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LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOD IN THE PENTATEUCH

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY
JARED D. GREER
SUMMER 2024

For my loving and supportive parents, Mark and Peggy Greer. I love learning about God because your blood is in my veins.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why study blood and its theology in the Pentateuch? It does not take long for students of the Bible to recognize the overwhelming ubiquity of blood within its pages; and much of this rhetoric harkens back to conceptions of blood that are introduced in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The anonymous author of the book of Hebrews constructs a theology of the Christian atonement that is largely informed by certain theological understandings of the priestly cult in the Pentateuch. He famously states, "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22 NIV). [1] Consequently, many Christians today continue to associate biblical blood primarily with atonement. While such a conception is certainly warranted, it has wrongly become a totalizing framework through which many interpret *all* language of blood and sacrifice in the Pentateuch.[2] The conceptions of blood that are active within the Pentateuch are rather multifarious, and nuance is required if one is to attain a more adequate understanding of its function and theological significance.

The shed blood of Abel cries out to God from the ground (Gen 4:10). YHWH prohibits the consumption of blood, and institutes vengeance for bloodguilt (Gen 9:4–6; Lev 17:10–11; Deut. 19:1–13). YHWH's various covenants with humankind are ratified by blood, whether the blood of circumcision (Exod 4:24–26) or the blood of a sacrificial offering (Exod 24:4–10). YHWH turns the water of Egypt into blood during the Plague Narrative (Exod 7:14–25), and when the firstborn of Egypt are destroyed at the climax of the Plague Narrative, the blood of the

[1] Unless stated otherwise, all subsequent biblical quotations will come from the NIV translation.

[2] See Gary A. Anderson, *That I May Dwell Among Them: Incarnation and Atonement in the Tabernacle Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023), 89–90. Anderson rightly notes, "If we review legislation for sacrifice found in Leviticus 1–7, we will discover that atonement plays a surprisingly small role in the priestly cult. Only two of these seven chapters address the concept directly. And even when this happens, the discussion centers on inadvertent sins, a small subset of a much larger category."

paschal lamb functions as a sign of protection for the Israelite households (Exod 12:13). Within Israel's cult, the blood of a ram serves to consecrate new priests (Exod 29:31–46; Lev 8), discharges of blood (e.g., menstruation) render individuals ritually impure (Lev 15), and the blood of the animal sacrifices accomplishes *kipper* (Lev 17:11). These are but a few examples of the ways in which blood is variously portrayed in the Pentateuch; they underscore not only the polysemy of blood within the Torah, but also the paradoxical nature of its function. How is it that blood functions in some contexts as a pollutant (e.g., menstruation in Lev 15) and in other contexts as a purificant (e.g., expiatory rituals in Leviticus)? These kinds of questions have catalyzed the present study.

My intentions are twofold. On the one hand, I will simply analyze the major contexts in which blood (*dām*) is accorded particular significance by the authors of the Pentateuch, in order to better apprehend various sociocultural understandings of blood that inform these ancient texts. This task, given its cultural emphasis, is anthropological in nature. On the other hand, I will attempt to construct from this information a more robust and comprehensive theology of blood in the Pentateuch. To accomplish this, I will identify the various theological contexts in which these conceptions of blood are operative; and from within these contexts, I will accentuate various theological commitments that undergird the text *as it exists in its final form*.

It is obvious that any sociocultural study of blood in the Pentateuch must attend to various historical- and source-critical concerns; to neglect the concern for history and provenance in such a study would be imprudent. Consequently, when anthropology is in view, this paper may approach the text diachronically. Nevertheless, anthropology is not the final goal of the present study; theology is. Anthropology will be the focus only insofar as it helps us to better understand the ways in which blood is being conceptualized *theologically*. Recognizing

that it is ultimately the final and canonical form of the biblical text that is authoritative for the church today, Brevard Childs famously propounded a 'canonical' interpretive approach to theology. According to Childs, such an approach respects the text in its "present canonical context," and does not "disregard the crucial theological intention of the tradents of the tradition" or "isolate a text's meaning from its reception."[3] Childs never believed that a canonical approach should be strictly synchronic; he merely wanted readers to respect "distinct and independent points of origin while at the same time recognizing the larger thematic or theological unity that the final editors intended."[4]

In the present study, I will follow a canonical approach. While I plan to exegete relevant passages with an eye toward various historical and anthropological concerns, I will ultimately locate them within certain theological frameworks and trajectories that are present in the text as it exists in its final and canonical form. In his book *Created Equal*, Joshua Berman offers a helpful distinction between the study of "Israelite religion" (the real historical practice and development of religion in Israel) and "Biblical religion" (how religion is portrayed and even idealized in the final form of the biblical text).[5] While "Israelite religion" is certainly a peripheral concern for the present study, that concern is ultimately subordinated to the more pressing concern of "Biblical religion" and its theology. One advantage of prioritizing the canon is that we are able to engage with a text that is "a given, relatively fixed, and concrete entity."[6] Another

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[3] Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 11.

[4] Anderson, *That I May Dwell*, 147. In context, Anderson is discussing Childs' canonical approach and applying it to the story of the golden calf, which clearly interrupts the Tabernacle Narrative (Exod 32–34).

[5] Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2008), 7.

[6] Ibid., 9.

advantage is that we are able to engage with the text as it exists in its most theologically authoritative form.

In many ways, the impetus for this study is the work of Matthew Lynch in *Portraying Violence in the Hebrew Bible*. In this book, Lynch presents a taxonomy of "'grammars' within which biblical rhetoric about the problem of violence operated." He defines 'grammars' as "culturally formed patterns of representation with which biblical writers address their subject matter." Lynch is therefore concerned with "the web of associated linguistic expressions, metaphors, and themes that coalesce around recognized portrayals of violence."[7] In a similar way, the present study is largely concerned with exploring culturally formed portrayals of blood in the Pentateuch. The two principal contexts in which blood appears in the Pentateuch are 1) Israel's cult, and 2) instances of bloodshed. Therefore, our study will center primarily around these two contexts. Moreover, because the cult is a particularly complex conceptual apparatus, it will be accorded an exceptional degree of attention. Even so, I plan to devote at least brief attention to the more peculiar and peripheral contexts, as well.

[7] Matthew J. Lynch, *Portraying Violence in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary and Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2020), 8–10.

Chapter 2: Blood in the Priestly System and Sacrificial Atonement

2.1 General Introduction to the Priestly System[8]

The highly technical and detailed nature of Israel's priestly legislation has caused many to overlook its narrative significance within the macrostructure of the Pentateuch. Long, intricate manuals that detail how to construct a tabernacle (Exod 25-40) or offer a cultic sacrifice (Lev 1-7) may not have the same kind of intrigue as stories about Egyptian plagues and miraculous sea crossings (Exod 7-14). Indeed, many daily Bible reading plans have gone to the book of Leviticus to die. Fortunately, however, several scholars are working diligently to make the logic, theology, and narrative significance of Leviticus once again penetrable and exciting for students of the Bible.[9]

The introduction of sin into the cosmos (Gen 3) resulted in an exile from the Edenic temple, and a loss of access to the indwelling presence of God.[10] In the Pentateuch, God seeks to remedy this problem by establishing a new sanctuary, a new earthly abode: the tabernacle. In so doing, YHWH opens a way for humankind to dwell in the divine Presence. For this reason, L.

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[8] Source-critical scholarship of the Hebrew Bible has from its inception recognized the Priestly origin of various writings in the Pentateuch; these writings have been attributed to a Priestly source/school called P. In recent decades, however, scholars have convincingly argued that P materials were later redacted by a Holiness school called H. In the book of Leviticus, P is likely responsible for much of the material in Lev 1–16, whereas Lev 17–26 is likely original to H. For the earliest references to a P source, see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, 2nd edition (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883). For evidence that H is a later redaction of P, see Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995); and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 1319–64.

[9] See, for instance, Andrew Rillera, *Lamb of the Free: Recovering the Varied Sacrificial Understandings of Jesus's Death* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024); L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); and Mark W. Scarlata, *A Journey Through the World of Leviticus: Holiness, Sacrifice, and the Rock Badger* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

[10] The 'Fall' in Genesis 3 will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Michael Morales rightly argues that "Leviticus is the very heart of the Pentateuch's narrative."[11] In the book of Leviticus, God makes a way for the created to live with the Creator again.

Nevertheless, as Mark Boda notes, "…the danger of having the presence of the Creator in the midst of the created is that creaturely imperfection endangers…the Creator's presence among the community."[12] For this reason, the hieratic system through which God chooses to re-establish fellowship with His people is both complex and hazardous. Moreover, this system often appears illogical to modern sensibilities—or, at the very least, culturally removed from modern readers.

Before we enter into a discussion of the cultic significance of blood, then, it would behoove us to contextualize our study with a thorough analysis of the broader priestly worldview and its theological substructure. In what follows, I will parse out fundamental priestly categories (e.g., "holy," "common," "pure," "impure"); elucidate the priestly conceptions of sin and consequence; and contemplate the nature and significance of 'Scripturalized' cultic rituals. This will lay the foundation necessary for our discussion of sacrifice and atonement, in which I will consider the function and theological significance of ritual blood manipulation.

Phillip Jenson has rightly noted that Leviticus 10:10 is a key text for parsing out ritual categories in Leviticus.[13] In this verse, the priests are told, "You are to distinguish [*bāḏal*] between the holy [*qāḏôš*] and the common [*ḥōl*] and between the unclean [*ṭāmēʾ*] and the clean [*ṭāhôr*]" (NRSVUE). Jenson, following the earlier work of scholars like James Barr, suggests from this text that there are four *distinct* ritual categories: holy, common/profane, unclean, and

[11] Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 39.

[12] Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Siphrut 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 50–52.

[13] Phillip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOTSup 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992; repr. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2021), 43.

clean. He also suggests that these categories are intentionally presented according to a chiastic, parallel structure. He thus deduces that 'the holy' is closely aligned with 'the clean,' and 'the common' is closely aligned with 'the unclean.'[14]

Gordon Wenham offers a contrasting position. Rather than reading this verse as chiastic in structure, Wenham suggests that the latter two categories are actually subcategories of the second category ('common' [*ḥōl*]). In other words, what is *not* holy is common, and what is common can be either clean or unclean. Therefore, there are actually only three (not four) basic ritual states: holy, clean, and unclean.[15] Wenham summarizes his position thus: "Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean."[16] Jay Sklar rightly contends that Wenham's position is to be preferred, as it better harmonizes with the usage of *ḥōl* elsewhere in Scripture (cf. 1 Sam. 21:4-6 and Ezek. 48:15, where *ḥōl* clearly means 'common,' but not 'impure').[17] Mark Boda, synthesizing the work of Wenham, Jenson, and Sklar, has constructed a helpful visual for understanding basic ritual states and movements.[18] I have reproduced this visual below:

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[14] Ibid., 43–44.

[15] So Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 51.

[16] Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 19.

[17] Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 105n2.

[18] Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 52.

Table 2.1 – Basic Ritual States & Movements in Leviticus

<table>
<tr><td>Cause of Movement</td><td colspan="4">Priestly rituals: sacrifice, anointing, shaving, washing</td></tr>
<tr><td>Positive Movement</td><td colspan="2">To sanctify
←
קִדֵּשׁ</td><td colspan="2">To cleanse
←
טִהַר</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category</td><td>Holy
קָדוֹשׁ</td><td colspan="2">Clean
טָהוֹר</td><td>Unclean
טָמֵא</td></tr>
<tr><td>Negative Movement</td><td colspan="2">To profane
→
הִלֵּל</td><td colspan="2">To defile
→
טִמֵּא</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cause of Movement</td><td colspan="4">Human sin and impurity</td></tr>
</table>

It is clear that holiness is of great importance to the writers of Leviticus; but, as Baruch Levine submits, it ”is difficult to define or describe; it is a mysterious quality.”[19] Typically, it is interpreted as meaning something like “separate” or “set apart,” but Boda asserts that “this is a subsidiary meaning, not the primary meaning.”[20] He follows Jenson, who argues that ‘holy’ should be defined as “that which belongs to the sphere of God’s being or activity.”[21] This accords well with Levine’s understanding of biblical holiness, as Levine likewise argues that the concept is inextricably tied to the person and attributes of God.[22] Holiness in Leviticus, then, might “correspond to a claim of [divine] ownership, a statement of close association, or proximity to [God’s] cultic presence.”[23] In this light, it is easy to see how holiness has come to be associated with the notion of *separateness*. Sklar puts it this way: “In Leviticus, that which is

[19] Baruch Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation and Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 256.

[20] Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 51n5.

[21] Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 48.

[22] Levine, *Leviticus*, 256–257.

[23] Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 48.

holy is distinct because it has been *set aside* as belonging to the LORD, as though it were now stamped, 'This is the LORD's!'"[24] We might think of sanctification as the process by which someone/something that is 'common' receives this stamp of ownership.

Ritual purity is another primary concern of the priestly writers, as such impurity serves to profane and/or defile that which is holy and/or clean. Even so, it is important to note that ritual impurity is not necessarily rooted in moral wrongdoing.[25] One of the more complicated aspects of Leviticus is discerning the relationship between ritual purity and moral purity; this relationship will be discussed at more length below. For now, suffice it to say that in the Pentateuch, "ritual impurity is a state of being."[26] Not only are *people* categorized according to the various ritual states (holy, clean, unclean), but so too are *space*, *time*, and *food*. For instance, the Sabbath is holy *time*; the sanctuary is holy *space*; and certain *foods* are clean while others are unclean. Ritual categories "guide the community in understanding which ritual actions a person may (or may not) do or which ritual places a person may (or may not) go."[27] For example, an impure person with a defiling disease must live alone outside the camp until he/she is healed of the disease and made clean (Lev 13:45–46). Even today, this concept is at least marginally familiar to us, as similar societal regulations have been implemented in response to the COVID-19 crisis. While we recognize that contracting COVID-19 is not a morally culpable sin, we also recognize that the disease affects one's way of life and must be dealt with responsibly. A similar (though not identical) logic is discernible in Israel's ritual purity system.

