, to have Balaam curse them.

With so many Israelites so close, King Balak of Moab and his people are seized by sickening dread because they see what Israel has done to the Amorites (22:2—3), who earlier defeated Moab (21:26—30). Slim indeed are your chances of winning against a team that has handily defeated another team that earlier defeated you!

According to Deuteronomy 2:9, the Lord has already commanded Moses not to disturb the Moabites or take any of their land, but poor Balak does not know this. So, ruling out a preemptive military strike, even with the help of his Midianite allies (Num. 22:4), he comes up with an alternative proactive strategy to utilize a secret weapon: a curse by Balaam. Balak does not expect Balaam to destroy the Israelites but only to soften them up and thereby even the odds to manageable proportions so that his ground troops will have a fighting chance (22:5—6). Balaam, a diviner (Josh. 13:22) who originated from the northeast by the Euphrates River, has an international reputation for pronouncing effective blessings, and when it comes to curses, you could say that he is the maledictorian in his class (Num. 22:6b).

For persuading Balaam to come on his errant errand, King Balak uses verbal flattery, an impressive delegation of Moabite and Midianite leaders (referred to as [tribal] elders)[1] to convey the gravity of the request, and divination fees (22:6b—7). Balak's message does not identify the Israelites as such (22:5, 11), perhaps so that Balaam will not recognize a conflict of interest that pits the Lord against his own people.

Balaam keeps the messengers overnight so that he can receive an answer ffrom the Lord (22:8). This non-Israelite diviner is a kind of prophet and expects a revelation in the night (cf. Dan. 7:2, 7, 13). An eighth-century B.C. group of inscriptions correlates with the biblical story in important ways. These texts on plaster walls were discovered by archaeologists at the site of Deir 'Alla, about

eight kilometers east of the Jordan River and close to the northern bank of the Jabbok/Zerqa River, which flows into the Jordan some distance to the north of Moab. The inscriptions, which present literary similarities to the biblical Balaam oracles (e.g., poetic quality), are written in a Northwest Semitic dialect (with some affinities to Aramaic), which may be a form of Hebrew spoken by Israelites who lived in that Transjordanian region. In terms of content, the most striking feature is that Balaam son of Beor is remembered as a seer of the gods, who convey a disturbing message to him in an oracular vision at night.

The Deir ʾAlla writings are saturated with polytheism, express belief in divination, and portray Balaam as interacting with a number of gods in various ways: by receiving visions and through involvement with divination and possibly exorcism.[2] If he was a polytheist, as depicted here, it appears that he would have dealt with whatever supernatural beings were relevant to the needs of his clients. Perhaps the Deir ʾAlla account reflects a stage in Balaam's life that came after an apostasy from monotheistic devotion to Israel's deity (Yahweh), but there is insufficient evidence to establish this.

Partly on the basis of the Deir ʾAlla inscriptions, S. C. Layton contends that King Balak called Balaam from Deir ʾAlla, where he had settled by "the river of the land of the Ammonites" (22:5—reading *ʾammo* ["his people"] as "Ammon," with the Samaritan, Syriac Peshitta, and Latin Vulgate versions), that is, the Jabbok River.[3] However, Noordtzij insists that "the River" must be the Euphrates, in accordance with prevailing use of this expression else-where.[4] Since Balaam was from Pethor (perhaps = Pitru) of Aram in upper Mesopotamia, that is, northeastern Syria (22:5, cf. 23:7, Deut. 23:4),[5] it seems possible that his connection with the deity of the Israelites is through their Aramean roots or relatives (Gen. 25:20, 28:5, 31:24).

Not taking Balaam's divinely directed "no" for an answer, desperate Balak offers Balaam a tempting "blank check" to fill in any amount he wishes for his "honorarium" (22:15—17). The first part of Balaam's answer—"Even if Balak gave me his palace …" (22:18)—is a model of piety that would make him a biblical paradigm of loyalty to the Lord, whom he claims as his God, if it were not for the rest of the story.

Balaam's next words, however, betray a certain ambivalence. He invites the messengers to stay so that he can find out what else the Lord may have to say (v. 19). This is odd. Why would Balaam think the Lord might change his mind? Or perhaps we should ask: Why would Balaam *hope* the Lord might change his mind? The answer to this question is rather obvious: King Balak has "upped the ante" to the point that Balaam cannot resist!

Surprisingly, the Lord's answer is indeed different: Balaam can go to Moab on condition that he do only what God tells him. Undoubtedly delighted at the prospect of satisfying his greed with his professional integrity intact, thereby "having his cake and eating it too," Balaam wastes no time lest the Lord should withdraw permission. In the morning he rises, saddles his female donkey, and sets out with two servants (22:20—22, cf. Gen. 22:3 of faithful Abraham).[6]

Journey on a jenny. In spite of the fact that God allows Balaam to go, he is angry when the diviner leaves. To forcefully convey divine displeasure, "an angel of the LORD" (NJPS)[7] takes his stand in the road as a *sa tan* (i.e., adversary) to Balaam (22:22, see also v. 32). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, *sa tan* can designate the adversary of God and his people (Job 1—2, Zech. 3:1—2), namely, Satan (proper name without definite article, 1 Chron. 21:1). But here the term refers to a role played by an angel or messenger of God.[8] Balaam is trotting into heavy opposition!

Balaam values his own insight and wisdom, but his life is saved by the lowly beast of burden that he mistreats for irritating him (22:33). She is his greatest asset. When the Lord uncovers Balaam's eyes and he sees what she did, he reacts similarly (cf. 22:27) by prostrating himself before the awesome angel blocking the way with sword drawn (22:31, cf. Gen. 3:24).

The angel issues Balaam a ticket for reckless driving (22:32).The verb that NIV renders "is a reckless one" is *yrt*, which shows up only here in the Hebrew Bible. Because we have no other contexts to determine the meaning of this word, interpreters have offered a variety of guesses. If the way *(derek)* is that of Balaam and is a literal road or path, *yrt* may mean "blocked" (NJB), but if it is a figurative path (i.e., course of action or mission), it could mean "twisted"[9] (i.e., "perverse" [NKJV, NRSV], "obnoxious" [NJPS], or "reckless" [NIV]).

While most readers take "the way" *(hadderek)* to be that of Balaam (e.g., NIV "your path," following Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, and Vulgate), Levine suggests that the angel may have said to Balaam, "for the mission was pressing upon me."[10] That is, the angel has to stop Balaam in order to carry out the angel's urgent mission to convey a message to him. In any case, it is clear from the context that the Lord, represented by his angel, disapproves of what Balaam is doing and is determined to alter his course of action. If (against Levine) the angel explicitly holds Balaam accountable for his way "before me" (22:32), he speaks for the Lord, or possibly even *as* the Lord (cf., e.g., Judg. 6 and 13).[11]

Although Balaam confesses and offers to return home, as well he might (Num. 22:34), the angel tells him to continue, with the condition that he "speak only what I tell you" (22:35). When King Balak meets Balaam at the Moabite border,

Balaam cites this condition of complete divine control (22:38) as an “escape clause” in case Balak should be dissatisfied with his utterances.

Balak extends hospitality to Balaam by sacrificing (Qal of zbh) animals at Kiriath Huzoth and sending them to Balaam and the princes with him, apparently primarily for them to enjoy a feast (22:39—40). The text does not identify the deity to which these non-Israelite sacrifices are offered, but it appears that they are related to the Israelite *zebah* (so- called “sacrifice”) class of sacrifices (e.g., Lev. 3, 7:11—21), from which the offerer(s) could eat (7:15—21).

The following morning, Balak takes Balaam up to a place with a view—Bamoth Baal, “high places of Baal”—where he can visually connect with Israel from a safe distance (Num. 22:41) in order to aim his imprecatory “smart bombs.” Ironically, whereas Israelites looked on Moses’ bronze serpent in order to be healed (21:8—9), Balaam is now gazing at Israelites. He too believes in a “line of sight” (we might say “wireless”) link, but his goal for them is the opposite of theirs.

Bridging Contexts

TAKING "NO" FOR an answer. Numbers 22:22 is puzzling: The Lord is angry with Balaam for going to Moab, even though he has given him permission (20:20). Why does God not hold Balaam to his earlier answer (20:12)? We could ask the same question about why the Lord was angry with the Israelites at Kibroth Hattaavah when they gathered quail he had sent for them to eat (11:31—33).

It appears that in both cases the Lord is testing people by giving them what they want in order to see whether they will show some restraint in accordance with what they already know to be right. The Israelites and Balaam both flunk by single-mindedly gravitating to self-gratification. In Balaam's case there is an additional aggravating factor: He is setting out to enrich himself at the expense of God's people, who are divinely blessed. Understanding the firm nature of the blessing, he should have taken God's first "no" as the final answer.

There may be another reason for God's apparently contradictory treatment of Balaam, which could apply even if God really wanted him to go to Moab: to set up an opportunity for overwhelmingly impressing on Balaam the fact that his message will come only from the Lord.

> When the Lord tells Balaam that he should speak only what the Lord gives him, Balaam most likely still expects to use his patented methods. By speaking through the donkey God demonstrates that he has something entirely different in mind and that the delivery of the message will not depend in the least on this famous diviner's mantic skills. Yahweh can open a dumb beast's eyes and fill his mouth, so certainly he can manage to do the same with Balaam.[12]

When the "angel of the LORD" brings Balaam to a screeching halt, his confession (22:34) betrays two hints of ambivalence. (1) He admits that he has sinned because he did not know that the "angel" was standing in the road. While he partly addresses his fault in beating his faithful donkey, which he should not have done in any case, he does not speak to the more serious problem of his attempt to profit as a prophet by cursing people whom the Lord has blessed.

(2) Balaam expresses his willingness to turn around with the words, “Now *if* you are displeased, I will go back” (emphasis supplied). Is there any doubt that the Lord is displeased? He has just informed Balaam, “I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me” (22:32) and “I would certainly have killed you by now” (22:33). It takes a lot of nerve for Balaam to say “if"! In spite of all that has happened, Balaam has not given up on the possibility of going to Moab.

If Balaam had unconditionally surrendered to the Lord, as Saul/Paul later surrendered to Christ under somewhat similar circumstances while on the road to persecute Christian believers in Damascus (Acts 9), he would have insisted on returning home at once. But earthly reward blinded Balaam to the needs of God’s people. There is a story about a rabbi who illustrated the way this kind of blindness works. A rich but miserly member of his congregation had stubbornly refused making a contribution to the temple building fund. So the rabbi called the man into his study, took him to the window, and asked him what he saw.

> “People,” answered the rich man.
>
> Then the rabbi led him to a mirror. “Now what do you see?” “Myself.”
>
> The rabbi said, “The window is glass and the mirror is glass. But the glass in the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is a little silver added than you cease to see others and see only yourself.”[13]

First Kings 22 shows how the Lord deals with those who rebel against him and refuse to take “no” for an answer: He gives them “over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices” (Ps. 81:12) and thereby suffer the consequences. Even after a penetrating and sophisticated warning, King Ahab characteristically spurned divine counsel. He went to Ramoth Gilead anyway and died miserably as a result (1 Kings 22:29—37).

Centuries later, Paul spoke of similar rebellion during the Christian era (2 Thess. 2:10—12):

> They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

When the Lord has clearly revealed his will to us, our role is to accept and follow it, not to engage in false piety by attempting to circumvent our duty through asking for a second opinion.

Contemporary Significance

OF DONKEYS AND HUMILITY. The story of Balaam and his donkey captivates young children, who love to hear every detail and act it out in charades accompanied by giggles, using Daddy as the hapless beast of burden and enjoying the novelty of beating on him with impunity. Children accept miracles more easily than adults, and the idea of a talking donkey (over three thousand years before Mr. Ed, the talking horse) is delightful. For my daughter, who from a young age has been strongly inclined toward animal rights activism, the most satisfying element is the rebuke of Balaam, the animal abuser (cf. Prov. 12:10).

Contributing to the humor of the donkey story is its remarkable irony. Three times Balaam's donkey sees what the "seer" does not, and he vents his frustration (22:23, 25, 27). Just as God will put words in Balaam's mouth (22:38), her speech is enabled by the Creator (22:28, 30). R. Alter points out that this episode anticipates Balaam's three visions with eyes unveiled (cf. 23:9, 24:3—4, 17), to which King Balak reacts with frustration (23:1 1, 25, 24:10— 11), except that the donkey plays the role of Balaam and Balaam acts as Balak.[14] Notice that unlike the other talking animal in the Bible—the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3)—the donkey utters undeceptive truth.

Most amusing is the fact that Balaam answers his donkey (22:29—30) as if he were used to conversing with her regularly. Against his accusation that she is abusing him (22:29) after he has been abusing her (22:23, 25, 27), she gets him to admit that her present actions are a departure from the norm (22:30b), implying that there is an unusual reason of which he is not aware. In a stunning reversal, the donkey is like a human and the human is asinine! Don Quixote ruthlessly focused on chasing a delusion of grandeur has become Donkey Xote.

Needless to say, this should have been a humbling experience for Balaam. He thought he was special because God spoke through him, but now God spoke through his donkey, to whom he considered himself so superior.

> Hearing God speak to us is no indication that we are unusually spiritual or mature or important. God is able to communicate with whomever he chooses….
>
> Now imagine that the donkey had responded to that event as many of us

might be tempted to. Suppose the donkey had returned to its stable all puffed up because of its superior spiritual insight: “I was able to discern the angelic presence when even the prophet himself was ignorant!” What if the donkey had put on airs and considered itself in an exalted spiritual class above the other quadrupeds?[15]

Whether we are human or donkey, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, asking who is superior to whom is to miss the point: God can use whomever or whatever he chooses, including even stones (Luke 19:40, cf. Matt. 3:9, Luke 3:8). It is God who is superior, and none of us are excluded from service to him. Here is a call for humility and for treating each other with respect (cf. Rom. 12:10, 1 Cor. 12:21—25).

Aesop delivered a wise observation through a delightful fable:

> An Ass once carried through the streets of a city a famous wooden Image, to be placed in one of its Temples. As he passed along, the crowd made lowly prostration before the Image. The Ass, thinking that they bowed their heads in token of respect for himself, bristled up with pride, gave himself airs, and refused to move another step. The driver, seeing him thus stop, laid his whip lustily about his shoulders and said, “O you perverse dull-head! it is not yet come to this, that men pay worship to an Ass.”
>
> *The moral is: They are not wise who give to themselves the credit due to others.*[16]

By contrast, Corrie ten Boom reflected on her own ministry:

> When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it even entered the head of that donkey that any of it was for him? … If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in His glory, I give Him all the praise and all the honor.[17]

Ironically, humbly accepting the roles God has given us as his servants, as Corrie did, liberates us to be who we really are.[18]

1. On the Transjordanian monarchies as tribal kingdoms rather than true nation-states, see O. LaBianca and R. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age

Transjordan (ca. 1400—500 BCE),” in T. Levy, ed., *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 401 — 15, R. Younker, “Moabite Social Structure,” *BA* 60 (1997): 237—48.

2. For detailed discussion of the Deir ’Alla inscriptions, see, e.g., Levine, *Numbers 21—36,* 241 —75, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 473—6, J. T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (BJS 244, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 2—3.

3. S. C. Layton, “Whence Comes Balaam? Num 22,5 Revisited,” *Bib* 73 (1992): 32—61.

4. Noordtzij, *Numbers,* 200—201. On apparently contradictory cues for Balaam’s geographic origin, see also Levine, *Numbers,* 145—49.

5. About 360 miles from Moab (Noordtzij, *Numbers,* 200).

6. Because of an accumulation of such correspondences between the binding of Isaac story in Gen. 22 and the story of Balaam’s donkey in Num. 22, J. Safren regards the latter as a “reflection story,” in which Balaam appears as the antithesis of Abraham (“Balaam and Abraham,” *VT* 38 [1988]: 105—13).

7. Compare Gen. 22:11—12, where an angel of the Lord called to Abraham at the climax of the binding of Isaac story (ibid., 106—7). Although these passages lack the definite article before “angel,” Christian versions render “the angel (or Angel) of the Lord (or LORD)” (e.g. NIV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV), implying a special theophanic angel, i.e., a manifestation of the deity himself as an angel.

8. For *sa ta n* as a human person who acts as an adversary, see 1 Sam. 29:4, 2 Sam. 19:22, 1 Kings 5:4, 11:14, 23, 25.

9. Compare Milgrom, *Numbers,* 320, citing rabbinic sources.

10. Levine, *Numbers,* 5, 159.

11. Many Christians have understood such striking identifications between the/an angel of the Lord and the Lord himself to mean that the angel spoke *as* the Lord = the pre-incarnate Christ, but W. G. MacDonald has disputed this interpretation (“Christology and ‘The Angel of the Lord,'” in G. F. Hawthorne, ed., *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 324—35).

12. J. H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 610.

13. A. S. Kramer, *Three Rabbis in a Rowboat: The World’s Best Jewish Humor* (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 29.

14. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 106. Here Alter notes the midrash *Bemidbar Rabbah,* 20:21, which

points out the irony of the fact that Balaam wanted a sword to kill a donkey when he is setting out to defeat an entire nation with only his words.

15. J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 141—42.

16. *Aesop's Fables*, transl. G. F. Townsend (Books for the Ages, Version 1.0 on CD-ROM, Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 45.

17. S. Gaukroger and N. Mercer, eds., *A-Z Sparkling Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 76—77.

18. J. Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 65.

Numbers 23

BALAAM SAID, “Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me.” 2Balak did as Balaam said, and the two of them offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

3Then Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offering while I go aside. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet with me. Whatever he reveals to me I will tell you.” Then he went off to a barren height.

4God met with him, and Balaam said, “I have prepared seven altars, and on each altar I have offered a bull and a ram.”

Tie LORD put a message in Balaam’s mouth and said, “Go back to Balak and give him this message.”

6So he went back to him and found him standing beside his offering, with all the princes of Moab. 7Then Balaam uttered his oracle:

“Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.’

8How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?

How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced?

9 From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them.

I see a people who live apart and do not consider
themselves one of the nations.

10 Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of
Israel?

Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be
like theirs!”

“Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!”

12He answered, “Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?”

13Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place where you can see them, you will see only a part but not all of them. And from there, curse them for me.” 14So he took him to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah, and there he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

15Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offering while I meet with him over there.”

16The LORD met with Balaam and put a message in his mouth and said, “Go back to Balak and give him this message.”

17So he went to him and found him standing beside his offering, with the princes of Moab. Balak asked him, “What did the LORD say?”

18Then he uttered his oracle:

“Arise, Balak, and listen, hear me, son of Zippor.

19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man,
that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not
fulfill?

201 have received a command to bless, he has blessed,
and I cannot change it.

21"No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in

Israel.

The LORD their God is with them, the shout of the King is among them.

[22]God brought them out of Egypt, they have the strength of a wild ox.

[23]There is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel.

It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘See what God has done!’

[24]The people rise like a lioness, they rouse themselves like a lion

that does not rest till he devours his prey and drinks the blood of his victims.”

[25]Then Balak said to Balaam, “Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!”

[26]Balaam answered, “Did I not tell you I must do whatever the LORD says?”

[27]Then Balak said to Balaam, “Come, let me take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God to let you curse them for me from there.” [28]And Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland.

[29]Balaam said, “Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me.” [30]Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Original Meaning

NOT EVEN A SORCERER'S APPRENTICE. After all the trauma of his trip to Moab, Balaam's moment of truth has arrived. What kind of words will the Lord put in his mouth? Can he satisfy King Balak? At Bamoth Baal (22:41), Balaam instructs Balak to "put his best foot forward" by providing the Lord a rich complex of burnt offerings on seven altars (23:1—2). Somehow Balaam seems to have known that the sabbatical number seven is appropriate for invoking the God of Israel. However, he cannot guarantee an encounter with the Lord, who will communicate with him only if he chooses to do so. It is by no means clear that the burnt offerings, which basically serve as instruments of divination to evoke communication from the deity, provide the Lord with a reason for giving Balaam a revelation. Israelite prophets were never required to offer sacrifices before they received divine messages.[1] It appears that God meets with Balaam (23:4—5) *in spite of* the sacrifices.

Then Balaam utters (ns', lit., "lifts") his oracle (23:7). The word for "oracle" is *masa l*, which refers to a discourse constructed with parallelism, often employing figurative language. This is the first appearance of the term in the Hebrew Bible, although it is anticipated by the participle of *msl* ("balladeers, poets") in 21:27. In Numbers 23—24 the same *ns' + masa l* phraseology introduces seven oracular speeches of Balaam (23:7, 18, 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23), affirming that the number seven is indeed significant for the God of Israel.

Balaam's first oracle (23:7—10) employs seven (this number again!) couplets. He is now fully aware of the identity of the people whom Balak wants him to curse: Jacob/Israel (23:7, cf. 22:5, 11). Balaam quickly moves to the basic problem: his conflict of interest. Since he is God's spokesman, how can he "curse … denounce" *(qbb … z'm)* those whom the Lord has not cursed/denounced (23:8)? For a spokesman to express the opposite of the authority he represents would be inexcusable insubordination. Would a U.S. President tolerate a White House press secretary who indulges in freelance diplomacy?

From his vantage point, Balaam views Israel as separate rather than just another nation, and metaphorically he refers to their innumerable multitude in terms of "dust" (23:9—10a). This is what God promised Abraham and Jacob

that their chosen offspring would be like (Gen. 13:16, 28:14, cf. “sand” in Gen. 22:17, 32:12).

At the end of Balaam’s speech, he wishes for himself to die like straight/upright = righteous ones *(yesarim),* referring to the Israelites, and (in poetic parallelism) he wants his afterlife *(’aharit,* lit., “after-part, end”) to be like theirs (23:10b). In light of the first part of the same verse, the desirability of a righteous person’s fate lies largely in the assurance of having abundant posterity to live on and multiply after one dies. “Balaam’s wish illustrates the blessing that every nation and person will desire to receive from God—to share the fate of Israel. This is expressed in Genesis 12:3, 22:18, and 28:14.”[2]

Ironically, the Lord makes Balaam express admiration for and identification with those whom he has set out to curse! Balaam could take these words from his own lips as a pointed appeal to himself to abandon his course of action (cf. Num. 22:32) and preserve his ultimate self-interest by allying himself with God’s people rather than trying to destroy them for the mirage of temporary gain. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!

King Balak has hired Balaam as a master sorcerer, a powerful practitioner of black magic (cf. Ex. 7:11 — 12, 22), but he isn’t even a sorcerer’s apprentice. He is just a diviner who is mastered by divinity (rather than a Master of Divinity) to heap divine blessings on the enemy (Num. 23:11). Balaam is playing a dicey game between the Lord’s vested interest in Israel and Balak’s antagonism toward the same nation. But Balaam has his escape clause ready for Balak: He can only speak God’s words (23:12).

Not giving up, Balak hopes that moving the curser to a different location will help him delete his blessings. So he takes Balaam to “the field of Zophim [i.e., Lookouts] on the top of Pisgah,” where a narrower field of vision will help him retain his focus (23:13—14a). Curses and narrow outlooks go together!

After sacrificial preparations (23:14b, cf. 23:1—2), Balaam receives his second oracle (23:15—17), which consists of ten parallel units (23:18—24), expanding on the theme of his earlier speech. There is no trouble or sorrow among the Israelites. Rather, they have the battle cry *(teru’ah)* of the divine King in their midst (23:21, see comments on Lev. 23). The couplet “God, who brings them out of Egypt, is like the horns[3] of a wild ox for them” (Num. 23:22, NRSV, cf. NJPS, NJB, NASB, NKJV)[4] alludes to the initial expressions of Moabite fear in 22:4—5, but reversing the order of the “ox” and “out of Egypt” ideas.

There are two more differences. (1) The Moabites likened Israel to a domestic ox licking up grass (22:4), but the oracle refers to greater danger: the towering horns of a wild ox, which they cannot control or subdue (cf. 24:8, Deut. 33:17,

Job 39:9—10, Ps. 22:21). (2) The Moabites spoke of a threat from Israel (Num. 22:4—5), but in the oracle, Israel's power is that of God.

Balaam continues by affirming that no divination *(nahaï)* is effective against Israel.[5] The point is not what Israel can do, but "what God has done!" (23:23).[6] Notice that just after Balaam has spoken of a dangerous wild ox (23:22), the word *nahas* can be taken to mean "snake" (cf. Gen. 3, 49:17, Ex. 4:3, etc.), another hazardous creature, until the parallel *qesem* ("divination") in the continuation of Numbers 23:23 shows that this *nahas* has to do with the magical arts ("sorcery"). We have found that snakes were indeed effective against Israel, but only when sent by the Lord as punishment for disloyalty to him (21:6), and the bronze snake *(nahas)* that Moses made at his direction was effective for Israel in countering the sting of death (21:8—9).

The last simile of Balaam's speech sounds even more terrifying than a wild ox: Israel is like a devouring lion (23:24).[7] If Balak is disappointed by Balaam's first oracle, this devastating blessing of Israel is a catastrophe. It would be better if Balaam said nothing (23:25). In other words, "Shut up!" Again, Balaam simply cites his "escape clause" (23:26, cf. 22:38, 23:12).

Desperate, and still vainly imagining that the divine attitude can be altered by the venue, Balak relocates Balaam at "the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland" (23:28). It is unlikely that even a human being would be so fickle as to change from pr; to anti-Israelite in this way. To use a modern analogy, moving a Republican from one town to another does not change him or her into a Democrat. Since the world and all its contents belong to the supreme Lord of Israel (Ps. 50:12), moving from one part of his creation to another or attempting to bribe him by giving him something that already belongs to him does not impress him. This is reassuring to those who are under his protection, but it is frustrating to those who find his will impervious to their malicious machinations!

It is remarkable that Balaam plays along with the futile charade, directing Balak to waste fourteen more valuable animals (23:29—30). Having no vested interest in either Israel or Moab, Balaam is clinging to hope for reward no matter what the outcome.

Bridging Contexts

THE POWER OF A CURSE. King Balak chooses Balaam because he is known for formulating curses that work. A curse is regarded as negatively altering reality, by contrast with a blessing that positively alters reality.

The first blessings (Piel of brk, cf. Gen. 1:22, 28, 2:3, 5:2) and curses (Qal of ’rr, cf. 3:14, 17, 4:11) in the Bible were uttered by the Creator himself with profound results. Later, Isaac pronounced divine blessings on his sons, Jacob and then Esau, which were believed to determine their respective destinies and which were irrevocable even though Isaac was deceived into directing the first blessing of dominance to Jacob rather than Esau (27:19—40). Conversely, Noah cursed Canaan, who would be servant of servants to his brothers (9:25), and Jacob cursed the anger of his sons Simeon and Levi, who would be dispersed in Israel (49:7). These patriarchal blessings and curses were not simply communication of information and attitudes. Rather, they were “performative speeches” that *did* things by invoking divine decrees.

Because a curse was unalterable and its effects were real, a person could be held accountable and punishable by death for the negative effect that he or she intended to accomplish against someone else by using a curse as a weapon (Ex. 21:17, 22:28, Lev. 24:1 1, 14, 15, 23, 1 Kings 21:13). David and Solomon saw to it that Shimei did not die a natural death after he cursed David (2 Sam. 16:5—12, 1 Kings 2:8—9, 36—46), even though he ostensibly repented of what he had said and David at least nominally accepted his repentance (2 Sam. 19:16—23).

