

The Holiness of God in Sacrificial Worship in Leviticus

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A. Introduction to Leviticus

1. Its relevance

- Student from New Guinea about Lutherans in the USA: “For them nothing is sacred any longer.”
- Loss of a sense of holiness in the western world: effect of the Enlightenment
- Sense of contamination from our bodies: see Mary Douglas
- Modern obsession with pollution and natural purity
 - Infection as impurity: germs as dirty in modern thought
 - Racial purity: Hitler
 - Ecological movement
- Modern contempt for ritual

2. Its use

- Lack of use in the church: only Lev 19:1, 2, 15-18 for Proper 25 in the three year lectionary
- Importance of Leviticus for Jews: centre of the Hebrew Bible
- Usefulness in our mission to animists, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus

3. Liturgical contents: Israel’s involvement in God’s service

- Word of God: 36 speeches by God

- Address to Moses as cult founder and mediator (32x)
- Address to Moses and Aaron (11:1; 13:1; 14:33)
- One address to Aaron (10:8-11)
- Seventeen as teaching for the people (1:2; 4:1; 7:23, 25; 11:1; 12:1; 15:2; 18:2; 20:1; 23:2, 10, 24, 34; 24:2; 25:2; 27:2) and the whole assembly (19:2)
- Five as teaching for the priests (6:9, 25; 21:1; 22:2, 17)
- Two as teaching for the priests and the people (17:2; 22:18)
- One as teaching for Aaron (21:19)
- God's institution of the divine service by his word
 - Divine mandate: legislation as God's gift of the divine service to Israel
 - Divine authorisation and empowerment
- Purpose of divine institution
 - Liturgical "enactment" of God's word: see the use of the formula of compliance with God's word in 8:4, 36; 16:34; 21:24; 23:44; 24:23 and the formula of execution of God's word in 8:9, 13, 17, 21, 29; 9:7, 10, 21.
 - Cooperation with God in enacting his word
 - Sanctification of the service by his word in 20:7-8:
Consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes and do (enact) them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you (pl).
 - Avoidance of the occult practices of pagan rituals
- Terms for God's word
 - Ritual "statute" (*huqqah*) on what is to be done (eg. 3:17)
 - Ritual "ordinance" (*mishpat*) on how the service is to be done (eg. 5:10; 9:16)
 - Ritual "teaching" (*torah*) on right enactment (eg. 6:9, 14, 25)
 - Ritual "commandment/mandate" (*mitzvah*) that authorises a right enactment in the divine service (eg. 22:31; 26:3, 14, 15;

27:34) or prohibits a wrong enactment (eg. 4:2, 13, 22, 27).

See the summary in 27:34 about the whole book

- Ritual “provision” (*hoq*) of food from the offerings for the priests (eg. 6:17, 18, 22; 7:34)
- Shift in location for God’s speaking in 1:1
 - from Mt Sinai in Exodus
 - to the tabernacle
- Narrative context: sacred procession of the Israelites with God from Egypt to Canaan
 - Part of ongoing story: historical origin
 - ❖ Events at Mt Sinai: Exodus 19 to Numbers 10
 - ❖ After the building of the tabernacle
 - Continuation of narrative in three places
 - ❖ Ordination of priests and inauguration of the divine service in 8-9 followed by the death of Aaron’s sons for desecration in 10
 - ❖ Institution of the Day of Atonement in response to the death of Aaron’s sons in 16
 - ❖ Stoning of a man for blaspheming the holy name in 24:10-23

B. Theological Framework of Leviticus

1. The theology of holiness as the key to Leviticus:

See God’s word to Moses in 19:2: *Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, “You will be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”*

- Self-declaration and self-presentation as intrinsically holy: *I the Lord your God am holy.*

- See also 11:44-45; 20:7, 26 as well as the remarks about the priests in 21:6-8, and the claim that the priests are “holiness/a holy thing/ a holy place” in 21:6
 - Holiness as a liturgical term
 - No definition of holiness as it has to do with God’s divine being
- Call to be holy in 19:2
 - Promise: *You will be holy*
 - Demand: *You shall be holy*
 - Statement of fact: *You are holy*
- Ongoing source of holiness: *I am the Lord, who sanctifies*
 - Holy people: 20:8; also 21:8; 22:32
 - Holy things: 21:23; also 22:16
 - Holy priests: 22:9; also 21:15
- Sanctification by God’s name and his word in 22:31-33:

I am the Lord; you therefore shall keep my commandments by enacting them. I am the Lord; you shall therefore not desecrate my holy name, so that I may show myself as holy among the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.