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[24] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: A Discourse Analysis of the Hebrew Bible*, ZECOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 12. Emphasis mine.

[25] Ibid., 21.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 22.

Following the work of David P. Wright,[28] Sklar has further noted that ritual “impurities may be placed on a continuum between two poles: minor impurities and major impurities.”[29] These two poles are “determined based on the type of rite required for cleansing, the duration of the impurity, and the degree of its contagion.”[30] Perhaps the most striking justification for this kind of stratification is the fact that some impurities (major impurities) require sacrificial rectification (e.g., the parturient woman in Leviticus 12), whereas other impurities (minor impurities) require only waiting, washing, and/or bathing (e.g., the corpse-defiled person in Lev 11:24–28).

Sin, in the priestly corpus, is any violation of the laws of YHWH. Boda rightly notes that it “includes both action (commission) and inaction (omission).”[31] For instance, one can steal and/or deceive (Lev 6:2–3; a culpable sin of commission), and one can neglect his/her duty to testify on another’s behalf (Lev 5:1; a culpable sin of omission). In addition to these categorizations, sin in Leviticus can be further taxonomized as follows: 1) unintentional, 2) intentional but not (necessarily) high-handed, and 3) high-handed.[32] Numbers 15:27-31 clearly distinguishes between the first and third categories. In that text, a person who sins inadvertently (*ḇišg̱āg̱āh*) is given an opportunity for expiation by means of sacrifice, whereas a person who

[28] David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*, SBLDS 101 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 179–219.

[29] Jay Sklar, “Sin and Impurity: Atoned or Purified? Yes!” in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible*, ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffrey Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008), 26.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 53.

[32] Jay Sklar, “Sin and Atonement: Lessons from the Pentateuch,” *BBR* 22, no. 4 (2012): 485. A similar formulation is presented in Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 202–213; and in Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 53–54.

sins with a high-hand (i.e., defiantly; *bəyāḏ rāmāh*) is given no such opportunity. Nevertheless, passages like Lev 5:1, 6 and Lev 6:1–7 make it clear that there are certain *expiable* sins that are *intentional*, but not high-handed. For this reason, Sklar, Gane, and others have opted for the existence of this third distinct category.[33] In any case, Leviticus makes clear that *all* sin endangers the guilty party. Without some kind of mediation, a person guilty of sin might 1) be put to death (*mûṯ*, cf. Lev 20:9–16; 24:10–17), 2) be "cut off" from the Lord/community (*kāraṯ*, cf. Lev 20:3–5), and/or 3) "bear the guilt" of his/her sin (*nʾ ʿāwōn*, cf. Lev 19:8).[34]

How, then, should we understand the relationship between sin and ritual purity? Jonathan Klawans has offered perhaps the most popular and forceful case that there is a rigid distinction between ritual and moral impurity in the Bible. His basic position is that "in the Hebrew Bible, certain sins defile in a way that is altogether different from—but no less real than—the better-known bodily defilements delineated in Leviticus 11–15 and Numbers 19."[35] Consequently, "it is not sinful to be ritually impure, and ritual impurity does not result from sin."[36] While many scholars have come to agree with Klawans' basic distinction between ritual and moral purity (myself included, as evidenced above), his work has nevertheless warranted some criticism. Sklar, in reference to Klawans' work, notes that "by failing to make distinctions within the realms of ritual and moral purity, important similarities between the two realms are not identified."[37] In particular, Sklar observes that "major ritual impurities and inadvertent moral

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[33] Jay Sklar, "Sin and Atonement," 478–481. Gane, *Cult and Character*, 202–213.

[34] Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 55–58.

[35] Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2000), 41.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Sklar, *Sin*, 149.

impurities both require sacrificial atonement."[38] This points toward there being some kind of convergence between ritual and moral impurity—even if the two remain essentially distinct.

Sklar identifies several ways in which "the priestly literature understands sin and impurity to be closely related."[39] There are various texts in Leviticus that refer to sin as something that, like ritual impurity, pollutes or defiles (Lev 18:24–25a; 20:3); and more specifically, major ritual impurities and sins both appear to attach themselves to the sanctuary. According to Jacob Milgrom, "the Priestly source propounds a notion of impurity as a dynamic force, magnetic and malefic to the sphere of the sacred, attacking it not just by direct contact but from a distance."[40] This is primarily evidenced by the fact that the adytum needs to be purged on the Day of Atonement despite the fact that no one could have manually defiled it (because no one is permitted to enter the adytum throughout the year).[41] Impurities, whether ritual or moral, impose a threat not only upon individuals, but upon the sanctuary. This creates a dangerous impediment in the divine-human relationship, as it threatens the continuous presence of God in Israel's sanctuary. This explains why the rituals on the Day of Atonement are prescribed as a targeted response to *both* sin and impurity (Lev 16:16a).[42] All things considered, then, ritual impurity and sin are not identical, but they have similar practical out-workings—and, in the case of major ritual impurities, they are remedied in similar ways.

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[38] Ibid. Sklar also rightly criticizes Klawans for not identifying inadvertent sins as moral impurities, despite the fact that inadvertent sins also pollute (Lev 4:1–5:13).

[39] Sklar, "Sin and Impurity," 23–24.

[40] Jacob Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *RB* 83 (1976): 394.

[41] Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 394. See also Sklar, "Sin and Impurity," 26–27.

[42] Sklar, "Sin and Impurity," 23–24.

Though it may seem counterintuitive to modern sensibilities, the Priestly school teaches that ritual sacrifice is central to remedying the adverse effects of sin and impurity and achieving reconciliation. More specifically, it teaches that sacrificial blood has the capacity to purify and sanctify. To that end, we will now turn our attention to these textualized sacrificial rituals and consider what they reveal about the nature of atonement and, more specifically, the significance of blood.

2.2 Methodology for the Study of Cultic Rituals

From the outset, the study of ancient rituals is fraught with methodological difficulties. These must be addressed before we can properly discern the anthropological or theological significance of rituals (and more specifically, blood rites). In 1966, the anthropologist Mary Douglas changed the landscape of ritual studies with her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. In this book, Douglas argues that "separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience."[43] That is to say, primitive rituals operate according to "symbolic structures" and are largely concerned with establishing order where there is disorder, chaos, and "matter out of place."[44] Douglas attempts to penetrate the logic of this symbolic system, and often reaches plausible and compelling conclusions—though such conclusions are ultimately conjectural in nature. For instance, Douglas postulates that "swarming things," like worms, are deemed unclean in the book of Leviticus because of their association with "the realm of the

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[43] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (with a New Preface by the Author)*, Routledge Classics (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 5.

[44] Ibid., 6, 50.

grave, with death and chaos."[45]

Milgrom follows Douglas closely, and likewise argues for the importance of symbolism in the logic and procedures of Israel's cult. For instance, he attributes the uncleanness of scale disease, corpses, and genital discharges in Leviticus to their "common denominator," which he perceives to be *death*.[46] By this same logic, Milgrom posits that blood, as *life* (cf. Lev 17:11), is able to purge the sanctuary "by symbolically absorbing its impurities."[47] He calls this a "victory of life over death."[48] Jonathan Klawans is an even more recent advocate of this symbolic-communicative approach to ritual studies. While he does at times critique Douglas for over-simplifying the system which underlies ritual procedures, he nevertheless accepts her more general premise that rituals, particularly within the biblical Priestly corpus, are informed by symbolism.[49]

In 1992, however, Catherine Bell released an important book challenging the symbolic-communicative approach that had become pervasive in the field of ritual theory.[50] In the book, Bell offers as a salient critique of the symbolic-communicative approach "the fact that a distinction between technical practical and ritual symbolic activities often reflects categories rather alien to the peoples involved."[51] In the Priestly corpus of the Pentateuch, virtually no

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[45] Ibid. 70.

[46] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 46.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] For a better understanding of Klawans' view of symbolism in Israel's cult, see his more recent monograph on the topic: Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2010), Kindle edition.

[50] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1992).

[51] Ibid., 72.

interpretive comments are offered which indicate that rituals are to be understood symbolically.[52] Rather, these texts are, as Bell puts it, "technical practical" in nature; they are more concerned with practical instruction than with symbolic interpretation.

Working from Bell's theoretical foundations, Nancy Jay advocates for a different kind of ritual interpretation altogether—one that interprets ritual activities as indices rather than symbols.[53] While a symbol "is related to its object by convention," an index "is in existential relation to its object."[54] For instance, we understand that a green traffic light means "go"—but this is a merely conventional and thus symbolic meaning. There is nothing inherent in a green light that requires it to mean "go." By contrast, rising smoke indicates that there is a fire from which the smoke is rising. In this scenario, the smoke *indexes* the fire. Smoke does not communicate the existence of a fire through convention, but through an existential relationship to the fire. Jay argues that the interpretation of rituals as indices is to be preferred to older symbolic interpretations because indices, unlike symbols, "can be understood across cultural and linguistic boundaries."[55]

This theoretical framework, popularized by Bell and Jay, has deeply impacted the work of a number of biblical scholars—including but not limited to Saul Olyan, William Gilders, Christophe Nihan, and James Watts. In his book *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power*, Gilders follows Jay's interpretive approach closely, considering "how the 'matter of

[52] Leviticus 17:11 is perhaps the single exception to this. Nevertheless, this verse is fraught with interpretive difficulties. It will be discussed in more detail below.

[53] Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[54] Ibid., 6.

[55] Ibid.

fact,' existential relationship between an individual or object and the blood of a sacrificial animal points to and creates various types of relationships."[56] By circumventing questions about the symbolic meaning of blood rituals and highlighting their latent and 'indexical' functions instead, Gilders concludes that biblical rituals not only create structure and order in sacred space, but also establish and reinforce social status and identity. Christophe Nihan, who adopts Gilders' sociocultural approach in his study of rituals in Leviticus 4, reaches similar conclusions.[57] He posits that "the application of blood to various areas inside the sanctuary complex connects the guilty party with the deity, while establishing at the same time several basic distinctions and hierarchies at the social, ethical and ritual level."[58]

The scholars I have just mentioned have also gone to great lengths to emphasize the point that priestly rituals have been *textualized*—and thus, we are ultimately interpreting *texts* about rituals, not the rituals themselves. Nancy Jay avers that "meaning is not a simple and direct product of action itself, but a reflection upon it. And the act of reflection is always *another* act, socially situated in its own way."[59] Since every ritual is its own "socially situated" act, every ritual *text* is necessarily a separate, subsequent, "socially situated" act—and should therefore be interpreted on its own terms. As Roy Gane recognizes, "the ideal way to study [rituals] is by direct observation"—but we unfortunately only have access to *texts*, which do not "fully

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[56] William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 8.

[57] Christophe Nihan, "The Templization of Israel in Leviticus: Some Remarks on Blood Disposal and Kipper in Leviticus 4," in *Text, Time, and Temple: Literary, Historical and Ritual Studies in Leviticus*, ed. Francis Landy, Leigh M. Trevaskis, and Bryan D. Bibb, HBM 64 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 96–120.

[58] Ibid., 126.

[59] Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 8.

[capture] the ritual experience."[60] It is for this reason that Gilders suggests "interpreting a textually represented ritual requires attention to the text as well as to the ritual. Both must be interpreted."[61] As James Watts has often refrained, "texts are not rituals and rituals are not texts."[62]

But while these methodological insights have contributed much to the field of biblical studies, Yitzhaq Feder is correct to note that the profound skepticism they betray vis-à-vis the identification of ritual meaning is "exaggerated."[63] Moreover, sociocultural analysis does not need to be the exclusive approach to locating ritual meaning. Responding specifically to the work of Christophe Nihan, Christian Eberhart offers the following:

> …the sociocultural analysis of latent dimensions of meanings of blood rites is appealing and plausible in and of itself. However, it is no direct alternative to the one that is articulated in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, which is theological in nature. It is thus methodologically inappropriate to posit that the explicit interpretation in biblical texts of blood application rites (which utilizes theological concepts such as "atonement," "purification" from sin and impurity, or "consecration") must be abandoned because one sets out to devise a sociocultural interpretation that focuses on latent or implicit aspects (such as the creation of order, the indication of the status of ritual participants, or the connection of humans to the sanctuary). These interpretive approaches—not to mention historical or psychological ones—do not exclude each other. It is thus not appropriate to claim that one interpretive approach would be incorrect and another one correct. To the contrary, both are correct, albeit on different interpretive levels.[64]

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[60] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 4.

[61] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 9.

[62] See, for example, James W. Watts, "Texts Are Not Rituals, and Rituals Are Not Texts, with an Example from Leviticus 12," in *Text and Ritual in the Pentateuch: A Systematic and Comparative Approach*, ed. Christophe Nihan and Julia Rhyder (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021), 172–87.

[63] Yitzhaq Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning* (Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 151.

[64] Christian A. Eberhart, "To Atone or Not to Atone: Remarks on the Day of Atonement Rituals According to Leviticus 16 and the Meaning of Atonement" in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 210.