Balaam is fully aware that he is dealing with the Lord, a volitional being who can choose whether or not someone should be blessed or cursed. However, it appears that King Balak is thinking more along the lines of magic, attributing the power of blessing or cursing to the human diviner (23:6). A practitioner of magic is regarded as controlling a ritual key to a superhuman power source.[8]

Some ancient peoples used magic for cursing. For example, the Egyptians inscribed pottery bowls or figurines with the names of their enemies and then smashed them for the purpose of breaking their power.[9] This magical ritual activity could not affect distant human enemies through natural cause and effect, but it was viewed as producing results through some kind of supernatural energy

guided to its targets by analogy between nonliving objects and living persons.[10]

Contemporary Significance

ASSURANCE OF DIVINE BLESSING. Colonel William Kirby was captured by the Chinese during the Korean War. A Chinese officer informed him that he was to be shot at dawn the next day. Kirby asked if he could be granted one last request, to which the Chinese officer agreed. His request was simply to be buried in an American flag.

After several days the Chinese managed to find an antique American flag. By that time the United States government had managed to secure Kirby's release. Frustrated, the Chinese officer told him that if they ever caught him again, they would shoot him on sight. Nevertheless, Kirby got to keep the old flag, the symbol of his nation and its firm resolve to protect loyal Americans.[11]

The Lord is fully committed to blessing and protecting his loyal people in every age. The fact that he communicates with Balaam, who speaks of him as his God (Num. 22:18), shows that the Israelites do not have a monopoly on their deity. However, while others could have access to the Lord, he gave a special promise to Abraham when this patriarch left the upper Mesopotamian region where Balaam later lived (Gen. 12:2—3):

> I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you,
>
> I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
>
> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse,
>
> and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (cf. 27:29)

God intended for other people, such as Balaam and the Moabites, to know and respect this blessing on Abraham and his descendants (see, e.g., Num. 22:12).[12] King Balak, like Pharaoh before him, was repeatedly attempting to neutralize the blessing of Abraham by reducing his descendants.[13] However, even though the Israelites had been giving their beneficent deity a hard time, and many individuals lost out on the benefits of the covenant because of their

disobedience, and those who remained were still far from perfect, his plan to fulfill the divine promises to and through his corporate chosen people was unshaken and unshakable. His covenant with Israel was conditional in the sense that individuals could only benefit if they were loyal to him, as Colonel Kirby was loyal to the United States, but it was unconditional in the sense that he would use Israel to reveal his blessing in the world (cf. Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14), no matter what happened.[14]

The imperfections of the Israelites were between them and God. While he disciplined them within their corporate boundaries, he did not air their "dirty laundry" in front of people from other nations, such as Balaam and Balak. To non-Israelites he showed only monolithic support for those he protected as his special possession. To attack them was to assault God. By setting out to curse them, Balak and Balaam were on the way to bringing a curse on themselves, as God had said to Abraham, "Whoever curses you I will curse" (Gen. 12:3).

The Lord's firm resolve to bless the children of Abraham is also for Christians who are truly God's people through faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26): "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (3:29). The promise includes salvation, a future home, and adoption into a multitude of literal and spiritual descendants of Abraham, the patriarch who set the paradigm for faith (cf. Heb. 11:10, 12). With the divine King in our "camp" (cf. Num. 23:21), we have ultimate "social security."

The fact that those who bless God's people are blessed and those who curse them are cursed (Num. 24:9) does not mean that they never suffer persecution (e.g., Matt. 5:11, Luke 21:12). Nor does it mean that the wicked will never be more prosperous than the righteous (Ps. 73). However, the Lord ultimately sorts out final destinies according to his inexorable will (73:17—20).

> Leslie Weatherhead proposes that we picture a stream running down the side of a mountain. We can dam up that stream and prevent its flow toward the valley below, but only temporarily. The law of gravity requires that water at high elevation will eventually make its way down. Similarly, God's ultimate will cannot be thwarted. Though human history with all its evils may place many blockages in the way, in the end these will be overcome. God will get his family back, on an earth restored to something resembling its original state.[15]

Dr. Laura Schlessinger explains the purpose of "chosenness": "The Israelites were basically given an assignment. By their adherence to a unique way of life, with laws of holiness, justice, generosity, mercy, ethics, and compassion, the

whole world would come to know, love, and obey the One and Only God."[16] Since God's people are a channel of divine blessing to the world, it is inherently to the benefit of others to accept them and counterproductive to reject them. Not only do those who fail to welcome the Lord's agents lose the short-term benefit that they could have received, they are held accountable for rejecting God and the invitation to his kingdom (cf. Luke 10:8—12).

The Lord has always had a vested interest in his people, who do his work in the world. As in ancient times, whoever touches his modern people "touches the apple [= pupil] of his eye" (Zech. 2:8, cf. Deut. 32:10), that is, touches him in a sensitive spot. Consequently, he rewards with blessing any who help and bless them and takes it personally when anyone mistreats them.

1. J. H. Walton, private communication.

2. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 197.

3. Lit., "high points," cf. "peaks" of mountains in Ps. 95:4.

4. Alternatively, "He [Israel] has [strength] like the horns of a wild ox" (cf. NIV, Ps. 92:10). Outside Israel, either humans or deities could be depicted this way: "King Hammurabi of Babylon proclaims himself as 'the fiery wild ox who gores the foe.' In the ancient Near East, gods were depicted with horns or wearing horned crowns. On a bas-relief from Ugarit, Baal is pictured wearing the horns of a wild ox" (Milgrom, *Numbers,* 200).

5. Cf. the divine command, "Do not practice divination" (Piel of nhs, Lev. 19:26).

6. In May, 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse sent these words in the KJV —"What hath God wrought!"—as the first formal message from Washington, D. C. to Baltimore on the first inter-city telegraph line in the world.

7. Cf. Ps. 22:21, reversing the order of lion and wild ox.

8. Cf. the definition of magical ritual by R. Grimes: "Insofar as it is a deed having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result, a rite is magical" *(Beginnings in Ritual Studies* [Washington, D. C.: Univ. Press of America, 1982], 45).

9. *ANET,* 328—29.

10. According to E. Leach, "whereas the primitive *technician* is always in direct mechanical contact with the object which he seeks to change, the *magician* purports to change the state of the world by action at a distance" *(Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976], 30).

11. Col. William Kirby, personal communication.
12. Cf. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative*, 405—6.
13. Ibid., 406—7.
14. See Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose*, 100.
15. Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, 266—67.
16. Schlessinger and Vogel, *The Ten Commandments*, xxiii.

Numbers 24

NOW WHEN BALAAM saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel,
he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face toward
the desert. 2When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe
by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him 3and he uttered his oracle:

"The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one
whose eye sees clearly,

4the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees
a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and
whose eyes are opened:

5"How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling
places, o Israel!

6 "Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a
river,

like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the
waters.

7Water will flow from their buckets, their seed will have
abundant water.

"Their king will be greater than Agag, their kingdom will
be exalted.

[8]“God brought them out of Egypt, they have the strength
of a wild ox.

They devour hostile nations and break their bones in
pieces, with their arrows they pierce them.

[9]Like a lion they crouch and lie down, like a lioness—
who dares to rouse them?

“May those who bless you be blessed and those who
curse you be cursed!”

[10]Then Balak’s anger burned against Balaam. He struck his hands together and said to him, “I summoned you to curse my enemies, but you have blessed them these three times. [11]Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the LORD has kept you from being rewarded.”

[12]Balaam answered Balak, “Did I not tell the messengers you sent me, [13]‘Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the command of the LORD—and I must say only what the LORD says'? [14]Now I am going back to my people, but come, let me warn you of what this people will do to your people in days to come.”

[15]Then he uttered his oracle:

“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one
whose eye sees clearly,

[16] the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High,

who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate,
and whose eyes are opened:

[17] "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near.

A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of
Israel.

He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the
sons of Sheth.

18 Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be
conquered, but Israel will grow strong.

19 A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the
survivors of the city."

20Then Balaam saw Amalek and uttered his oracle:

"Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come
to ruin at last."

21Then he saw the Kenites and uttered his oracle:

"Your dwelling place is secure, your nest is set in a rock;
22 yet you Kenites will be destroyed when Asshur takes
you captive."

23Then he uttered his oracle:

"Ah, who can live when God does this?

24 Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will
subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to
ruin."

25Then Balaam got up and returned home and Balak went
his own way.

Original Meaning

THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT! At the top of Peor (23:28), Balaam gives up seeking to meet omens/divinations (plural of *nahas,* 24:1), apparently referring to the divine Source with which he connected on previous occasions (23:3, 15). To short-circuit the Lord's control, he skips going off by himself and simply sets his face in the direction of the desert, where Israel is encamped (24:1). The implication sticks out like the peak of Pisgah: He is bent on sorcery without interference by the Source in order to satisfy Balak and claim his reward.[1]

Since Balaam has not come to the Lord, the Lord comes to him (cf. 11:26) with some short-circuiting of his own. He possesses Balaam as a prophet (24:2, cf. 11:25—26, 1 Sam. 10:10, 11:6, 19:20, 23), thereby bypassing his volition and overpowering his ability to say anything contrary to the divine will. So Balaam introduces his third oracle: "The oracle of Balaam …" (Num. 24:3). The word for "oracle" here (see also 24:4, 15—16) is *ne'um,* which refers to a prophet's inspired utterance (2 Sam. 23:1) or a declaration of the Lord (e.g., Gen. 22:16, Num. 14:28, Isa. 1:24).

The third oracle contains twelve parallel units (24:3—9).[2] That there are twelve is appropriate because Balaam is looking at "Israel encamped tribe by tribe" (24:2). The second member of each of the first three couplets refers to Balaam's visionary gift (24:3—4). He also "hears the words of God" (v. 4a). The third couplet—"who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened [Qal passive of glh]" (v. 4b) alludes in reverse (chiastic) order to 22:31, where the Lord uncovered (Piel of glh) his eyes so that he could see the "angel of the LORD," and then he bowed and prostrated himself.

In the fourth to seventh couplets, Balaam extols Israel's war camp, of which the beauty is in tents (24:5—7a). Among other similes, likening the tents (plural of *'ohel,* v. 5) of the Israelites to aloe trees (plural from root *'hl,* v. 6) provides a satisfying Hebrew wordplay. After figuratively referring to water ("like gardens beside a river," v. 6), verse 7a affirms the Israelites' literal abundance of that crucial resource.

The eighth couplet (24:7b) speaks of Israel in royal terms: "Their king will be greater than Agag, their kingdom will be exalted." In his second oracle, Balaam

described Israel as already having a king, that is, the Lord (23:21). However, in 24:7 the verbs are in the imperfect tense/aspect and may refer to a future human king of Israel. In later history it was Saul, the first king, who destroyed the Amalekites under King Agag as divine punishment for the Amalekite attack on the Israelites at Rephidim when they came out of Egypt (1 Sam. 15, cf. Ex. 17:8).[3]

The ninth couplet (Num. 24:8a), recalling the Exodus and likening Israel to a wild ox, reiterates part of Balaam's second oracle (23:22). The tenth parallel unit (24:8b) would be particularly disquieting to Balak because it describes Israel as devouring nations that are its enemies, breaking their bones, and striking them (Qal of *mhs)*[4] with arrows. Here the only figurative expression is "devour," a transparent metaphor for destroying in battle (cf., e.g., Deut. 32:42, 2 Sam. 2:26, 11:25). The rest of the language is devastatingly literal, calculated to intimidate Balak into peaceful relations with Israel.

I can somewhat understand how Balak must be feeling. During an academic break from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1987, my wife and I went to a beach at Eilat. Noticing what appeared to be public beach chairs, I sat in one of them. Moments later I was approached by a tough-looking young man, who informed me in no uncertain terms that there was a charge for use of the chairs and offered to break all my bones if I tried to sit in one without paying. Since I liked my bones the way they were and had no reason to doubt that he could carry out his threat, I profusely apologized and abruptly left—without thanking the chair-man for his hospitality.

In his eleventh parallel unit, Balaam continues to intimidate by likening Israel to a lion (Num. 24:9a), affirming the ongoing validity of Jacob's prophetic blessing on Judah: "You are a lion's cub, O Judah, you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness— who dares to rouse him?" (Gen. 49:9). Let sleeping lions lie! In his previous oracle, Balaam has already warned of what the Israelite lion will do if aroused: "… he devours his prey and drinks the blood of his victims" (Num. 23:24).

As Balaam's punch line, the twelfth and final parallel hammers home God's unequivocal "bottom line" toward Israel: "Blessed are they who bless you, Accursed they who curse you!" (24:9b, NJPS). In his first oracle, Balaam said he could not curse those whom the Lord had not cursed (23:8). In his second oracle he admitted that he could not change God's command to bless (23:20). Now he speaks of blessing and cursing together (cf. 22:12), adding the motivational concept that the way people treat Israel determines whether they are blessed or cursed (24:9). By building to this climax, Balaam has arrived at the full

formulation of God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse (Gen. 12:3, cf. 27:29).

Infuriated that his persistence has backfired, King Balak fires Balaam and orders him to "flee" (Qal of *brh)* home, without giving him any honorarium, severance package, or even a token consolation prize (Num. 24:10—11). Nevertheless, by blaming the Lord for keeping Balaam from his reward, Balak acknowledges divine control (24:11b).

For the last time, Balaam cites his escape clause (24:12—13). However, this time he repeats the fuller version that he stated to Balak's second group of messengers: "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold …" (24:13, cf. 22:18).

Parting shots. Before leaving, Balaam delivers unsolicited divine counsel regarding what the Israelites will do to the Moabites in the latter days, that is, in the distant future (24:14, cf. Gen. 49:1, Deut. 31:29, Jer. 48:47). Balaam begins his "latter days" oracle as a prophetic speech, using the same words with which he commenced his third oracle (Num. 24:15—16, cf. 24:3—4). But this time he adds a line at the center of his introductory section of three parallels (24:15—16), describing himself as one "who has knowledge from [lit., knows knowledge of] the Most High" (24:16a). He has access to information that is otherwise inaccessible to humans, in this case because it concerns future events.

The following couplets (24:17—19) are startling. Balaam sees a future ruler, whom he metaphorically depicts as a "star" or "scepter" who will originate from Israel and strike (Qal of *mhs)* the heads of the Moabites (24:17).[5] Unlike Balaam's third oracle, this is not a conditional threat that the Moabites will be defeated if they disturb Israel (cf. 24:8—9), rather, it is a prediction.

Israel will also take possession of Edom/Seir, which treated Israel as an enemy (24:18, cf. 20:14—21). The Lord protected the Moabites and Edomites from the Israelites because they were related to them (Deut. 2:4—5, 9), but this protection will end because both nations have treated the chosen people with hostility rather than brotherhood and thereby incurred the curse of Abraham: "… and whoever curses you I will curse" (Gen. 12:3, Num. 24:9).

Balaam concludes his salvo with three brief discourses against other nations—(1) Amalek, (2) Kenites, and (3) Assyria and Eber (24:20—24, see below)—each of which is introduced as a *masal* (see comments on 23:7). Numbers 24 ends anticlimactically by simply reporting that Balaam goes home and Balak goes on his way (24:25). With this "gruesome twosome" splitting up, we could assume that their threat to Israel is over. However, we will discover that such a conclusion is premature (cf. chs. 25, 31).

Bridging Contexts

"A STAR WILL COME OUT OF JACOB." To a significant extent, King David fulfilled Balaam's prophecy that a "star" will march forth (Qal of *drk)* out of Jacob and a "scepter" will arise from Israel to defeat Moab and Edom (24:17—18, cf. 2 Sam. 8:2, 13—14). Since David was a king, it is readily understandable that he could be represented by a "scepter," but what is the point of a "star" (Num. 24:17)? There are other places in the Bible where stars are associated with people. For one thing, similes that liken people to stars can emphasize their large numbers (Gen. 15:5, 22:17, 26:4, Ex. 32:13, Deut. 1:10, 10:22, Neh. 9:23).[6] Daniel uses a simile that refers to another aspect of stars: their light (12:3).

More relevant to the metaphorical/symbolic "star" from Jacob in Numbers 24:17 is young Joseph's dream, in which he saw that "the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me" (Gen. 37:9). Here the nuclear family of Jacob, from which came the nation of Israel, appears as a kind of "solar system," with each member represented by a heavenly body.

To an extent, Balaam's star out of Jacob (24:17) is like the eleven stars in Joseph's dream. They represented his brothers, who were out of Jacob because they were descended from him. In Balaam's oracle, however, the "star" person is also a scepter. So, like Joseph, he will reign over his fellow Israelites. Indeed, David reigned over the twelve tribes, descended from Joseph and his brother "stars," which comprised a multitude as numerous as the stars (1 Chron. 27:23). The rule of David, like that of Joseph, was divinely mandated for the purpose of delivering God's people (1 Sam. 16, 2 Sam. 3:18, 7:8—11, cf. Gen. 45:5—8).

Although David fulfilled Balaam's prophecy up to a point by conquering Moab and Edom, later prophets pointed to future messianic victory for Israel linked to defeat of the Transjordanian peoples (e.g., Isa. 11:14, 25:9—11). In the New Testament, another deliverer is also a "star": "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16). Christ continues the Davidic kingship and delivers in a larger sense: God saves the world through him (John 3:16—17) because he saves people from their sins (Matt. 1:21, 1 Tim. 1:15) and frees Planet Earth from the tyranny of Satan and powers allied with him (Luke

10:18, John 12:31—32, Rev. 19:11—21).

While stars can stand for humans, they can also represent heavenly beings (Job 38:7, Isa. 14:13). Ancient Near Eastern peoples associated stars with deities and worshiped them as such from early times.[7] In fact, the Sumerian cuneiform sign for "god" *(DINGIR)*, which was adopted into the writing system of the Akkadian language used by the Babylonians and Assyrians and also into Hittite cuneiform writing, was originally a pictograph of a star.[8]

It is no coincidence that a star led Magi from the east to baby Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1 — 11). Both the Magi and King Herod took this star to be the sign of a divinely designated "king of the Jews" (2:2), a ruler like the Davidic "star" out of Jacob that Balaam saw (Num. 24:17). In this case the newly born King was the Son of God (Luke 1:32—35), whose heavenly, divine origin (John 3:13, 31, 6:38, 51) made the symbol of a star even more appropriate.

Oracles against nations. After pronouncing doom on Moab and Edom (24:17—18), Balaam turns his ominous gaze toward other nations. (1) Amalek will come to destruction (24:20), in accordance with the Lord's promise to "completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex. 17:14) because this nation attacked Israel (17:8, cf. 1 Sam. 15).

(2) Although the Kenite (qeni) people have a secure "nest" *(qen)* in which to dwell, they are destined for burning/destruction and for captivity by Assyria (24:21 —22). The Bible does not record Kenite hostility toward Israel, as it does in the cases of Amalek, Moab, and Edom. Indeed, the Kenites were related to Moses by marriage (Judg. 1:16, 4:11), and King Saul was grateful that the Kenites "showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt" (1 Sam. 15:6).

During the period of the "judges," Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, became a heroine to the Israelites when she staked Sisera in her tent (Judg. 4:17—22, 5:24—27). Sisera was the general of Jabin, the Canaanite king of Hazor who oppressed Israel (4:2—3). However, the reason why Sisera sought refuge with Jael was "because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite" (4:17). So the Kenites appear to have had a conflict of interest (cf. 1 Sam. 15:6, where Saul warned the Kenites to leave the Amalekites before he destroyed the latter). Because the Kenites settled in the Negev, the southern part of Judahite territory (Judg. 1:16, cf. 1 Sam. 27:10), it is possible that they would have fallen into the hands of the Assyrians when Sennacherib invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13).

Balaam's third and final speech against non-Israelites begins differently and is

directed against two nations—Assyria (Asshur) and Eber: "Alas, who can live except God has ordained it? But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim, And they shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber, So they [lit., he] also shall come to destruction" (24:23—24, NASB). Thus, after taking Kenites captive (24:22), Assyria will fall prey to Kittim.

Kittim refers to the Mediterranean region where Cyprus is located (Isa. 23:1, 12, Jer. 2:10, Ezek. 27:6). So in Numbers 24:24, ships from the direction of Cyprus will come against Assyria and Eber (cf. Dan. 11:30). Elsewhere Eber appears as an early descendant of Shem (Gen. 10:21, 24, 25, 11:14—17). Although this name does not designate a particular nation, it seems to refer to several Semitic peoples descended from this patriarch (see Gen. 10:21), who was also an ancestor of the Israelites through Abraham (11:16—26). So the idea that ships from the direction of Kittim would afflict Asshur and Eber can be taken to mean that westerners will subdue territories belonging to several groups. Some have identified this threat from the Mediterranean with the influx of "Sea People" during the thirteenth century B.C., but since the invasion stopped at the borders of Egypt, those who hold this view tend to identify Asshur with a north Arabian tribe (see Gen. 25:3 and south Arabian inscriptions) rather than with Assyria.[9]

Balaam's speeches constitute early examples of oracles against nations. This kind of oracle is robustly represented in the books of the classical writing prophets (e.g., Isa. 10, 13—35, Jer. 46—51, Ezek. 25—32). Balaam's oracles have the purpose of magnifying Israel at the expense of her detractors. The classical prophets hold all nations accountable to the Lord's sovereignty[10] and show that he is fair when he holds his own apostate people of Israel and Judah accountable.

Contemporary Significance

IN TOUCH WITH GOD. Balaam began his oracle of the "latter days" by describing himself as the man (1) whose eye is open, (2) who hears the words of God, (3) who has knowledge of the Most High, (4) who sees a vision of the Almighty, (5) who falls (prostrate), and (6) whose eyes are uncovered (Num. 24:15—16, cf. vv. 3—4). This was the divine ideal for a prophet, which Balaam was experiencing because God had taken control of him. If he had chosen to accept this ideal during the rest of his life, his story would have turned out a lot differently.

While Balaam's words describe a prophet who receives special revelation from the Lord, there is also a sense in which the same principles can apply to those who preach and teach God's Word. Today, no less than in ancient times, spokespersons for God need clear vision to see what he wants to show them, whether in his written Word, in his creation, or in providential circumstances. They need to be ready at all times to hear communication from God, even when it comes in a "gentle whisper" (cf. 1 Kings 19:12), rather than drowning it out with all kinds of other "noise," including their own exhuberant verbosity. They need knowledge of the Most High, including both knowledge from him and about him. They need to gain their vision from El Shaddai (see Gen. 17:1, 35:11, Ex. 6:3, Job 37:23), be awestruck by his power and glory as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John were (Isa. 6, Ezek. 1, Dan. 7:9—14, Rev. 4—5), fall prostrate before him in humility, and allow him to uncover their eyes to see the "angel of the LORD."

It is not enough to know that these characteristics are good and that we should have them. Balaam knew that much. It is necessary to go a step further in order to possess them and allow them to become part of us. We can do this only by unconditionally saying "yes" to God in our hearts/minds as well as with our mouths. Balaam's oral commitment was impressive (Num. 22:18, 24:13), but he had "heart trouble." The Lord blessed him with rare privilege as a prophet of extraordinary insight and foresight, but we can and must be spiritually closer to God than he was.

Staying in touch with God requires choosing to accept his kind of thinking, which is far higher than ordinary human patterns of thought (Isa. 57:7—9). As

revealed by Christ, the divine mind is characterized by humility and unselfish love for other people rather than conceit and selfish ambition (Phil. 2:1—8).

1. Against the idea of B. Levine that Balaam is voluntarily acting in harmony with what he knows to be the Lord's will *(Numbers 21—36,* 191).

2. Notice that 24:8b is a triplet rather than a couplet.

3. Cf. the book of Esther, where the enemy of the Jews is Haman, an "Agagite" (Est. 3:1, 10, 8:3, 5, 9:24), which could be taken to imply that he was somehow descended from the Amalekite royal line.

4. Cf. Akkadian *mahasu,* "to hit, to wound, to kill, to strike" (CAD, 10:71).

5. "Sons of Sheth" for the Moabites or as their counterparts appears only here. Elsewhere the proper name *Set* refers to Seth, the son of Adam (Gen. 4—5, 1 Chron. 1:1).

6. Cf. Nah. 3:16, where the prophet Nahum says of Nineveh, capital of Assyria: "You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more than the stars of the sky."

7. In the Bible, see Deut. 4:19, 17:3, 2 Kings 17:16, 21:3, 5, 23:4—5, Jer. 8:2, 19:13, Amos 5:26, Zeph. 1:5, Acts 7:42—43.

8. R. Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie Akkadienne,* 5th ed. (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1976), 1, 48—49.

9. Noordtzij, *Numbers,* 236—37.

10. Cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 5:21.

Numbers 25

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge
in sexual immorality with Moabite women, 2who invited them to the
sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these
gods. 3So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD'S
anger burned against them.

4The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill
them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the
LORD'S fierce anger may turn away from Israel." 5So Moses said to
Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your men who
have joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor."

6Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman
right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while
they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 7When
Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left
the assembly, took a spear in his hand 8and followed the Israelite into
the tent. He drove the spear through both of them—through the
Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the
Israelites was stopped; 9but those who died in the plague numbered
24,000.

10The LORD said to Moses, 11"Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of
Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he
was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I
did not put an end to them. 12Therefore tell him I am making my
covenant of peace with him. 13He and his descendants will have a
covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor
of his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

14The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite

woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. 15And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.

16The LORD said to Moses, 17"Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, 18because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of Peor."

Original Meaning

CAMPING AT SHITTIM east of the Jordan River (25:1a), the Israelites are just across from the Promised Land. They have recently won important military victories (ch. 21), but their journey is not quite over. As General George Patton warned in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge, "We can still lose this war."

Alfred Adler has observed: "It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them."[1] At Shittim the Israelite men are distracted by Moabite women, who effectively use sex appeal to lure them to sacrifices honoring Moabite gods (25:1b-3). These are *zebah-type* sacrifices, like those King Balak offered when Balaam first arrived (22:40). Related to Israelite *zebah* sacrifices of well-being (Lev. 3, 7), they are occasions to feast on meat, regarded as a luxury. To eat such meat is to participate in honoring the deity.

A significant number of Israelites swallow the bait without apparent resistance and even prostrate themselves to worship the Moabite gods, presumably in the form of idols (Num. 25:2). In this way the Israelites enter into a binding religious relationship with the god Baal, whose name means "lord," of the place called Peor (25:3a). Remember that Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor to deliver his third oracle (23:28). "The Balaam narrative describes how even an ass can recognize an angel of God and how even a pagan seer can see God and do his will. The same cannot be said of this generation of God's own people" (cf. Isa. 1:2—3).[2]

To turn away divine wrath from corporate Israel and thereby save the nation from destruction, the Lord orders Moses to take all the chiefs (lit., "heads") of the people, who are apparently the leading culprits, and expose them (i.e., their dead bodies) before the Lord in full public view (25:4, see also Bridging Contexts section). Undoubtedly the frightfulness of the penalty, which makes a public spectacle out of rebels under divine judgment, is also calculated to stop the apostasy dead in its tracks by deterring any other Israelites inclined to have dates with Moabite girls.

Apparently not long after Moses conveys the divine verdict to the Israelite judges, who are to execute it (25:5), lo and behold *(hinneh)*, an Israelite man

"brought …" (25:6, Hiphil of *qrb).* Since this word is the usual term for bringing a sacrifice to the sanctuary (e.g., Lev. 1:2—3, 10, 4:3, 14), it would be logical for the reader to expect that the Israelite devoutly sets out to make amends with the Lord. Alas, what he has in tow is not an animal victim but a lass—and a Midianite one at that (Num. 25:6a)! His mission is not expiation but fornication.