 - My holy name: the name of my holiness, the name of my sanctuary, my sanctuary name (cf. 20:3; 22:2)
 - Connection of the name with the sanctuary (20:3) and the offerings (22:2)
 - LXX for 22:2: the name of my sanctified things
 - Desecration of the Lord’s name by its ritual misuse (19:12; 20:3; 21:6)
- Sanctification by divinely instituted rites in 20:7-8: *You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my statutes and enact them; I am the Lord, who makes you holy.*
- God’s consecrating presence in the divine service in Ex 29:43: *There (at the altar) I will meet with the children of Israel, so that it (Israel or altar)*

may be consecrated by my glory.

- Liturgical participation in God's holiness
- Reception of it through holy meals
- Reception of God's holiness by contact with the most holy things
 - Altar of burnt offering: Ex 29:37
 - Anointing oil: Ex 30:29
 - Meat from sin and guilt offerings: Lev 6:17-18, 27
 - Bread from grain offerings: Lev 6:17-18
- The use of the formula for sanctification by physical touch:
whoever/whatever touches x will become holy.
 - The altar for burnt offering (Ex 29:37) as well as the ark, the table for the bread, the lampstand, the altar for incense and the laver (Ex 30:26-29)
 - The bread from the grain offerings of the priests and the meat from the sin and guilt offerings (6:14-18, 27)
- Distinction in 21:22
 - Most holy things that sanctify (means of grace)
 - Holy things/offerings that are sanctified by them (5:15, 16; 12:4; 19:8; 21:22; 22:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16)
- Degrees of holiness from proximity to God
 - Holy of Holies: Holy Place: courtyard: camp
 - High priest: priests: Levites: lay Israelites
- God's wrath at the desecration of his holiness
 - Death from desecration by the performance of strange/alien/unauthorised service: case of Nadab and Abihu in 10:1-3
 - Death from the individual desecration by defilement: 15:31
 - Exile from corporate desecration: 20:22-26
- Result of sanctification: safe access to God's blessings

2. God's mandate to Aaron and the priests in 10: 10-11:

Then the Lord said to Aaron, 'You and your sons are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.'

- The holy: what is divine and in God's presence (the tabernacle, the meat of a sacrificed animal)
- The common: what is permitted for human use in the order of creation (sex, ordinary food)
- The unclean: forbidden as disorderly, unnatural and perverted in the order of creation (sickness, homosexuality)
- The clean: the proper, natural condition of something common (bread, sexual intercourse in marriage)

3. Impurity as the opposite of holiness

- Powers rather than concepts
- Impurity as the opposite of God's holiness
- Impurity as a life-denying and destructive power
- Incompatibility with God's holiness
 - Darkness by light
 - Petrol by fire
- Problem of impurity: 15:31: *Thus you shall separate the Israelites from their impurity, so that they do not die in their impurity when they defile my tabernacle that is in their midst.*
 - Death from defilement of God's holiness: wrath rather than grace
 - Separation for safe access to God's holy presence: avoidance of desecration and death (7:20-21)
 - Exclusion of unclean people from participation in the divine service (12:5)

- Defilement by contact with impurity
- Spiritual power of impurity from desecration of holiness
- No creature as intrinsically clean or unclean
- Impurity as an unnatural power: association with disorder and death
- Demons as the source of impurity (?) ► unclean spirits in NT