Eberhart submits that the biblical texts often already include "explicit interpretations" of ritualized activities (and more specifically, blood rites). The interpretations to which he refers are what scholars sometimes call 'goal formulas.' Roy Gane rightly notes that "a 'ritual' is an activity system with a special kind of goal."[65] It is "believed to *do* something that changes reality"[66]—and that intended change is often established in the 'goal formula(s)' of the ritual text. For example, in the excerpt above, Eberhart notes that blood rites in Leviticus typically have as their goal atonement, purification, and/or consecration—and these goals are explicitly assigned in the ritual texts (e.g., Lev 4:26; 5:10; 8:15, 34; 12:7; 16:16). Understanding the goal(s) of a ritual can help us better discern the instrumental efficacy of that ritual. Therefore, Gane often focuses on "isolating and closely examining the language of goals that are indicated by the biblical text."[67]

The goal-oriented approach taken by Eberhart and Gane may prove useful for our purposes. After all, the aim of this study is an understanding of the *theological* significance of blood; and by focusing on the (theological) goals made explicit in these ritual texts, we do well to prioritize theological inquiry. But more than that, the approach of Eberhart and Gane allows us to take seriously the dangers of 'gap-filling' (a primary concern of Bell, Jay, Gilders, etc.) without limiting ourselves to (nor abandoning) the "sociocultural analysis of latent dimensions of [meaning]."[68] Thus, I will adopt this goal-oriented approach in the analysis that follows.

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[65] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 14.

[66] Ibid., 15.

[67] Ibid., 24.

[68] Eberhart, "To Atone or Not to Atone," 210.

2.3 Sacrifice, Blood Manipulation, and Atonement

In the Priestly worldview, sacrifice is certainly a means of atoning for sin—and that will be addressed in due time. But it should be noted that atonement is only a secondary or even tertiary purpose for sacrifice in the Pentateuch. After receiving instructions for priestly ordination, Israel is prescribed an important daily offering called the *tāmîḏ* (Exodus 29:38–46). The *tāmîḏ* is to be offered as “a pleasing aroma, a food offering…to the LORD” (41). Furthermore, “the performance of this regular daily sacrifice is explicitly connected to the notion of the perpetual maintenance of the presence of God within the sanctuary.”[69] Thus Klawans: “It is not that the daily sacrifice undoes the damage done by grave transgression. Quite the contrary: grave transgression undoes what the daily sacrifice produces.”[70] Only two Levitical sacrifices (the purification offering and the guilt offering) are offered primarily for the sake of making atonement. Fundamentally, sacrifices in the Priestly corpus are gifts to God which invite His presence in the sanctuary.[71]

The Priestly writings prescribe several different kinds of sacrificial offerings, all of which are oriented ultimately toward establishing and/or maintaining communion with God. As was argued in 2.1, communion with God is the precise purpose of the sanctuary—which is why the Priestly writings are found at the heart of the Pentateuchal narrative. It is no coincidence that God’s initial command to build an altar and offer sacrifices is “immediately followed by the divine promise to be with [Israel] and bless them” (Exodus 20:22–24). Gary Anderson follows

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[69] Klawans, Jonathan. *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, Kindle Location 1113.

[70] Ibid., Kindle Location 1150.

[71] See, for example, Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 27–68; Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011) 94–101; and Scott Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice: A Historical and Theological Study* (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2022), 18–27.

many other scholars when he suggests “the tabernacle is a microcosm of the universe; it is the world in miniature…When God indwells the tabernacle, the goal of the created order has been reached.”[72] Scott Shauf has thus posited that sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible serves three main purposes: “to establish communion with God, to provide gifts to God, and to make atonement.”[73] In what follows, I will analyze each of the different kinds of sacrificial offerings prescribed in the Priestly writings, and consider the role that blood plays in each of them.

2.3.1 The ʿōlāh and Minḥāh Offerings

The first of the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus is the *ʿōlāh*, typically translated “burnt offering,” “whole burnt offering,” or “ascension offering.” In this rite, the offerer is required to bring an animal—whether a bull, a male goat, a male sheep, a turtledove, or a pigeon—to the entrance of the sanctuary. From here, the offerer lays a single hand on the animal’s head and then slaughters the animal. This is where blood is introduced. The priest brings the blood forward (*wəhiqrîḇû*) and then dashes it (*wəzārəqû*) around the sides of the altar of burnt offering, which is located in the courtyard in front of the Tent of Meeting. The blood is then drained into the ground via the gutters surrounding the altar. Meanwhile, the offerer skins the animal, dismembers it, and washes its legs and entrails. The priest stokes the fire by placing wood upon the altar, and then he places all of the animal parts (save for the hide) on the wood. The offering culminates with the burning of the entire animal upon the altar.

In the Pentateuch, the *ʿōlāh* was offered in several different contexts: priestly ordinations (Exod 29, Lev 8), *tāmîḏ* offerings (Exod 29), major feasts (Num 28–29), purification rites (Lev

[72] Anderson, *That I May Dwell*, 23.

[73] Ibid., 18.

12, 14–15), petitions to God (Num 23), and vows (Num 6). Beyond the Pentateuch, even more contexts for the *ʿōlāh* appear. Milgrom concludes, "the fact that the burnt offering answers every conceivable emotional and psychological need leads to the inference that it may originally have been the only sacrifice offered except for the *šəlāmîm* [discussed below], which provided meat for the table."[74] He posits that the most manifest purpose for the offering in all of these contexts is "entreaty," which "covers a wide range of motives: homage, thanksgiving, appeasement, expiation."[75]

The hand-leaning rite is only vaguely explained in the biblical text. According to the goal formula in 1:4, this gesture is done in order that the animal "will be accepted on [the offerer's] behalf to make atonement for [the offerer]." It is often assumed that the hand-leaning gesture represents some kind of identification between the human and the animal (perhaps through the transference of sin), such that the death of the animal substitutes for the death of the offerer.[76] Such an interpretation cannot be substantiated. As was mentioned above, the *ʿōlāh* is used in many non-atoning contexts. Moreover, the hand-leaning rite is absent from several atoning contexts (e.g., the guilt offering in Lev 5). While transference of sin is certainly the explicit meaning of the hand-leaning gesture during the scapegoat ritual on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), two hands are used for that rite rather than one—and the animal is sent out into the wilderness rather than killed. For these reasons and more, it's perhaps most reasonable to assume that by performing the *single* hand-leaning rite, "the offerer declares ownership of the animal before the officiating priests continue to handle it in subsequent ritual actions."[77]

[74] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 176.

[75] Ibid., 175.

[76] See, for example, Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 128–130.

[77] Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus*, 64.

Unfortunately, the biblical text does not attach any goal formulas to the manipulation of blood in this particular ritual. In the absence of such goal formulas, we are left to analyze only latent and indexical functions of the blood manipulation. As a sacred appurtenance, the altar is clearly associated with YHWH. Thus, the blood manipulation at least establishes "a triangular relationship…between the offer, the altar (Yahweh), and the priests."[78] However, this is likely not the sole purpose of the rite. It was common in the ANE for blood to be conceptualized as the "principal substance or force of vitality."[79] This is likely because "the conceptualization of blood as life could be 'empirically verified' through the observation that the loss of blood causes death."[80] Leviticus 17:11 lends credibility to the notion that blood was conceptualized in this way in the ANE: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar."[81] Because the altar is associated with God, and because blood is associated with the life of the animal, it is reasonable to assume that the blood manipulation rite "had the purpose of returning the animal's life…to a sacred site and thus to God, the giver of life."[82] As we see elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, "Blood not properly disposed off [*sic*] constituted a sacrilege" (cf. 1 Sam 14:32–34; Lev 17:13).[83]

The culminative burning rite is interpreted in the goal formulas of Lev 1:9. According to

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[78] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 82.

[79] Christian A. Eberhart, "Blood: Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *EBR* 4:201–02.

[80] Ibid., 202.

[81] Gilders follows Jacob Milgrom and Israel Knohl in assigning Lev 17:11 to H rather than P. He is correct to assign the passage to H, but he goes too far when he states that "Lev 17:11 should not be employed as a key for explaining blood manipulation in P or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible" (Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 176). As Eberhart has argued, "Even if dated late as part of the Holiness Code (H), Lev 17:11 shows that the HB/OT cultures shared the ANE convention: blood is presented as the principal substance or force of vitality" (Eberhart, "Blood," 206).

[82] Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 65. Cf. Milgrom, *Lev 1–16,* 156.

[83] Eberhart, "Blood," 205.

Eberhart, "the term 'offering by fire'…refers to a process of metamorphosis of the sacrificial substance offered by a human being." The altar fire thus "changes the sacrificial material and transforms it into a new, ethereal essence."[84] Put differently, the *ʿōlāh* bridges the gap between the earthly and heavenly realms, establishing a connection between God and humanity. This is more than just a connection, however. The word for 'offering' that's used in 1:3, 9 (*qārəbān*) has monetary connotations: it is a gift to YHWH, a "token of homage."[85] YHWH perceives and accepts this "pleasing aroma"—as a 'meal,' one might say (cf. Num 28:2, 24). As Eberhart clarifies, however, "it is…a misunderstanding to assume that the God of Israel needs to be nourished. The purpose of describing sacrifices as meals is rather that of maintaining relationships and indicating honor."[86]

The second sacrifice, prescribed in Lev 2, is the *minḥāh*, sometimes called the "grain offering," the "cereal offering," or the "tribute offering." Significantly, this offering was exclusively vegetal; it was made from flour, oil, salt, and sometimes frankincense. The offering was primarily associated with "joy and festivity."[87] For our purposes, it is helpful to note that the *minḥāh* is primarily non-atoning, and that it's considered a *qārəbān* even though there is no sacrificial victim. As a vegetal offering, no blood manipulation is required for the *minḥāh*. However, the burning rite—which serves to establish and/or maintain communion between humanity and God—is integral to the offering. This reinforces the idea that communion with God (rather than atonement) is the primary purpose for sacrifice.

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[84] Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 67.

[85] Ibid., 69.

[86] Ibid., 75.

[87] Ibid., 78. This is indicated at least in part by the fact that oil, presumably olive oil, was a necessary component. For a discussion on the association between olive oil and joy, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 180, 197.

2.3.2 The Šəlāmîm Offering, the Passover, and Covenant Inauguration

The third of the sacrifices prescribed is the *šəlāmîm*, commonly called the "well-being offering," "peace offering," or "fellowship offering." Instructions for this sacrifice are found in Lev 3. The root of the word *šəlāmîm* actually matches that of *šālôm* —a term that will be discussed in Chapter 3 below. The *šəlāmîm* is primarily a celebratory offering. According to Lev 7:11–18, there are "three sub-categories of the well-being offering, these being for thanksgiving, to mark the fulfillment of a vow (a *votive* offering), and as a freewill offering."[88] The *šəlāmîm* was often used for altar/temple dedications (e.g., Josh 8:30–31, Judg 21:4, 2 Sam 24:25) and other national celebrations (e.g., Israel finally entering the land in Deut 27:1–8, the walls of Jerusalem getting rebuilt in Neh 12:35–41, etc.).

The instructions for performing the *šəlāmîm* are mostly similar to the instructions for performing the *ʿōlāh*. However, with the *šəlāmîm*, much of the meat is given to the offerer(s) and the officiating priests for consumption. The suet of the animal, which "was considered the choice part of the animal in antiquity," was given to God alone.[89] The fact that the *šəlāmîm* was consumed by the offerer helps to explain why the *ʿōlāh* and the *šəlāmîm* were often offered in tandem. According to Gary Anderson, "the role of human consumption constitutes the primary level of meaning for this sacrifice and helps to explain why the *ʻôlâ* and the *šəlāmîm* are routinely paired in biblical (and Ugaritic) ritual. The *ʻôlâ* was the sacrifice that constituted the basic nourishment for the deity, while the *šəlāmîm* in turn nourished the people."[90]

Since the *šəlāmîm* is primarily a celebratory offering, it is not fundamentally tied to any

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[88] Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice*, 46.

[89] Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 81.

[90] Gary A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings: Old Testament," *ABD* 5 (1992): 879.

atoning function. In fact, Andrew Rillera suggests that “these are not sacrifices that petition God *to* deliver or rescue; rather, they commemorate and memorialize a *past* act of divine deliverance, whether individual or communal (e.g., Pss 56:12–13; 107:2–9 with v. 22)”.[91] This means that neither the blood rite nor the hand-leaning rite in the *šəlāmîm* have any atoning significance. The splashing of the blood along the sides of the altar likely has the same effect that it has in the *ʿōlāh*: it delivers the life of the animal back to God, the giver of life. There are, however, two unique contexts related to the *šəlāmîm* in which blood serves a different function: the Passover and the covenant inauguration ceremony in Exod 24. We will begin by exploring the Passover.

While the original Passover event in Exod 12 is not called a *šəlāmîm*, or even a sacrifice (and this is to be expected, given the absence of a priest or sanctuary), the author does note that “each subsequent Passover will be celebrated as a ‘sacrifice’ (*zebaḥ*, Exod 12:27) when it is incorporated into the sacrificial and calendrical framework.”[92] Moreover, Numbers 10:10, which immediately follows the instructions for Passover in Numbers 9, seems to implicitly place Passover under the umbrella of “sacrifices of well-being.” Several other details point toward the annual Passover feast being a kind of *šəlāmîm*: the participant(s) are required to be ritually pure (Num 9:13, cf. Lev 7:20–21), the laity eat from the offering, the sacrifice expires after one day (Exod 12:8, 10; Num 9:12; cf. Lev 7:15), participants partake with unleavened bread (Exod 12:8, Num 9:11; cf. Lev 7:12–13); and the offering celebrates an act of deliverance. For all these reasons and more, Rillera argues that the annual Passover celebration is best understood as a thanksgiving well-being sacrifice.[93]

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[91] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 39.

[92] Ibid., 42.

[93] See his argument, which is more detailed, in Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 42–44.