While 25:1 mentions Moabite women, this one is Midianite. As shown by 22:4, 7, the Midianites were allied with the Moabites against Israel. Also like the Moabites, they were related to the Israelites: Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah, the wife he took after Sarah died (Gen. 25:1—2, 4). In fact, Moses' wife Zipporah was from a branch of the Midianites (Ex. 2:16— 22, see comments on Num. 12:1).

Rather than sneaking his foreign pleasure into the camp (cf. Josh. 7:20— 22), the Israelite blatantly parades with her in full view of Moses and the assembled Israelites, who are weeping at the court of the sanctuary (Num. 25:6b). They have a lot to weep about (cf. Ezek. 9:4). Apostasy, divine anger, death sentences, and a plague are rending the peace of the triumphant nation of happy campers that Balaam has so recently extolled from the top of Peor with the words, "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob!" (Num. 24:5).

Apparently Moses is traumatized, but with the quick reflexes of a young priest, Phinehas sets out to meet the crisis (25:7). Since his grandfather, Aaron, has died and his father, Eleazar, has become high priest (20:23—29), Phinehas has inherited Eleazar's former position as head of the Levites in charge of guarding and caring for the sanctuary (cf. 3:32).

In the tent where the Israelite and Midianitess have gone, Phinehas summarily kabobs both of them together (25:7b—8). Obviously they are physically close, either engaged in or on the verge of a sexual merge.[3] The term for "tent" in verse 8 is not the usual word *'ohel* but *qubbah*, which only appears here in the Hebrew Bible. Because a priest performs the execution, it has been suggested that the immoral couple entered part of the sacred precincts.[4] But no mention of a *qubbah* there shows up elsewhere in the Bible, and a separate, special tent[5] in the residential area is adequately explained by the fact that the Israelite man is the son of a tribal chief (25:14). The choice of *qubbah* adds literary punch in close proximity to the similar-sounding term for the woman's impaled "stomach"—*qebah* (25:8). Thus Phinehas penetrates both the *qubbah* and, with his spear, her *qebah.* The punishment matches the crime.[6]

The word *qebah* appears elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 18:3, where it refers to the stomach of a sacrificial animal. This adds another ironic ritual twist to the story. The Midianite woman, who is likely in the process of enticing the Israelite

man to participate in a sacrifice to her gods (cf. Num. 25:1—2), is publicly brought as if she were a sacrifice (Hiphil of qrb, 25:6) and is slain by an Israelite priest while his people are assembled at the sanctuary.

Phinehas' "officiation" accomplishes expiation *(kipper)* for the Israelites (25:13) in the sense of destroying offending persons to remove disruption of the covenant relationship between the Lord and his corporate people. Consequently, a plague of divine retribution against them is stopped (25:8b). However, this expiation does not benefit the promiscuous Israelite who has brought the Midianitess.[7] His "offering" is to himself, not to the Lord. He and his lady friend constitute the evil that Phinehas removes. There is no sub-stitutionary atonement here.

By the time Phinehas grabs his spear and uses it, a divine plague has already killed thousands of Israelites (25:9). Because it requires execution of the leaders to turn the Lord's anger from Israel (25:4), it is possible that the plague has begun taking effect before God issues their death sentence. In any case, the plague results from the Peor episode as a whole, it is not simply triggered by one Israelite man and a Midianite woman (25:18).

The body count of 24,000, an average of 2,000 from each of the twelve tribes, is the highest ever suffered by the Israelites during their long and painful passage from Egypt to Canaan. It is even higher than at Kadesh, where 14,700 died in addition to Korah & Co. before Aaron's propitiatory *(kipper)* intercession with incense brought the onslaught of divine plague to a halt (Num. 16:46—49). The only divine punishment on Israel during biblical times that slew more was the plague that took the lives of 70,000 as a result of David's census (2 Sam. 24:15).

The Lord highly commends Phinehas for his decisive action and grants him a covenant of peace/well-being *(salom,* Num. 25:12) and of eternal *('olam)* priesthood (25:13). This implies that religious leadership through the high priesthood will flow through his line of descendants. Phinehas gains his covenant of priesthood for the same reason that the tribe of Levi was earlier promised special service for the Lord: by executing the disloyal and thereby defending the Lord's honor at a national crisis of apostasy involving idolatry (cf. Ex. 32:25—29).

Honor goes to Phinehas because he is zealous (Piel of *qn)* for the Lord with God's zeal *(qin'ah),* so that the Lord in his zeal *(qin'ah)* does not finish off the Israelites (25:11, 13). Psalm 106:31 adds the idea that Phinehas's intervention "was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come." This echoes the commendation of Abram when he believed the Lord (Gen. 15:6).

God's covenant of eternal priesthood for Phinehas is similar to the later divine covenant of dynastic monarchy for David (2 Sam. 7, Ps. 89). Both covenants

promise loyal individuals that they and their descendants will fill existing institutional positions of national leadership within the framework of the covenant established with Israel at Sinai.[8] According to the New Testament, Christ occupies both positions within the "new covenant": He is eternal High Priest (but after the order of Melchizedek, Heb. 7) and the Davidic King (e.g., Mark 11:10, Luke 1:32—33, Rev. 19:11 — 16, 22:16).

When the dust settles at Shittim, the writer identifies the Israelite (Zimri) and the Midianitess (Cozbi) slain by Phinehas as children of chieftains (Num. 25:14—15). As also indicated by those whom the Lord targeted for execution (25:4), the immorality and disloyalty to God on this occasion were a "high class" affair. At least in Hebrew, the name of the Midianitess—Cozbi— comes from the root *kzb* and means something like Lying or Deceiving. This may be a pejorative Hebrew twist on her real name.[9]

While the Moabite and Midianite women appeared friendly, the catastrophic outcome for Israel leads us to suspect that their peoples intentionally sought to drive a wedge between the Israelites and their God, putting in his hand a "sword" to slay them. Whodunit? Who thought up the brilliant and devastatingly effective strategy of using sex and food as lethal weapons to kill Israelites by luring them to commit capital offenses punishable by their own deity?

When the Israelites later attacked the Midianites to avenge the deaths of those whom the Lord slew, we get a clue when "they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword" (31:8, see also Josh. 13:22). What was he doing with the Midianites? Hadn't he gone home (Num. 24:25)? If we "connect the dots," Balaam came up with a scheme and returned to counsel the Midianites and Moabites to use their women to incite Israelites to rebellion against the Lord (31:16).[10] If so, by shrewdly exploiting his understanding of the relationship between the Lord and his people, he succeeded in having them cursed after all, probably in order to gain the "honorarium" that God had denied him (cf. 24:11, also 2 Peter 2:15).

As the destroyer of the Lord's people, Balaam would have topped the Lord's "Most Wanted" list. From a prophet privileged with special communication from God, Balaam became a deadly "Osama bin Ladin," turning Israelites into the target of their own deity, just as an Al-Qaeda gang turned Americans and their buildings into targets of American jetliners. Tragic as September 11 was, the Baal of Peor disaster resulted in eight times as many deaths.

Bridging Contexts

WHY WAS IDOLATRY attractive to the Israelites? The "Baal of Peor" was Israel's first encounter with the Baals ("lords") that dotted the religious landscape of Syria-Palestine. To modern Christians, idolatrous worship of a local Baal deity is simply stupid. How could the Israelites possibly get hooked by such nonsense? However, we are looking back with 20/20 hindsight. From the perspective of an ancient Near Eastern person, idolatry was attractive for a number of reasons.

(1) Idolatry made sense. Through Baal worship, people honored personifications of natural forces that directly affected their physical and economic well-being. Cycles of nature, such as seasons of storms and the essential rains that came with them, served as tangible evidence for the existence and activities of gods such as Baal. In myth and religion, Baal was believed to die in autumn when agricultural fertility waned, and to rise in spring when nature sprang to life afresh. This explains why God gave the northern Israelites a three-year drought announced by Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1). By preventing fertility that was the basis of survival and wealth in an agrarian society, the Lord virtually kept Baal dead for three years and demonstrated that he (the God of Israel) alone controlled the forces of nature.

(2) Localized ritual worship centering on divine symbols appealed to what people wanted: material well-being, not moral or spiritual goodness. Thus Micah, who had earlier stolen silver from his own mother, made an unauthorized, idolatrous shrine to the Lord and installed a Levite as his ritual officiant. "And Micah said, 'Now I know that *the LORD will be good to me*, since this Levite has become my priest'" (Judg. 17:13, emphasis supplied).

(3) Idolatry provided tangible symbols to which people could relate. As Aaron said to the Israelites regarding the golden calf: "*These* are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4, emphasis supplied).[11] It is not that the people thought they worshiped such an idol itself, as if a piece of metal could constitute the sum total of a deity. Rather, images representing gods were symbolic ritual instruments for worshiping what were believed to be live divine beings. Because the Hebrew prophets rejected belief in such deities, they regarded idols as having no value beyond the physical materials of which they

were made (e.g., Isa. 37:19, Jer. 2:11, 5:7, 16:20).

(4) Because idolatry localizes deities, it tends to be polytheistic. This kind of religious pluralism provides options and appears to be enlightened and tolerant.

(5) Like modern people, the Israelites felt social pressure to conform. Idolatrous worship was a normal and integral part of the culture of other peoples, so friendship with them could easily lead to social influence and assimilation that naturally included participation in idolatry (Ex. 34:15—16, Deut. 7:3—4).

(6) Perhaps the most potent attraction was the way in which idolatrous religion blended various kinds of sensual stimulation with fulfillment of basic human needs (including all of the above). For example, S. Terrien describes the cult of the Mother Goddess, whom the Canaanites and other peoples worshiped:

> It lulled human beings into communing with the cycles of nature … the cult of the Mother Goddess succeeded in merging the sexual drive with the thirst for religious ecstasy and the need for economic security. It offered an overwhelming thrill with physiopsychological effects. The rituals it proposed led to sexual fulfillment, metaphysical satisfaction, and the hope of success in agriculture, viticulture, and animal husbandry. They gratified basic instincts, for they combined erotic pleasure with religious delight, as well as with an escape from the dread of hunger and thirst. They answered human desires at all levels of expectation.[12]

Why was it important for the Israelites to worship correctly? To begin with, the Lord was the superior party to his covenant with Israel. Therefore he had the right to establish the rules of interaction. Anything that deviated from these rules violated his covenant authority.

Worshiping God improperly results in a distorted view of him. Since no human being living on earth has seen his face (Deut. 4:15—18), a material representation of him can only be inaccurate and diminish his transcendent glory. Therefore the Lord refuses to identify with an idol of himself (cf. Ex. 20:4—5). So even ostensible worship of him by means of an image is really polytheistic, having another god in violation of the first command of the Decalogue (20:3).

There is another problem with idolatry: It denies his real immanence. The Israelites do not need any images of their deity, even in the authorized sanctuary, because he draws near to them (Deut. 4:7). So an idol rejects the sufficiency of the Shekinah Presence, as if the Lord does not really dwell among his people. Remember that it is precisely when the Israelites lost faith in the Lord's presence in the cloud on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:15—18) that they made and worshiped a bovine image to give them false assurance (32:1—6).

Other ancient Near Eastern religions were believed to have resident deities, but Israelite worship was unique in the way it walked a theological tightrope to simultaneously affirm the nearness and transcendence of God, without compromising either.[13] At the heart of Israelite religion, the sanctuary and its services enacted the central concept that the awesome Creator desires an intimate relationship with faulty human beings.

Divine immanence was epitomized when Christ became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14). Therefore, a person who denies Christ's incarnation is "antichrist" (2 John 7, cf. 1 John 2:22). The equivalent of an "antichrist" in Old Testament times was an idolatrous Israelite, who implicitly denied the divine Presence by worshiping a false substitute.

If people gain diminished, distorted, and unbalanced conceptions of God through improper worship, they can readily slide into worship of other gods (Deut. 4:15—19, 23—24). Judges 8 illustrates three easy steps into apostasy. First, Gideon made a golden ephod (priestly garment) as an instrument for unauthorized worship of the Lord (Judg. 8:27a). Then the unauthorized instrument itself became an object of worship: "All Israel prostituted themselves [Qal of znh] by worshiping it there" (8:27b). Finally, "no sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves [Qal of znh] to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god" (8:33). Once they were into idolatry, switching deities was not such a big deal.

Spiritual promiscuity. Notice the metaphor for religious apostasy in Judges 8:27, 33: znh, which in literal usage almost always refers to sexual promiscuity committed by women (e.g., Gen. 38:15, 24, Lev. 19:29, Deut. 22:21). This is the term that describes the immorality of Israelite *men* with Moabite women in Numbers 25:1. "By using a term elsewhere reserved to describe the sexual activity of women, the narrator clearly links the sexual activity to the spiritual harlotry of Israel against Yahweh."[14] As a metaphor, *znh* evokes the concept that when people worship deities other than the Lord, they violate their exclusive relationship with him, which is the religious equivalent of a marriage. Even non-Israelites engage in religious promiscuity (znh) when they worship their own gods (Ex. 34:15—16).

For the Israelites, who solemnly pledged themselves to an exclusively intimate covenant relationship with the Lord as his "treasured possession" (Ex. 19:5; 24:3—8), there was a greater responsibility to remain loyal to him. So the Pentateuch warned them against committing religious promiscuity (znh) by sacrificing to goat demons (Lev. 17:7), Molech (20:5), or foreign gods of Canaan (Deut. 31:16), or by seeking occult sources (Lev. 20:6). The chosen people were

to wear tassels on their garments as the religious equivalent of wedding rings in order to remember their commitment to the Lord rather than promiscuously (znh) following their hearts and eyes, that is, minds/emotions and senses (Num. 15:39).

The Lord held the Israelites accountable for their "promiscuity" *(zenut)*, that is, their faithless disobedience at Kadesh following the report of the scouts, even though no religious "paramour" (e.g., another god) was identified in this instance (Num. 14:33).[15] Because they rejected their spiritual "husband," they were unfaithful, even if the Lord's competitor was nothing more than human inclinations guided by hearts and eyes. The fact that human inclinations could be the functional equivalent of another god in the sense of violating the divine-human covenant means that modern Christians are not immune to the possibility of committing spiritual promiscuity by failing to follow the Lord, even if we do not touch idolatry or the occult. "Until our passion for finding God is deeper than any other passion, we will arrange life according to *our* taste, not God's."[16]

Our discussion of spiritual promiscuity has prepared us to better grasp the force of the zeal/jealousy (Piel of *qn';* noun *qin'ah)* of God and Phinehas in 25:11, 13. As an Israelite husband who suspected that his wife had committed adultery could experience zeal/jealousy (noun *qin'ah;* Piel of *qn';* 5:14, 30), so the Lord's anger at the religious promiscuity of his people can be characterized in the same way. This is not petty jealousy, but rightful zeal to protect the exclusive intimacy of a relationship. Because Phinehas identifies with the Lord, he is motivated by zeal to defend God's exclusive prerogative with Israel. It is striking that in Numbers 25 the targets of divine and priestly retribution are engaged in a combination of literal (sexual) and metaphorical (religious) promiscuity.

> When Nu. 25:1 states that Israel committed fornication with *(zanah M)* the daughters of Moab, it is because *zänah* here refers to apostasy from the covenant, expressed in the form of intercourse with the Moabite women. Therefore *zanah,* which everywhere else has a feminine subject, can have Israel as its subject here, because Israel plays the female role in relationship to Yahweh.[17]

Corpse under curse. In Numbers 25, exposing the corpses of offending Israelite leaders before the Lord in order to turn his anger away from Israel as a whole (25:4) was to have the same effect as the expiation *(kipper)* accomplished by Phinehas when he slew a chieftain's son, whose sin contributed to disruption of the corporate divine-human relationship (25:13, cf. 25:11). Similar

punishment for a similar reason appears in 2 Samuel 21: Seven of King Saul's male descendants were killed (v. 9) and their bodies left exposed (vv. 6, 9, 13) "before the Lord" (cf. v. 10), in order to expiate *(kipper,* v. 3) for his genocide against the Gibeonites and thereby end the divine punishment of a famine in the land (cf. v. 1). Even though Saul was dead, he was punished by losing his descendants in this manner.[18]

In the ancient Near East, it was an appalling disgrace to be denied a timely, decent burial (e.g., Isa. 14:19—20). Thus, the sentence of death followed by exposure of the corpse, possibly by impaling it on a stake, was worse than simple capital punishment. It was related to the penalty of hanging a person or his dead body, most often on a tree. This fate met Pharaoh's chief baker (Gen. 40:19, 22), kings defeated by Joshua (Josh. 8:29, 10:26), those who assassinated Ish-Bosheth (2 Sam. 4:12), men who plotted to assassinate Ahasuerus/Xerxes (Est. 2:23), and Haman (7:10). The Philistines hung the bodies of King Saul and his sons by fastening them to a wall (1 Sam. 31:10, 12, 2 Sam. 21:12).

Aside from disgrace before other human beings, a person whose body was hung was regarded as suffering a divine curse, as Deuteronomy 21:22—23 testifies:

> If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.

In accordance with this law, Joshua only left the bodies of defeated kings hanging until evening (Josh. 8:29, 10:26). Similarly, the body of an executed "King of the Jews" was taken down before nightfall from the wooden frame to which he was fastened (Matt. 27:57—60, Mark 15:42—46). "The fact that Jesus ended his life hanging on a 'tree' (for the Jews regarded nailing to a cross and hanging on a tree as equivalents) meant that he was under the divine curse."[19]

Rather than avoiding the implication of a divine curse, Christ's apostles underscored it by using the language of Deuteronomy 21 to describe the manner of his death: "by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30, 10:39). In Galatians 3, Paul explains that whereas those who fail to keep God's law are under a curse (Gal. 3:10, quoting Deut. 27:26), "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13).[20]

Like the execution of Israelite leaders whose bodies were to be exposed because they had joined themselves to the Baal of Peor (Num. 25:4), Christ's

death was to turn divine wrath away from his people (John 3:36, Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9). There is a crucial difference, however: He is the sinless one, while the rest of his people are the offenders.

Contemporary Significance

COW ON THE TRACK. A story illustrates how slowly old trains used to make their way across vast rural areas of Australia. Such a train once lurched to a halt. A passenger called out to the conductor, "What's the matter, what's the matter!" The conductor answered, "There's a cow on the line." The train continued for several more hours and stopped again. The passenger queried, "What's the matter this time?" "There's a cow on the line," came the reply. "What, another cow?" asked the passenger. "No, same cow," said the conductor.

At Mount Sinai, progress of the Israelites toward the Promised Land was interrupted by a cow on the line in the form of a golden calf (Ex. 32). They encountered idolatry and its attendant sensuality again further down the track at Shittim = "Acacia Trees" (Num. 25), the kind of trees from which (ironically) much of the Lord's holy sanctuary and its furniture had been made (see Ex. 25:10, 23, 26:15). The cow was dressed up a bit differently for the Baal of Peor, but it was basically the same unholy cow.[21] Later during the monarchy, Jeroboam put not one but two golden calves in the way of progress toward fulfillment of God's plan for northern Israel (1 Kings 12:28—29). No wonder it took the Israelites so long to get anywhere!

Balak and Balaam utterly failed to derail God's people through a sophisticated and esoteric strategy of cursing (Num. 22—24), but the cow of idolatry succeeded because the way to a man's heart has always been through his eyes and his stomach. The fact that apparently unattached women just happened to get close enough to the Israelite encampment to make their charms known and then invited the Israelites to their cultic banquet (25:1—3) betrays a strategy of seduction, employing allurements of sex and food (cf. 25:18).

Unfortunately, Balaam's mission of perdition did not die with him. Peter refers to this prophet for profit as a paradigm of later false teachers who are immoral and greedy: "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness" (2 Peter 2:15). In the Apocalypse, a letter to the Christian church at Perga-mum includes the words: "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality"

(Rev. 2:14).[22]

When it comes to the deceptive inroads of apostasy into the church, Christians may need to face corporate conflicts head-on. Like the proactive priest of Numbers 25, Jesus demonstrated this. When he drove out those engaged in business at the courts of the temple, "his disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:17). The rest of the verse from the psalm cited here reads, "and the insults of those who insult you fall on me" (Ps. 69:9). Like zealous Phinehas, Christ identified with God to the extent that there was no difference between defending the honor of God and that of himself.

When God's people are in imminent danger of losing their connection with him, it may take the swift, accurately focused, decisive leadership of a faithful and wise (not fanatical and unbalanced) person to "spearhead" a defense. We are not living under a theocracy that metes out capital punishment, so a modern "Phinehas" must make his or her point verbally rather than with a spear. But there may be occasions that call for removing flagrant sinners from membership in the church so that the Lord's honor, people, and work can be preserved (e.g., 1 Cor. 5).

Even before warning of false teachers who follow the way of Balaam (see above), Peter identifies God as the defense of Christians in 2 Peter 1:3—4:

> His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Severe as our tests may be in this www-dot world, with its cornucopia of concupiscence and greed that invites us to follow the way of Balaam, "God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Temptations are screened by the watchful eye of the One who does not want any to perish (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

The promise of a way out does not mean that our own insight and willpower keep us safe from destructive allurements of self-gratification. Nor does it mean that we can cruise blissfully on without paying attention to danger. Rather, the Lord provides ways of escape that we must decide to take in order to keep from being derailed or at least stopped by a "cow on the line." We need to be alert to recognize such exits and choose them as they become available.[23] Lord, show me the "off-ramps"!

If we fail to take an “off-ramp” and become ensnared by sin and its consequences, we can still escape through Christ, who forgave and healed a helpless sinner let down to him through a hole dug in the roof (Mark 2:1 — 12). A contemporary Christian song vividly expresses hope for deliverance:

> When you’ve finished your fun
> When the feeling has fled
> When your eyes dart about in the darkness
> That’s suddenly filled up with terror and dread
> Do you think that it’s over?
> Is the beast satisfied?
> You know he only looks stronger to me now
> And I think that he’s starting to tear you up
> From inside.
> But as God is my Savior
> I know that He’s yours
> And if the prison around you
> Doesn’t have any doors
> Then He’ll crash through the ceiling
> Or He’ll dig up the floors
> He will surely release you
> From the chains that hold you
> If you are sure
> That you don’t want to be held any more.
> But you may not want Him
> Though you wish that you could
> Well you only must ask Him to help you
> To want to want the things
> That you know you should.[24]

1. A. Adler, quoted in Kramer, *Three Rabbis in a Rowboat,* 21.
2. Olson, *The Death of the Old,* 159.
3. Cf. Cole, *Numbers,* 441.
4. J. Sturdy, *Numbers* (CBC, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 184—85.
5. So Cole, *Numbers,* 441, Budd, *Numbers,* 280.
6. Cf. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* 521.

7. Cf. the Day of Atonement, on which rebellious faults are purged from the sanctuary for the benefit of the Israelite community even though the sinners do not receive the benefit (see Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 16).

8. Cf. Jer. 33:17—22, where the Lord reaffirms his covenants both with David and with the Levitical priests.

9. Other biblical examples of pejorative personal names are “Cushan-Rishathaim” (“Cushan of the Double Wickedness", Judg. 3:8, 10) and Ishbosheth (“Man of Shame", 2 Sam. 2:8, 10, 12, 15, etc., but see 1 Chron. 8:33). See also the pejorative derivation of the geographic name “Babel” (Akkadian *Bab-ili,* “gate of god[s]”) from the root *bll* (“confuse", cf. Gen. 11:9).

10. On the relationship between their nefarious deployment for the purpose of luring Israelite men to commit sacrilege and subsequent deployment of Israelite troops in retaliation (v. 5), see Levine, *Numbers 21—36,* 455—56.

11. Echoed by King Jeroboam I of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:28).

12. S. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood & Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 60.

13. See Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 24, R. Gane, “Temple and Sacrifice,” *JATS* 10 (1999): 362.

14. R. M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: A Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 100.

15. Elsewhere this sexual term appears only in the prophetic books, where it can be used metaphorically for unfaithfulness to the Lord through polytheism and idolatry (e.g., Jer. 3:2, 9; 13:27; Ezek. 23:27).

16. L. Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 20.

17. S. Erlandsson, TO *zanah,*” *TDOT,* 4:102.

18. Cf. D. Daube on “ruler punishment” *(Studies in Biblical Law* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1947], 163).

19. J. Stott, *Basic Christianity,* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 94.

20. Cf. ibid., 94—95.

21. For parallels between the golden calf and Baal of Peor narratives, see Wenham, *Numbers,* 184—85. For example, both involve idolatry, slaughter of idolaters, and divine reward for faithful members of the tribe of Levi, who carry out divine retribution.

22. On the long and fascinating paradigmatic role of Balaam in biblical

and extrabiblical literature, see Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters.*

23. Remember the story of three rabbis in a rowboat (see Contemporary Significance section of Num. 15).

24. Dan Oliver, “As God Is My Savior,” in CD titled “Desert of Exile” (Deer Park, Calif.: Silk Road Records, 1997), used by permission.

Numbers 26

After the plague the LORD said to Moses and Eleazar son of
Aaron, the priest, 2"Take a census of the whole Israelite community by
families—all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in
the army of Israel." 3So on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across
from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them and said,
4"Take a census of the men twenty years old or more, as the LORD
commanded Moses."

These were the Israelites who came out of Egypt:

5The descendants of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel,
were:
through Hanoch, the Hanochite clan;
through Pallu, the Palluite clan;
6through Hezron, the Hezronite clan;
through Carmi, the Carmite clan.

7These were the clans of Reuben; those numbered were
43,730.

8The son of Pallu was Eliab, 9and the sons of Eliab were Nemuel,
Dathan and Abiram. The same Dathan and Abiram were the
community officials who rebelled against Moses and Aaron and were
among Korah's followers when they rebelled against the LORD. 10The
earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose
followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served
as a warning sign. 11The line of Korah, however, did not die out.

12The descendants of Simeon by their clans were:

through Nemuel, the Nemuelite clan;
through Jamin, the Jaminite clan;
through Jakin, the Jakinite clan;
13 through Zerah, the Zerahite clan;
through Shaul, the Shaulite clan.

14 These were the clans of Simeon; there were 22,200 men.

15 The descendants of Gad by their clans were:
through Zephon, the Zephonite clan;
through Haggi, the Haggite clan;
through Shuni, the Shunite clan;
16 through Ozni, the Oznite clan;
through Eri, the Erite clan;
17 through Arodi, the Arodite clan;
through Areli, the Arelite clan.

18 These were the clans of Gad; those numbered were 40,500.

19 Er and Onan were sons of Judah, but they died in Canaan.

20 The descendants of Judah by their clans were:
through Shelah, the Shelanite clan;
through Perez, the Perezite clan;
through Zerah, the Zerahite clan.
21 The descendants of Perez were:
Hezron, the Hezronite clan; Hamul, the Hamulite clan.

22 These were the clans of Judah; those numbered were 76,500.

[23]The descendants of Issachar by their clans were:
through Tola, the Tolaite clan; through Puah, the Puite clan;
[24] through Jashub, the Jashubite clan; through Shimron, the Shimronite clan.

[25]These were the clans of Issachar; those numbered were 64,300.

[26]The descendants of Zebulun by their clans were: through Sered, the Seredite clan; through Elon, the Elonite clan; through Jahleel, the Jahleelite clan.

[27]These were the clans of Zebulun; those numbered were 60,500.

[28]The descendants of Joseph by their clans through Manasseh and Ephraim were:

[29]The descendants of Manasseh: through Makir, the Makirite clan (Makir was the father of Gilead); through Gilead, the Gileadite clan.