4. Three domains from God's holy presence on earth

- The clean holy domain
 - Order of salvation: rule by the gospel
 - Luther: kingdom of God's right hand
- The clean common domain
 - Order of creation: rule by the law
 - Luther: kingdom of God's hand
- The unclean common domain
 - Domain of darkness: disorder and chaos
 - Dominion of pagan gods and the occult

God's Presence



Sanctification Purification

Holy	Clean	Common
and	and	and
clean	common	unclean



Desecration Defilement



Evil Powers

5. Four changes: states of being before God

- Desecration: transference of something holy into a common state (redemption of firstborn son)
- Defilement: transference of something clean into an unclean state (touching a corpse)
- Purification: transference of something unclean into a clean state (washing after menstruation)
- Sanctification: the transference of something clean into a holy state (presentation of offering to God)

6. Three kinds of ritual impurity

- Physical disorder (sickness, irregular menstruation)
- Moral disorder (adultery, murder)
- Religious disorder: occult use (menstrual blood, semen, corpses, pork)

7. Degrees of impurity

- Mild forms
 - Sexual emission: until evening
 - Menstruation: seven days
- Worst forms: excommunication or death in 20
 - Sacrifice of children to Molech for prosperity
 - Consulting mediums and spiritists
 - Cursing parents
 - Sexual abuses: adultery, incest, sodomy, bestiality
- Difference of focus in 18 and 20
 - God's life-giving ordinances and statutes for all humanity: 18:2-5

- God's penalties for the desecration of his holiness by his holy people in the Promised Land: 20:22-26
- Self-pollution and the pollution of the holy land by four kinds of impurity
 - Sexual impurity
 - Child sacrifice to Molech ► idolatry
 - Murder
 - Spiritism (20:27; cf. 19:26, 31)
- Requirement: greater purity for those who are closer to God

8. Purity as a liturgical rather than social or moral category in Leviticus

- Origin in God rather in certain classes of people as is common in most cultures
- Impurity of all Israelites including the priests
 - Connection with sin: unclean environment
 - Cleansing of minor impurities by washing
 - Cleansing of serious impurities: blood
- Need for continual purification
- Rules for purity and impurity
 - Admission to God's presence: safe access
 - Inclusion in the holy congregation
 - Maintenance of holy status
- Unclean food as forbidden for liturgical use
- Use of the Ten Commandments for lay diagnosis of impurity and desecration

9. Use of theology of purity and holiness

- Connection of physical life with the divine service
 - Tabernacle ► home
 - Holy meals ► common meals
 - God's work ► human work
 - God's blessing ► procreation

- Demand for purity from the Lord’s holy presence with His people in His land
- Sanctuary as bridgehead for holiness: home, land and world
- Call to “do guard duty”
 - People for clean land: 18:30
 - Priests for holy sanctuary: 8:35; 22:9
- Importance of the body and its location

C. Structure of Leviticus

1. Legislation for offerings and removal of impurity: 1-15

a. The manual of offerings for the divine service

- Voluntary God-pleasing offerings (1:1-3:17)
 - Burnt offerings
 - Grain offerings
 - Peace offerings
- Mandatory offerings for atonement (4:1-6:7)
 - Sin offerings
 - Guilt offerings
- Consumption of holy food (6:8-7:38)
 - The public burnt offering
 - Most holy bread from the daily grain offering
 - Most holy meat from the sin offering
 - Most holy meat from the guilt offering
 - Holy meat from the peace offering

b. The inauguration of the divine service

- Consecration of the priests (8)
- Inaugural performance of the divine service (9)
- Penalty and remedy or desecration (10)

c. The manual for purity

- Clean and unclean meat (11)

- Impurity from childbirth (12)
- Impurity from skin diseases and fungus in a house (13-14)
- Impurity from genital discharges (15)