However, as a well-being sacrifice, the Passover has no atoning function. This may come as a surprise to many, because many understand at least the original Passover event to be an occasion of substitutionary atonement. It is commonly believed that the death of the sacrificial lamb substituted for the death of the firstborn of Israel; and for that reason, the 'destroyer' passed over the house of any Israelite who had blood on his/her door frame. The primary issue with this explanation is that it is not found in the text.[94] Gilders and Rillera rightly critique this interpretation for relying too heavily on "conceptual gap-filling."[95] Gilders suggests that the interpretation is informed more by the "Western Christian doctrine of 'substitutionary atonement'" than by proper exegesis.[96]

In order to properly understand the use of blood at the Passover event, we need to look at the interpretive comments/goal formulas that are present in the text. Rillera rightly notes that "the only explicit statements about the function of the blood are unambiguous and have nothing to do with 'substitutionary death.'"[97] These statements are found in Exod 12:13, 23. According to these two verses, "the blood functions as a signal for God to 'see' it and so restrain the 'destroyer' from smiting the house."[98] Put differently, "the blood is identified as an apotropaic agent. It achieves an instrumental effect, warding off destruction, because Yahweh sees it."[99]

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[94] Rillera offers several more reasons to reject this interpretation. I am not able to enumerate all of his arguments here. See Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 44–54.

[95] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 46; Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 45.

[96] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 46.

[97] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 45.

[98] Ibid. Interestingly, the word for "sign" that's used in Exod 12:13 is *ʾôṯ*, which is the same word used to describe the sign that God gave Cain for his protection. In both instances, the sign serves a protective function. In the case of Cain, however, the sign is clearly not associated with any substitutionary death. For more discussion, see Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 47–48.

[99] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 44.

Gilders rightly notes that the text gives no explanation for why blood is specifically chosen as the apotropaic agent.[100] Eberhart has offered a few potential reasons. It's possible that blood "represents life beyond which the deadly power has no influence"; but it's also been suggested that the blood establishes a covenant with God and/or purges impurity.[101]

Rillera believes that the use of hyssop in the ritual points toward the blood having a purificatory (though non-atoning) effect. According to Rillera, hyssop and blood are the "taken-for-granted standard ingredients to use in non-sacrificial purification rituals" (cf. Lev 14:3–6, 34, 44, 54–55; Num 19:6, 19).[102] In Leviticus, their combined use "is either purifying any remaining invisible (symbolic?) miasma from these people/houses or warding off reinfection (or perhaps both) of the person/house."[103] Thus, in the first Passover (hyssop was not used in subsequent Passovers), Rillera submits that the blood can be "reasonably conceived of as purifying the house to protect it from 'the destroyer' coming in…it is a preventative apotropaic ritual warding off this specific one-off threat."[104]

While Rillera's thesis is reasonable, we cannot say with certainty that purification is specifically in view. What we can say with certainty is that the blood used in the original Passover event had an apotropaic function rather than an atoning function. Moreover, we can say that all subsequent Passover celebrations commemorated the original event "by feasting on a unique type of (non-atoning) thanksgiving well-being offering."[105]

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[100] Ibid., 46.

[101] Eberhart, "Blood," 204.

[102] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 52.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 53.

[105] Ibid., 54.

A second unique context tied to the *šəlāmîm* is the covenant inauguration ceremony of Exodus 24. In Exod 24:4–8, Moses takes blood from the sacrificial animals and splashes it against the sides of the altar he built at the foot of Mount Sinai. This blood rite is familiar, of course; it is a necessary component of all *ʿōlāh* and *šəlāmîm* offerings. In this particular instance, though, Moses withholds some of the blood and sprinkles it on the congregation of Israel. The sprinkling of the blood on the people of Israel is unique to this ceremony. What's more, the passage does not offer much in the way of interpretive comments. At the very least, we can say that the application of the blood to both the altar and the congregation indexes the forging of a relationship/bond between God and the people of Israel.[106] Furthermore, we know that the two blood manipulations "bookend the covenant-inauguration ceremony" (between the two acts of manipulation, the Covenant Code is read and the Israelites pledge to obey it).[107] The blood then serves to ratify the covenant agreement. This accords with v. 8, which is the closest thing we have to a goal formula: "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"[108]

It is worth noting, however, that in every other ritual in which *people* are the object of blood application, the person(s) to whom the blood is applied "undergo a metaphysical

[106] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 40–41.

[107] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 57.

[108] Blood is also tied to the concept of covenant in a brief, enigmatic passage in Exodus (4:24–26). In this narrative, Moses arouses God's anger and is suddenly at risk of death. Zipporah saves Moses by circumcising their son and placing his foreskin on Moses. She then calls Moses a "bridegroom of blood." We do not know what the expression "bridegroom of blood" means; but we can at least deduce that performing the covenantal act of circumcision—which involved the shedding of blood—delivered Moses from danger. For a helpful introductory discussion of this text, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Exodus*, SGBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 151–155.

transition…always in the direction of holiness."[109] This can be seen most evidently in the priestly ordination rite described in Exod 29 and Lev 8. In this ritual, there is to be a "ram of filling" or "ram of ordination" (Exod 29:22) that is slaughtered; and the blood from that ram is to be applied to the right earlobes, the right thumbs, and the right big toes of Aaron and his sons. In this particular context, we are actually given an explicit goal formula: "then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated." Therefore, the goal of the blood application is to sanctify or consecrate (*qāḏaš*). Aaron and his sons are moved from the category of 'clean' to the category of 'holy' (see Table 2.1).[110] The blood most likely has a consecrating effect because it believed to contain life, and is therefore sacred. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that in the covenant inauguration ceremony, there was a similar "metaphysical transition for Israel as a whole…the blood ritual is not only about forging a covenantal bond between Israel and God…but is also indexing their metaphysical transition from being a regular people to a 'treasured possession' (Exod 19:5; cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18) and a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod 19:6)."[111]

2.3.3 The Ḥaṭṭāʾṯ Offering, Kipper, and the Day of Atonement

The fourth of the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus is the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ*, sometimes called the "sin offering" or "purification offering." This is the first sacrifice that is prescribed specifically

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[109] Ibid., 58.

[110] While we are not given any explanation for why the blood in this particular ritual is to be applied to the earlobes, thumbs, and toes, Gilders, following Cornelis Houtman, suggests that it might indicate a "'top-to-bottom' sanctification." I.e., "the organs are not selected on the basis of their functional significance but due to their anatomical location. They represent the top, middle, and bottom of the body, and the blood daubing effects a complete consecration." Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 97.

[111] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 66.

to address sin/impurity; and it is the most important sacrifice for understanding the nature of atonement in the Pentateuch. This sacrifice is sometimes called the "sin offering" because the word *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* is usually translated as "sin" throughout the Old Testament. This translation is further justified by the fact that the biblical text initially introduces the offering as a remedy for unintentional sin (Lev 4:2–3, 13, 22–23). Nevertheless, more and more scholars have been opting for the translation, "purification offering." This development is largely attributable to the work of Jacob Milgrom. One reason Milgrom rejects the traditional translation of "sin offering" is because certain Priestly texts prescribe the offering in contexts unrelated to sin. For example, the offering "is enjoined upon the recovery from childbirth ([Lev] 12), the completion of the Nazirite vow (Num 6), and the dedication of the newly constructed altar ([Lev] 8:15; see Exod 29:36-37)."[112] Milgrom also makes a grammatical argument, suggesting that the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* appears as a *pi'el* derivative—and its corresponding verbal form is "always the *pi'el* (e.g., 8:15), which carries no other meaning than 'to cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate.'"[113] For these reasons, the translation "purification offering" is also warranted—and it is my preferred rendering.[114]

The instructions for the offering are found primarily in Lev 4:1–5:13. And again, the offering is initially introduced as a remedy for unintentional sin. The instructions for the sacrifice vary slightly depending on which person/group has committed the relevant offense (the priest, the assembly, the chieftain, or the lay individual). In Lev 5, additional instructions are given for

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[112] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 253. Some have argued that Lev 12 actually *is* related to sin. Sklar, for instance, argues that major impurity defiles the sanctuary and its sancta, and that polluting the sanctuary is itself a serious sin in P/H (Lev. 22:3, 9); therefore, contracting a major impurity (as in Lev 12, 14) constitutes an inadvertent sin that needs removal (See Sklar, "Sin and Impurity"). While this is a possible interpretation, it seems unlikely that sin is in view in these texts. The goal formulas in Lev 12:8 and 14:53 never mention forgiveness (contra 4:20); they only mention cleansing. In any case, Sklar still ultimately opts for Milgrom's translation.

[113] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 253.

[114] Yitzhaq Feder argues for the traditional translation mostly on etymological grounds (see Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 99–108); but even so, Feder acknowledges that *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offerings have some purificatory functions.

guilty parties who cannot afford a lamb (v. 7). In each of these contexts, certain unique blood rites are required that have not yet been discussed in this thesis. Rather than dashing the blood along the sides of the altar, the priest is to either sprinkle (*hizzâ*) or place/daub (*nātan*) the blood toward or upon certain appurtenances in the sanctuary. In the case of an inadvertent sin by a lay individual or a chieftain, blood is to be daubed on the horns of the altar of burnt offering (the outer altar; Lev 4:27–31). If the sin is committed by the anointed priest, or if it is committed collectively by the whole Israelite community, blood must be applied to the horns of the altar of incense (the inner altar; Lev 4:3–21).

The fact that the sacrificial blood is applied to sancta indicates that the temple itself is, at least in large part, the object of purification. Furthermore, several goal formulas associate the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* blood rites with verbs like "purge" (*kipper*; Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 8:15; 14:18; 16:16)[115], "sanctify" (*qāḏaš*; Exod 29:44; Lev 8:12, 15; 16:19), "make clean" (*ṭāhēr*; Lev 12:8; 14:53; 16:19), and "purify" (*ḥiṭṭēʾ*; Lev 8:15). We may conclude, then, that the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* is functioning as some kind of "ritual detergent"[116] or "cultic cleansing agent."[117] As was demonstrated in 2.1, major impurities and sins attach themselves to the sanctuary and defile the sancta therein. These 'stains' that accumulate upon the sancta threaten God's sustained presence in the sanctuary. The logic of these blood rites, then, is to purge the sancta of these stains. Blood, as a sacred substance containing life, has the power to transmit sacredness upon application (cf. Lev 6:27).

There has been rigorous debate as to whether or not sancta are the only objects of

[115] The word *kipper* and my preferred translation of it will be explained in more detail below.

[116] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 254.

[117] Eberhart, "Blood," 206.

purification in the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* offering. Milgrom has famously argued that the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* does not accomplish purification for the offerer; rather, the purification is for the sanctuary only.[118] This view is complicated by the fact that Lev 4:1–5:13 repeatedly accentuates guilt as a primary concern (4:3, 13, 22, 27; 5:4–5) and forgiveness as a ritual goal (4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13). Milgrom concedes that the language of forgiveness is prevalent in this pericope, but he insists that "the inadvertent offender needs forgiveness not because of his act per se—…his act is forgiven because of the offender's inadvertence and remorse—but because of the consequence of his act."[119] In other words, the forgiveness accomplished by the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* is forgiveness for polluting the sanctuary, not forgiveness for the original offense. For good reason, scholars have increasingly called this view into question. Anderson asks: "If such an important atoning function is present in the act of feeling remorse, why is the term absent in Num 15:22–31? Or why is it absent in the case of the priest (Lev 4:1–12)?"[120] These are important questions. Moreover, Roy Gane and (more recently) Joshua Vis have powerfully challenged Milgrom's view on syntactical grounds.[121] Their arguments, however, are largely contingent upon certain understandings of the verb *kipper*, a word that is routinely used in the goal formulas of purification offerings.

The meaning of the word *kipper* has long been a subject of debate. It is often translated as "make atonement"; but while this translation is convenient, it is not necessarily accurate. In actuality, 'atonement' was a word first coined in the 16th century by the English Reformer

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[118] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 255–256.

[119] Ibid., 256.

[120] Anderson, "Sacrifice," 880.

[121] Gane, *Cult and Character*; Joshua M. Vis, "The Purification Offering of Leviticus and the Sacrificial Offering of Jesus" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2012).

William Tyndale. Tyndale used atonement as a convenient catch-all for various terms in the Bible relating to reconciliation; it literally comes from the words "at one" (at-one-ment). It is doubtful that this word precisely captures the original meaning of *kipper*; but in the absence of any strong scholarly consensus on the word's actual meaning, it is often still translated "atone" and/or "make atonement" in modern English Bibles.

Major lexicons include a wide variety of potential meanings. HALOT, for instance, includes glosses like "appease," "make amends," "avert," "expiate," "purge," "make good," and others.[122] Many scholars have turned to potential Semitic cognates in an attempt to decipher the word's cultic meaning (e.g., Arabic *kafara*, "to cover"; Akkadian *kuppuru*, "to smear" or "to wipe"). However, Yitzhaq Feder worries that many of these scholars have "fallen victim to the fallacy of using etymology as an indication of meaning."[123] Without wholly neglecting the value of etymological inquiry, he rightly posits that "the practical implementation of this research strategy [is] fraught with insurmountable difficulties" and suggests instead a "focus on the intralinguistic evidence of biblical Hebrew."[124]

Scholars largely agree that the earliest uses of *kipper* in the Hebrew Bible relate to the concept of appeasement. In Gen 32:20, the term is used to describe the effect Jacob hopes his gifts will have on his angry brother Esau: "I will pacify him [*ʾăḵappərāh*] with these gifts I am sending on ahead." In Prov 16:14, we read, "A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it [*yəḵappərennāh*]." The "appeasement" meaning fits nicely with what we know about the word's nominal form, *kōp̄er*; it is fairly well established that a *kōp̄er* is "a propitiatory

[122] *HALOT*, s.v. "כפר." For a small sampling of the varying contexts in which this term is used, cf. Gen 32:21, 2 Sam 21:3, Is 47:11, Lev 4:20, Num 35:33–34.

[123] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 168.