[30]These were the descendants of Gilead: Iezer, the Iezerite clan; Helek, the Helekite clan;

[31] through Asriel, the Asrielite clan; Shechem, the Shechemite clan;

[32] through Shemida, the Shemidaite clan; through Hepher, the Hepherite clan.

[33] (Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons; he had only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.)

[34]These were the clans of Manasseh; those numbered were 52,700.

[35]These were the descendants of Ephraim by their clans: through Shuthelah, the Shuthelahite clan; through Beker, the Bekerite clan; through Tahan, the Tahanite clan. [36]These were the descendants of Shuthelah: through Eran, the Eranite clan.

[37]These were the clans of Ephraim; those numbered were 32,500. These were the descendants of Joseph by their clans.

[38]The descendants of Benjamin by their clans were: through Bela, the Belaite clan; through Ashbel, the Ashbelite clan; through Ahiram, the Ahiramite clan;

[39]through Shupham, the Shuphamite clan; through Hupham, the Huphamite clan.

[40]The descendants of Bela through Ard and Naaman were: Ard, the Ardite clan; Naaman, the Naamite clan.

[41]These were the clans of Benjamin; those numbered were 45,600.

[42]These were the descendants of Dan by their clans: through Shuham, the Shuhamite clan. These were the clans of Dan: [43]All of them were Shuhamite clans; and those numbered were 64,400.

[44]The descendants of Asher by their clans were: through Imnah, the Imnite clan; through Ishvi, the Ishvite clan; through Beriah, the Beriite clan;

45 and through the descendants of Beriah: Heber, the
Heberite clan; Malkiel, the Malkielite clan.

46(Asher had a daughter named Serah.)

47These were the clans of Asher; those numbered were
53,400.

48The descendants of Naphtali by their clans were:
Jahzeel, the Jahzeelite clan;
Guni, the Gunite clan;

49 through Jezer, the Jezerite clan;
Shillem, the Shillemite clan.

50These were the clans of Naphtali; those numbered were
45,400.

51The total number of the men of Israel was 601,730.
52The LORD said to Moses, 53"The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. 54To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed. 55Be sure that the land is distributed by lot. What each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe. 56Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot among the larger and smaller groups."

57These were the Levites who were counted by their
clans: through Gershon, the Gershonite clan; through
Kohath, the Kohathite clan; through Merari, the
Merarite clan.

58These also were Levite clans:
the Libnite clan,
the Hebronite clan,
the Mahlite clan,

the Mushite clan,
the Korahite clan.

(Kohath was the forefather of Amram; [59]the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a descendant of Levi, who was born to the Levites in Egypt. To Amram she bore Aaron, Moses and their sister Miriam. [60]Aaron was the father of Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. [61]But Nadab and Abihu died when they made an offering before the LORD with unauthorized fire.)

[62]All the male Levites a month old or more numbered 23,000. They were not counted along with the other Israelites because they received no inheritance among them.

[63]These are the ones counted by Moses and Eleazar the priest when they counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. [64]Not one of them was among those counted by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai. [65]For the LORD had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

Original Meaning

"AFTER THE PLAGUE" (Num. 26:1) at Shittim, which reduced the number of Israelites by 24,000 (25:9), the Lord commands a military census of men twenty years old and older, as in chapter 1 (26:1—4, cf. 1:3). The second census of Numbers 26 shows that the torch has passed to the new generation. Rather than enumerating tribal leaders to assist Moses and Eleazar with the census (cf. 1:4—16), chapter 26 lists clans within each tribe that receive their names from the earliest descendants of the twelve patriarchs. Thus the chapter reads like a combination of genealogy and census.

With the genealogical component are some notices of special circumstances that affected certain lines of descendants: the rebellion and deaths of Reubenites Dathan and Abiram with Korah & Co. (26:9—11, cf. ch. 16), the deaths, also divinely administered, of Judah's oldest sons Er and Onan in Canaan (26:19, cf. Gen. 38:7—10), and the fact that Zelophehad of Manasseh has only daughters (Num. 26:33). The significance of these daughters will come to light in chapters 27 and 36.

The order of tribes in this second census report is the same as in the first report of 1:20—43, except that Manasseh is placed before Ephraim (26:29—37, cf. 1:32—35). Numbers 26:51 adds up the total number of Israelite fighting men twenty years of age and older as 601,730. This is slightly less than the total of the first census: 603,550 (1:46).

Census 1 (1:20-46)	Census 2 (26:5-51)
Reuben: 46,500	Reuben: 43,730
Simeon: 59,300	Simeon: 22,200
Gad: 45,650	Gad: 40,500
Judah: 74,600	Judah: 76,500
Issachar: 54,500	Issachar: 64,300
Zebulun: 57,400	Zebulun: 60,500
Ephraim: 40,500	Manasseh: 52,700
Manasseh: 32,200	Ephraim: 32,500

Benjamin: 35,400	Benjamin: 45,600
Dan: 62,700	Dan: 64,400
Asher: 41,500	Asher: 53,400
Naphtali: 53,400	Naphtali: 45,400
Total: 603,550	Total: 601,730

The numbers tell how the various tribes fared during the decades of desert wandering. Some flourished, such as Manasseh. Others declined, most notably Simeon, the tribe of Zimri (slain by Phinehas, 25:6—8, 14), which lost more than half its number. A serious factor was retributive justice meted out by the Lord on rebellious Israelites, which took out 14,700 at Kadesh (16:49) and 24,000 at Shittim alone (25:9). Since the last of the condemned older generation already died within thirty-eight years after the people left Kadesh (Deut. 2:14, cf. Num. 21:12—13) and before the Baal of Peor incident (Num. 25), the 24,000 slain in the plague at Shittim (25:9) belonged to the younger generation.

In addition to its military function, the second census is to determine the size of the territories that will be allotted to the tribes when they conquer the land (26:52—56). Distribution of inheritances by casting lots will be fair in that the Israelites will be distributed evenly throughout the Promised Land. However, some tribes will have more land than others, just as some states in the U.S. have more members in the House of Representatives than others. By making sizes of territories proportional to tribal populations, which were affected by loyalty/disloyalty to the Lord during the desert period, he rewards the tribes according to their levels of faithfulness during that time.

As earlier in Numbers, Levites are counted separately because they do not serve in the regular army, and their males are counted from the age of one month instead of twenty years (cf. ch. 3). Furthermore, they will not inherit land along with the other tribes (26:62, see also 18:20—24). Numbers 26:57— 62 reports the second census of Levites, who total 23,000 (26:62), as compared with 22,000 earlier (3:39).

The second census gives the Israelites a new beginning. About to conquer Canaan, they are back to the same situation as at the time of the first census, after losing nearly four decades. Aside from determining the strength of the military and Levite forces, assessing the relative growth or decline of the respective tribes, and establishing a basis for division of the land, the second census has another important purpose: to make sure that the entire generation excluded from Canaan because of the rebellion at Kadesh (ch. 14) is dead. So the end of chapter 26 delivers this crucial piece of information: Except for Caleb and Joshua, the second military census includes none counted in the first census

(26:63—65). At last, the Israelites will be permitted to enter the Promised Land.

Bridging Contexts

WARNING SIGN AND amazing grace. Numbers 26:10 says that Korah & Co. became a *nes.* Usually this word refers to a "signal/standard" to which people should rally (cf. Isa. 5:26, 11:10, 12, 13:2). After the Israelites defeated the Amalekites at Rephidim, "Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner [nes]. He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD" (Ex. 17:15—16).[1] But in Numbers 26:10, Korah & Co. become a sign/signal of warning.

As elsewhere in the Bible, negative examples are useful for deterring people from evil and destructive courses of action. For example, in Ezekiel 23:48 the Lord speaks to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, who are allegorically represented as two sisters, regarding the result of their punishment: "So I will put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not imitate you" (cf. 5:15). For the Christian church setting, Paul advises Timothy: "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning" (1 Tim. 5:20). Nevertheless, Paul views even severe church discipline as having a potentially redemptive purpose for the offender (1 Cor. 5:4—5).

In ancient Israel, although capital punishment did not allow for rehabilitation of an offender, the Lord could accomplish redemption for and through his descendants. In fact, there was such redemption for the family of Korah, the ringleader of revolt. Numbers 26:11 provides a piece of information not included in the chapter 16 account of Korah's rebellion: The sons of Korah (named in Ex. 6:24) did not die. So for some unstated reason, unlike the families of Dathan and Abiram (cf. Num. 16:27, 32—33), Korah's line of descendants was not cut off.

The fact that Korah's line continued explains how descendants of Korah came to be authors of no less than eleven of the Psalms: 42, 44—49, 84—85, 87—88. These include some of the greatest expressions of faith and praise in the Bible, which have inspired some of our most beloved hymns and songs, such as Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" (Ps. 46). As Korah's descendants sang, ultimately the Lord prevails and brings good out of evil, even out of Korah. That is amazing grace!

For congregational singing to go with a sermon I preached in Paw Paw, Michigan, I chose the hymn, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy." But the

church bulletin came out with a typo: “There’s a Wildness in God’s Mercy.” That was serendipitous, reminding us that God’s mercy is truly wild!

Contemporary Significance

EVEN THE STRONG are not indispensable. Tony Campolo describes his experience as a counselor at a junior high camp. The counselors tried every way they could to get the kids interested in the Lord. They even brought in baseball players whose batting averages had improved since they had started praying. But nothing was working.

At the camp there was a little boy named Billy, who suffered from cerebral palsy. The other children loved to pick on him by imitating his grotesque body movements and mimicking his contorted stammer. On the morning that it was the turn of Billy's cabin to provide a speaker for devotions, they had chosen Billy so they could make fun of him.

> As he dragged his way to the front, you could hear the giggles rolling over the crowd. It took little Billy almost five minutes to say seven words. "Jesus … loves … me … and … I … love … Jesus."
>
> When he finished, there was dead silence. I looked over my shoulder and saw junior high boys bawling all over the place. A revival broke out in that camp after Billy's short testimony. And as I travel over the world, I find missionaries and preachers who say, "Remember me? I was converted at that junior high camp."[2]

If the Lord can't accomplish his purposes through the strong, he turns to the weak. When the Israelites lamented that any attempted invasion of Canaan would result in their children being taken captive by the enemy (Num. 14:3), God responded by saying that he would give the Promised Land to those same defenseless children (14:31—32). If he cannot use some people to carry out his goals, he turns to others, even if they seem inadequate and even if he must wait for another generation. While the Lord inexorably moves his plans for human beings through to fulfillment, none of us is indispensable for carrying out his will.

John the Baptist stormed the pride of those who thought they were essential when he thundered: "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of

these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt. 3:8—9). Nor are Jesus' followers indispensable. When some demanded that he rebuke his disciples for joyfully praising God when he triumphantly rode into Jerusalem, he replied: "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

The fact that none of us is indispensable calls for individual and corporate humility. No matter how lofty the pretensions or how powerful the influence, no human being or group of human beings owns God's plan for Planet Earth. If this one point were understood and accepted in place of all the dogmas and—isms of human concoction, we would see a lot more peace in the world.

While we are privileged to participate in God's plan, our realization that its success does not depend on us provides rest and security. We are to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), but no matter how important our positions of leadership may be, the Herculean weight of responsibility for the world does not rest on our shoulders, as if anything that puts us out of action will bring everything crashing down. There is another who carries the weight, and he is indispensable because he is not an ordinary human being: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, *and the government will be on his shoulders.* And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6, emphasis supplied).

1. Compare the *nes* ("pole/standard") on which Moses displayed the bronze serpent that he made (Num. 21:8—9).

2. T. Campolo, "Just a Kid with Cerebral Palsy," in A. Gray, ed., *Stories for the Heart: Over 100 Stories to Encourage Your Soul* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1996), 60—61.

Numbers 27

THE DAUGHTERS OF Zelophehad son of Hepher, the son of Gilead,
the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of
Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah,
Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They approached 2the entrance to
the Tent of Meeting and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the
leaders and the whole assembly, and said, 3"Our father died in the
desert. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together
against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. 4Why
should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no
son? Give us property among our father's relatives."

5So Moses brought their case before the LORD 6and the LORD said to
him, 7"What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must
certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's
relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them.

8"Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his
inheritance over to his daughter. 9If he has no daughter, give his
inheritance to his brothers. 10If he has no brothers, give his inheritance
to his father's brothers. 11If his father had no brothers, give his
inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it.
This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the LORD
commanded Moses.'"

12Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim
range and see the land I have given the Israelites. 13After you have
seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron
was, 14for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of
Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before
their eyes." (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert

of Zin.)

15 Moses said to the LORD, 16 “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of
all mankind, appoint a man over this community 17 to go out and come
in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the
LORD’S people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

18 So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in
whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. 19 Have him stand before
Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their
presence. 20 Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite
community will obey him. 21 He is to stand before Eleazar the priest,
who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the
LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites
will go out, and at his command they will come in.”

22 Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had
him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. 23 Then he
laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed
through Moses.

Original Meaning

SOME WOULD CALL working out the details of living in land before you conquer it "counting your chickens before they're hatched." In the book of Numbers, however, this is faith. As the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land, Numbers 27 deals with two matters of transfer from older persons excluded from Canaan (Zelophehad, Moses) to persons of relatively younger generations who will enter and possess the land (Zelophehad's daughters, Joshua).[1]

Transfer of inheritance from Zelophehad to his daughters. Inheritance of the Promised Land is to be according to male population (26:52—56), but "Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons, he had only daughters" (26:33). His daughters recognize that unlike other members of his unfaithful generation, who died in the desert, the late Zelophehad will be additionally punished by receiving no share in Canaan to preserve memory of his name through an inheritance passed down his line of descendants (27:3—4).[2]

In biblical days, justice was for the dead as well as the living (cf. 2 Sam. 21). Thus, Zelophehad's daughters seek to redress the inequity by asking to inherit their father's possession of landed property (27:1—4). Having no legal precedent on which to base an answer to the young women, Moses turns to the Lord, who confirms that Zelophehad's daughters are right (27:5—7). As on other occasions when Moses sought divine legal counsel, God gives him permanent legislation surrounding the case in question (cf. Lev. 24:10—23, Num. 9:6—13). In this instance, the Lord establishes the hierarchical succession of relatives who will inherit a man's ancestral real estate in the event that he has no son (27:8—11): his daughter(s), his brothers (if no daughter), his uncles (if no brother), and his nearest clan relative (if no uncle).

We will hear of the daughters of Zelophehad again when chapter 36 revisits them with the question: What happens to their inheritance when they marry?

Transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Aaron has already died because of his role at the waters of Meribah (20:23—29, cf. 20:7—12). Now Moses' turn is approaching. Unlike the Israelites who died in the desert, including Zelophehad, Moses will at least be permitted to see the Promised Land

from the top of a mountain before he dies (27:12—14, cf. 14:23). Deuteronomy 3:27 and 34:1 identifies the place as Pisgah, the same as the name of the mountain where Balaam uttered his second oracle (Num. 23:14— 24), which includes the words: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind” (23:19). In spite of Moses’ pleading, God does not change his mind about forbidding Moses to enter the Promised Land (Deut 3:23—28).

With utmost gravity, Moses appeals to “the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind,”[3] to appoint a good “shepherd” in his place (Num. 27:15—17). The Lord responds by identifying Joshua as “a man in whom is the spirit” and instructing Moses to commission this worthy successor (27:18—21, cf. Deut. 3:28). It is not necessary for God to transfer his Spirit to Joshua as he had to the seventy elders (Num. 11:16—17, 24—26), because Joshua already has the Spirit. This kind of nonhereditary Spirit-qualified leadership makes Israel distinct from the time of Moses until that of Samuel, when establishment of the monarchy makes Israel like other nations.[4]

Joshua cannot talk with the Lord face-to-face as Moses has (cf. Ex. 33:11, Num. 12:8, Deut. 34:10). However, he is to ascertain God’s will through the Urim (and Thummim, understood) worn by the high priest. In accordance with this guidance he will command the Israelites what to do (Num. 27:21, cf. Ex. 28:30).

Transfer of power requires only a simple, straightforward, but elegant ceremony in which Moses leans his hand on Joshua and then commissions (lit., “commanded/charged”) him while he stands before Eleazar the high priest and the whole assembly (Num. 27:18—23).[5] By commissioning Joshua to take some of his majesty/authority (hod, 27:20), Moses shares leadership while he is still alive in order to ensure a smooth transition when he dies.[6] Not until Deuteronomy 34 does Moses climb to the top of Pisgah in order to view the Promised Land and die there. Most of Deuteronomy consists of Moses’ final speeches to the Israelites before God calls him up a mountain for the last time (cf. 32:48—51).

Bridging Contexts

NO DOUBLE JEOPARDY. In the divine legislation responding to Zelophehad's daughters, we see concern for preserving property ownership within a given family. The aim intersects with that of the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25: to ensure that all Israelites will have opportunity to own land on which to support themselves through agriculture.

It is tempting to discuss women's rights here, but we should beware of importing our twenty-first century agendas into the second millennium B.C. It is true that Zelophehad's daughters seek social justice, but it is not to assert their rights as women. Rather, it is concern for their deceased father (27:4). Why should he be especially punished by having his name disappear when he was no more sinful than others of his generation (cf. 27:3)?

While the solution of Zelophehad's daughters will elevate their status to that of property owners, this is only to bridge the gap in the male line for the sake of their father's honor. They do not need to inherit property for their own survival and prosperity because they will be supported by the families into which they marry (cf. ch. 36).

The fact that the Lord grants the request of Zelophehad's daughters demonstrates his justice. Although Zelophehad was personally excluded from the Promised Land because of his sin, he would not be unduly punished by the additional loss of property attached to his name, which would preserve memory of him. Even for the faithless generation that refused to accept the grant of territory that God offered, there was redemption through their children. There would be no double jeopardy or insult added to injury. The cup of justice was full, but it did not overflow.

Leaders of spirit. As Moses' longtime servant and assistant, Joshua is intimately acquainted with his work (11:28). Centuries later, Elisha serves a similar apprenticeship with Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). However, there is more to equipping a person for greatness than working for a great man, as shown by the example of Gehazi, Elisha's greedy and dishonest servant (2 Kings 5:20—27). For the Lord, the crucial qualification is to be a person "in whom is the spirit" (Num. 27:18). Pharaoh recognized in Joseph the same factor, which uniquely qualified him for one of the most breathtaking promotions in history: from slave

and prisoner to prime minister (Gen. 41:38—44).

The simple procedure by which Moses commissions Joshua is to acknowledge and proclaim God's choice of a new leader so that the Israelites will know to follow him (27:18—20). But no amount of pomp and ceremony can substitute for what Joshua already has as "a man in whom is the spirit."

When the early Christian community needed administrative leaders (deacons), they sought people who were "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). With such qualifications from God, human ceremony could be simple, as in the case of Joshua: "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (6:6). Only with the Spirit of God internalized can a person be a good "shepherd," an unselfish servant leader. This is because the love that motivates such devoted service is only available to human beings as a gift from God through his Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5).

Contemporary Significance

SHEPHERDING IS TRICKIER than it looks. Arab boys on the hills by Bethlehem make it look easy, but it is not so easy for people who are more accustomed to obedient machines than to living creatures with minds of their own. Having heard that it doesn't work to drive sheep, I learned my lesson the hard way when I accidentally left a sheep pen open and was horrified to see that one adventurous animal had gotten out and the rest had followed it with remarkable speed. Panicking, I tried to drive them back in. Rather than going where they were supposed to, they scattered in every other direction. Defeated, I was forced to find the owner, sheepishly admit my negligence, and watch as he called them back to their pen.

People are a lot like sheep. The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous discovered that drinkers

> would not take pressure in any form…. They always had to be led, not pushed…. Inother respects, too, we found we had to make haste slowly. When first contacted, most alcoholics just wanted to find sobriety, nothing else. They clung to their other defects, letting go only little by little. They simply did not want to get "too good too soon."[7]

Like sheep, people need someone they trust to lead them rather than to drive them. In short, they need a "shepherd." If they are "like sheep without a shepherd" (27:17), they scatter and are defenseless (1 Kings 22:17, 2 Chron. 18:16, Isa. 13:14). When Jesus saw crowds, "he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

Not any shepherd will do. Sheep need a *good* shepherd who protects his sheep with his life, not a cowardly "hireling," a "sheep in sheep's clothing,"[8] who cares primarily about protecting himself (John 10:11—13). Nor do they need a shepherd who exploits and scatters them (Jer. 23:1, Ezek. 34:1—8). One way to scatter sheep is the way I did—simply by attempting to drive them.

Being a good shepherd or herdsman can demand toughness and courage, involving exposure to all kinds of discomforts, irritations, and perils (Gen.

31:40, 1 Sam. 17:34—35). Being a good shepherd of human beings[9] is no less challenging. It requires toughness and humility, courage and ability to lead rather than drive. Moses' years with woolly flocks were peaceful compared to the four decades he spent shepherding Israelites through the desert toward the Promised Land. Had he not possessed a character of granite and at the same time a gentle humility surpassing that of all others (Num. 12:3), history would have been a lot different.

Despite the unprecedented exaltation of his role, Moses set a paradigm of restraint for later leaders by resisting the temptation to become so high and mighty that he ceased caring about each individual member of his people, no matter how lowly. He would have agreed with Dr. Seuss, whose delightful children's story *Horton Hears a Who!* contains the gem of wisdom: "A person's a person, no matter how small."[10] In *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories,* Dr. Seuss expresses a similar idea:

> I know, up on top
> you are seeing great sights,
> But down at the bottom
> we, too, should have rights.[11]

It is not surprising that Jacob/Israel, after whom the nation was named, Moses, who brought the Israelites to independent nationhood under God, and David, who led them to completion of the Conquest, were all shepherds. There is a fourth "shepherd" who joins them on the biblical Mount Rushmore. Although not a shepherd of literal sheep as they were, he said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Like Moses, Christ offered to give up everything for his people (Ex. 32:32). But he went beyond Moses, becoming a "Lamb" and dying for them (John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19, Rev. 5:6, cf. Isa. 53:7). This is the ultimate leadership it takes to deliver our race of slaves to freedom from sin and all its evil consequences, including mortality. The least we can do is to follow him.

1. Remember that while Joshua was a generation younger than Moses, he belonged to the same generation as Zelophehad, but was exceptionally permitted to enter Canaan (14:30).

2. K. Sakenfeld, "Zelophehad's Daughters," *PRSt* 15 (1988): 41.

3. He and Aaron had used similar language at Kadesh under extreme circumstances when they cried out for God to spare his mutinous people

(16:22).

4. H. Minkoff, “Moses and Samuel: Israel’s Era of Charismatic Leadership,” *JBQ* 30 (2002): 257—61.

5. For analysis of this ceremony, see K. Mattingly, “The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12—23 and Deuteronomy 34:9” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1997).

6. If Moses and Joshua were monarchs whose reigns overlapped (e.g., the Neo-Baby-lonian kings Nabonidus and Belshazzar), this arrangement would be called a “coregency.”

7. (No listed author), *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1985), 74—75.

8. As Sir Edmund Gosse, an English critic and translator (1849—1928) said of Sturge Moore, a poet.

9. Cf. the prologue to the Laws of Hammurabi: “I am Hammurabi, the shepherd, selected by the god Enlil, he who heaps high abundance and plenty” (transl. M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 77.

10. Dr. Seuss, *Seuss-Isms: Wise and Witty Prescriptions for Living from the Good Doctor* (New York: Random House, 1997), 8.

11. Ibid.

Numbers 28—29

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Give this command to the Israelites
and say to them: ‘See that you present to me at the appointed time the
food for my offerings made by fire, as an aroma pleasing to me.’ 3Say
to them: ‘This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the
LORD: two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering
each day. 4Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight,
5together with a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour
mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives. 6This is the
regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma, an
offering made to the LORD by fire. 7The accompanying drink offering
is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour out
the drink offering to the LORD at the sanctuary. 8Prepare the second
lamb at twilight, along with the same kind of grain offering and drink
offering that you prepare in the morning. This is an offering made by
fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

9On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old
without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of
two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. 10This is the burnt
offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and
its drink offering.

11“"On the first of every month, present to the LORD a burnt offering
of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all
without defect. 12With each bull there is to be a grain offering of three-
tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, a grain
offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; 13and
with each lamb, a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour
mixed with oil. This is for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, an

offering made to the LORD by fire. 14With each bull there is to be a drink offering of half a hin of wine; with the ram, a third of a hin; and with each lamb, a quarter of a hin. This is the monthly burnt offering to be made at each new moon during the year. 15Besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering, one male goat is to be presented to the LORD as a sin offering.

16“'On the fourteenth day of the first month the LORD'S Passover is to be held. 17On the fifteenth day of this month there is to be a festival; for seven days eat bread made without yeast. 18On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 19Present to the LORD an offering made by fire, a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. 20With each bull prepare a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, two-tenths; 21and with each of the seven lambs, one-tenth. 22Include one male goat as a sin offering to make atonement for you. 23Prepare these in addition to the regular morning burnt offering. 24In this way prepare the food for the offering made by fire every day for seven days as an aroma pleasing to the LORD; it is to be prepared in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. 25On the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.

26“'On the day of firstfruits, when you present to the LORD an offering of new grain during the Feast of Weeks, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 27Present a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. 28With each bull there is to be a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, two-tenths; 29and with each of the seven lambs, one-tenth. 30Include one male goat to make atonement for you. 31Prepare these together with their drink offerings, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its grain offering. Be sure the animals are without defect.

29:1“'On the first day of the seventh month hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. It is a day for you to sound the trumpets. 2As an aroma pleasing to the LORD, prepare a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. 3With the bull prepare a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, two-tenths; 4and with each of

the seven lambs, one-tenth. [5]Include one male goat as a sin offering to make atonement for you. [6]These are in addition to the monthly and daily burnt offerings with their grain offerings and drink offerings as specified. They are offerings made to the LORD by fire—a pleasing aroma.

[7]“'On the tenth day of this seventh month hold a sacred assembly. You must deny yourselves and do no work. [8]Present as an aroma pleasing to the LORD a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. [9]With the bull prepare a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, two-tenths; [10]and with each of the seven lambs, one-tenth. “Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the sin offering for atonement and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

[12]“'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. Celebrate a festival to the LORD for seven days. [13]Present an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, a burnt offering of thirteen young bulls, two rams and fourteen male lambs a year old, all without defect. [14]With each of the thirteen bulls prepare a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with each of the two rams, two-tenths; [15]and with each of the fourteen lambs, one-tenth. [16]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[17]“'on the second day prepare twelve young bulls, two rams and fourteen male lambs a year old, all without defect. [18]With the bulls, rams and lambs, prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to the number specified. [19]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

[20]“'On the third day prepare eleven bulls, two rams and fourteen male lambs a year old, all without defect. [21]With the bulls, rams and lambs, prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to the number specified. “Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[23]“'On the fourth day prepare ten bulls, two rams and fourteen male
lambs a year old, all without defect. [24]With the bulls, rams and lambs,
prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to the
number specified. [25]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition
to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[26]“'On the fifth day prepare nine bulls, two rams and fourteen male
lambs a year old, all without defect. [27]With the bulls, rams and lambs,
prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to the
number specified. [28]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition
to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[29]“'On the sixth day prepare eight bulls, two rams and fourteen male
lambs a year old, all without defect. [30]With the bulls, rams and lambs,
prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to the
number specified. [31]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition
to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[32]“'On the seventh day prepare seven bulls, two rams and fourteen
male lambs a year old, all without defect. [33]With the bulls, rams and
lambs, prepare their grain offerings and drink offerings according to
the number specified. [34]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in
addition to the regular burnt offering with its grain offering and drink
offering.