2. Purification on Day of Atonement: 16

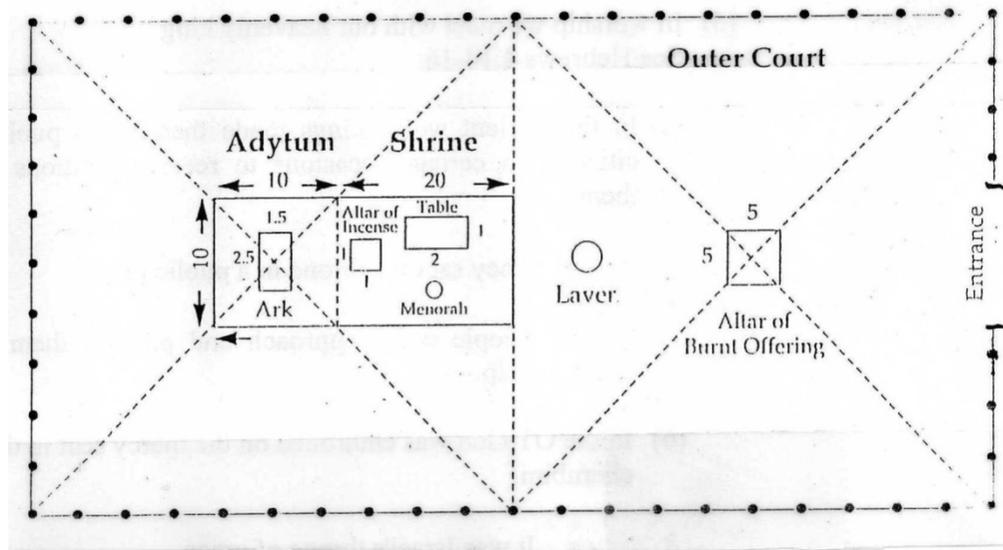
3. Participation in God's holiness: 17-27

- a. The use and abuse of blood from animals (17)
- b. Avoidance of sexual impurity: life-preserving ordinances for humanity (18)
- c. The holiness code: participation in God's holiness (19-26)
 - Holiness of the congregation (19-20)
 - Holiness of the priests (21-22)
 - Holy times for worship: liturgical calendar (23)
 - Holy things: lamp stand, show bread, the Lord's name (24)
 - Holy land: sabbatical and jubilee years (25)
 - Results of right or wrong worship
 - Blessings from respect for holy things (26:1-13)
 - Penalties for desecration (26:14-39)
 - Restoration after repentance (26:40-46)
- d. An appendix on the treatment of votive offerings and tithes (27)

D. Theology of Worship

1. The Daily Sacrifice

- Its location at the tabernacle



- The arrangement of the tabernacle in three zones
 - The Holy of Holies as God's private quarters: throne made up of the mercy seat, the cherubim as the throne-bearers and the ark as the footstool
 - The Holy Place as God's audience room for priests with the altar for incense, the lampstand and the table for the showbread.
 - The courtyard with the altar for burnt offering as the place for public assembly and meeting
- The terms for the tabernacle
 - The LORD's earthly *dwelling* place for him to *dwell* with His people(*mishkan*: 8:10;15:31; 26:11)
 - The LORD's *sanctuary* (*miqdash* 12:4; 16:33; 20:3; 26:2)
 - The *Tent of Meeting* (*'ohel mo'ed*) where the LORD *met* with Moses to speak with him (1:1)
- The function of the daily service as the public offering
 - Public service for all Israel
 - Combination of three offerings: basic food stuff for Israelite household
 - ❖ Burnt offering: male lamb

- ❖ Grain offering: flour, olive oil and incense
 - ❖ Drink offering: wine
- Times: morning and evening
- Order of enactment
 - ❖ Splashing of blood on altar: atonement
 - ❖ Burning of incense in the Holy Place: intercession
 - ❖ Burning of lamb and oil soaked flour with its incense: meeting
 - ❖ Aaronic benediction: blessing
- Meal: eating holy food by the priests on duty
- Framework for other offerings
 - ❖ Additional offerings for festive occasions
 - ❖ Family offerings on the three pilgrim festivals : peace offerings and grain offerings
 - ❖ Offerings for pastoral needs: sin and guilt offerings
- The inauguration of the divine service in chapter 9
 - Purpose of the service in 9:6: *This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you.*
 - ❖ Climax of the story of God's glory
 - ❖ Egypt (Ex 13:20-22)
 - ❖ Red Sea (Ex 14:19-25)
 - ❖ Desert (Ex 16:6-10)
 - ❖ Top of Mt Sinai (Ex 19:16-19 and 24:15-18)
 - ❖ Face of Moses (Ex 34:29-35)
 - ❖ Tabernacle (Ex 40: 34-38)
 - ❖ Daily service
 - Manifestation as fire on the altar: 9:24
 - ❖ Origin: the Holy Of Holies
 - ❖ Source of the perpetual fire on the altar (6:8-13)
 - ❖ Use for the burning of incense in the Holy Place