[124] Ibid., 169.

gift or payment given in situations when the giver is at risk, usually in mortal danger, and placed at the mercy of another."[125] Even so, Feder argues that *kipper* underwent a decisive transition from "propitiation" to "expiation" prior to its cultic usage. To explain the difference between the two, Feder quotes C. Brown: "propitiation is directed toward the offended person, whereas expiation is concerned with nullifying the offensive act."[126]

Feder argues this transition was informed by the logic of blood retribution. To make his point, Feder references several passages involving homicide—namely, 2 Sam 21:3, Exod 21:30, and Deut 21:8. Together, these passages betray a gradual shift from the focus of "placating one's adversary" to the focus of "rectifying the wrong itself."[127] For instance, in 2 Sam 21, David learns that the cause of the famine in Israel was the bloodguilt of Saul. Because Saul was guilty of killing Gibeonites, David seeks to placate their descendants—but they refuse a monetary gift, insisting instead upon the *objective compensation* of blood from the line of Saul. For David, then, what needs to be addressed is not so much the offended party, but the source of the guilt. In further support of Feder's thesis, texts like Num 35:33–34 use *kipper* in its passive form, to shift the emphasis to "the guilt objectified."[128]

Vis largely agrees with Feder's theory, and recognizes that the shift to objectified guilt is important. However, he believes Feder misses an "important nuance to the idea of 'expiation' as it moves away from the idea of 'propitiation'"—namely, "the shift from 'propitiation' to 'expiation'…includes an element of 'expiation' as 'purgation.'"[129] For instance, in Deut. 21:9,

[125] Ibid.

[126] C. Brown, "Reconciliation," *NIDNTT* 3:151, cited in Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 173.

[127] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 184.

[128] Ibid., 185.

[129] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 175.

the language of purgation is clearly operative, but Feder does not address it: "and you will have *purged* from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the LORD." Moreover, in Num 35:33–34, the land is "purged" of the stain of blood that is upon it. In both of these instances, blood is a "substance that purges."[130] It is true that P and H contain a handful of texts in which *kipper* is widely believed to mean something like "to ransom" (e.g., Exod 30:11–16; Num 31:50); but in each of those contexts, "there is no objectified guilt and the context is not sacrificial. Thus כפר [in those contexts] is something different than it is in contexts where guilt and sin are objectified (Num 35:33–34; Lev 4–5, Lev 16)."[131]

Consequently, Vis submits that "the meaning of 'purge/effect purgation' for כִּפֶּר…is the only sure meaning in P, and…H is not opting for a different meaning of כִּפֶּר in sacrificial settings."[132] This understanding of *kipper* pairs nicely with the literal etymological rendering proposed by Gilders: "effect removal."[133] The idea is that the act of sin or defilement introduces an impediment to the divine-human relationship. The goal of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* is to remove or purge (*kipper*) that impediment. But again: is it purged from the sanctuary or from the offerer?

This is where the syntactical arguments from Gane and Vis come into play. The first argument, popularized by Gane, is largely centered around the meaning of the preposition *min*, which appears often in *kipper* formulas. Gane argues that the use of *min* is almost certainly

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid., 177. This is one of several difficulties with the view that 'ransom' is an active sense of *kipper* in sacrificial contexts (Contra, e.g., Sklar, *Sin*; Sklar, "Sin and Impurity"). Some have suggested Lev 17:11 appeals to the notion of ransom in a sacrificial context; that text will be discussed in more detail below.

[132] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 216.

[133] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 29.

privative rather than *causative* in at least two key texts (Lev 12:7; 14:9). In Lev 12, for instance, parturient women are instructed to perform certain purification rites to address ritual impurities caused by the discharge of blood after childbirth. Regarding the goal formula of these offerings (v. 7), Gane says:

> [F]ollowing וְטָהֲרָה, 'and then she shall be pure,' מִן does not refer to impure blood coming 'from' its genital source. Rather, the real force of מִן here can only be *privative*, a usage derived from the overall concept of separation that is basic to this preposition…[A]s a result of the priest's performing כפר on her behalf (עָלֶיהָ), the parturient becomes pure in the sense that she is freed/separated '*from*' (מִן) her physical ritual impurity, which is identified in terms of its physical cause as her 'source of blood.'[134]

Gane makes a similar argument regarding 14:9, a verse "which contains parallel syntax to express a parallel concept: remedy for evil belonging to the offerer."[135] While these two texts do have minor differences, Gane demonstrates that a privative meaning in both contexts makes sense given that the texts both clearly address the removal of a contamination from an offerer. To argue for a *causative* sense of *min* would be to needlessly "complicate the plain sense" of the text.[136] Lev 16:30, which is located specifically in the context of purification offerings on the Day of Atonement, also matches the syntactical construction of 12:7. For these reasons, Gane has consistently argued that "[f]ollowing 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."[137] In the context of Lev 4:1–5:13, then, it is clearly the offerer who is purged (4:20, 26, 31, 35).

Vis largely agrees with Gane's syntactical argument, despite some differences in their

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[134] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 112–113.

[135] Ibid., 115.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 104.

systematic understandings of atonement. However, Vis employs an additional syntactical argument grounded in the use of the prepositions *bəʿad*, *ʻal*, and *ʼêṯ* within the Priestly corpus.[138] He perceptively points out that when people are the object of *kipper* in Lev 16:1–28, the Priestly writer consistently uses the preposition *bəʿad* ('on behalf of') to introduce the object (16:6, 11, 17). When sancta is being purged, the object is introduced with either *ʼêṯ* or *ʻal*. In this pericope, *bəʿad* and *ʻal* are never used interchangeably.[139] That *ʻal* is an object marker throughout the pericope is therefore apparent: "If the Priestly writer wishes to communicate that *kipper* happens 'on behalf of' a person… בעד is used, not על."[140] The H addition in vv. 29–34 follows a similar pattern; objects of purgation are marked by either *ʼêṯ* or *ʻal*.[141] Milgrom suggests that Lev 16 does not use the preposition *ʻal* as an object marker. Instead, he posits that its meaning is 'for, on behalf of' when the object is human, and 'on, upon' when the object is non-human.[142] But as Vis points out, Milgrom does not even follow his own rule when translating 16:16—because in that verse, he translates *ʻal* as a direct object marker ("he shall purge the adytum").[143] Moreover, the meaning of 'on, upon' is nonsensical in certain contexts where Milgrom proposes it. Indeed, in Lev 16:20, Aaron does not "effect purgation *on* the adytum," but rather, "*purges the adytum*."[144]

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[138] Vis's argument is very thorough; I will not be able to rehearse it here in full. What follows is merely a concise summary of the argument. For more detail, see Joshua M. Vis, "The Purgation of Persons Through the Purification Offering," in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017); Vis, "The Purification Offering," 135–203.

[139] Vis, "The Purgation of Persons," 34.

[140] Ibid., 35.

[141] Ibid., 34, 42–48.

[142] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1036.

[143] Vis, "The Purgation of Persons," 35. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1010.

[144] Vis, "The Purgation of Persons," 35–36.

In Lev 4–5, the Priestly writer(s) "used the logic of the חטאת offering as a purgative offering in Lev 16" and maintained "grammatical consistency" with Lev 16, but "shifted the object of purgation…to the offerer(s)."[145] Vis is thus correct to conclude that "if the offerers of Lev 4:1–5:13 were not the objects of purgation, as Milgrom suggests, the authors would have used כפר + בעד to mark the offerer, not כפר + על."[146] Vis's syntactical argument is further supported by Gane's argument; because if the offerer is indeed the object of purgation, a privative *min* is all the more logical. Nevertheless, as Vis points out, his argument is not dependent upon a privative *min*: "Once it is understood that the offerer is the object of purgation, which כפר+על makes clear throughout Lev 4:1–5:13, whether the offerer is purged 'of/from' his sin or 'because of' his sin (or both) is not crucial. Either way, the offerer is purged because the offerer committed wrongdoing."[147] Thus Vis concludes, "The people can be purged of the sin/guilt they carry through the manipulation of sacrifices within and upon the sancta."[148]

Gane and Vis go too far, however, when they argue that the blood rites of Lev 4:1–5:13 purge *only* the offerer, and not the sancta. While it is true that goal formulas in this pericope foreground the purgation of the offerer and do not explicitly mention the purgation of the sancta, it is implied contextually that the sancta is also purged. Gane himself acknowledges that the purgation of the sancta on the Day of Atonement concomitantly accomplishes the purgation of the people. Quoting Milgrom affirmatively, Gane writes that on the Day of Atonement, "as the sanctuary is polluted by the people's impurities, their elimination, in effect, also purifies the

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[145] Ibid., 48.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 156.

[148] Ibid., 132.

people."[149] If this is indeed the case (as I believe it is), it seems plausible that this same logic underlies the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* offerings of Lev 4:1–5:13. Perhaps in the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* offerings of Lev 4–5, the offerer is purged at least in part because the sancta has been purged. This would reinforce the reciprocal relationship that appears to exist between Israel and the sanctuary all throughout P/H. As Stephen Finlan writes, "Just as the temple suffers pollution whenever sin is committed in Israel, so does purification of the temple signify purification of people."[150] Given that blood clearly acts as a 'ritual detergent' upon application in other sacrificial contexts (e.g., Lev 8:15 and Lev 16), it seems highly unlikely that Lev 4:1–5:13 is an exception to this rule. Such an exception is never made explicit in the text, nor is it logically necessary. In conclusion, then, the regular *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* offerings prescribed in Lev 4:1–5:13 purge the sancta of the stain caused by inadvertent sin, and thereby purge the offerer(s) of sin/guilt. Likewise, in cases of major ritual impurity, the *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* purges both the altar and the offerer of the impurity (e.g., Lev 12:6-8).[151] It is worth noting that in Lev 4–5, the offerer(s) are declared 'forgiven' (e.g., Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35) only after the burning rite is accomplished. It is therefore possible that forgiveness is not the result of purgation alone, but also of the offering of a propitiatory gift (*qārəbān*) to God via the burning rite.[152]

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[149] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1056, cited in Gane, *Cult and Character*, 129.

[150] Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors*, AcBib 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 37.

[151] Context should then determine *what* is being purged, and *from* whom/what it is being purged. This is another benefit of translating *kipper* as "purge" or "effect removal." As Gilders states, "By using [the rendering 'effect removal'], I leave open the question of what is removed and how" (Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 29). Feder similarly opts for a more generic term, "clearing," since the term can be used to describe the removal of impurity *and/or* the removal of culpability—and not just one or the other. See Yitzhaq Feder, *Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible: From Embodied Experience to Moral Metaphor* (New York, NY: Cambridge, 2021), 95–96.

[152] So Christian Eberhart, review of *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, by Roy Gane, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 3 (2006): 575–576. See also Christian Eberhart, *Studien Zur Bedeutung Der Opfer Im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- Und Verbrennungsriten Im Kultischen Rahmen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 115–137.

One day a year, the priest performs a series of rites to effect atonement for the sanctuary and for the entire congregation of Israel (Lev 16:1–34); this day is famously called the Day of Atonement. The primary ritual performed on the Day of Atonement involves two goats; one is selected for sacrifice and the other is selected for an elimination rite.[153] The goat selected for sacrifice is called a *ḥaṭṭāʾāṯ* (Lev 16:15). When the goat is slaughtered, the priest begins by sprinkling its blood on the ark of the covenant in the adytum. Already, then, this ritual differs from the rituals prescribed in Lev 4:1–5:13; in Lev 4:1–5:13, the priest never enters the adytum. The text says that by sprinkling blood in the adytum, "[the priest] will make atonement for [that is, purge] the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been" (Lev 16:16). He does the same for the Tent of Meeting and for the outer altar. He applies blood to the horns of the outer altar, and sprinkles the altar with blood seven times. In this way, he is able to purge the outer altar (Lev 16:20), to "cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites" (Lev 16:19). After these blood rites, the priest takes the live goat and begins the elimination rite. The biblical text calls the live goat the *ʿăzāʾzēl* (עֲזָאזֵל) goat; but scholars have not reached a consensus on what the word *ʿăzāʾzēl* means. Some have proposed that it is the proper name of a demonic entity that dwells in the wilderness where the goat is eventually dispatched; but other alternatives have been proposed.[154] The ritual function of the goat is discernable regardless, so I will simply refer to it as 'the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat.' The priest lays both hands on the head of the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat and confesses over it "all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins" (Lev 16:21). The *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat,

[153] Elimination rites are non-sacrificial rites that function according to a process of eradication. "While sacrificial rituals are characterized by a gradual movement toward the sanctuary…, the dynamics of elimination rituals are in each case directed away from the human habitat and toward uncultivated territory" (Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus*, 91).

[154] For further discussion, see Sklar, *Leviticus*, 429–430.

now carrying the sins of the people, is released into the wilderness (Lev 16:22).

But why is the Day of Atonement necessary? If the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offerings from Lev 4:1–5:13 are sufficient to purge both the sancta and the offerer of sin/impurity, what is the purpose of the Day of Atonement ritual, and why does it function differently than the regular *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offerings? One major difference between the regular *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* and the Day of Atonement ritual is adumbrated in Lev 16:16a: "In this way he will make atonement for [that is, purge] the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been." Jay Sklar has rightly argued that the sins referenced in this verse should not be understood as inadvertent sins *only*:

> [T]wo factors suggest [Lev 16:16a] refers to sins in general. First, it prefaces the second term for sin with the word 'all/any,' suggesting that a full range of sins is in view. Second it uses the word 'transgressions' (פֶּשַׁע), which is not used in Leviticus for inadvertent sin but is used elsewhere in the Pentateuch for situations where an inferior commits serious sin against a superior (Gen 31:36; 50:17).[155]

This means that brazen sins are also purged on the Day of Atonement—in contradistinction to the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offerings of Lev 4:1–5:13, which address only inadvertent sins. Because brazen sins are not expiable through voluntary *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offerings, the 'stains' that they produce in the sanctuary become the collective responsibility of the congregation of Israel.[156] Thus Yitzhaq Feder: "This day's rites would then complement the other expiatory offerings that are performed throughout the year, thus forming a comprehensive system for rectifying the relationship between Israel and God."[157] It should be noted that the purgation of brazen sins from the sanctuary is the sole context in which the guilty are not concomitantly forgiven when the

[155] Sklar, *Leviticus*, 432.