[35]“'On the eighth day hold an assembly and do no regular work.
[36]Present an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, a
burnt offering of one bull, one ram and seven male lambs a year old,
all without defect. [37]With the bull, the ram and the lambs, prepare their
grain offerings and drink offerings according to the number specified.
[38]Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the regular
burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

[39]“'In addition to what you vow and your freewill offerings, prepare
these for the LORD at your appointed feasts: your burnt offerings, grain
offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings. ‘”

[40]Moses told the Israelites all that the LORD commanded him.

Original Meaning

MAINTAINING A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP, whether in a home or a religious community, requires enjoyment of regular interaction. To ensure and coordinate these encounters, it helps to schedule in advance. This is especially true when it comes to uniting a large group of people for some kind of celebration. In fact, we have made some special times, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, a permanent part of our calendar so that everyone will always know when to participate in what.

In the ritual calendar of Leviticus 23, the emphasis was on outlining overall observance of sacred times. The parallel calendar in Numbers 28 — 29 fills in important details by providing a comprehensive inventory of public sacrifices that must be performed at the sanctuary on regular and festival occasions. These chapters simultaneously remind the Israelites of earlier instructions and complement these as the Israelites prepare for life with God in the Promised Land.

Daily worship. Numbers 28 begins by reiterating the prescription given earlier at Sinai (Ex. 29:38—42) for regular *(tamia)* burnt offerings, which must be performed every day as the foundation of the sacrificial system (Num. 28:1—8). This sacrifice constitutes what the Lord lavishly describes in a series of appositions as "my offering *[cjorban],* my food *[lehem]* for my food gifts [plural of *'îsseh],* my pleasant aroma *[reah nihoah]"* (28:2, my transl.).

"Food" is the operative metaphor. So the fact that the sacrifice must be offered twice a day, one lamb in the morning and the other "between the evenings" (i.e., at twilight, 28:4), indicates that the two burnt offerings with their accompanying grain and drink offerings (28:5, 7a, cf. 15:4—5) constitute the daily symbolic "meals" of the Lord that are essential for maintaining his Presence among the Israelites.

In addition to the usual offering of "wine" *(yayin,* cf. 15:5) at the outer altar to accompany the regular burnt offering, 28:7b prescribes a unique libation of *sekar.* This beverage is to be offered in the *Codes* ("Holy [Place]," i.e., inside the tabernacle). Usually *sekar* is interpreted as strong/fermented drink. There is considerable support for this idea. (1) In several contexts, the noun *sekar* clearly refers to an intoxicant (1 Sam. 1:15, Prov. 31:6, Isa. 28:7, 29:9). (2) The

adjective and verb from the same root *skr* are associated with intoxication (Gen. 9:21, 1 Sam. 1:13—14, 2 Sam. 11:13). (3) The Akkadian cognate *sikaru* refers to beer (made from grain) or another kind of fermented alcoholic beverage, such as wine or fig wine.[1] Beer appears, for example, in a description of daily sacrifices at Uruk.[2] (4) Syriac *sekar/sakra* is "*strong drink other than wine*, esp. a liquor made from dates or from honey" (cf. *sakar/sakra*, "sugar").[3]

That alcoholic beverages would be offered at the holy sanctuary for symbolic utilization by the Lord as part of his daily "meal" seems inconsistent with the rule in Leviticus 2:11, that no yeast/leaven or even honey was permitted in a grain offering turned into smoke to the Lord on his altar (cf. 6:17), presumably because these materials included or were susceptible to fermentation associated with "death," which was antagonistic to holiness.[4] Leavened bread was presented for thanksgiving and firstfruits offerings, but the Lord assigned it to priests for their utilization rather than keeping it himself (7:13—14, 23:17, 20). The concept that something holy should be kept free from contact with fermentation/intoxication also appears to be behind the divine commands that priests must not drink wine or *se kar* when they enter the sacred Tent (10:8), and Nazirites must abstain from these beverages during their periods of consecration (Num. 6:3, cf. Judg. 13:4, 7, 14).

Even if it is be argued that sacrificial wine should be poured out beside the altar at its base (Ecclus. 50:15, Josephus, *Ant.* 3.234) rather than on its hearth, the offering of *sekar* is a special problem because it is to be poured out to the Lord inside the sacred Tent (Num. 28:7). Perhaps one or both types of drink offerings are unfermented, with *yayin* and/or *sekar* referring to the same kinds of juices that become alcoholic if fermented *(yayin*—see Isa. 16:10, Jer. 40:10, 12, 48:33, *sekar*—see Syriac cognate, cited above). But there is no clear evidence to settle this issue.

Inside the tabernacle, the offering of *sekar* utilizes golden libation vessels placed on the golden table along with the "bread of the Presence" (Ex. 25:29, 37:16).

> Thus, the libatory act is that of pouring a libation (see Num. iv 7) of *sïkâr* (Num. xxviii 7b) into the golden vessels, whereupon the vessels with their contents simply remain upon the table until the time comes to replace them with fresh drink. This would parallel the presentation type bread offering, which is simply placed/arranged *(sym*—Lev. xxiv 6, *'rk*— vs. 8) on the table until it is changed on the next Sabbath (vs. 8).[5]

Whereas the ritual of renewing the "bread of the Presence" takes place once per week on the Sabbath (Lev. 24:8), the context in which the *sekar* libation is prescribed (Num. 28:7b) indicates that it is performed twice daily, like the drink offerings of wine accompanying the regular morning and evening burnt offerings (28:7a, 8).

Liturgical year. After prescribing the regular daily sacrifices, the ritual calendar of Numbers 28—29 moves to additional sacrifices performed weekly on the Sabbath (28:9—10), monthly at new moons (28:11—15), and yearly at the annual festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread (28:16—25), Weeks (28:26—31), Trumpets (29:1—6), the Day of Atonement (29:7—11), and Booths (29:12—38). The order is the same as in Leviticus 23, going from smaller to larger cycles and moving through the yearly festivals in chronological order from spring to autumn.

Notice the following characteristics of the ritual calendar. (1) Numbers includes daily and new moon observances (28:1—8, 11—15), which Leviticus 23 does not. Conversely, Numbers does not mention the day when a sheaf of new barley is dedicated by elevating it before the Lord (Lev. 23:9—14).

(2) Numbers fills in specifications for additional sacrifices at some points where Leviticus abbreviates (cf., e.g., Lev. 23:8, Num. 28:18—24). At the same time, Numbers mentions unique observances detailed in Leviticus— such as the offering of new grain at the Feast of Weeks (23:16—17, 20) and the pilgrimage aspect of the Feast of Booths (28:39—43)—only in passing (Num. 28:26, 29:12).

(3) Additional complexes of sacrifices on festival occasions to supplement the regular burnt offering are similar to each other, varying primarily in terms of the numbers of victims (see below).

(4) The fact that festival sacrifices are "in addition to the regular morning burnt offering" (28:23) implies that they are to be performed just after that burnt offering and its accompaniments.[6]

(5) The calendar richly illustrates ritual hierarchy. We find in ascending order of complexity: (a) individual rituals, (b) small complexes consisting of combinations of individual rituals, such as a burnt offering with its accompanying grain and drink offerings, (c) larger complexes in which several smaller complexes are embedded, such as groups of burnt offerings with their accompaniments, (d) individual festival days on which several large ritual complexes are performed, and (e) multiday festivals.[7]

The table below summarizes burnt and purification offerings (not including the Passover lamb) that must be performed on the various religious occasions:

Occasion	Date	Reference	Burnt Offerings	Purification Offerings
daily		28:1–8	2 lambs	
Sabbath		28:9–10	2 lambs	
new moon		28:11–15	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
Passover	1/14	28:16		
Unleavened Bread	1/15	28:17–25	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/16	28:24	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/17	"	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/18	"	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/19	"	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/20	"	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
"	1/21	28:24–25	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
Weeks	50 days after sheaf[8]	28:26–31	2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
Trumpets	7/1	29:1–6	1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
Day of Purgation	7/10	29:7–11	1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat
Booths	7/15	29:12–16	13 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/16	29:17–19	12 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/17	29:20–22	11 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/18	29:23–25	10 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/19	29:26–28	9 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/20	29:29–31	8 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
"	7/21	29:32–34	7 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs	1 goat
concluding day	7/22	29:35–38	1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs	1 goat

Chiastic symmetry frames the yearly festivals (cf. comments on Lev. 23:23—44):

Spring: Passover (1 day)
Unleavened Bread (7 days)

Autumn: Booths (7 days)
concluding day (1 day)

Between the two seven-day festivals are three one-day festivals, of which the middle one (Trumpets) stands at the center of the calendar and marks the transition to the awesome festivals of the seventh month. As the first day of the seventh month, this is the seventh of the twelve new moon days.

The number seven, which is associated with the weekly Sabbath and conveys the idea of holiness,[9] is prominent in the Israelite system of new moons and festivals. At new moons and on each festival day, seven or fourteen (= 2 x 7) lambs are offered as burnt offerings. The ritual year culminates in the seventh month. Since Unleavened Bread and Booths last for seven days each, the total number of each kind of animal offered during these festivals is a multiple of seven. During the seven-day Feast of Booths, a total of seventy (= 7 x 10) bulls are offered as burnt offerings, including seven on the seventh day (7/21). These instances of the number seven suggest that the cyclical holy times of special worship (cf. Lev. 23:2—4, 7—8, 21, 24, 27, etc.) are, in a sense, extensions of the weekly Sabbath.[10]

The large numbers of sacrifices during the Feast of Booths acknowledge God's blessings at the thanksgiving season of harvest. How can the Israelites afford to give so much to God, both corporately and privately? They are like a farmer who was asked how he could give so much to his church and still have more to give. "'Oh,' the farmer declared, 'that is easy to explain. I keep shoveling into God's bin, and God keeps shoveling into mine—but God has the bigger shovel!'"[11]

Bridging Contexts

SABBATH AND THE "NEW COVENANT." In addition to the morning and evening burnt offerings at the Israelite sanctuary, two lambs are to be sacrificed as burnt offerings every Sabbath (28:9—10). It is not surprising that the Sabbath should be honored in this way and by renewal of the "bread of the Presence" (Lev. 24:8). In addition to its function as a celebration of creation (Ex. 20:11), the Sabbath took on additional meaning for the Israelites as a reminder of divine deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Like creation, God accomplished the redemption from Egypt by his creative power, which was displayed in the plagues on Egypt, salvation from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, and miraculous provision for his people in the desert (Ex. 7—17).

For most Christians, the Sabbath does not commemorate deliverance of their literal ancestors from Egypt. However, the honored place of the Sabbath in the worship system of Israel as a particular phase of the divine covenant does not nullify its foundational significance as the ongoing "birthday of the world" for other people living at other times and places.[12]

For Israel, the sanctified Sabbath (Gen. 2:2—3) was more than a commandment. According to Exodus 31:13, 17 (cf. Ezek. 20:12), it served as a sign of the covenant relationship by which the Lord sanctified his people, who emulated their Creator by resting from their work. Those who rest on the Sabbath acknowledge their dependence on God as their Creator and Sanctifier. Such dependence continues every moment that he sustains human life (Job 12:10, Ps. 114:14—15, 145:15—16, Dan. 5:23). So the basic meaning of the Sabbath, which encapsulates this divine-human relationship,[13] cannot become obsolete as long as human beings inhabit Planet Earth.

The Lord stipulated Sabbath observance for the Israelites in the form of law (Ex. 20:8—11), and the Sinaitic/Israelite phase of the divine covenant, which emphasized law, has been followed by a "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31 — 34). However, this does not mean that the Sabbath has passed away with the "old covenant." For one thing, the covenant established with Israel at Sinai became "old"/dysfunctional as a result of failure on the human side of the divine-human relationship (31:32), not because the Lord offered his chosen people a defective

covenant of salvation by works. It takes two good partners to make a good "marriage."

To the nation of Israel, God offered salvation by grace through faith, as he did to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:6) and as he does to "new covenant" Christians (Eph. 2:8). First he saved the Israelites by grace (Ex. 20:2), and then he gave his commandments to these already saved people as the charter of his covenant relationship with them (20:3—17). Grace through faith has always been the way of salvation. There has never been a different way. There has been a succession of divine covenants, but they function as phases of cumulative development in God's plan rather than different roads to redemption.[14]

Christ's revelation illuminates divine principles behind God's law (e.g., Matt. 5:17—48), but Christ did not replace law as the means of salvation (see 5:17, Rom. 3:31) for God has never offered salvation on that basis. In Jeremiah 31:31—34, the difference between the "old" and "new" covenants is not between "law" and "grace," as many Christians assume. Rather, the "new covenant" based on forgiveness (31:34) is characterized by humble internalization of the divine law as a gift from God (31:33), by contrast with "old covenant" disobedience resulting from failure to internalize (31:32). "It is harder to break the law when it is internalized, sin against law in the heart would be a 'myocardial infraction.'"[15]

If God's "new covenant" sanctifies his people by putting his holy law in their hearts, and if basic Sabbath rest is a timeless part of that law rather than a temporary ceremonial "type" (see above and the Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 23:1—22), it makes sense that the "new covenant" restores the Sabbath to its proper place. It is those who allow God to sanctify them who can truly keep the sanctified day. When the Israelites disobeyed the Lord and failed to receive his sanctification, any Sabbath rest they observed was a hypocritical outward form, a "*tour de farce.*" However, when people accept God's grace and internalization of his law, he makes them holy as he is holy (cf. Lev. 19:2), and their Sabbath-keeping becomes a genuine sign of a real sanctification experience (Ex. 31:13, cf. Isa. 58:6—14).

During his ministry on earth, Jesus showed Christians how to live under the "new covenant."[16] The fact that he took so much trouble to restore the Sabbath indicates that it was of prime importance for him and he wasn't about to do away with it. You don't remodel a house if you are about to demolish it. Jesus incurred and ignored perilous controversy by persistently and pointedly healing on the Sabbath (see, e.g., Mark 3:1—6, John 5:2—18, 9:1—41), thereby demonstrating that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus gave rest from suffering and manifested his divine, creative power (John 5:17). He also provided “snapshots” of God’s ideal for the world as he created it (“very good", Gen. 1:1—2:3) and as he promises to restore it (Rev. 21—22):

> Some see miracles as an implausible suspension of the laws of the physical universe. As signs, though, they serve just the opposite function. Death, decay, entropy, and destruction are the true suspensions of God’s laws, miracles are the early glimpses of restoration. In the words of Jurgen Moltmann, “Jesus’ healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly ‘natural’ things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded.”[17]

Contemporary Significance

DAILY ASSURANCE. AT the ancient sanctuary, morning and evening ritual worship framed every day of the year, and the evening burnt offering was "to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till morning" (Lev. 6:9). This regular worship was foundational for maintaining Israel's connection with God (cf. Num. 28:2).

The earthly sanctuary and its sacrifices are gone, but there remains the need for everyone who enjoys a "new covenant" relationship with God to maintain it on a daily basis. The point is not that the Lord is dependent on our service and will immediately reject us if we miss a day, but that *we need* frequent and regular reaffirmation of our connection to him. Martin Luther wrote:

> It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour, first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.[18]

By maintaining our line of communication with God, we refresh our assurance that we belong to him. This relational link is the basis for any other kind of assurance that we may enjoy (1 John 5:11—13).

Daily and festival sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary, with their smoke ascending heavenward, showed that a healthy relationship with God was available to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Now our prayers ascend to where our sacrificial Lamb is depicted as if he has just been slaughtered (Rev. 5:6), that is, carrying the cross event with him to continually offer its healing to all who will avail themselves of it. Those who have him have assurance of life.

Christians and the Israelite festivals. A number of activities involved in Israelite worship, such as prayers, music, and the priestly blessing,[19] did not function as temporary types. However, the ritual essence of the yearly festivals did serve as historical temporary types, which Christians are not required to observe (see Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 23:1—22).

Even if it could be argued that (antitypical) fulfillment of one or more of the autumn festivals is still in the future from our perspective, this does not mean that Christians who wish to follow the Bible are required to keep it/them today. In the New Testament, the focus of Christian worship has shifted from an earthly place of God's Presence, with its human priests, animal sacrifices, and yearly cycle of national festivals, to the heavenly temple, where Christ ministers (Heb. 7—10).

Unlike the weekly Sabbath, the yearly festivals were grounded in the experience of the Israelite nation within its historical and agricultural context. Because the essence of their observance was dependent on the ritual system centered at the sanctuary/temple, the heart of the festivals could not survive the demise of the temple institution.[20] Today it is impossible for us to fulfill the festival requirements even if we want to because that would require pilgrimage to a functioning temple in Jerusalem, where special festival sacrifices would be offered (Ex. 23:14—17, 34:22—24, Lev. 23, Num. 28—29).

After the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in A.D. 70, Jews have continued to observe the festivals by developing adapted festival liturgies, including traditional and didactic components, from important biblical elements that do not require sacrifice or pilgrimage. But Christians who accept only the Bible as their rule of faith and practice should not imagine that by keeping the current Jewish festivals they will fulfill the biblical festival requirements.

While Christians are not obliged to keep the festivals, anyone who has the privilege of voluntarily participating in a Jewish holiday (= holy day) will likely experience rich edification and understanding of common heritage, as I have on a number of occasions in Israel and in the United States. In this way we can grow spiritually in three important ways. (1) We can learn how to concretize our *experience* of God's deliverance from evil and pass it on to our children in a way that will make a powerful impression on them. (2) We can gain appreciation for the *corporate* dimension of redemption: The Lord saves people to be a community rather than simply isolated individuals. (3) We can learn the joy of *thanksgiving by faith*, expressing gratitude to God for what he has done, is doing, and will surely do for us even if not everything has gone well lately and we do not know the details of how things will turn out.

Just as the Lord appointed yearly times of thanksgiving for the Israelites, it is beneficial for us to schedule regular times of gratitude that we celebrate even though we may not be in a joyful mood. Did the United States cancel Thanksgiving in November of 2001 because it came soon after September 11? No. Rather, our thanksgiving drew upon and strengthened a richer dimension of faith. If less bright, it was more profound. If it wasn't Renoir, it was Rembrandt.

Paul urged Christians to "give thanks *in all circumstances,* for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18, emphasis supplied). This kind of unconditional thanksgiving as a way of life—"thanksliving"[21] —is based on unconditional love and trust.

A man told his wife that he was planning to risk asking his employer for a raise. Apprehensive all day, he finally summoned his courage and approached his boss. He was surprised and delighted when the boss immediately agreed to grant the request.

When he returned home, he found that the table was set with the best dishes, candles were lit, and his wife had prepared a magnificent supper to celebrate. He suspected that someone from the office must have already informed her, but he happily broke the great news anyway. After hugging and kissing, they sat down to eat.

> Next to his plate, the man found a beautiful note: "Congratulations, darling! I knew you'd get the raise! All of this tells you how much I love you."
>
> But while on her way to the kitchen to get dessert, he noticed that a second card had slipped from her pocket. Picking it up, he read: "Don't worry about not getting the raise! You deserve it anyway! These things will tell you how much I love you."[22]

With total acceptance and trust, she was ready to celebrate, no matter what.

Although biblical events such as the Exodus from Egypt did not directly benefit the ancestors of those of us who are Gentiles, New Testament Christians share with the Jewish people the foundational biblical heritage revealed through Abraham and his descendants. Furthermore, the Exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt served as a harbinger of universal Exodus from bondage to sin and Satan through Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7).

To preserve the memory and hope of the worldwide Exodus, Christ transformed a Passover celebration into the Lord's Supper/communion service (Matt. 26:26—29, 1 Cor. 1 1:23—26). Because this commemoration utilizes only bread and wine and requires no temple priesthood, it is perfectly suited for ongoing function after the Second Temple period. So we do not need to exercise our ingenuity to figure out how to adapt the Israelite festivals. Christ himself adapted the observance that he commanded us to keep in remembrance of him (1 Cor. 11:24—25, cf. Luke 22:19).

1. CAD, 17:420—28.

2. *ANET*, 343.

3. J. P. Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, founded on the *Thesaurus Syriacus* of R. P. Smith), 577.

4. Milgrom, *Leviticus i-ie*, 188—90.

5. R. Gane, "'Bread of the Presence' and Creator-in-Residence," *VT* 42 (1992): 187.

6. So m. Zebah=. 10:1; Gane, Ritual Dynamic Structure, ch. 7.

7. Ibid., 88–92.

8. See Lev. 23:15—16.

9. Cf. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Noonday, 1955), 417.

10. See Bridging Contexts of Lev. 23:1—22.

11. Griffith, *Looking Up*, 52.

12. R. Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," *JATS* 10 (1999): 317.

13. Cf. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, transl. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 244.

14. Cf. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 27—52, Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose*, 49—50.

15. Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," 328.

16. Cf. W. Specht, "The Sabbath in the New Testament," in K. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982), 105.

17. P. Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 182—83.

18. Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 18.

19. See Num. 6:23—27, 1 Sam. 1:10—11, 2:1 — 10, 1 Kings 8:22—54, 1 Chron. 6:31—46, 16:4—37, 41—42, 25:1—31.

20. For detailed analysis, including development of criteria for determining whether or not sacred occasions remain in force, see R. Cole, "The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of Their Applicability" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1996), esp. 335—53.

21. Griffith, *Looking Up*, 57.

22. Ibid., 26.

Numbers 30

Moses said to the heads of the tribes of Israel: “This is what the
Lord commands: 2When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an
oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but
must do everything he said.
3“When a young woman still living in her father’s house makes a
vow to the Lord or obligates herself by a pledge 4and her father hears
about her vow or pledge but says nothing to her, then all her vows and
every pledge by which she obligated herself will stand. 5But if her
father forbids her when he hears about it, none of her vows or the
pledges by which she obligated herself will stand; the Lord will
release her because her father has forbidden her.
6“If she marries after she makes a vow or after her lips utter a rash
promise by which she obligates herself 7and her husband hears about it
but says nothing to her, then her vows or the pledges by which she
obligated herself will stand. 8But if her husband forbids her when he
hears about it, he nullifies the vow that obligates her or the rash
promise by which she obligates herself, and the Lord will release her.
9“Any vow or obligation taken by a widow or divorced woman will
be binding on her.
10“If a woman living with her husband makes a vow or obligates
herself by a pledge under oath 11and her husband hears about it but
says nothing to her and does not forbid her, then all her vows or the
pledges by which she obligated herself will stand. 12But if her husband
nullifies them when he hears about them, then none of the vows or
pledges that came from her lips will stand. Her husband has nullified
them, and the Lord will release her. 13Her husband may confirm or
nullify any vow she makes or any sworn pledge to deny herself. 14But

if her husband says nothing to her about it from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or the pledges binding on her. He confirms them by saying nothing to her when he hears about them. 15If, however, he nullifies them some time after he hears about them, then he is responsible for her guilt.”

16These are the regulations the LORD gave Moses concerning relationships between a man and his wife, and between a father and his young daughter still living in his house.

Original Meaning

A VOW TO GOD is supposed to be an absolute promise. But what happens if you take on such a binding commitment and then discover that another obligation to the Lord, such as honoring your parents (Ex. 20:12), conflicts with your vow?

Numbers 29 has concluded the ritual calendar by saying that the sacrifices for all Israel are aside from offerings that the people vow to give or sacrifice as freewill offerings (29:39, cf. Lev. 23:38), this next chapter picks up on the topic of vows. We have already encountered vows in the contexts of sacrificial votive offerings (Lev. 7:16, 22:18, 21, 23, Num. 15:3, 8), vows to dedicate persons (Lev. 27:2, 8), the Nazirite vow of separation (Num. 6:2, 5, 21), and Israel's vow to devote the cities of the Canaanite king of Arad to destruction (21:2).

Conveying the divine commands of Numbers 30 through leaders of the patriarchal society (30:1) is appropriate because these commands focus on the family (cf. 27:2, 36:1 —4). The role of the "heads of the tribes of Israel" in transmitting a message from God is in welcome contrast to the part perpetrated by the chieftains in the Baal of Peor apostasy (25:1—4).

To provide a baseline for the exceptional situations treated later, chapter 30 begins by affirming a man's obligation to not violate a vow he has made or a pledge that he has bound on himself by swearing an oath (30:2). A vow is a solemn promise to the Lord, and an oath taken by his name should not be taken in vain and profaned by swearing falsely (Ex. 20:7, Lev. 19:12).

The main concern of Numbers 30 is not with the binding nature of vows and oaths taken by men, but with the tension that can arise when dependent women bind themselves by obligations to God that may conflict with the will of their fathers or husbands, to whom they are legally subordinate in ancient Israelite society (30:16). The vows/obligations of widowed or divorced women, who are independent, are binding like those of men (30:9).

The thrust of this legislation is to benefit dependent women by absolving them of guilt before God when their fathers or husbands do not allow them to fulfill their vows or oaths. Three cases are cited here, following the progression of a woman's life from single to married status:

- unmarried women subject to their fathers (vv. 3—5)
- women who marry while they are under vows or pledges previously taken (vv. 6—8)
- married women who make vows/pledges while subject to their husbands (vv. 10—15)

The Lord does not allow males to exercise their authority in an arbitrary manner. If a father or husband does not approve of the vow or pledge made by his daughter or wife, he can forbid it only when he first hears of it, in which case God will automatically forgive her for not fulfilling her obligation (30:5, 8, 12). These are the only instances in the Bible of forgiveness *(slh)* automatically guaranteed by statute.[1] If the man does not express disapproval the first time the woman's obligation comes to his attention, his silence constitutes binding consent (30:3—4, 6—7, 10—11, 14). Therefore, if he later breaks her obligation, he is responsible and will bear her culpability (30:15).

Verses 6 and 8 refer to a woman becoming married while still under obligation from a *mibta'* of her lips. This noun appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. It is generally interpreted as a rash/thoughtless utterance (e.g., NASB, NKJV, NIV, NRSV),[2] in accordance with the fact that in Psalm 106:33 the Piel verb from the root *bt,* describes the rash utterance from Moses' mouth when he was angry at the waters of Meribah (cf. Num. 20:10). However, because *mibta'* appears only in a case that involves a change of a woman's status from single to married, it seems clear that her "rashness" is not necessarily a character flaw. Rather, it seems to reflect her inability to foresee the potential effects of a change in circumstances: coming under the jurisdiction of a husband who may feel adversely affected by an obligation she incurred while single.

Singled out for special mention[3] is a husband's right to confirm or annul any obligation that his wife takes to practice self-denial (lit., "afflict oneself"). Presumably it will be of no consequence to him if she chooses to fast for a limited time. However, he will be affected if her self-denial includes other aspects of this kind of mourning observance, especially if she committed herself to abstain from sexual relations. While this possible aspect of self-denial does not explicitly appear in Numbers 30, *m. Yoma* 8:1 includes abstinence from sexual intercourse in self-denial that is required on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:29, 31, 23:27, 29, 32, Num. 29:7).

Bridging Contexts

WORDS ARE NOT CHEAP! Anyone who thinks words are cheap is ignoring the cost of broken trust when promises are broken. Keeping a promise, even (or especially?) if it is to a child, can be a lot cheaper than neglecting or annulling it. The problem with promises is that they are easy to make—especially in the heat of a moment when there is need to express caring, gratitude, or a desire for reconciliation—but can be more difficult to fulfill than first imagined.