- ❖ Use for the production of sweet smelling smoke as pleasing aroma for and from the LORD
- ❖ Technical term *hiqtir*: sending up in smoke (9:10, 13, 14, 17, 20)
- ❖ Association with the perpetual fire on the altar and the pillar of smoke from the daily burnt offering
 - Connection with the benediction and jubilation: 9:23
 - Daily theophany in the divine service: see the common idiom of *appearing* before the Lord
- God's acceptance of his people in the divine service
 - Function of the incense and the burnt offering: cloud of fragrant smoke
 - Formula of approval: *a pleasing aroma to the Lord*
 - Formula of acceptance: *for your acceptance* (1:3; 19:5; 22:19, 20)
- God's meeting with the congregation in Exodus 29:42-45:

For generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord where I will meet you (priests) and speak to you (Aaron); there also I will meet with the children of Israel so that it may be sanctified by my glory; I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar and sanctify Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God.

 - God's meeting with the priests and the Israelites at the altar rather than in the Holy of Holies
 - God's sanctification of the priests and the Israelites by His presence through the most holy things
 - God's dwelling among them in the tabernacle as his dwelling place to act as their God

2. The Personal Offerings of the Israelite Families

- The personal offerings as an addition to the national offerings

- Presentation by the families at the three pilgrim festivals
- Peace offering with offering of bread and wine
- Provision of food for holy meal as God's guests (Deut 12:17-18; 14:22-23)
- Presentation after the public burnt offering in the middle of the day
- Placement on the lamb for daily burnt offering
- The offering of grain offering with olive oil and frankincense: 2:1-16
 - Offering of first ripe grain (2:14) and the first processed produce (2:12) as rent for the land
 - Grain as flour or bread without yeast
 - Smoking up of the memorial portion with incense
 - Leftover flour or bread from cereal offering for priests as most holy food for them
 - Consecration of other bread as holy food
 - Provision of holy bread from the Lord's table from tithes: 27:30-33
- Peace offerings of domesticated animals: 3:1-17 and 7:28-34
 - Rare consumption of meat in ordinary life except on special occasions
 - Offering of firstlings: first born male animals from flock and herd (Deut 15:19-20)
 - ❖ Sheep, goats, cattle
 - ❖ Animal without defect
 - Three kinds of peace offerings
 - ❖ Thank offerings: offerings with song of thanksgiving
 - ❖ Votive offerings: offerings to fulfil a promise
 - ❖ Free will offerings
 - Slaughter by head of the household
 - Disposal of blood by the priest

- Presentation of breast with fat and right thigh
 - ❖ Right thigh: officiating priest
 - ❖ Breast: shared among the priests on duty
- Burning of fat with kidneys and liver lobe
- Eating of holy meat as Lord's guests
 - ❖ Family with guests: Levites and poor
 - ❖ Families of priests: food from God's table
- Theological purpose in 19:5: God's approval and acceptance of person with offering

3. Impurity and the Need for Atonement

- The need for atonement: 10:1-3
 - Problem: how can unclean people meet with their holy God without desecrating his holiness?
 - ❖ Impurity ► desecration
 - ❖ Desecration ► wrath
 - ❖ Wrath ► death: see the proverbial cases of Nadab and Abihu in 10:1-3 and of the sons of Korah in Num 16-17
 - Treatment of impurity
 - ❖ Avoidance of contact with unclean things
 - ❖ Washing for minor impurities
 - ❖ Atonement for major impurities
 - ❖ Cleansing from impurity: forgiveness
- Basic sense of *kipphapher*: to perform the rite of atonement by which the Lord cleanses people and things from impurity
 - Propitiation: God's grace rather than His wrath against impurity
 - Expiation: cleansing and release from sin
- The use of blood for atonement in 17:11: *The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have given it to you to make atonement for*

your lives upon the altar, because it is the blood that makes atonement by means of the life.