[156] Discussed further in Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 91–97; Feder, *Purity and Pollution*, 96.

[157] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 97.

sancta is purged; in Num 15:22-31, personal purgation for brazen sin is strictly prohibited. Rather, the stains caused by brazen sins are a kind of "*depersonalized evil*" that "affects the corporate personality of Israel."[158]

Lev 16:16 appears specifically in the context of purging the adytum, which strengthens Milgrom's theory that the "dynamic, aerial quality of biblical impurity" has a kind of "graded power."[159] Remember that the location of the blood rites in Lev 4–5 varies depending on the status of the offender. If the inadvertency is committed by a chieftain or lay person, blood is manipulated on the outer altar. If the inadvertency is committed by the priest, or by the whole congregation of Israel, blood is manipulated on and around the inner altar. On the Day of Atonement, the purgation of brazen sins is associated with blood manipulation in the adytum. Milgrom reasonably concludes from this gradation of purgation that "the severity of the sin or impurity varies in direct relation to the depth of its penetration into the sanctuary."[160] The sins of individuals stain the outer altar; collective sins and the sins of the anointed priest stain the Holy Place; and brazen sins stain the adytum, the Most Holy Place.[161]

But even if one grants that the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* offered on the Day of Atonement

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[158] Ibid., 99. Emphasis his. Sklar seems to suggest that Lev 16 allows for brazen sins to be purged from the offerer so long as the offerer is penitent (Sklar, "Sin and Atonement," 476n23). This is a possible interpretation; but it seems less likely given that this provision is never made explicit in the text, and the forgiveness formula used in Lev 4–5 is nowhere used in Lev 16.

[159] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 257.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Because the blood rites on the Day of Atonement move from the adytum to the shrine to the outer altar, Milgrom also suggests that brazen sins move through the courtyard and toward the adytum, staining every altar along the way (ibid.). This cannot be substantiated. If sin always 'moved' in this way, then the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* for the priest/congregation would need to purge both the inner *and* outer altars—because the miasma would have stained the outer altar on its way into the shrine. We can affirm Milgrom's basic thesis—that the severity of a sin directly corresponds to the sancta that it stains—without affirming that the sin must stain *every* altar in its path. There are better ways of understanding the 'outward' movement of purgation rituals on the Day of Atonement. This will be discussed below.

purges the adytum of brazen sins, one may still wonder about the purpose of the elimination rite. To better understand the logic of that rite, it may be helpful to consider a similar rite in Lev 14:1–7.[162] This passage details an elimination rite that must be performed for individuals with a defiling skin disease. The ritual involves two birds; one is selected for sacrifice and the other is selected for elimination. After the first bird is slaughtered, the second bird is dipped into the blood of the first. The priest then uses the live bird as an instrument with which to sprinkle the infected person with the purgative blood of the slaughtered bird. This rite cleanses (*ṭāhēr*) the defiled person. The live bird is then sent away. The similarities are clear and striking. On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the slaughtered goat is used as a purging agent; and the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat is then sent into the wilderness, carrying away all the sins that have just been purged. Similarly, in Lev 14, the blood of the slaughtered bird is used as a cleansing agent; and the live bird, which has just been used for the sprinkling rite, must be sent away. Eberhart deduces, "The analogy [of the Lev 14 ritual] to the scapegoat ritual in Lev 16:20–22 qualifies it as an elimination rite *in which the life bird carries the disease away*."[163]

The logic underlying each of these rituals is that defilement does not simply disappear; it is transferred to a medium. That medium is whoever or whatever makes contact with the purgative blood. In Lev 14:1–7, the live bird makes contact with the blood, and so 'absorbs' the defilement of the diseased person and "transports it into the open country."[164] In Lev 16, it is Aaron who makes contact with the purgative blood. It can be deduced, then, that when Aaron

[162] I am indebted to Christian Eberhart for much of the argument that follows. In a person email correspondence on June 26, 2024, he helped me to more critically evaluate the logic of the elimination rituals in both Lev 14 and Lev 16.

[163] Eberhart, "Blood," 205. Emphasis mine.

[164] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 136.

manipulates blood during the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* ritual, the sin or impurity that is purged is then transferred to Aaron; and Aaron must bear it. This logic accords with what we read in several other Priestly passages. Take, for instance, Exod 28:38a: "[A golden plate] will be on Aaron's forehead, and *he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate*, whatever their gifts may be."[165] Remember also that the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* instructions in Lev 4:1–5:13 are different depending on the status of the offender. In the case of a sin committed by the anointed priest (Lev 4:3–12), no *kipper* formula follows the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* instructions. We are never told that the anointed priest is purged and forgiven. The case of the anointed priest is the only case in that entire pericope that does *not* include a *kipper* formula. While Lev 16:6 does indicate that a *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* is to be offered for Aaron and his household, we are not told that the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* functions to *purge* Aaron; we are told that it effects purgation *on behalf of* Aaron. The preposition that follows *kipper* in this verse is *bəʿaḏ*. As Vis correctly points out, "If the Priestly writer wishes to communicate that כפר is done 'on behalf of' a person, meaning another object is purged on a person's behalf, בעד is used."[166] Therefore, the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* in Lev 16:6 purges the sancta on behalf of Aaron and his household, but it does not purge Aaron.

In sum, the Day of Atonement is also unique in that it incorporates a ritual capable of purging Aaron. On the Day of Atonement, the anointed priest now has the opportunity to purge himself of all the sins and impurities he has been carrying on behalf of the Israelites. As the representative of Israel, he transfers their sins and impurities onto the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat, and dispatches the goat into the wilderness, away from the camp. Vis is therefore correct when he

[165] Emphasis mine. See also Num 18:1a: "The Lord said to Aaron, 'You, your sons and your family are to *bear the responsibility* [*tiśʾû ʾeṯ-ʿăwōn*] for offenses connected with the sanctuary.'"

[166] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 99.

translates the phrase *ləkappēr ʿālāyw* in Lev 16:10 as "to purge him (Aaron)."[167] My rough translation of that verse would then be: "but the goat chosen by lot as the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat shall be presented alive before YHWH to purge him [Aaron] by sending it off into the wilderness as the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat."

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron purges the sanctuary one last time, on behalf of the collective congregation of Israel. This final purgation is comprehensive. He begins in the adytum, purging even the stains caused by brazen sins. Following the blood rite in the adytum, he effects purgation for the Tent of Meeting and for the outer altar. After purging the sanctuary of all remaining sins and impurities, he is now laden with these sins and impurities himself. Through the two-handed leaning rite and confession, he transfers those sins and impurities to a new medium: the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat. The *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat now removes those sins permanently by carrying them into the wilderness, away from the camp. Following these events, Aaron performs a burning rite (Lev 16:24), which may be understood as a propitiatory gift (*qārəbān*) that consummates the atonement process and re-establishes Israel's relationship with YHWH. Finally, by means of this elaborate Day of Atonement ritual, Aaron can become the *object* of purgation (Lev 16:33), and the entire congregation of Israel can be declared clean (Lev 16:30). Lev 16:21–22 states that the live goat carries "the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins [*ləḵol-ḥaṭṭōʾṯām*]." Vis is correct when he asserts that the term *ləḵol-ḥaṭṭōʾṯām* functions in this verse as a "summarizing category," just as it does in Lev 16:16.[168] "All their sins" is a catchall term referencing all of the impediments that stand between Israel and God, including the impurities of verse 16. These are all toted away in the eradication of the *ʿăzāʾzēl*

[167] Ibid., 110.

[168] Ibid., 123.

goat.

2.3.4 The ʾāšām Offering

The fifth and final type of sacrifice prescribed in the book of Leviticus is the *ʾāšām*, sometimes called the "guilt offering" or "reparation offering." This is the least common of the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus, and is therefore the most enigmatic. Instructions for the *ʾāšām* are given in Lev 5:14–6:7. Like the *ḥaṭṭāʼāṯ*, the *ʾāšām* is prescribed for cases of transgression; but it is not prescribed for *all* cases of transgression. Rather, it is specifically prescribed for any individual 1) who has sinned unintentionally toward "any of the Lord's holy things" (Lev 4:14); 2) who has sinned unknowingly by doing "what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands"[169]; 3) who has committed an offense against his/her neighbor's property (Lev 6:1–7); 4) who is seeking purification from a defiling skin disease (Lev 14:12–18); 5) who is a Nazarite and must be rededicated after defilement (Num 6:9–12); and 6) who is having sexual relations with a betrothed slave woman (Lev 19:20–22).

"[T]he basic feature of [the *ʾāšām*]," writes Anderson, "is its function as a means of reparation. Unlike other sacrifices which one 'offers'…the *ʾāšām* can 'be payed.'"[170] For this reason, the term "reparation offering" is preferrable to "guilt offering." The *ʾāšām* grants the offender an opportunity to make restitution through an offering. This is either a monetary offering or the offering of a ram. Rillera rightly notes that "the operative function here is money being repaid with interest; not the death of the offender."[171] While fewer details are given

[169] While this seems like a fairly broad category, Milgrom makes a fairly robust argument that this is still in reference to transgressions committed against "the Lord's holy things." See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 331–335.

[170] Anderson, "Sacrifice," 880.

[171] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 91.

regarding the execution of the *ʾāšām*, it bears some resemblance to the *šəlāmîm*—with the exception that the offerer is forbidden from eating from the offering.

When a person recovering from a defiling skin disease offers an *ʾāšām* (Lev 14:12–18), there is a unique set of instructions given for blood manipulation. In this setting, the manipulation of blood mimics that of the ordination rite discussed in 2.3.2. The priest is to apply blood and oil to the right earlobes, the right thumbs, and the right big toes of the person. This process contributes to the purgation of the offerer (Lev 14:18). Just as the blood applied to the extremities of Aaron and his sons (Exod 29; Lev 8) signified a metaphysical transition from the status of "clean" to "holy," so too does the application of blood to the extremities of this offerer signify a transition from the status of "unclean" to "clean" (see Table 2.1). Remember that when blood is applied to *person(s)* rather than objects, the person(s) to whom it is applied "undergo a metaphysical transition…always in the direction of holiness."[172] The term *kipper* in Lev 14:18 can refer to a transition in status from "unclean" to "clean" (purification) *and/or* a transition in status from "clean" to "holy" (sanctification). In the context of the offerer in Lev 14, it refers to the former. As Sklar notes, "the difference between purification and consecration is one of degree more than substance—that is, both refer to cleansing, with consecration being a more intense form of cleansing than purification."[173]

2.3.5 Conclusion: Blood as Life, Lev 17:11, & a Cultic Theology of Sacrifice

In conclusion, blood has several functions in the cultic context in ancient Israel—but each of these functions is generally correlated to the ancient Near Eastern identification of blood and

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[172] Ibid., 58.

[173] Sklar, *Sin*, 126.

life. In non-atoning sacrificial contexts, the most common blood rite is that of dashing the blood along the sides of the altar and thereby draining the blood into the ground. There is no goal formula attached to this particular rite; and many times, the rite is performed when no purgative function is necessary. This makes its meaning particularly abstruse. Nevertheless, we know with certainty that the rite indexes a connection between the blood and the altar (which represents YHWH). Furthermore, we know that blood is commonly conceptualized as "life" in the ANE (cf. Lev 17:11). Thus, the most logical conclusion is that this rite functions to return the life of the animal to God, the giver of life. This rite would thus constitute a proper, non-sacrilegious disposal of blood.

In atoning sacrificial contexts, blood functions primarily as a purgative agent. In the Priestly material, the process commonly referred to as 'atonement' (*kipper*) is more precisely concerned with purgation. Sins and major impurities defile not only the offenders but also the sanctuary. The primary function of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* is to purge both the sancta and the offerer through blood application. The blood, when applied to the altar, transmits its sacredness and thereby purges the altar (see Lev 6:27). Through the purgation of the sancta, the offerer is purged as well; there is something of a reciprocal relationship between the sanctuary and the people. The burning rite of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ* consummates the purgation process and results in the offerer being forgiven. Communion with God is then re-established. Nevertheless, the anointed priest, who is responsible for manipulating the purgative blood, absorbs the sins and impurities of Israel. These are permanently eliminated on the Day of Atonement, when the priest loads them onto the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat and sends it away. The Day of Atonement allows for the full purgation of Israel (Lev 16:34).

Blood is also applied to people directly in unique contexts where personal purgation is

necessary. When a person recovering from skin disease is in need of purification, blood is applied to that person's extremities (Lev 14). This contributes to their metaphysical transition from the status of "unclean" to the status of "clean." This ritual mirrors the ordination ritual found in Exod 29 and Lev 8. During the rite of ordination, blood is applied to the extremities of Aaron and his sons in order to consecrate (*qāḏaš*) them for priestly service. This application of blood contributes to their metaphysical transition from the status of "clean" to the status of "holy." Finally, blood is applied to the entire congregation of Israel at their covenant inauguration ceremony (Exod 24). In addition to indexing the covenant bond between the two parties (Israel and God), this blood rite contributes to Israel's metaphysical transition into "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). Again, the purgative power of blood is attributable to its sanctity as life.