A binding obligation to the Lord is set in concrete. Why would anyone make such a promise? Because it is worth more. If you are stuck in a life raft on the Pacific Ocean, with nothing to eat, no water to drink, and sharks circling around, you are likely to make an unconditional commitment that some in this situation have expressed: "Dear God, if you get me out of this alive, I'll serve you forever!" Somehow it just doesn't have the same ring to say, "All right, God, if you save my life, I'll be loving to people when it's convenient, go to church when I'm not too busy, and give you all the money I have left over after comfortably taking care of myself."

A promise that is worth more costs more because it binds in an absolute way that is not adaptable to changing circumstances. An Israelite who made such a commitment to the Lord had to honor it if he or she did not want to dangerously damage the divine-human relationship (cf. Eccl. 5:4—5). The only exceptions are stipulated by the Lord himself, who waives his right to receive fulfillment of vows/pledges from dependent women in favor of preserving something highly valuable to him: harmony in the home (Num. 30).

Because of her change of circumstances, the Lord absolves a bride of responsibility to fulfill a prior obligation if her groom has a problem with it (30:6—8). Jephthah and his daughter were not so fortunate: Nobody could annul his vow when he was confronted by a situation that he did not anticipate (Judg. 11). This story illustrates conflict between inviolable promise and extenuating circumstance. Jephthah is an extreme example of someone "who keeps his oath even when it hurts" (Ps. 15:4). Tragically, with utmost sincerity and misguided piety, he kept his oath to honor God at the expense of breaking God's own law against murder and child sacrifice.[4] Surely the Lord would have allowed him to redeem her, as the Israelites later ransomed Jonathan when King Saul uttered a

rash curse (1 Sam. 14:24—30, 37—45).

We have found that oaths can cause problems because of human limitations and circumstances (see also Judg. 21:1—7). Jesus presented the proper solution: “But I tell you, Do not swear at all …” (Matt. 5:34). He did not say that we should not make solemn commitments to God, but we do not need to unduly bind ourselves.

Contemporary Significance

COMMITMENT AND MUTUAL CONSENT. A modern reader could view Numbers 30 as establishing patriarchal prerogatives at the expense of women's rights. However, this misses the point of the passage. As with the divine legislation responding to the daughters of Zelophe-had (27:1—11), chapter 30 assumes a patriarchal society with the family (rather than the individual) as the basic unit of society and males as the primary legal actors for their families.[5] In those days, to be independent as a widow or divorcee was hard, as is illustrated by the story of Ruth. It was more difficult than in our culture, which provides opportunity for many single women to enjoy freedom with financial and legal security.

The legislation of Numbers 30 does not attempt to ignore society, as if timeless divine principles can be lived out in a social vacuum. Nor does it sweep away basic social dynamics in order to institute something better. Rather, it applies divine principles within the context of an already existing patriarchal society. It does not institute a higher level of male control over women, but it protects women from culpability before God that can result from that control. What is astonishing is that the Lord waives his own right in order to safeguard family harmony,[6] which is crucial for his people, but which can be fragile.

An Israelite woman's vow or pledge could be a legal matter that involved her father or husband if she obligated herself to give something that belonged to him, such as an animal for a sacrifice. It would be unfair and generate resentment on his part if he were forced to relinquish something against his will. How would you feel if your child or spouse gave away something that was at least partly yours, which you seriously intended to keep? When it comes to large items, such as vehicles and real estate, there are modern laws to protect co-owners by requiring their signatures of consent to sale or other forms of transfer.

One thing that a woman could vow or swear to give up would be sexual relations during a time of self-denial. Because this would also obligate her husband, it is understandable that Numbers 30:13 requires his consent. Paul later recognized that a prolonged period of sexual abstinence even by mutual consent can open the door for temptation (1 Cor. 7:3—5).

Modern Western society is not patriarchal, at least not to the degree that men

have almost exclusive control over the legal structure. Nevertheless, Numbers 30 contains some important principles that transcend the differences between cultures.

1. Promises made to God are serious.
2. We should consider the effects that our vows/pledges may have on other people. Binding obligations, including the marriage vow, should be taken carefully, prayerfully, sparingly, and in counsel with others.
3. Family harmony within the context of a given culture should not be disturbed unless absolutely necessary.
4. By being willing to waive his own rights, the Lord teaches us that we do not always need to insist on our rights.
5. People who control other individuals should not be arbitrary or fickle. Sometimes it is necessary to annul someone's decision, but there should be a good and consistent reason for doing so.

1. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 252, idem, *Leviticus 1—16*, 245.

2. See also BDB, 105.

3. Rather than referring to the only kind of vow that a husband could annul (see L. Schiffman, "The Law of Vows and Oaths [Num. 30,3—16] in the *ZadokiteFragments* and the *Temple Scroll" RevQ* 15 [1991]: 211).

4. Against D. Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech Press, 1986), 48. See R. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1996), 87—98.

5. Cf. P. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in R. R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 51.

6. Ibid., 51, 56.

Numbers 31

THE LORD SAID to Moses, 2“Take vengeance on the Midianites for
the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people.” 3So
Moses said to the people, “Arm some of your men to go to war against
the Midianites and to carry out the LORDS vengeance on them. 4Send
into battle a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel.” 5So
twelve thousand men armed for battle, a thousand from each tribe,
were supplied from the clans of Israel. 6Moses sent them into battle, a
thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the
priest, who took with him articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets
for signaling.

7They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and
killed every man. 8Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur
and Reba—the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of
Beor with the sword. 9The Israelites captured the Midianite women
and children and took all the Midianite herds, flocks and goods as
plunder. 10They burned all the towns where the Midianites had settled,
as well as all their camps. 11They took all the plunder and spoils,
including the people and animals, 12and brought the captives, spoils
and plunder to Moses and Eleazar the priest and the Israelite assembly
at their camp on the plains of Moab, by the Jordan across from Jericho.

13Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community
went to meet them outside the camp. 14Moses was angry with the
officers of the army—the commanders of thousands and commanders
of hundreds—who returned from the battle.

15“Have you allowed all the women to live?” he asked them.
16“They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the
means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened

at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD'S people. [17]Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, [18]but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

[19]"All of you who have killed anyone or touched anyone who was killed must stay outside the camp seven days. On the third and seventh days you must purify yourselves and your captives. [20]Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair or wood."

[21]Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone into battle, "This is the requirement of the law that the LORD gave Moses: [22]Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead [23]and anything else that can withstand fire must be put through the fire, and then it will be clean. But it must also be purified with the water of cleansing. And whatever cannot withstand fire must be put through that water. [24]On the seventh day wash your clothes and you will be clean. Then you may come into the camp."

[25]The LORD said to Moses, [26]"You and Eleazar the priest and the family heads of the community are to count all the people and animals that were captured. [27]Divide the spoils between the soldiers who took part in the battle and the rest of the community. [28]From the soldiers who fought in the battle, set apart as tribute for the LORD one out of every five hundred, whether persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep or goats. [29]Take this tribute from their half share and give it to Eleazar the priest as the LORD'S part. [30]From the Israelites' half, select one out of every fifty, whether persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats or other animals. Give them to the Levites, who are responsible for the care of the LORD'S tabernacle." [31] So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.

[32]The plunder remaining from the spoils that the soldiers took was 675,000 sheep, [33]72,000 cattle, [34]61,000 donkeys [35]and 32,000 women who had never slept with a man.

[36]The half share of those who fought in the battle was:
337,500 sheep, [37]of which the tribute for the LORD was 675;

[38]36,000 cattle, of which the tribute for the LORD was 72;

[39]30,500 donkeys, of which the tribute for the LORD was
61;

[40]16,000 people, of which the tribute for the LORD was
32.

[41]Moses gave the tribute to Eleazar the priest as the LORDS part, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[42]The half belonging to the Israelites, which Moses set apart from that of the fighting men—[43]the community's half— was 337,500 sheep, [44]36,000 cattle, [45]30,500 donkeys [46]and 16,000 people. [47]From the Israelites' half, Moses selected one out of every fifty persons and animals, as the LORD commanded him, and gave them to the Levites, who were responsible for the care of the LORD'S tabernacle.

[48]Then the officers who were over the units of the army— the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds—went to Moses [49]and said to him, "Your servants have counted the soldiers under our command, and not one is missing. [50]So we have brought as an offering to the LORD the gold articles each of us acquired—armlets, bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces—to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD."

[51]Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted from them the gold—all the crafted articles. [52]All the gold from the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds that Moses and Eleazar presented as a gift to the LORD weighed 16,750 shekels. [53]Each soldier had taken plunder for himself. [54]Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gold from the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds and brought it into the Tent of Meeting as a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD.

Original Meaning

BATTLE AGAINST THE MIDIANITES. Moses has a few more miles to go and promises to keep before it is time for him to sleep (cf. Num. 27:12—14).[1] One major piece of unfinished business is to fulfill the divine command issued after the Baal of Peor scandal: "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi" (25:16—18). Because Midian is a tribal confederation constituting a kind of nation, corporate retributive justice requires a major military operation.

Along with the Israelite army of one thousand from each tribe (31:3—5),[2] Moses sends Phinehas, the priest (31:6). For one thing, this is a holy war commanded by God. It can be argued that all wars in the ancient Near East were holy wars in the sense that soldiers believed their deities were with them in battle. But not many wars are described as specifically initiated by deities, like this one.[3] Generally it was monarchs who made decisions to embark on military campaigns because that was the royal thing to do (cf. 2 Sam. 11:1 —"In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war …").

Phinehas and the unspecified holy objects that he takes with him represent the Lord's presence with the troops. When he blows the *teru'ah* signal on a silver trumpet (cf. 10:9), they will know that the divine King in their midst (cf. 23:21) will give them victory. Another reason to send Phinehas, specifically, is the fact that this unsqueamish priest has energetically begun the process of vengeance by slaying Cozbi (25:8, 15). So his presence will inspire the Israelite soldiers to finish the job.

Rather than relishing the gory details, Numbers 31 describes the actual battle with brevity (31:7) that is almost as breathtaking as Julius Caesar's famous *Veni, Vidi, Vici* ("I came, I saw, I conquered"). Among the slain are the kings of five major subdivisions of the Midianite tribal nation (v. 8a). Oh, by the way, the Israelites "also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword" (v. 8b). With his insight regarding Israel's God, the unprofitable prophet must have returned from home (cf. 24:25) to incite the Midianites and Moabites to deception against the Israelites at Shittim (31:16, see comments on ch. 25). The success of this tempter

and his female agents was their own undoing because they succeeded in arousing the Lord and his people to deadly resolve.

When the triumphant Israelite warriors return with captives and spoils of war (31:12—13), having destroyed all Midianite men (31:7), we expect Moses to be overjoyed. Instead, he is angry with the army officers for keeping alive the Midianite women, who have been the most dangerous enemies as instruments of apostasy to penetrate the Israelite camp (31:14—16) like a Trojan horse. Even if the officers have received no explicit orders regarding these women, as Saul does later regarding the Amalekite women (1 Sam. 15:3), Moses thinks they should have known what to do.

Having attempted to destroy the Israelites, the Midianites have forfeited mercy. So Moses orders summary execution of all captives except for 32,000 young virgin girls (31:17—18, 35). These can be assimilated into the Israelite community by marrying Israelite men, who will provide them with new family identities. Absorption of the girls will help to restore the Israelite population depleted by loss of the 24,000 who died at Shittim (25:9).

Purification and distribution. All soldiers who have come in contact with corpses are required to remain outside the main encampment, where the holy sanctuary is, and to undergo ritual purification (31:19, cf. 5:1—4, 19) to avoid bringing the conceptual sphere of impurity/death into association with divine holiness/life (see comments on Lev. 12). Since this dynamic conceptual system is abundantly attested in the context of biblical Israel, there is no need to speculate that such cleansing expresses "ambivalence concerning the ethics of war."[4]

Operating under the assumption that the surviving girls have contacted dead bodies, the Israelites also purify them for a week (31:19b), during which time they have to babysit these unhappy campers before they can be placed in new homes. In addition to persons, a wide variety of objects taken into battle or captured from the Midianites require purification from corpse contamination. Regarding these, Eleazar the high priest picks up where Moses left off (31:20, cf. 19:18—19, 21), conveying supplementary instructions that Moses received from the Lord (31:21—24). It is appropriate that the high priest should serve as God's spokesman concerning such matters, especially because Moses will soon be departing from the scene and the people need to get used to listening to someone else.

Metal objects are to be purified by fire and the "water of lustration" (31:22 — 23a), which contains the ashes of the red cow (cf. ch. 19). Other things that cannot withstand fire are to be passed through water instead (31:23b) and also

sprinkled with the "water of lustration."[5] D. P. Wright points out that the requirement of fire/water purification in addition to the "water of lustration" supplements the rules of chapter 19 to provide for washing of corpse-contaminated objects, just as contaminated persons need to be sprinkled with the special ash water (19:12, 19) *plus* laundering their clothes and bathing (19:19).[6]

The rest of Numbers 31 describes distribution of the spoils of war (31:25—54). The captured girls and animals are to be equally divided between the warriors and the rest of the community. Part of each of these half portions is to be set apart for the Lord and his sanctuary: one five-hundredth from the soldiers and one fiftieth from the community.

Both of the mandatory contributions to God are much lower percentages than the voluntary tithe Abraham gave the priest Melchizedek after his victory over four kings (Gen. 14:20). Perhaps the numbers of captured girls and animals are simply too great for the sanctuary, priests, and Levites to absorb at the ten percent rate. For one thing, there are more sheep than the total number of Israelite men counted in the military census (Num. 31:32, cf. 26:51)!

Gold purified through fire. The distribution just described deals only with captured persons and animals. All other plunder belongs to the soldiers who have taken it, every man for himself (31:53). However, the army officers are grateful to God that in Operation Remember Baal Peor their casualties amount to a miraculous zero. So as a valuable offering *(qorban)* to ransom *(kipper)* their lives (plural of *nepes)* before the Lord (31:50b), they present the crafted items of gold—primarily jewelry—that they have seized (31:48—54). This ransom is like the half shekel census tax (Ex. 30:12—16) in the sense that the lives of those who were counted (cf. Num. 31:4—6) have been spared. Notice that rather than holding a grudge against Moses for upbraiding them for failing to slay the Midianite women (31:14—16), the army officers treat Moses with great respect by speaking to him as "your servants" (31:49).

Moses and Eleazar bring the commander's contribution into the sacred tent as a memorial/reminder for the Israelites before the Lord (31:54), testifying to the fact that their lives have been ransomed (cf. the terminology in Ex. 30:16). The rich endowment shows the fine attitude of Israel's military leaders, who care about the men under their command, are unselfish, respectfully acknowledge the human authority over them, and are grateful to the Lord. This is a breath of fresh air for Moses, who can end his career on an upbeat. His ransomed people are becoming like that memorial: gold purified through fire (cf. Num. 31:22—23, Rev. 3:18).

Bridging Contexts

DIVINE JUSTICE AND GENOCIDE. The Israelites have wiped out a major segment of the Midianite population and totally destroyed the people of Arad, as well as the subjects of Sihon and Og (Num. 31, Deut. 2—3). These massacres are just a preview of what they are commissioned to do to the inhabitants of Canaan:

> However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. (Deut. 20:16—17)

This can only be described as systematic, divinely mandated genocide.[7] How can a God of love (1 John 4:8) be so merciless? We cannot simply blame the Israelites, they are the Lord's agents. Instead of destroying the peoples of Canaan by fire as he did Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24— 28), he used the Israelites as his terrible swift sword, at least partly to teach them faith through the discipline of war (cf. Judg. 3:2, 4).

Some scholars refuse to accept the possibility that God—at least the God revealed by Jesus—could have ever commanded genocide under any circumstances. So they must posit radical discontinuity between Israel's God and the God of the New Testament and/or interpret the Old Testament as misrepresenting God's true character.[8] Those of us who accept the entire Bible as the Word of God have no choice but to admit that God sometimes gives up on groups of people and chooses to destroy them (Gen. 6—7, 19, Rev. 20), and that during a certain phase of history he *uniquely* delegated *a carefully restricted part* of his destructive work to his chosen nation of ancient Israel, *which he tightly controlled and held accountable under theocratic rule*.[9]

> It will only be with the frank acknowledgment that ordinary ethical requirements were suspended and the ethical principles of the last judgment intruded that the divine promises and commands to Israel concerning Canaan and the Canaanites come into their own. Only so can the conquest be justified and seen as it was in truth—not murder, but the hosts of the

> Almighty visiting upon the rebels against his righteous throne their just deserts—not robbery, but the meek inheriting the earth.[10]

It is pointless either to defend or condemn God (cf. Job 40:2). Our attempts at theodicy—justifying God's character—are stimulating exercises,[11] but in the final analysis we can only stand back and let God be God, admitting that our reasonings are flawed by inadequate perspective. Ultimately, our acceptance of his character is a matter of faith. He has given us plenty of evidence to trust him, but not enough to penetrate all the mysteries of his ways (cf. Deut. 29:29).

There are some clues that the Lord's treatment of the peoples in Canaan was in harmony with his character of mercy and justice.[12] (1) He gave these people ample opportunity to know him through witnesses such as Abraham and Melchizedek (e.g., Gen. 14:17—24).

(2) He kept his people of Israel waiting in Egypt until the end of four centuries of probation for the Amorites (Gen. 15:13, 16). This is more than three times the 120 years he gave the antedeluvian world (6:3).

(3) Depraved inhabitants of Canaan practiced gross immorality (e.g., Lev. 18:3, 27—28) and child sacrifice (e.g., Deut. 12:31). If God hadn't destroyed them, he would have owed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah an apology (cf. Gen. 18—19).

(4) As exemplified by what happened at Shittim (Num. 25), idolatrous and immoral men *and women* in close proximity to the Israelites would inevitably corrupt them and thereby cause their destruction (Deut. 7:4, 20:18). The Lord's ideal for the Israelites was incompatible with the Canaanite environment. Aesop illustrates the principle of incompatibility:

> A Charcoal-Burner carried on his trade in his own house. One day he met a friend, a Fuller, and entreated him to come and live with him, saying that they should be far better neighbors and that their housekeeping expenses would be lessened. The Fuller replied, "The arrangement is impossible as far as I am concerned, for whatever I should whiten, you would immediately blacken again with your charcoal."[13]

(5) The fact that the Lord threatened to treat unfaithful Israelites like Canaanites (Lev. 18:28, Num. 33:55—56, see Bridging Contexts section on Num. 16:1—35) shows that his vendetta was against wickedness, not ethnicity. Those who rebel against him are subject to "equal-opportunity punishment."

Contemporary Significance

JIHAD AND GENOCIDE. An ardent pacifist, Albert Einstein wrote: “Heroism on command, senseless violence, and all the loathsome nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism—how passionately I hate them! How vile and despicable seems war to me! I would rather be hacked in pieces than take part in such an abominable business.”[14] Unfortunately, Einstein’s twentieth century witnessed war and genocide on an unprecedented scale, with the annihilation of millions of Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Tutsis, Hutus, and others simply because they belonged to certain groups.

For us, genocide evokes revulsion and instant condemnation. But then we read the Bible and find that God’s chosen people carried out on their enemies— of all things—genocide! Not only does the Bible condone this behavior, God commanded holy wars of extermination and punished his people for rebellion if they failed to shed the last drop of blood (Num. 33:55—56, 1 Sam. 15).

The brutal question is: How is genocide by the Israelites different from all other genocides? What gave them any more right to massacre entire populations, including women and children, than other “holy warriors” through the centuries? After all, “Christian” Crusaders in the Middle Ages, who piously perpetrated unbelievably bloody atrocities, and their Islamic opponents both acted in accordance with sincere beliefs that they were engaging in holy war approved by their respective deities. Hans Küng pointedly observes:

> Many massacres and wars not only in the Near East between Maronite Christians, Sunni and ShPite Muslims, between Syrians, Palestinians, Druse and Israelis, but also between Iran and Iraq, between Indians and Pakistanis, Hindus and Sikhs, Singhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, and earlier also between Buddhist monks and the Catholic regime in Vietnam, as also today between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, were or are so indescribably fanatical, bloody and inexorable because they have a religious foundation. And what is the logic? If God himself is ‘with us,’ with our religion, confession, nation, our party, then anything is allowed against the other party, which in that case must logically be of the devil. In that case even unrestrained violation, burning, destruction and murder is permissible

in the name of God.[15]

Today, Islamic militants view themselves as simply continuing an international *jihad* ("holy war"). When Yasser Arafat rallies his supporters by yelling "*Jihad'*" he appeals to a kind of divine mandate. However Americans and their Western allies may characterize the so-called "war on terrorism," those on the other side have consistently said that it is a religious war motivated by zeal to carry out (their interpretation of) commands enshrined in their "holy books."

If the *jihad* of firebrand groups such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizballah involves indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, children, and the elderly, why is anyone surprised? Shocked, dismayed, angered, of course, but why surprised? This is the way their kind of "holy war" works. Those whom we despise as kooks, fanatics, and serial murderers are idolized as heroes and martyrs by those who share their religious worldview. If ancient Israelite holy war does not disturb us the way modern Islamic *jihad* does, it is at least partly because the carnage of the former is chronologically removed from us. CNN and *Time* magazine do not assault us with the visual impact of corpses and mangled wreckage in ancient Arad, Heshbon, and Jericho (Josh. 6).

For me, a believer in the divine authority of the Bible, Israel's holy wars were unique because that nation *was a true theocracy* acting on the basis of *direct* revelation from God and carrying out retributive justice on his behalf. When God tells you to do something, you do it, even if it is unusual and unpleasant. A towering example of such obedience was carried out by Abraham, the father of the Jews and Arabs and the spiritual father of the Christian faith. When God commanded him to offer his son as a human sacrifice, he set about to do this painful deed and was stopped only by another divine command (Gen. 22).

The problem is that other groups also claim to be theocracies acting on commands from God/god(s)/Allah. We immediately think of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the ShPite regime of Iran, which have attempted to enforce on modern civil society the rules and penalties stated in the Koran and other sources, as if Allah were uttering direct commands today. Historically speaking, Christians have not been immune from this approach. For example, the medieval church claimed divine authority and in some respects the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony tried to live as a theocracy, enforcing authoritative biblical revelation as binding on their society.

None of the groups just mentioned have been theocracies in the sense that Israel was because they have lacked the resident, manifest Presence of the divine King in their midst and the powerful checks and balances that go with his

ongoing, intimate control. With Israel, the Lord was operating the brakes as well as the accelerator, making sure that his people carried out his orders and then stopped. Thus he commanded the Israelites to wipe out the inhabitants of Canaan, but not people of other nations (Deut. 20) and especially not relatives of Israel (Num. 20, Deut. 2), unless their hostility made them dangerous (Ex. 17, Num. 21, 31, Deut. 2—3). When King Saul, in his misguided zeal, broke Israel's sworn treaty with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) by attempting to wipe them out like other peoples of Canaan, God held him and his family seriously accountable (2 Sam. 21).

The Lord's goal was to provide a spiritually and physically secure home for his people within a limited geographic area so that they could flourish in their own land without being destroyed by idolatrous, corrupt, and predatory neighbors. By sharp contrast with Islam, Israel was not commissioned to use military force anywhere in the world for propagating the faith and attempting to destroy polytheism.[16]

Of course, my belief that ancient Israel was a theocracy is precisely that: a belief, which is based on the same holy book produced by that theocracy. The Israelite holy wars were commanded by the Lord of the Bible. For Muslims, their *jihad* is authorized by Allah of the Koran. In spite of all the similarities between our monotheistic deities and all of our attempts at ecumenical "bridge-building," respect for other religious groups, and postmodern "political correctness," if we are not Muslim, we do not accept the Koran as authoritative revelation from the true God. Conversely, Muslims do not accept the Bible the way we do.

We confront the hard reality that our approach to the ethics of "holy war" genocide depends on our answer to a religious question: Which deity is true and therefore has ultimate authority over human life? Problems such as the political and ideological environment of the Middle East will never be satisfactorily and permanently solved at any conference table as long as moral attitudes and ethical judgments are founded on different religions. If we could agree that because theocracy no longer exists on Planet Earth, there is no such thing as "holy war" in the twenty-first century and therefore indiscriminate slaughter is unconscionable, inhumane, and universally condemnable, we would have a solid basis for resolution of conflict. The catch, however, is that this is a religious statement alien to the worldview of many Muslims.

Given that we have different religions, we must ask: "Can people with fundamentally different truth claims live together without killing each other?"[17] Hans Küng argues in the context of gruesome modern history that "there can be

no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. In short, there can be no world peace without religious peace."[18] The prognosis looks bleak indeed unless/until some kind of dramatic change occurs. Pope John XXIII was on target when he said, "The world will never be the dwelling-place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of each and every man, till every man preserves in himself the order ordained by God to be preserved."[19]

The British satirist Jonathan Swift wrote that we have just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another. This reminds me of a schnauzer named Bear. His owners enrolled him in a training course for guard dogs with two parts: to develop aggression and then to control it. Bear passed the first with flying colors but flunked the second.

Obviously we cannot force other people to change their worldviews, but we can improve our own contribution to world peace. A first step is to get acquainted with those of different persuasions as human beings. Philip Yancey describes his reaction to a conference in New Orleans between Muslims, Jews, and Christians:

> Suffering sometimes serves as a moat and sometimes as a bridge. The Muslim who fled from the soldiers at Deir Yassin years later had an automobile accident in the United States. It was a Jewish nurse who stopped, tied a tourniquet with her scented hanky, and painstakingly plucked glass from his face. He believes she saved his life. The Muslim man's wife, a physician, went on to say that she had once treated a patient with a strange tattoo on his wrist. When she asked about it, he told her about the Holocaust, a historical event omitted from her high school, college, and graduate school education in Arab countries. For the first time, she understood Jewish pain.
>
> Why do human beings keep doing it to each other? Yugoslavia, Ireland, Sudan, the West Bank—is there no end to the cycle of pain fueled by religion? As Gandhi observed, the logic of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" cannot sustain itself forever, ultimately both parties end up blind and toothless.
>
> Our meeting in New Orleans did not, rest assured, change the Middle East equation, or make peace between three major religions any more likely. But it did change us. For once we focused on intersections and connections, not just boundaries. We got to know Hil-lel, Dawud, and Bob, human faces behind the labels Jew, Muslim, and Christian.[20]

As Christians, what we need is not less of religion, but more of *truer* religion

(cf. Matt. 5:20) that is permeated by Christ's self-sacrificing love. Leaving vengeance up to God to administer according to his wisdom (Deut. 32:35, Rom. 12:19, Heb. 10:30), we must love others as ourselves (Lev. 19:18, Matt. 22:36—40, John 13:34—35, Rom. 13:8, etc.). The holy war that we are to wage is love.

1. Cf. the last lines of Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening": "The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep."

2. Compare this army of 12,000 (12 x 1,000) equally representing the Israelite tribes with the perfectly symmetrical group of 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1,000) in Rev. 7:4, 14:1, 3.

3. Other examples include the wars by which the Israelites conquered Canaan (book of Joshua), battles for deliverance recorded in the book of Judges, Saul's war against the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15), and attacks by Mesha (King of Moab) on Israelites, which he claims that his god Chemosh commanded (Mesha Stele, lines 14, 32, transl. *ANET,* 320—21).

4. Against S. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 89, idem, "War, Women, and Defilement in Numbers 31," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 53.

5. Wright, "Purification from Corpse-Contamination in Numbers XXXI 19—24," 218—19.

6. Ibid., 221—23.

7. See comments on Lev. 27 regarding *herem* (devotion to God for destruction).

8. C. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 13—44, J. J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *JBL* 122 (2003): 3—21.