- Drinking of blood in pagan rites for the lifepower of animals
- Reservation of blood for atonement
- Institution of rite of atonement
- Application of blood on the altar
- Ransom of person's life by the blood of the animal
- Cleansing and forgiveness through the blood
- Prevention of desecration by defilement
- Regular rite of atonement: splashing of blood against the sides of the altar
 - Burnt offering
 - Peace offering
- Rite of atonement with a corporate sin offering for purification of the high priest and congregation
 - Two young bulls
 - Disposal of blood
 - ❖ Sprinkling 7x against the curtain
 - ❖ Smearing of horns of incense altar
 - ❖ Pouring on base of altar
 - Disposal of meat
 - ❖ Fat burnt on altar
 - ❖ Incineration of all meat outside camp
- Rite of atonement with sin offering for the purification of a lay person (4:27-35)
 - Male goat for tribal leader
 - Female goat or lamb for lay person
 - Disposal of blood
 - ❖ Smearing on horns of the altar
 - ❖ Pouring at base of the altar

- Disposal of meat
 - ❖ Fat burnt on the altar
 - ❖ Eating of most holy meat by priest
- Atonement on the Annual Day of Atonement
 - Fasting by people
 - Sin offerings
 - ❖ Male bull for priests
 - ❖ Male goat for people
 - ❖ Male scapegoat
 - Rite of atonement for the Holy of Holies
 - ❖ Sprinkling of bull's blood: once on the mercy seat and seven times on the floor (8^x)
 - ❖ Sprinkling of goat's blood: once on the mercy seat and seven times on the floor (8^x)
 - Rite of atonement for the Holy Place
 - ❖ Bull's blood: smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the floor (11^x)
 - ❖ Goat's blood: smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the floor (11^x)
 - Rite for the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard
 - ❖ Mixing of most holy blood from bull and goat
 - ❖ Smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the altar (11^x)
 - Bearing of iniquity by scapegoat
 - ❖ Levites for people: Num 18:23
 - ❖ Priests for Levites: Num 18:1
 - ❖ High priest for congregation: Ex 28:38
 - ❖ Scapegoat for sins of Israel: Lev 16:22
 - The theological purpose of the ritual enactment

- ❖ Atonement for all the sins of the Israelites (16:34)
- ❖ Cleansing the altar for burnt offering (16:19) and the Israelites from impurity (16:30)
- ❖ Reconsecration of altar for burnt offering for the new year: 16:19

E. Living with a Holy God

1. Reception of blessings through right worship: 26

- Basic requirements: 26:1-3
 - Negative: avoidance of idolatry
 - Positive: respect for holy day and holy place
- Four kinds of blessing: 26:4-12
 - Regular rainfall with good harvests
 - Peace with security and victory
 - Growth of families with abundant food
 - God's residence and service of them
- Result: freedom to walk as his royal people: 26:13
- Repentance and restoration: 26:40-45

2. Living as holy people in God's holy presence: 19:1-18

- Call to share God's holiness: 19:1-2
- Common participation in God's holiness: 19:3-10
 - Respect for parents as holy people
 - Observance of Sabbath
 - Avoidance of idols: worst desecration
 - Respect for holy offerings
- Rule of justice and love in God's holy community: 19:11-18
- Avoidance of defilement

- Ethics of holiness
 - ❖ Israel as holy community
 - ❖ Priestly fraternity
 - ❖ Communal participation in God's holiness
 - ❖ Common holiness ► justice and solidarity in love

Further Reading

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