The initial Passover event (Exod 12), which is often believed to be an occasion of substitutionary atonement, is better understood as an apotropaic ritual. The only statements that explicitly describe the function of the blood on the doorposts (Exod 12:13, 23) assign an apotropaic (or "warding off") function to the blood. The blood serves as a sign that wards off the 'destroyer' and thus protects the household. The logic of penal substitution is foreign to the text. In fact, I agree with Joshua Vis when he says, "the concept of substitution is [not] at play anywhere…in the sacrificial system."[174]

The primary text used to prove that ransom and/or substitution are operative ideas in Israel's cult is Lev 17:11, a text that has been referenced several times already: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement [*ləḵappēr*] for yourselves

[174] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 114. Vis does concede that the logic of substitution *may* have been operative at an early stage in the cult, but only in respect to the *ʿōlāh*. In any case, on a synchronic reading of Lev 1–16, any notion of substitution in the cult cannot be substantiated.

on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement [*yəkappēr*] for one's life." Some have taken *kipper* in this passage to mean "ransom"—primarily because of its syntactical similarity to Exod 30:15 and Num 31:50, where *kipper* clearly means ransom.[175] As we have already noted, while P/H does use *kipper* to mean "ransom" on rare occasions (as in Exod 30 and Num 31), this happens exclusively in non-sacrificial contexts and/or contexts where guilt is not objectified.[176] Uniformly, P/H uses *kipper* to mean "purge" or "effect purgation" in sacrificial contexts. Thus, Liane Feldman argues:

> The context of Exod 30 and Num 31 is markedly different than Lev 17:11. In both Exod 30 and Num 31, the context is monetary…Lev 17:11 lacks the monetary context, and there is nowhere else in the Priestly Narrative where this monetary concept is imported into a sacrificial context. Rather than positing a unique occurrence of כפר in a sacrificial context meaning 'ransom,' it is simpler to suggest that כפר in Lev 17:11 means precisely what it means everywhere else in the Priestly Narrative: to decontaminate.[177]

Milgrom has suggested that Lev 17:11 refers only to *šəlāmîm* offerings, since the immediate context deals with meat consumption and the *šəlāmîm* is the only sacrifice from which Israelites can eat. He then argues that to kill a sacrificial animal is a capital offense, and that a ransom must be paid via blood manipulation.[178] This, for Milgrom, is the logic of Lev 17:11. The life of the offerer, which is now endangered by virtue of his/her slaughter of the sacrificial victim, is ransomed by the 'life' of the animal, which is its blood. Baruch Schwartz rightly notes that this is a highly dubious claim: "[T]he very notion that sacrifice can be intrinsically sinful, that one cannot sacrifice to God without becoming, at least momentarily,

[175] E.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 706–713; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1472–1479; Sklar, *Sin*, 5. In some cases, this understanding of Lev 17:11 has driven scholars to read *kipper* as connoting "ransom" in virtually all cultic contexts. See Sklar, "Sin and Impurity," 24–25.

[176] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 177.

[177] Liane M. Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source*, FAT 141 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 189.

[178] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 711.

guilty of a capital crime, is entirely foreign to Priestly thought."[179]

However, Schwartz's solution has its own problems. According to Schwartz, H offers an anachronistic reinterpretation of *kipper* that is now to be applied to all atoning sacrificial contexts. For Schwartz, Lev 17:11 means that *kipper* is no longer just "a matter of purifying the sancta from the contamination generated by sin or physical conditions…but rather a matter of…redeeming [that is, ransoming] one's life."[180] As Vis correctly indicates, other passages in H reject the notion that a ransom can be made for either animal life (Lev 24:18) or for human life (Num 35:31–34). By "accepting the blood of an animal as a ransom for the life of the human offerer," Vis posits, "YHWH is breaking his own rule."[181] Moreover, Vis points out that Schwartz does not have an answer for why the offerer's life is at stake.[182] The most logical conclusion is that H is using *kipper* the same way it was used by H in Lev 16:30, 34: as "purge." My rough translation is then: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I, I have placed it for you on the altar to purge your lives; for it is the blood that purges by means of the life."

Even though Baruch Schwartz and Jay Sklar opt to translate *kipper* as "ransom" in Lev 17:11, there is one crucial aspect of the verse that they both get right: God's sovereign agency in the atonement process. As Sklar rightly notes, only one "I" is necessary for the clause "I have placed it for you," but two are used. "The first 'I' (אֲנִי)," writes Sklar, "is unnecessary and

[179] Baruch Schwartz, "The Prohibitions Concerning the 'Eating' of Blood in Leviticus 17," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, JSOTSup 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 59.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 214–215. Vis and Schwartz are both in agreement that Num 35:31–34 is original to H. See Schwartz, "The Prohibitions," 56n1. See also Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 179–180.

[182] Vis, "The Purification Offering," 215.

emphasizes that the Lord is the one doing this."[183] Schwartz puts it this way: "What our clause does…is to take a set phrase, the 'placing' of the blood on the altar, and to reverse the conceptual direction of the action: 'It is not you who are placing the blood on the altar for me, for my benefit, but rather the opposite: it is I who have placed it there for you—for your benefit.'"[184] The idea here is that God provides blood (that is, life) as a means of purgation, out of an abundance of grace. Ultimately, God, not the priest, is the sovereign one who effects *kipper*.

This lengthy analysis of sacrifice (and particularly blood rites) in cultic contexts brings out several important theological insights. One general insight is that sacrifice is ultimately oriented around establishing communion with God and offering gifts to Him. Atonement is a tertiary aspect of sacrifice intended to redress various impediments in the divine-human relationship; the relationship itself is what is primary. As Anderson has noted, God's desire to dwell with His people is logically prior to His desire to atone for their sins; his desire to dwell with humanity "has [not] been made contingent upon on an act of rebellion against God."[185] It is that desire for fellowship that informs His gracious decision to provide atonement (Lev 17:11). Such desire is to be reciprocated by God's people.

The blood rites offer a wealth of insight, also. In the case of the *ʿōlāh* and the *šəlāmîm*, the life of the sacrificial victim is given back to God via the dashing of blood on the sides of the altar. This signifies God's sovereignty over life; ultimately, all life comes from God and belongs to God. In the case of the *ḥaṭṭā'āṯ*, the logic underlying the blood rites tells us a great deal about the nature of sin. In the Priestly worldview, sin and impurity stains the sanctuary and requires

[183] Sklar, *Leviticus*, 458.

[184] Schwartz, "The Prohibitions," 51.

[185] Anderson, *That I May Dwell*, 228.

purgation via blood manipulation. The sanctuary is God's means of dwelling with Israel. That Israel's sin stains the sanctuary and threatens God's sustained presence signifies that sin can cause a rupture in one's relationship to God. Furthermore, the sanctuary is shared by the congregation of Israel; and on the Day of Atonement, brazen and unpurged sins become the collective responsibility of the entire congregation. In the Priestly worldview, then, sin has individual *and* corporate dimensions; God provides a means for dealing with sin both privately and corporately.

As we have recurringly noted, the ultimate function of blood in the Priestly writings is purgation. Blood has the power to purge (and thereby purify and/or sanctify) because of its identification with life. As we noted briefly in 2.2, Milgrom has suggested that all of the impurities (corpse defilement, scale disease, and genital discharges) that require purgation appear to have death as their common denominator.[186] The association of corpses with death is self-evident; scale disease in the Priestly writings is associated with a corpse-like appearance (e.g., Num 12:12); and genital discharges (blood for women, semen for men) signify a loss of life. Hyam Maccoby has offered a helpful correction to Milgrom's view: "It is not just death that the temple excludes, but the whole cycle of mortality."[187] It is for this reason that menses and the blood of childbirth are sources of impurity, but blood from a wound is not. This also explains how blood, as a purgative agent, can function as a pollutant in the context of menses and childbirth. Both menses and childbirth relate directly to cycles of mortality. If Milgrom and Maccoby are correct, the theological principle at play in the purgation process is that "the power

[186] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 45–46.

[187] Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 49–50.

of life overwhelms the forces of death."[188] While their theory is ultimately conjectural, it has remarkable explanatory power—especially in light of the explicit identification of blood and life in Lev 17:11.

The logic of sacrifice, then, is not that God needs someone or something to die, as in some popular substitutionary models of atonement. The logic of sacrifice is that *life* is needed, to purge the stains of death and mortality. The slaughter of the sacrificial victim is accorded no ritual significance; rather, it is the purgative function of the blood that is accorded significance. The slaughter is performed by the offerer, but it is the priest who manipulates blood and effects *kipper*. Moreover, slaughter is common to all kinds of animal sacrifice, even those that are non-atoning. The death of the animal is therefore incidental to the procurement of its blood, its life; and that life, given graciously by God (Lev 17:11), is used to purge the forces of death.

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[188] Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 120.

Chapter 3: The Shedding of Blood

3.1 Shed Blood and Creation Theology (Genesis 1–9)

Genesis 1–2:4a (hereafter Genesis 1) gives an account of creation that theologically contextualizes not only the book of Genesis, but the entire biblical canon; and this was undoubtedly the intention of the final redactors who placed the pericope at the start of the book. It may prove useful, then, to begin our study of bloodshed with Genesis 1. While Genesis 1 does not include any explicit reference to blood, an examination of its primary theological motifs will prove indispensable to our inquiry. As we will see, the creation theology of Genesis 1 can helpfully contextualize later pentateuchal rhetoric about bloodshed. For our purposes, we will identify three motifs: 1) order and sacred space, 2) the *šālôm* of God,[189] and 3) the *imago dei* (or "image of God"). I will examine each in turn, and consider how the shedding of blood relates to each of them.

Scholars have long noted the priestly overtones of Genesis 1:1–2:4a. In this opening sequence, we are presented with a creation account in which God actively 'orders' the cosmos over a period of seven days. In separating light from darkness, God orders time on the first day. The heavens and the sea are ordered on the second day, and the land is ordered on the third. The last three days of creation directly correspond to the first three days—as God fills the three tiers of the cosmos with what John Walton calls "functionaries."[190] On day four, God creates the sun, moon, and stars, which correspond to the "light" and "darkness" of day one; on day five, God

[189] I have opted to transliterate the Hebrew term *šālôm* throughout this study, as no single English word quite adequately captures its meaning. I like the way Matthew Lynch has glossed this term: "right-relating wholenesss, flourishing, and peace." See Matthew J. Lynch, *Flood and Fury: Old Testament Violence and the Shalom of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 40.

[190] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 38–39.

creates birds and fish, which correspond to the sky and the sea of day two; and finally, on day six, God creates land animals and human beings, which correspond to the land of day three. Functional order is almost certainly what is in view when the author of Genesis 1 describes the creation as *ṭôḇ* (“good”). While *ṭôḇ* can have several meanings, context suggests that in this passage it indicates “something is functioning the way it is designed to” (cf. “not good” in Gen 2:18).[191] It is incontrovertible that the author of this cosmogony is concerned with form, structure, and order. Moreover, we are told that on the seventh day, God rests from his work of ordering the cosmos. This is not a moment of relief from divine exhaustion; it is a climactic moment in which God "[takes] up his residence in the ordered system that he has brought about in the previous six days... [and exercises] his control over this ordered system.”[192] Genesis 1 thus envisions the cosmos as a kind of sanctuary for God, a cosmic temple. He dwells there and rules there. It is a sacred space.[193] It has been noted by many scholars that the three-tiered cosmos our author presents (heavens, land, and sea) may intentionally correspond to the three levels of the temple (holy of holies, holy place, and courtyard).

The language of Genesis 1, then, is plainly and intentionally hieratic. The stress that this chapter lays on order, holiness, and divine dwelling clearly evinces a priestly agenda on the part of its author. Moreover, the fact that God is attributed with ordering time, seasons, and Sabbaths (1:3–5, 14b; 2:2–3) indicates an authorial concern for Israelite festival observance (cf. Lev 23). Mark S. Smith, following an exegetical and theological analysis of this chapter, succinctly

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[191] Ibid., 54. For a more detailed argument for this rendering of *ṭôḇ*, read pp. 53–57.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Cultic portrayals of divine rest are common in ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature, and they can be found in extra-biblical contexts, as well (e.g., the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*). There is a shared cultural framework in the ANE according to which "temples are for divine 'rest,' and divine rest is found in sanctuaries or sacred space.” See John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 149–150.

summarizes what he calls “the priestly vision of Genesis 1”:

> In the midst of a dangerous and unruly world, the divine acts of creation create space and time for Israel to experience divine goodness and blessing crowned by the seventh day, a day of holiness. Like the Temple, the world as created by God supports the proper order of priestly space and time. The universe is the site for the observance of Sabbath and festivals. The holiness is not entirely separate from the other days. Like the Temple priesthood that maintains sacrifice and festivals, God creates a time ordered for the celebration of festivals…With this order of time and space, the creation is like a cosmic temple overseen by God for the good of humanity.[194]

As we have noted, the canonical prioritization of this priestly text should not be ignored. While other cosmogonies can be found in the Hebrew Bible, this particular cosmogony is given a certain precedence. Such precedence suggests that the final editors of the Pentateuch saw the passage as possessing great theological import. In Genesis 1, God orders a non-ordered cosmos with the intent of taking up residence and dwelling among his creation; and it is through this lens that the final redactors of the Pentateuch want us to see the whole of the pentateuchal narrative. William P. Brown rightly notes, “by virtue of its placement at the Bible’s threshold, this quintessential creation story not only relativizes the other biblical cosmogonies interspersed throughout the Old Testament, but also imbues all other material, from historical narrative to law, with cosmic background.”[195]

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[194] Smith, Mark S. *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), Kindle edition, Kindle Locations 1620–1624. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, it is a rough consensus that H is responsible for the material found in Leviticus 17–26. Therefore, one might rightly attribute to H a profound theological concern for order, holiness, and the observance of Sabbaths and festivals. As we have seen, such concerns are not only present, but foregrounded in Genesis 1:1–2:4a; and that realization has catalyzed a proliferation of scholarship defending the notion that Genesis 1 is a Holiness redaction. In addition to theological evidence, a wealth of linguistic and conceptual evidence has also been found to support the proposition. Consequently, the conclusion that Genesis 1 belongs to H has become, in my estimation, quite difficult to refute. See Bill T. Arnold, “Genesis 1 as Holiness Preamble,” in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Iain Provan and Mark J. Boda; VTSup 153; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 331–43; and Paavo N. Tucker, *The Holiness Composition in the Book of Exodus*, Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 35–44.