9. Cf. E. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy,*63 — 94, D. Gard, "The Case for Eschatological Continuity," in *Show Them No Mercy,* 113—41, Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in *Show Them No Mercy,* 161—87.

10. M. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 163.

11. See the extensive bibliography on this fascinating subject compiled by B. L. Whitney: *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil 1960—1990* (New York: Garland, 1993).

12. See Bridging Contexts section on Num. 16:1—35, Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes*, 21—22.

13. Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*, 13.

14. A. Einstein, "My Views," in E. Knoebel, ed., *Classics of Western Thought: Volume III— The Modern World*, 4th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 3:539.

15. Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 73 —74.

16. R. Firestone, "Conceptions of Holy War in Biblical and Qur'anic Tradition," *JRE* 24 (1996): 105—7, 111—18.

17. Question formulated by a rabbi at an interfaith meeting in New Orleans with Jews, Muslims, and Christians, cited by P. Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1997), 56.

18. Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, 76.

19. Pope John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris," in D. Gochberg, ed., *Classics of Western Thought: Volume IV—The Twentieth Century* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 4:463.

20. Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places*, 54—55.

Numbers 32—34

THE REUBENITES AND Gadites, who had very large herds and
flocks, saw that the lands of jazer and Gilead were suitable for
livestock. 2So they came to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the
leaders of the community, and said, 3"Ataroth, Dibon, jazer, Nimrah,
Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon—4the land the LORD
subdued before the people of Israel—are suitable for livestock, and
your servants have livestock. 5If we have found favor in your eyes,"
they said, "let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do
not make us cross the jordan."

6Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, "Shall your countrymen
go to war while you sit here? 7Why do you discourage the Israelites
from going over into the land the LORD has given them? 8This is what
your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to look over
the land. 9After they went up to the valley of Eshcol and viewed the
land, they discouraged the Israelites from entering the land the LORD
had given them. 10The LORD'S anger was aroused that day and he
swore this oath: "'Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly,
not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of
Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob—12not one except Caleb son of jephunneh the Kenizzite and
joshua son of Nun, for they followed the LORD wholeheartedly.' 13The
LORD'S anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the
desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done
evil in his sight was gone.

14"And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of
your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Israel. 15If
you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people

in the desert, and you will be the cause of their destruction."

16Then they came up to him and said, "We would like to build pens here for our livestock and cities for our women and children. 17But we are ready to arm ourselves and go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our women and children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land. 18We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. 19We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan."

20Then Moses said to them, "If you will do this—if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for battle, 21and if all of you will go armed over the Jordan before the LORD until he has driven his enemies out before him—22then when the land is subdued before the LORD, you may return and be free from your obligation to the LORD and to Israel. And this land will be your possession before the LORD.

23"But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. 24Build cities for your women and children, and pens for your flocks, but do what you have promised."

25The Gadites and Reubenites said to Moses, "We your servants will do as our lord commands. 26Our children and wives, our flocks and herds will remain here in the cities of Gilead. 27But your servants, every man armed for battle, will cross over to fight before the LORD, just as our lord says."

28Then Moses gave orders about them to Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun and to the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29He said to them, "If the Gadites and Reubenites, every man armed for battle, cross over the Jordan with you before the LORD, then when the land is subdued before you, give them the land of Gilead as their possession. 30But if they do not cross over with you armed, they must accept their possession with you in Canaan."

31The Gadites and Reubenites answered, "Your servants will do what the LORD has said. 32We will cross over before the LORD into Canaan armed, but the property we inherit will be on this side of the Jordan."

[33]Then Moses gave to the Gadites, the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan— the whole land with its cities and the territory around them.

[34]The Gadites built up Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, [35]Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, [36]Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran as fortified cities, and built pens for their flocks. [37]And the Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh and Kiriathaim, [38]as well as Nebo and Baal Meon (these names were changed) and Sibmah. They gave names to the cities they rebuilt.

[39]The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it and drove out the Amorites who were there. [40]So Moses gave Gilead to the Makirites, the descendants of Manasseh, and they settled there. [41]Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, captured their settlements and called them Havvoth Jair. [42]And Nobah captured Kenath and its surrounding settlements and called it Nobah after himself.

[33:1]Here are the stages in the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. [2]At the LORD'S command Moses recorded the stages in their journey. This is their journey by stages:

> [3]The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, [4]who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods.
>
> [5]The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Succoth.
>
> [6]They left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert.
>
> [7]They left Etham, turned back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol.
>
> [8]They left Pi Hahiroth and passed through the sea into the desert, and when they had traveled for three days in the Desert of Etham, they camped at Marah.
>
> [9]They left Marah and went to Elim, where there were twelve

springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.
10They left Elim and camped by the Red Sea. “They left the
Red Sea and camped in the Desert of Sin.
12They left the Desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah.
13They left Dophkah and camped at Alush.
14They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no
water for the people to drink.
15They left Rephidim and camped in the Desert of Sinai.
16They left the Desert of Sinai and camped at Kibroth
Hattaavah.
17They left Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.
18They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah.
19They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez.
20They left Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah.
21They left Libnah and camped at Rissah.
22They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah.
23They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher.
24They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah.
25They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth.
26They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath.
27They left Tahath and camped at Terah.
28They left Terah and camped at Mithcah.
29They left Mithcah and camped at Hashmonah.
30They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth.
31They left Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan.
32They left Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Haggidgad.
33They left Hor Haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah.
34They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah.
35They left Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber.
36They left Ezion Geber and camped at Kadesh, in the Desert
of Zin.
37They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the border of
Edom. 38At the LORD’S command Aaron the priest went up Mount
Hor, where he died on the first day of the fifth month of the
fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. 39Aaron was a

hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

40 The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev of
Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming.

41 They left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah.

42 They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon.

43 They left Punon and camped at Oboth.

44 They left Oboth and camped at Iye Abarim, on the border of
Moab.

45 They left Iyim and camped at Dibon Gad.

46 They left Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim.

47 They left Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of
Abarim, near Nebo.

48 They left the mountains of Abarim and camped on the plains
of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. 49 There on the plains
of Moab they camped along the Jordan from Beth Jeshimoth to
Abel Shittim.

50 on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD
said to Moses, 51 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you
cross the Jordan into Canaan, 52 drive out all the inhabitants of the land
before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and
demolish all their high places. 53 Take possession of the land and settle
in it, for I have given you the land to possess. 54 Distribute the land by
lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance,
and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot
will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes.

55 "'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you
allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your
sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live.
56 And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.'"

34:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Command the Israelites and say to
them: 'When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as
an inheritance will have these boundaries:

3 "'Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along
the border of Edom. on the east, your southern boundary will start
from the end of the Salt Sea, 4 cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue

on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, [5]where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea.

[6]“'Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west.

[7]“'For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor [8]and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, ‘continue to Ziphron and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north.

[10]“'For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. [11]The boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain and continue along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth. [12]Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea.

“'This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side.'”

[13]Moses commanded the Israelites: “Assign this land by lot as an inheritance. The LORD has ordered that it be given to the nine and a half tribes, [14]because the families of the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance. [15]These two and a half tribes have received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan of Jericho, toward the sunrise.”

[16]The LORD said to Moses, [17]“These are the names of the men who are to assign the land for you as an inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun. [18]And appoint one leader from each tribe to help assign the land. [19]These are their names:

Caleb son of Jephunneh, from the tribe of Judah;

[20]Shemuel son of Ammihud, from the tribe of Simeon;

[21]Elidad son of Kislon, from the tribe of Benjamin;

[22]Bukki son of Jogli, the leader from the tribe of Dan;

[23]Hanniel son of Ephod, the leader from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph;

[24]Kemuel son of Shiphtan, the leader from the tribe of
Ephraim son of Joseph;

[25]Elizaphan son of Parnach, the leader from the tribe of
Zebulun;

[26]Paltiel son of Azzan, the leader from the tribe of
Issachar;

[27]Ahihud son of Shelomi, the leader from the tribe of
Asher;

[28]Pedahel son of Ammihud, the leader from the tribe of
Naphtali.”

[29]These are the men the LORD commanded to assign the inheritance to the Israelites in the land of Canaan.

Original Meaning

HOME ON THE RANGE. When the Israelites conquer the Transjordanian lands of kings Sihon and Og (21:23—35), they do not intend to permanently occupy them. They are bound for the Promised Land, the borders of which (ch. 34) coincide with those of the Egyptian province of Canaan on the other (western) side of the Jordan River during the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C.[1] These borders indicate that Israel is to displace the Egyptian presence on the continent of Asia. However, when members of the tribes of Reuben and Gad look around them east of the Jordan, they like what they see. They have cattle, and the land is ideal cattle country. How can they do better than this?

When the Reubenites and Gadites approach Moses and other leaders to request the Transjordanian territories as their possession (32:1—5), they cause a major misunderstanding by concluding their petition with the words: "Do not make us cross the Jordan" (v. 5). Moses "hits the roof" and delivers one of the most sizzling speeches of his oratorically distinguished career (32:6—15). He assumes that they are faithless, indolent cowards, trying to get out of fighting for Canaan, and he accuses them of discouraging (lit., "restraining [nw'] the heart of") the other Israelites from crossing over into the Promised Land (v. 7) as the majority of scouts sent from Kadesh had discouraged (also nw') the earlier generation (vv. 8—9).[2] Although he does not mention Dathan and Abiram, Moses cannot have forgotten that they were Reubenites (16:1).

Moses thinks he has just aborted a rebellion by a "brood of sinners" (32:14), and no doubt expects the representatives of Reuben and Gad to slink away "with their tails between their legs." He must be surprised when they courageously come closer *(ngs)* to him instead (32:16). They clarify their intentions and outline a plan for their men to go not just *with* the rest of the Israelites, but to be deployed in advance of them[3] to help them fight for their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan (32:16—18). Moses approves, provided that they will follow through (32:20—24). So the Gadites and Reubenites reinforce their promise by repeating it, referring to their idea as their lord's (Moses') command (32:25—27). They are rapidly learning the art of diplomacy!

When Moses grants Transjordanian land to Gad and Reuben, he also allots a

portion east of the Jordan to half of the tribe of Manasseh (32:33).

The biblical text does not explain why Manasseh enters the picture at this point. Perhaps after Reuben and Gad pave the way with Moses, some Manassites decide they want to live in the Transjordan too. In any case, it serves Moses' interests to have the tribe of Manasseh straddling the Jordan. At least members of the half-tribe of Manasseh on the east will have a strong vested interest in assisting their fellow tribesmen on the west and making sure that the Reubenites and Gadites join them in this. Later the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan do make good on their pledge to send their army across the Jordan in front of the other Israelites (Josh. 4:12), after which they return home (22:9).

Incredible journey, homeward bound. Numbers 33 provides a straightforward list of "forty distinct stages between Egypt and the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Canaan."[4] Condensed as it is, the summary does not make room for value judgments on the Israelites' behavior. The point is where the Lord has led them.

God's people maintain a balanced perspective by reviewing their journey and remembering how he has led. In this way they simultaneously reinforce their sense of dependence on him and confidence that he will take care of them each step of the way. As one member of an urban church replied when her pastor asked how she was getting along: "I find myself living somewhere between 'thank you, Lord' and 'help me, Jesus.'"[5]

The summary in Numbers 33 is more complete than the accounts in Exodus and earlier in Numbers, which concentrate on places where memorable events have occurred.[6] While we know the overall contours of Israel's movement from Egypt to Canaan, modern scholars have not succeeded in definitively working out all the details because there is inadequate evidence to pinpoint all the locations named in the Bible.[7] Remember that the Israelites were camping in an uninhabited area, without building anything that would remain.

Because archaeological remains dating to the period in question (Late Bronze Age II, about 1400—1200 B.C.) have not yet been found at key sites such as Dibon, east of the Jordan (33:45—46), a number of scholars reject the reliability of the biblical record, even to the extent of denying that Israel's journey from Egypt occurred at all. In response, C. R. Krahmalkov points out the witness of Late Bronze Age Egyptian topographical lists:

> In short, the Biblical story of the invasion of Transjordan that set the stage for the conquest of all Palestine is told against a background that is historically accurate. The Israelite invasion route described in Numbers

> 33:45b-50 was in fact an official, heavily trafficked Egyptian road through the Transjordan in the Late Bronze Age. And the city of Dibon was in fact a station on that road in the Late Bronze Age.[8]

Verses 3—15 cover journeys from Egypt to the Desert of Sinai (cf. Ex. 12—19). Numbers 33:4 adds that the Lord has accomplished judgment on the gods of the Egyptians. In other words, the plagues (Ex. 7—12) were not simply to discomfort the Egyptians, they were strategically calculated to attack their religious system by displaying God's power over things they worshiped. Another addition by Numbers 33 is in verses 12—14, which name Dophkah and Alush as the stops between the Desert of Sin and Rephidim (cf. Ex. 17:1).

Numbers 33:15—16 includes the Desert of Sinai, where the tabernacle was constructed and the laws of Leviticus were given, as just another stop along the way. Taberah (11:3) is not included, apparently because it was sumbsumed under Kibroth Hattaavah as the same place, or very close by, with no journey recorded between the two locations.[9] Verses 16—49 cover the decades of travel from the Desert of Sinai to the plains of Moab by the Jordan River (cf. Num. 10—25), listing many place names that we have not encountered earlier in Numbers because no noteworthy events occurred there during the years of wandering (cf. Deut. 2:1).

Kadesh raises a question that remains unresolved. According to Numbers 33, after leaving the Desert of Sinai (33:16a), the Israelites camped at Kibroth Hattaavah (33:16b, cf. 11:34—35a), at Hazeroth (33:18a, cf. 11:35b, 12:16a), and then at a series of places not mentioned earlier in Numbers (33:18b-36a), before arriving at Kadesh in the Desert of Zin (33:36b). This is the Kadesh where the "waters of Meribah" were located (20:1—13, Deut. 32:51) and from which Moses petitioned the king of Edom for passage (Num. 20:14, Judg. 11:16—17).

From Kadesh they went to Mount Hor, where Aaron died in the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt (Num. 33:38—39, cf. 20:22—29). This was at the end of the desert wandering, as the Israelites were making their way toward Moab (see 33:40—49). The question is: Why doesn't Numbers 33 mention the long stay at Kadesh (Barnea, cf. 12:16, 13:26, 32:8, Deut. 1:19, 46, 2:14)? Was it perhaps a different Kadesh from the one where the Israelites stayed thirty-eight years later?[10]

The summary of past journeys in Numbers 33 returns to the present at the plains of Moab by the Jordan, where the Israelites are encamped (33:49). Here, across from Jericho, the Lord instructs them how to treat the Canaanites when

they cross the Jordan: Drive them out, destroy all their objects of worship, and settle in their land, dividing it up by casting lots (33:50—56).

Numbers 34 addresses the settlement and division of the land. First, the boundaries of the Promised Land are specified in the order: southern (34:3—5), western (34:6), northern (34:7—9), and eastern (34:10—12), aside from the Transjordanian territory of the Gadites, Reubenites, and half-tribe of Manasseh (34:13—15).” Next, chapter 34 lists the leaders who will be responsible for dividing up the land (34:16—29). Reuben and Gad are not represented among these leaders because their inheritance is on the other side of the Jordan (see ch. 32).

Bridging Contexts

"YOUR SIN WILL find you out." It is understandable that Moses overreacts to the request of the Reubenites and Gadites to settle in the Transjordan (Num. 32:6—15). He has long and hard experience with fickle failure to honor commitments. Even after Moses accepts their plan, he engages them in extended dialogue to confirm the agreement as a legal contract and spell out contingencies (32:20—33).

It is much the same today. If you agree to buy or sell a major item, such as real estate, or if you take out a bank loan, there is a substantial legal process that follows the initial agreement. The reason why a loan contract requires special safeguards is because the borrower receives money before performing the obligation to pay it back. When people already have what they want, as the Gadites and Reubenites will, the natural tendency is to relax and neglect their commitment.

At Nineveh, Iraq, in 1989, I needed one worker on the last day of our excavation season to re-cover and thereby protect some partially exposed Assyrian skeletons that had been crushed at the entrance to the Halzi Gate when the city fell in 612 B.C. Since our regular workers had already been dismissed, our director found it convenient to pay the local man who had been guarding our site to help me with the job. Until he did the work, his pay was a loan. However, having received his pay, he had no incentive and was in the process of leaving without performing his obligation. Because the job had to be done that day and I could not do it all myself, I imitated our Iraqi foreman by shoving him back to work amid a torrent of the most fluent Arabic I have ever mustered.

There is a saying that "possession is nine-tenths of the law." So modern law protects a lender from a borrower's default by enforcing the right of repossession or seizure of collateral. But how could the Israelites foreclose on two entire tribes if they refused to budge in order to help the other tribes across the Jordan? A civil war to force their cooperation (cf. Judg. 20) would defeat the purpose of strengthening Israel's position against its enemies.

Recognizing the danger inherent in loaning the Reubenites and Gadites territory that they would already possess, Moses warned: "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD, and you may be sure that your sin will

find you out" (Num. 32:23). There was a higher authority with power to enforce the contract.

Moses did not say that God would directly punish them. Rather, he said that their sin *(hatta't)* itself would find (Qal of *ms'*) them. In other words, sin would inevitably boomerang back to haunt them with evil results. In the Bible this prominent theme is often expressed by the metaphor of evil deeds returning on the heads of those who perpetrate them.[12] Today we say, "chickens come home to roost" or "what goes around comes around."

The Lord holds people accountable by bringing to completion the consequences inherent in their own actions.[13] Thus, key Hebrew terms for moral evil (including *hatta't, pesa',* and *'awon,* see comments on Lev. 16) can refer both to sinful acts and their consequences, implying that the consequences are inseparable from the actions themselves.[14]

For the Israelites as a whole, their sin will find them if they fail to drive out the Canaanites, destroy their idolatrous objects, and obliterate their places of worship (33:52). There can be no attempt to preserve the culture of these people, even in an anthropological museum. Needless to say, this is "politically incorrect" today. But if the Israelites bond to the Canaanites and their culture, they will bond to their sins. If God's people permit remnants of spiritual "cancer," they will set themselves up for overwhelming "metastasis." Détente would be the prelude to defeat.

The Lord warns: "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them" (33:55—56). By later failing in this regard, the Israelites do indeed bring on themselves untold misery during the long and dark period of the judges (see esp. Judg. 1—3).[15]

Contemporary Significance

DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY. Dwight L. Moody understood the value of delegating responsibility, saying, "I'd rather get ten men to do the job than to do the job of ten men."[16] Because Moses was running a nation, he had to delegate in all kinds of ways, but this was not always easy for him. Jethro found him trying to do the job of ten men and urged him to appoint judges, which he did (Ex. 18:13—26). The Lord found him crushed by the burden of leading the people and instructed him to choose seventy elders, which he also did (Num. 11).

H. Finzel lists several reasons why it is difficult for leaders to delegate: fear of losing authority, fear of work being done poorly, fear of work being done better, unwillingness to take the necessary time, fear of depending on others, and lack of training and positive experience.[17]

Moses was not jealous for his own authority or afraid that others could do things better than he could (see Num. 11:29). Nor would this former prince of Egypt have lacked training. However, Moses was concerned for God to maintain authority (e.g., 16:5—11), and he was conscientious, knowing that the stakes involved in cooperation with the divine will were high. So when it came to matters of crucial importance, it is not surprising that he would have some reservations about depending on others, especially when even his own brother let him and the Lord down by making a golden calf at Sinai (Ex. 32).

The way a leader should supervise those who follow him or her depends, of course, on their levels of motivation, interest, and skill.[18] P. Hersey and K. Blanchard present a model of situational leadership involving four styles of supervision, which are to be applied according to the readiness of the followers. Fully "delegating" is best for people who are able and willing or confident. If they are able but unwilling or insecure, it may be necessary for a leader to be "participating" with them in getting a job done. "Selling" people on doing a job through dialogue and clarification to support their motivation and commitment is helpful if they are unable but willing or confident. For those with low ability/skill and willingness, strongly "telling" people what to do, whether they like it or not, is the approach that works.[19]

If we don't feel comfortable with the strong way God and Moses ordered the Israelites to do things *or else*, we should keep in mind that these people had just come out of slavery. In many areas of life, a lot of them had low interest, motivation, and skill, so they needed the "telling" approach. Even if we are well motivated, highly skilled, and therefore ready for someone to lead us by "delegating," we can still learn a lot from prescriptive passages of the Pentateuch. Formulation of messages as law in this part of the Bible is part of the leadership style and does not invalidate the messages themselves as "legalistic."

Although Moses was cautious about delegating some tasks, one of his greatest strengths was the fact that he believed in his people more than they believed in themselves.

> It's easy to have faith in people who have already proved themselves. It's much tougher to believe in people *before* they have proved themselves. But that is the key to motivating people to reach their potential. You have to believe in them first, before they become successful, and sometimes before they even believe in themselves. French writer and moralist Joseph Joubert said, "No one can give faith unless he has faith. It is the persuaded who persuade." You need faith in others before you can persuade them to believe in themselves.[20]

Theodore Roosevelt said: "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."[21] Finzel agrees that an effective leader does not micromanage or make decisions behind the backs of workers. He tells of a boss who gave a new employee a challenging problem to work on, but when the young man had toiled long and hard to come up with an impressive report, the boss simply said "Looks good, Sam … but we've decided to take another approach with that project." The boss failed to give him the authority, freedom, and respect that should have gone with the assignment. Nor did he bother to check up on how Sam was doing.[22]

That was not Moses' style. When he assigned a job, he delegated the authority necessary to accomplish it. He did not overmanage by hovering over and interfering with his subordinates, but with his respect for the responsibility of others, he expected and demanded that tasks be done right for the sake of God and Israel (e.g., Lev. 10:16—18, Num. 31:14—18).

When Christ was about to leave his earthly ministry in order to commence his priestly ministry in heaven, he commissioned his followers in Matt. 28:18—20:

> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Finzel draws attention to the fact that Jesus “promised to follow up on that delegation by His presence: ‘Surely I am with you always.’ He is going to hold His followers accountable, but He also intends to encourage them along the way. Excellent practice of delegation!”[23]

The messages and styles of Moses and Jesus teach us both the message and method of our mission. Bound for our promised Paradise, we are not to hoard tasks or the authority that goes with them, but to pass them on as Christ multiplies empowerment the way he did the loaves and fish (cf. Matt. 14, Mark 6, Luke 9).

1. See R. de Vaux, “Le pays de Canaan,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 23—30, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 501—2, M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy* (AB 5, New York: Doubleday, 1991), 174—75.

2. The only other instances of *nw’* in the Pentateuch are in Num. 30, referring to a father or husband restraining a daughter or wife by annulling her privilege and obligation to fulfill a vow (30:5, 8, 11).

3. Levine, *Numbers 21—36,* 489—90.

4. Scolnic, “Theme and Context in Biblical Lists,” 137.

5. J. N. Griffith, *Looking Up* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1993), 31.

6. For detailed discussion, including comparison with other biblical passages regarding the Israelite itinerary, see Scolnic, “Theme and Context,” 112—241.

7. For identifications of locations named in the biblical text, see, e.g., Cole, *Numbers,* 518—28, with a helpful table comparing Pentateuchal itineraries and identifying locations if possible, Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* 627—33, Levine, *Numbers 21—36,* 514—22, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 278—82.

8. C. R. Krahmalkov, “Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence,” *BAR* 20 (1994): 58, cf. 57.

9. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 83.

10. On difficulties fitting the accounts of Numbers and Deuteronomy

into a single, coherent picture, cf. ibid., 164, 281.

11. On these boundaries, see Cole, *Numbers*, 532—38, with comparison between boundary and territorial lists in Num. 34, Josh. 14—19, and Ezek. 47, Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 639—42, Levine, *Numbers 21—36,* 532—36, Milgrom, *Numbers,* 284—87.

12. Judg. 9:57, 1 Sam. 25:39, 2 Sam. 1:16, 1 Kings 2:32—33, 44, 8:32, 2 Chron. 6:23. Abimelech's punishment literally came down on his head in the form of an upper millstone (Judg. 9:53, 56). In Obad. 15 the talionic formula, "As you have done, it will be done to you" (cf. Lev. 24:19, Deut. 19:19, Judg. 1:7, 15:11), parallels "your deeds will return upon your own head." Since R. Yaron has found the same pattern of expression in the Egyptian "Judicial Papyrus of Turin" from the reign of Rameses IV, he suggests that it is a kind of fixed formula ("A Ramessid Parallel to 1 K ii 33, 44—45," *VT* 8 [1958]: 432—33). See Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 16 regarding "The mysterious Azazel."

13. K. Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" transl. T. Trapp, in J. Crenshaw, ed., *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (IRT 4, Philadelphia/London: Fortress/SPCK, 1983), 60—82.

14. Ibid., 75—78.

15. Cf. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes,* 19—20, 24—25, 27—30.

16. D. L. Moody, cited by H. Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1994), 100.

17. Ibid., 99—101.

18. Ibid., 108—9.

19. P. Hersey and K. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources,* 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 170—94.

20. J. C. Maxwell and J. Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 67.

21. T. Roosevelt, cited by Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes,* 101.

22. Ibid., 103—5.

23. Ibid., 106.

Numbers 35—36

On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, the
Lord said to Moses, 2“Command the Israelites to give the Levites
towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And
give them pas-turelands around the towns. 3Then they will have towns
to live in and pasturelands for their cattle, flocks and all their other
livestock.

4“The pasturelands around the towns that you give the Levites will
extend out fifteen hundred feet from the town wall. 5outside the town,
measure three thousand feet on the east side, three thousand on the
south side, three thousand on the west and three thousand on the north,
with the town in the center. They will have this area as pastureland for
the towns.

6“Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to
which a person who has killed someone may flee. In addition, give
them forty-two other towns. 7In all you must give the Levites forty-
eight towns, together with their pasture-lands. 8The towns you give the
Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in
proportion to the inheritance of each tribe: Take many towns from a
tribe that has many, but few from one that has few.”

9Then the Lord said to Moses: 10“Speak to the Israelites and say to
them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, “select some towns to
be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone
accidentally may flee. 12They will be places of refuge from the
avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he
stands trial before the assembly. 13These six towns you give will be
your cities of refuge. 14Give three on this side of the Jordan and three
in Canaan as cities of refuge. 15These six towns will be a place of

refuge for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.

16“'If a man strikes someone with an iron object so that he dies, he is a murderer, the murderer shall be put to death. 17or if anyone has a stone in his hand that could kill, and he strikes someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 18Or if anyone has a wooden object in his hand that could kill, and he hits someone so that he dies, he is a murderer, the murderer shall be put to death. 19The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when he meets him, he shall put him to death. 20If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at him intentionally so that he dies 21or if in hostility he hits him with his fist so that he dies, that person shall be put to death, he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

22“'But if without hostility someone suddenly shoves another or throws something at him unintentionally 23or, without seeing him, drops a stone on him that could kill him, and he dies, then since he was not his enemy and he did not intend to harm him, 24the assembly must judge between him and the avenger of blood according to these regulations. 25The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil.

26“'But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled 27and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. 28The accused must stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest, only after the death of the high priest may he return to his own property.

29“'These are to be legal requirements for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live.

30“'Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

31“'Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.

32“'Do not accept a ransom for anyone who has fled to a city of
refuge and so allow him to go back and live on his own land before the
death of the high priest.
33“'Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the
land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has
been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34Do not defile
the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell
among the Israelites.'”
36:1The family heads of the clan of Gilead son of Makir, the son of
Manasseh, who were from the clans of the descendants of Joseph,
came and spoke before Moses and the leaders, the heads of the
Israelite families. 2They said, “When the LORD commanded my lord to
give the land as an inheritance to the Israelites by lot, he ordered you
to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters.
3Now suppose they marry men from other Israelite tribes, then their
inheritance will be taken from our ancestral inheritance and added to
that of the tribe they marry into. And so part of the inheritance allotted
to us will be taken away. 4When the Year of Jubilee for the Israelites
comes, their inheritance will be added to that of the tribe into which
they marry, and their property will be taken from the tribal inheritance
of our forefathers.”
5Then at the LORD’S command Moses gave this order to the
Israelites: “What the tribe of the descendants of Joseph is saying is
right. 6This is what the LORD commands for Zelophehad’s daughters:
They may marry anyone they please as long as they marry within the
tribal clan of their father. 7No inheritance in Israel is to pass from tribe
to tribe, for every Israelite shall keep the tribal land inherited from his
forefathers. 8Every daughter who inherits land in any Israelite tribe
must marry someone in her father’s tribal clan, so that every Israelite
will possess the inheritance of his fathers. 9No inheritance may pass
from tribe to tribe, for each Israelite tribe is to keep the land it
inherits.”
10So Zelophehad’s daughters did as the LORD commanded Moses.
“Zelophehad’s daughters—Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah
—married their cousins on their father’s side. 12They married within
the clans of the descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their
inheritance remained in their father’s clan and tribe.

[13]These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.

Original Meaning

TOWNS FOR LEVITES AND FOR REFUGE. Because the Levites are to receive tithes instead of territory (18:20—24, cf. 26:62), they will not have a part in the division of the Promised Land (ch. 34). Nevertheless, they do need to live somewhere. So chapter 35 instructs the Israelite tribes to give the Levites forty-eight towns distributed throughout their territories, surrounded by pasture lands for their animals (35:1—8).[1] Spreading out the Levite ministers of the Lord in this way will help to maintain the religious unity of the nation.

Six of the Levite towns, three on each side of the Jordan River, are to have special legal status as places of asylum/refuge to which any person (Israelite or alien) who has inadvertently killed someone can flee (35:6, 9—15). This plan will make it possible for a manslayer to receive a fair trial without being lynched by an avenger *(go'el,* kinsman as "redeemer/avenger") from the family of the one whom he has killed (35:12, cf. Deut. 19, Josh. 20).

Either of two criteria for what we call "first-degree murder," however, disqualifies a killer from asylum, so that capital punishment is to be administered by the avenger (Num. 35:16—21): (1) if death occurs by striking with a hard object of metal (iron), hand-held stone, or a hand-held object of wood that is capable of functioning as a deadly weapon (35:16—18), (2) if death is caused by shoving someone, throwing something at him/her, or punching that is motivated by hostile intention (35:20—21a). Unintentional manslaughter, for which the killer is eligible for protection at a city of refuge, lacks both of the factors just described (35:22—25).

Once an Israelite killer runs to a town of refuge, the community will take him and judge between him (as defendant) and the "avenger of blood" (representing the deceased) according to the criteria in this legislation (35:24). Undoubtedly the bulk of the debate centers on questions of intent that require witnesses to testify regarding the history of the relationship between the killer and the one slain. If the community judges the accused guilty of capital murder, he is to be put to death (Deut. 19:12—by the avenger). But if he is acquitted, the community is to return him to the city of refuge. Only by staying there will he enjoy legal immunity to the avenger until the high priest dies, after which he is free to return home (Num. 35:25—28).

Numbers 35 concludes with injunctions for safeguarding justice and preventing corruption (vv. 29—34). (1) Establishing capital murder requires more than one witness. So a single grudge-bearer cannot abuse the judicial system to destroy another person. (2) No ransom *(koper)* can save any condemned murderer from the death penalty. Thus, wealth or power cannot subvert equal opportunity punishment. (3) Temporary exile to a city of refuge is mandatory for accidentally taking a human life, and no ransom can enable a manslayer to return home before the death of the high priest.

In support of the law that a murderer must die (35:31), 35:33—34 explains that blood(shed)/murder pollutes (Hiphil of hnp) and defiles (Piel of *tm')* the land where the Lord dwells among his people (cf. Gen. 4:10—12). This is a serious problem because his holiness is incompatible with impurity (cf. Lev. 7:20—21). Unremedied, defilement of the land may ultimately lead to exile (cf. Lev. 18:28). It can only be expiated/purged (Pual of *kpr)* through the blood of the person who shed the blood (Num. 35:33).

Second Samuel 21 shows that the agricultural consequences of bloodguilt could be devastating. A three-year famine resulted from bloodguilt incurred by Saul when he unjustly slew the Gibeonites (21:1). Only after David authorized the Gibeonites to make expiation *(kipper,* 21:3) by putting some of Saul's descendants to death did God answer prayer for the land.

Female inheritance and marriage. Numbers 36 consists of a postscript to 27:1—8, where the Lord allowed the daughters of Zelophehad, a Manassite descended from Gilead, to inherit his property. The heads of the clan of Gilead, to which Zelophehad belonged, detected a potential problem: If Zelophehad's daughters marry men from another tribe, they will thereby join that tribe and take Zelophehad's property with them, thereby diminishing the allotted territory of Gilead (36:1—3). The Jubilee release, which applies to real estate transferred by sale (cf. Lev. 25) but not by inheritance or marriage, will change nothing. They and their property will have been permanently alienated from Gilead (Num. 36:4).[2]

The Lord has a simple solution. An heiress will be required to marry within her father's clan so that her property will stay in the family (36:6—9). The daughters of Zelophehad comply (36:10—12), and that is the end of the story. We can hope that they lived happily ever after.

In keeping with this gentle resolution, which reminds us of the compliance report setting the standard for faithfulness at the beginning of the book (1:54), Numbers concludes quietly with a simple summary: "These are the commands and regulations the Lord gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho" (36:13).

Bridging Contexts

DEGREES OF MURDER. The Decalogue commands: "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13, NIV). The verb here is *rsh* (Qal), which refers to wrongful taking of another person's life, not to killing in general. The familiar King James Version, "Thou shalt not kill," is misleadingly broad.

> As a commandment, the prohibition only has in view the willful act of taking another's life. It makes no sense to prohibit accidents. Willful killing is not defined solely by the intent to kill, however, since an attack with the will to harm that inadvertently kills a person is treated as murder in Israelite law. This means that the prohibition against killing actually covers lesser crimes as well, that is, any act of violence against another person that might result in death.[3]

The commandment prohibits killing on one's own initiative and authority, including suicide. It does not rule out killing animals for food or serving as God's agents for administering capital punishment. Under the Israelite theocracy, capital punishment could be delivered corporately through holy war (see comments on Num. 31).

In Numbers 35, *rsh* appears in the usual sense of murder (Qal participle = "murderer") in verses 16—19, 21, 31. However, in this chapter the same word is also used more broadly of an accused killer, including an unintentional manslayer, who has yet to be judged as guilty or innocent of first-degree homicide (vv. 6, 11, 12, 25). The warning in verses 26—28 that such an accused person is only safe from the avenger inside a city of refuge applies both before and after the trial. The text continues to call him a *roseah* ("murderer") in view of the accusation, without making the obvious distinction that if he is judged innocent, he is not really a murderer.

In chapter 35 the Qal of *rsh* also refers to justifiable capital punishment carried out by an avenger of blood on an unintentional manslayer who leaves his city of refuge (35:27) or by a court on a convicted first-degree murderer (35:30). This does not mean that such punishment is regarded as culpable homicide, 35:27 qualifies that an avenger who does this has no "blood" (i.e., bloodguilt). It

appears that the term *rsh* is chosen because capital punishment redresses a murder or manslaughter that has already occurred.[4]

Redeemer/avenger. An ancient Israelite kinsman of a slain person, acting in the legal capacity of a*go'el* (Qal participle of *g'l,* "redeemer/avenger") has the right and responsibility to avenge the death on behalf of the victim and his clan (Num. 35, Deut. 19), even if the murderer and victim belong to the same family (cf. 2 Sam. 14).

A *goM* is not required to weigh possible guilt or innocence, but simply acts without asking questions, likely under the highly motivating influence of hot rage (cf. Deut. 19:6). So it is up to an unintentional manslayer to flee beyond his reach. By instructing the killer to leave the territory where the tragedy has occurred and by avoiding conflict of interest, not attempting to require grieving relatives to protect the killer, the Pentateuchal legislation regarding manslaughter realistically recognizes human nature in order to prevent lynchings.

A *goM* is one who represents the interests of his relative, whether that relative is dead or alive. For example, a person who wrongs another must make restitution to that party (Num. 5:7), but if this is impossible, presumably because the wronged person has died, the restitution goes to the *go'el* if there is one (5:8). In Leviticus 25:25, a*go'el* may redeem ($g^{J}l$, i.e., buy back) the ancestral land that a poor relative has been constrained to sell (cf. Ruth 4).

The numerous biblical references to God as *go'el* ("Redeemer"), especially through the latter part of the book of Isaiah,[5] emphasize that the Lord is the great Kinsman, who bears responsibility for his weaker human "relatives." He is strong to defend the cause of his people (Jer. 50:34, Prov. 23:11), to deliver them from harm (Gen. 48:16) and bondage (Ex. 6:6, 15:13), and to avenge for them (Deut. 32:35, Rom. 12:19, Heb. 10:30, Rev. 6:10—11). Escaping from God is impossible (Ps. 139:7—12), so the guilty can run, but they cannot hide from a divine "all points bulletin." However, because the Lord is also a fair Judge (96:10, 13), the innocent need not flee from him as an innocent Israelite must flee from a human *go'el.*

An ancient Israelite *go'el* could avenge blood, but not restore the life that was lost. The divine Kinsman not only avenges the blood of his people, he redeems their lives from the pit of death (cf. Ps. 103:4). As their Creator, he can restore them to life (e.g., Dan. 12:1—3, 1 Cor. 15:51—54, 1 Thess. 4:13— 18). So with him as their Kinsman, it is of no eternal consequence that they die, as long as their divine Redeemer lives (Job 19:25—27).

Release at death. An unintentional manslayer was free to leave a city of refuge only when the high priest died (Num. 35:25, 28). Why? Although the

killer was not guilty of first-degree murder, he had committed the inadvertent/accidental (35:11) offense of manslaughter. A purification offering of an animal could remedy other kinds of inadvertent faults (Lev. 4), but not manslaughter, because it took the life of a human being. Only the life of another person could suffice, and only a priest was authorized to bear the culpability of others (cf. Ex. 28:38, Lev. 10:17). However, instead of calling for legal/ritual slaughter of a priest in place of the accused manslayer, the Lord accepted the natural death of the high priest as satisfying the demand of justice.

In the New Testament, Christ is the heavenly high priest (Heb. 7—10), but his expiatory death on behalf of sinners was not a natural one. Bearing human sin as Priest and then dying for that sin as sacrificial Victim (e.g., 7:27, 9:12, 14—15, 26, 28, 10:5—14),[6] he has united in himself the roles by which we are set free from culpability so that we are free to go “home.”

Contemporary Significance

THE BIBLE AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT. In their *Ethics for a Brave New World,* J. S. and P. D. Feinberg conveniently summarize biblical arguments by modern opponents to capital punishment. I will dialogue with these arguments by quoting the Feinbergs and then responding.

> Opponents of the death penalty emphasize the fact that the Law of Christ is love. Scripture requires believers to love and serve their neighbors (cf. Matt 22:37—40, 25:31—46, 1 John 3:18, 4:12, 20). Moreover, believers must love their enemies, not execute them (Matt 5:43—44). Revenge is forbidden (Rom 12:17—19, 1 Pet 3:8—9). Forgiveness of those who offend us is enjoined. In responding to *lex talionis,* Jesus explicitly replaced retribution with the principle of reconciliation (Matt 5:23—24). These considerations totally rule out capital punishment.[7]

True, God's law is love. But his love has always included justice as well as mercy. Is it loving to merely incarcerate a predatory murderer, rapist, or child molester and later let him/her out on parole? It depends on whose interest we have in mind—that of the criminal, the victim, or potential future victims. Mercy to one can be decidedly unloving to another.

It is true that Christ commanded love for enemies, forgiveness, and reconciliation rather than retaliation. These principles are already in the Old Testament. For example, Leviticus 19:18 says: "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself." However, a few chapters later, the same book stipulates: "If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death" (24:17). Is this a contradiction? Not if we realize that chapter 19 is addressed to individuals but chapter 24 is for the community. God's people were not to seek revenge, but a murderer was condemned to execution by the civil community. The latter was not revenge, it was divinely mandated retributive justice.

In Matthew 5:38—42, Christ was speaking to individuals, some of whom were undoubtedly inclined to seize on the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation: eye for an eye, etc.) as justification for vengeance, especially against the Romans.

Although they may have thought they should control society, they did not possess civil judicial power. Neither did the New Testament church have civil power to inflict physical punishment. The only executions in the context of the church were of Ananias and Sapphira, slain by God himself (Acts 5). However, Romans 13 makes clear that even outside theocracy, God mandates state civil power to maintain order in society by restraining and punishing wrongdoers (see further below).

The next argument against capital punishment, as summarized by the Feinbergs, is based on God's mercy for biblical murderers:

> Another objection appeals to biblical examples of mercy. Cain, David, and Moses murdered intentionally, not accidentally, but God extended them mercy. David and Moses went on to live fruitful and productive lives of service for the Lord. Given these examples of divine mercy and human rehabilitation, how can we withhold mercy to those convicted of capital crimes? At minimum, these biblical examples show that even if capital punishment is permissible, it is not mandatory.[8]

Granted, the Lord had the right to grant mercy, and he knew what he was doing. He also chose to end the lives of large numbers of people, including all but eight of the antedeluvian population (Gen. 7), the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), Korah and his associates (Num. 16), Uzzah (2 Sam. 6), and so on. Since human society lacks God's insight with regard to individual cases, how does it know which example of his to follow? The answer is: It doesn't, and God has never expected it to. Even in ancient Israel, with its access to divine oracles (e.g., Urim and Thummim, worn by the high priest), the Lord allowed for no equivocation or alternative: "Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death" (Num. 35:31).

Even merciful divine pardon does not erase all consequences of cause and effect. Cain was banished to a life of wandering (Gen. 4). Moses was forced to flee into exile (Ex. 2). David lost his first son born to Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:14—23) and experienced a chain of subsequent troubles in his household (foretold by Nathan in 12:10—12) that claimed the lives of three additional sons: Amnon (ch. 13), Absalom (ch. 18), and (after David's death) Adonijah (1 Kings 2). In accordance with David's response to Nathan's parable, he paid fourfold (cf. 2 Sam. 12:6).

> In the NT, mercy is also present. The best-known case is recorded in John

> 8:1—11. A woman caught in the very act of adultery was brought to Jesus. The law demanded her execution (Lev 20:10, Deut 22:21, 24). However, Jesus instructed those without sin to cast the first stone. When the accusers left, Jesus told her that he did not condemn her, she should go and sin no more. Opponents of the death penalty stress the importance of this passage. It is the one case where Jesus spoke to the applicability of the death penalty, and he did not demand it.[9]

Jesus' opponents placed this case before him as a "trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him" (John 8:6). On what basis could they accuse him? If his verdict was death in accordance with the law of Moses, they could report him to the Romans, who had revoked the right of the Jews to administer capital punishment.[10] But if Jesus escaped that side of the trap by ruling that the woman should not die, his enemies could then accuse him of not upholding the law of Moses. Of course, they were not following Moses either: Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 stipulate that both parties to adultery must die. If they had witnesses, who were necessary for a capital case (17:6, 19:15), why didn't they bring the woman's paramour to Jesus as well? The contrived judicial drama did not present a straightforward question of Jesus' approach to biblical law. That was not its purpose.

Jesus did not deny that the woman was guilty of adultery and worthy of death. He only said: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Justice demanded that the accusers be more righteous than the accused. Since the accusers were unwilling to commit themselves to this level of moral responsibility, at the risk of scrutiny and condemnation against themselves, the execution was simply short-circuited when they all went away (8:9). Then Jesus, who had not been a witness, forgave her as a divine act of grace (8:11), equivalent to his divine forgiveness of a paralytic (Mark 2:5—12) and to God's mercy in the cases of Cain, Moses, and David. This passage is not evidence against the administration of capital punishment by the state.

> Another biblical argument against the death penalty invokes OT judicial procedure. David Llewellyn notes five key aspects of the Mosaic application of the death penalty. These procedures were meant to prevent the miscarriage of justice. If Mosaic standards were used today, the death penalty as currently practiced would be outlawed.
>
> The five procedural items are: 1) Absolute certainty of guilt was required for conviction (Deut 17:4). This is stronger than the American rule of proof beyond reasonable doubt. 2) Conviction required the testimony of more

> than one witness (Deut 19:15, Num 35:30). Given the need for certain proof, most likely those witnesses were to be eyewitnesses. Moreover, since stoning to death was to be done by the witnesses (Deut 17:7), one might suspect reticence to cast the first stone unless one was an eyewitness. 3) To discourage attempts to "frame" someone for a crime, witnesses who committed perjury in capital cases were themselves to be executed (Deut 19:16, 19). 4) In difficult cases the verdict was deferred to judicial experts (Deut 17:8, 9). This differs from the American system in which jurors who often do not understand law must decide anyway. 5) If the verdict was "guilty," the death penalty was mandatory (Lev 27:29, Num 35:31). Lighter sentences could not be adopted. This made discriminatory application of the death penalty impossible, i.e., all people, regardless of social standing, etc., were treated equal if deemed guilty.
>
> With these regulations, undoubtedly fewer people were convicted under the Mosaic system than under others like the American system. Opponents of the death penalty maintain that if God really wants the death penalty enforced, it ought to be administered as God required. Until then, it should be outlawed.[11]

Here the question is not whether capital punishment per se for certain kinds of crimes is morally defensible, but whether the procedure leading up to condemnation is just. With regard to biblical capital punishment for adultery, we can add a sixth safeguard: *Both* parties were to be executed (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:22—24).

The importance of executing both parties to adultery can be illustrated by a case in Nigeria. In the village of Kurami in the northern state of Katsina, where adultery is now a capital crime under *Shari'a* (strict Islamic law), Amina Lawal gave birth late in 2001 to a baby girl after leaving her second husband and having an affair with Yahaya Mohammed. Because *Shari'a* requires four reliable witnesses to the sexual act and apparently there were none, Mohammed could not be convicted. However, a judge ruled that the baby was sufficient proof of Lawal's guilt. Under Islamic law it is typical for only the female party to be punished for adultery. Lawal was sentenced to be buried in the ground up to her chest and stoned to death as soon as she weaned her daughter.

Although Lawal lost one appeal, the national Nigerian government pledged support for another appeal process.[12] Her conviction was overturned in 2003 by an Islamic appeals court in Katsina.[13]

In the context of the ancient Israelite theocracy, for which the biblical

penalties were instituted, a woman with Lawal's circumstances could not be executed. Deuteronomy 22:22 says: "If a man *is found sleeping* with another man's wife, *both the man who slept with her* and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel" (emphasis supplied, cf. Lev. 20:10). Unless a woman is supposed to be a virgin bride (Deut. 22:13—21) or the Lord himself convicts her through the suspected adulteress ritual (Num. 5:11—31), the couple must be caught in the act and the man must also die. If there is insufficient evidence to convict the man, the woman must not be stoned either. The fact that she gets pregnant is not enough.

Granted that Lawal had a baby, is it really Mohammed's? The only way to absolutely prove that illicit intercourse occurred is to catch a couple *in flagrante delicto,* as in Deuteronomy. DNA testing can prove paternity, but where DNA testing is available, so is artificial insemination.

As Llewellyn shows (see above), the biblical protocol achieves fairness with remarkable simplicity, from which our bloated and bogged-down judicial system would do well to learn. One suspects that the ancient Israelites could achieve more justice in a morning than our multimillion dollar trials accomplish in months with teams of lawyers. Imagine how many billions of dollars taxpayers could save, even if we subsidize the retraining of some lawyers for alternate careers!

Does judicial dysfunction warrant a moratorium on our capital punishment for murder, pending reforms that include elimination of racial discrimination? In unclear cases, yes, just as an ancient Israelite capital case was to be dropped unless there were at least two witnesses (Deut. 17:6, 19:15). But why should society foster injustice and disregard for the lives of others by abdicating its God-given right to permanently purge itself of predatory individuals whose guilt is clearly proven? For clear proof in some cases, especially those that involve rape, we now have DNA testing as a reliable witness that was not accessible to the Israelites.

> Opponents of the death penalty know that the preceding arguments cannot negate clear biblical prescriptions to enforce the death penalty. Genesis 9 and Romans 13 are often understood to provide that mandate, but opponents think those passages do not prove the case.
>
> As to Genesis 9, opponents complain that supporters of the death penalty focus on verse 6, but ignore the injunctions in verses 4—5. Verse 4 apparently prohibits eating rare meat, and verse 5 requires the execution of animals who kill humans. No one demands enforcement of those injunctions, but, then, consistency dictates ignoring the commands about

capital punishment.[14]

The prohibition to eat meat from which the blood is drained out at the time of slaughter (Gen. 9:4) is enforced with the divinely administered penalty of "cutting off" (see comments on Lev. 17:10—14). So it is not up to human society to enforce this law. Similarly, God says that *he* will hold an animal accountable for taking human life (Gen. 9:5a). However, while he also holds human beings accountable for murder (9:5b), he delegates administration of capital punishment to other human beings (9:6).

Genesis 9:6 reads: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man." The motive clause ("for in the image …") is highly significant: "Every human person is sacred, the bearer of the image of God, and to kill a person is to violate God. Having taken life, the killer forfeits the right to life, and the human community is authorized to impose the death penalty."[15]

Today some argue that capital punishment for murder reflects a worldview in which life is cheap, but the Bible indicates exactly the opposite: Life is so valuable that a murderer who takes it cannot pay for his crime except with his own life (Num. 35:31). This approach to murder as an absolute crime contrasts with other ancient Near Eastern legal systems,[16] which permitted composition/ransom for homicide.[17]

> Second, the statements in Gen 9:5—6 may be predictive, not prescriptive. That is, rather than demanding the execution of murderers, the passage may merely predict that those who take life can expect to be killed in return. The Hebrew does not decide the issue, for the verbal form in verses 5—6 could be either imperative or indicative. Because of the implications of taking this passage as a mandate, there must be clearer evidence that it is a command than this.[18]

In Genesis 9, the Lord is setting up the post-Flood world order. While he now permits eating meat (v. 3), he prohibits ingesting the blood (v. 4). Here the context dictates that *lo'* + imperfect verb be taken as the usual way to express a categorical prohibition: "You must not (ever) eat…." What sense would it make for God to merely predict that people will not eat meat with the blood still in it? Verse 5 states what God commits himself to do: hold animals and humans accountable for human life. Then comes verse 6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." Human instrumentality is the way in

which God systematically holds murderers accountable. Whether the sense is imperative or indicative, this is the divinely mandated order of things.

> Finally, both Genesis 9 and the Mosaic Law require that execution of murderers be done by a blood relative of the victim. In fact, Gen 9:5 designates the victim's brother to do it. This is surely a far cry from the state having the right of capital punishment. Thus, Genesis 9 cannot apply today.[19]

Genesis 9:5 says that God will demand an accounting from each human being regarding the life of his "brother" (meaning a fellow human being). This does not mean that only a victim's brother can administer capital punishment.

In Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19, the kinsman of a murder victim, called the "avenger [lit., redeemer] of blood," functioned on behalf of the victim's clan as policeman and executioner responsible for apprehending the culprit and putting him to death. This was within the framework of tribal society. Israel was not a state in the modern sense, and it lacked a professional law enforcement infrastructure. If it was legitimate for a kinsman with vested interests to implement society's mandate, we could argue that it would be even more legitimate today for agents of society who are not relatives of victims to carry out the same penalty.

> What about Romans 13? Opponents of the death penalty think it neither mandates nor warrants the death penalty. The key phrase is, "it does not bear the sword for nothing" (v. 4). Does this reference to the state bearing the sword mandate or even allow capital punishment? Opponents deny that it does. They argue that while the sword clearly refers to the state's authority to punish evildoers, it does not demand that the state punish by execution. Under the Roman Empire most crimes were not punishable by death, but the sword was still an appropriate symbol for Rome's authority to punish criminals. Also, Rome did not execute by the sword, capital offenses were punished by crucifixion.[20]

Why would a New Testament writer demand whether or not the Roman empire should punish by execution, as if such a demand would be heard? Here Paul's point is that because God mandates the state to preserve basic law and order, Christians should "submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience" (Rom. 13:5). As for the idea that Rome did not execute by the sword, how did Paul himself lose his head?[21] He

was spared from the much worse fate of crucifixion because he was a Roman citizen and it was forbidden to crucify such citizens.

The bottom line of our discussion is that the Bible gives society the authority to administer capital punishment for some kinds of clearly established crimes, such as murder. If some people oppose any form of capital punishment, that is their right, but their position does not harmonize with that of the Bible.

It is important to keep in mind that although a person who justly suffers capital punishment has forfeited the present life, it is possible for him or her to enjoy the promised Paradise to come. When a dying criminal on the cross next to Jesus expressed his belief and repentance by saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," Jesus promised that the man would be with him in paradise (Luke 23:42—43).

1. Regarding the layout, see J. Milgrom, "The Levitic Town: An Exercise in Realistic Planning," *JJS* 33 (1982): 185—88, idem, *Numbers,* 502—4.

2. Sakenfeld, "Zelophehad's Daughters," 45—46, R. Gane, "The Laws of the Seventh and Fiftieth Years," *JAGNES* 1 (1990): 10.

3. Patrick, *Old Testament Law,* 53.

4. Compare the fact that words from the root *hf* can refer either to sin (e.g., Lev. 4:27—28) or to purification from evil (8:15) by a purification offering *(hatta't,* 8:14).

5. Isa. 41:14, 43:14, 44:6, 24, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 26, 54:5, 8, 59:20, 60:16, 63:16, see also Ps. 19:14, 78:35.

6. Augustine wrote: "He who alone was free among the dead, for he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again, was for us both Victor and Victim in your sight, and it was because he was the Victim that he was also the Victor. In your sight he was for us both Priest and Sacrifice, and it was because he was the Sacrifice that he was also the Priest. By being your Son, yet serving you, he freed us from servitude and made us your sons" *(Confessions,* transl. R. Pine-Coffin [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1992], 10.43 [p. 251]).

7. J. S. Feinberg and P. D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Cross-way, 1993), 138.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. According to tradition, the right of the Sanhedrin to impose capital punishment was annulled by the Romans forty years before the Second

Temple was destroyed *(b. Sanh.* 41a, i.e., during the time of Jesus' ministry).

11. Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics,* 138—39.

12. For Lawal's story, see S. Robinson, "Casting Stones," *Time* (Sept. 2, 2002): 36—37.

13. "Notebook: Milestones" page, *Time* (Oct. 6, 2003): 25.

14. Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics,* 139.

15. Patrick, *Old Testament Law,* 54.

16. See Bridging Contexts section of Lev. 20 regarding sexual offenses.

17. M. Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in M. Haran, ed., *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 13—20, idem, "More Reflections on Biblical Criminal Law," in S. Japhet, ed., *Studies in Bible* (ScrHier 31, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 1—17 (responding to criticism by B. Jackson, "Reflections on Biblical Criminal Law," *JJS* 24 [1973]: 8—38).

18. Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics,* 139.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. According to Eusebius *(Church History* 2.25), Paul was beheaded.

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The NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers
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