[195] William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 36.

I have opted to use the term "non-ordered" rather than "disordered" to describe the cosmos as it existed prior to the ordering process of Genesis 1. While this may seem like a trivial distinction, it is actually quite significant, and it pertains directly to my contention that Genesis 1 portrays a God who is concerned with and essentially characterized by *šālôm.* The *šālôm* of God is the second of the three aforementioned motifs that I wish to accentuate.

In 1895, Hermann Gunkel authored a seminal work entitled *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzdt und Endze*, in which he observed that a "creation-by-combat" motif was preponderant in many ancient Near Eastern creation stories. In these stories, creation is depicted as the consequence of a battle fought between divine beings and forces of chaos. The most prominent example of this motif is in the *Enuma Elish*. Therein, the god Marduk kills a sea monster named Tiamat and constructs the cosmos from her carcass. While theomachy is certainly not universal in ancient cosmogonies,[196] the motif is certainly present and significant.

A few scholars have sought to locate the "creation-by-combat" motif in Genesis 1:2, positing that *təhôm* (usually translated 'the deep' or 'the abyss') refers to an enemy that must be vanquished by God before creation can transpire.[197] Nevertheless, many other scholars have rendered these claims dubious. David Tsumura has proffered an especially forceful critique of this view in his book, *Creation And Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament*. Tsumura recognizes that the waters are not yet ordered (they are, rather, *tōhû wāḇōhû*), but he finds no exegetical evidence of a violent struggle against forces of chaos. There is non-order, but not disorder. Indeed, Tsumura concludes that, "the background of the Genesis

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[196] As has been demonstrated by John H. Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after Chaoskampf," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 48–63.

[197] Perhaps the most notable proponent of this view is Bernard Batto. See his argument in Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 73–101.

creation story has nothing to do with the so-called *Chaoskampf* myth of the Mesopotamian type, as preserved in the Babylonian 'creation' myth *Enuma Elish*. In Gen 1, there is no hint of struggle or battle between God and this *tə̱hôm*—water." [198]

But why does any of this matter? J. Richard Middleton calls attention to the profound ethical and theological implications of reading Genesis 1 as "creation-by-combat":

> Creation-by-combat…ontologizes evil, understanding it to be at least equiprimordial with God and goodness and perhaps even more primordial, as in the *Enuma Elish*, where the olden gods are the locus of chaos and where order (represented by the younger gods) is later. But not only is evil (in the form of chaos) given primordial status, the conquest of this evil/chaos to found the ordered world enshrines violence as the divinely chosen method for establishing goodness.[199]

While there are a select few instances of poetry in the Hebrew Bible that hint at a violent cosmogony (Job 26; Psalm 74, 79), we should "take seriously the placement of Genesis 1 as the prologue or preface to the biblical canon."[200] By placing a conspicuously nonviolent cosmogony at the start of the Hebrew Bible, the final biblical editors intended to signal "the creator's original intent for shalom and blessing at the outset of human history."[201] The creation accounts found in the opening chapters of Genesis aim to teach readers about God's original intentions for the cosmos; and all notions of primordial violence, despite their cultural currency in the ANE, are strikingly and purposely excluded. Subsequent texts should thus be read through the lens of God's fundamental desire for and identification with *šālôm*. Adopting such a lens will allow us to better recognize the moral implications of the bloodshed that occurs later in the biblical

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[198] David Tsumura, *Creation And Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 143.

[199] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 254.

[200] Ibid., 268.

[201] Ibid., 269.

narrative.

It may rightly be noted, however, that the word *šālôm* does not actually occur in the creation narrative of Genesis 1. On what grounds, then, should we understand Genesis 1 as portraying and idealizing *šālôm*? Here, the diachronic analyses of biblical scholars like Erhard Blum may prove useful. In his book *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, Blum develops the narrative theme of the Priestly material scattered about in Gen 1–Lev 26.[202] He identifies this material as a "P composition" (KP), and proposes that KP combines several distinct Priestly sources and redactions. Following Blum, Paavo Tucker likewise contends that "the Priestly materials in Gen 1–Lev 26 form a coherent composition that develops the themes of creation, Sabbath, sanctuary, and covenant to their climactic expression in Lev 17–26."[203] This is significant because the composition identified by both Blum and Tucker forms a narrative arch in which covenant obedience brings Israel back into the creational intentions of God. At the climax of this narrative arch (Lev 26:1–11), we find a description of the creational renewal that proper Torah observance will bring about. Verse 6 reads, "I will grant peace [*šālôm*] in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country." It is therefore clear that the authorial tradition that lies behind both Genesis 1 and Leviticus 26 understands the creative intentions of God to be fundamentally nonviolent and oriented toward *šālôm*. This nonviolent ideal can be recognized

[202] Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

[203] Tucker, *The Holiness Composition*, 3–4. Rather than calling this a P composition (KP), however, Tucker argues that "it is more fitting to see the Priestly narrative as part of an H composition which has utilized various priestly traditions in forming the composition but whose main themes of creation, Sabbath, covenant, and sanctuary reverence are features of H." In any case, Blum and Tucker both agree that this narrative composition integrates and supplements non-Priestly materials (traditionally called J [Yahwist] and/or E [Elohist]). Therefore, while the narratives of Gen 2–4 are likely non-Priestly in origin, their integration into the H composition allows canonical interpreters to read them in light of H's theology (and particularly, the theology of Gen 1). See Blum, *Studien zur Komposition*, 287; Tucker, *The Holiness Composition*, 4.

not only in the non-conflictual nature of the creative process itself, but also in the peaceful coexistence of humans and animals (Gen 1:29–30; cf. Lev 26:6).

The third and final theological motif from Genesis 1 that I would like to highlight is that of the *imago dei*, or "image of God." Genesis 1:26–27 reads:

> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Of particular interest to us are the Hebrew terms *ṣelem* ("image") and *dəmûṯ* ("likeness"). What does it mean that humanity has been created in God's "image" and according to his "likeness"? Despite the significance that Christian theology has (rightly) accorded to this notion, the biblical text is relatively ambiguous about the nature of 'imaging.' That human beings are created in the image of God is attested to almost exclusively in the book of Genesis, particularly in chapters 1–11 (1:26–27; 5:1–2; 5:3; 9:6).[204] In each and every instance, no theological commentary on the *imago* is offered.

In recent decades, several noteworthy studies have offered greater contextual insight into the meaning of the *imago*.[205] Brent Strawn suggests that three such insights are particularly helpful for its proper theological interpretation. First, the language of 'imaging' was almost certainly borrowed from the royal domain in the ANE; imagers were royal representatives. Second, ANE cosmogonies often portrayed the human realm and the divine realm as being

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[204] There seem to be a few more scattered references in the New Testament (e.g., 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15).

[205] See Middleton, *The Liberating Image*; W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism*, CHANE 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Ryan S. Petersen, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation*, JTISup 14 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016); Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God's Image: Why Creation Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023); Brent A. Strawn, "From *Imago* to *Imagines*: The Image(s) of God in Genesis," in *The Incomparable God: Readings in Biblical Theology*, ed. Collin Cornell and M. Justin Walker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023), 3–25.

integrally related. Third, a literary analysis of the book of Genesis in its canonical form can shed significant light on the meaning of the *imago*.[206]

From this third insight, Strawn argues that the *imago* may actually be "a matter of function and proper ethic, not a given of dignified essence."[207] By placing the *imago* in the narrative of Genesis with little to no explanation, the authors/redactors of Genesis may have intended to rhetorically evoke an anthropological question for readers: "Will [humans] image God or not?"[208] This question is then answered only as the book unfolds. In this light, certain ethical and vocational expectations attend one's status as an imager; and these expectations become a rubric of sorts, according to which characters of the book of Genesis might be evaluated.

To understand how well one images God, however, there must be an understanding of what God is fundamentally like. As we have seen from our previous inquiries, the God that humanity is called to image in the book of Genesis is a God of order, holiness, and *šālôm*. Along these lines, Strawn suggests that Genesis 1–11 presents readers with a God who exercises benevolent and nonviolent activity and power, making benevolence and peace integral to manifesting the *imago*.[209] When the cosmos is filled and properly maintained by God's benevolent and nonviolent vice-regents, flourishing is made possible for all of creation. As we progress through the narrative of Genesis, we will see that the act of bloodshed is a primary criterion according to which the effectiveness of one's imaging may be evaluated; those who

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[206] Strawn, "From *Imago* to *Imagines*," 7–11.

[207] Ibid., 18.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid., 12–13.

shed innocent blood actively distort rather than manifest the *imago*.

In sum, Genesis 1–2 presents us with a flourishing new cosmos characterized by order, divine presence, and *šālôm*. This all changes, however, in Genesis 3, when God's human vice-regents willfully chose to disobey the divine command given to them in 2:16–17. It is at this point that sin is introduced into the cosmos, frustrating God's intentions for creation. Mark Boda notes that sin in Genesis 3 is "identified as the violation of God's command and results in immediate punishment from God."[210] This punishment not only impedes their ability to fulfill the missional mandates of Gen 1:28, but also bars them "from the garden, where they had experienced close fellowship with Yahweh and where they would have enjoyed eternal life."[211]

This generates a new context in which human beings are now distanced from God, and sin and death are lived realities. It is only in this context that bloodshed becomes conceivable. The first to fall victim to the act of bloodshed (and thereby the first to experience death) is Abel, the younger son of Adam and Eve. At the start of Genesis 4, we are told that both Abel and his brother Cain offer sacrifices to YHWH; but YHWH only looks favorably upon Abel's sacrifice. Though we are never told why God favors the sacrifice of Abel, we are told that Cain responds with a jealous anger toward his brother Abel. In response to that anger, YHWH presents him with two options: "to do well" or "to not do well" (Gen 4:7 NRSVUE). He assures Cain that the former will result in abated anger and acceptance, while the latter will result in destructive consequences.[212] Rather than "doing well" by mastering the "crouching creature" (*rōḇēṣ*) at the

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[210] Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 19.

[211] Ibid.

[212] See Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* (Siphrut 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 137–138. Verse 7 is a particular difficult verse to translate, but Schlimm offers helpful insight. He accepts the now popular notion that the masculine term *rōḇēṣ* ("crouching") is, in this particular context, a nominalized participle ("crouching creature"). His translation of 7b ultimately flows from this exegetical decision.

"doorway to sin" (*lappeṯaḥ ḥaṭṭāʾṯ*), Cain chooses to fatally assault his brother Abel.[213] This is the first time that sin is explicitly mentioned in in the Hebrew Bible; and it appears in a context of fratricide. As Bill Arnold notes, "that which began in the Garden of Eden continues in a more disturbing way among humans East of Eden."[214] The first human being born of a woman is now the first human being to shed human blood.

In verses 9–12, YHWH confronts Cain about his crime. It is here that the Hebrew Bible explicitly mentions blood for the first time:

> Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

Following the work of scholars like William Brown, Matthew Lynch has published new scholarship that reflects on the ecological implications of bloodshed in this narrative.[215] In his study, Lynch rightly observes that "these verses present a significant, but mysterious relationship between the blood of Abel and the ground itself."[216] To better understand this relationship between the blood and the land, he contends that the reader should attend to the overlapping judicial logic and purity logic informing the text.[217] We will thus consider each of these in turn.

Interestingly, the blood of Abel is referenced here in the plural form (lit. "bloods"). Elsewhere, this plural term (*dāmîm*) is used in juridical contexts to denote guiltiness for

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[213] Ibid.

[214] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge, 2009), 79.

[215] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 17–51; cf. Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 164–172.

[216] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 31.

[217] Ibid., 31–38.

homicide. In such contexts, the word is usually translated “bloodguilt.” Lynch offers a helpful and concise explanation of this ancient legal concept:

> High-handed murder was resolved judicially in the ancient world (with notable exceptions) by a blood-avenger (or blood-restorer; גאל הדם) from the aggrieved family, who took the life of the murderer, the one who bore blood-guilt. That person would restore the imbalance created by bloodshed with the blood of the murderer and thus exact vengeance.[218]

Pamela Barmash avers that the term “bloodguilt” is “derived from the sense that the spilled blood of the victim has a concrete existence of its own and cannot be ignored.”[219] We can easily see how such a concept might be operative in Gen 4. The ‘bloods’ of Abel cry out to YHWH from the ground, likely “a cry for legal aid” and/or “vengeance.”[220] Nevertheless, a glaring oddity in this particular narrative is that the blood of Abel is not avenged—not in any normative way, at least. Cain is not killed, but is instead protected by YHWH. A few rationales for this peculiarity have been offered; it is possible that Cain was simply pardoned, or that his exile served as his ‘death’ sentence. However, one can only speculate; the text is not explicit on this matter.[221]

Gordon Wenham locates the logic of purity in verse 10, specifically in the phrase, “your brother’s blood is crying out to me.” According to Wenham:

> The four Hebrew words used hardly require comment. Compressed into them is a whole theology whose principles inform much of the criminal and cultic law of Israel. Life is in the blood (Lev 17:11), so shed blood is the most polluting of all substances. Consequently, unatoned-for murders pollute the holy land, making it unfit for the divine presence.[222]

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[218] Ibid., 31.

[219] Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005), 17–18.

[220] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 31–32.

[221] For a more thorough analysis of the rationales for this oddity, see ibid., 32–34.

[222] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 107.

The notion that bloodshed is pollutive is primarily informed by Numbers 35 (which will be discussed in more detail below). However, there seems to be at least adequate evidence of such logic in the present narrative. Later in the Pentateuch, innocent shed blood is believed to "pollute the killer or the land itself, rendering either unfit for contact with God's presence"; likewise, in the present account, the land responds negatively to the spilled blood of Abel (v. 12), and Cain is exiled from God's presence (v. 16).[223] Nevertheless, Lynch notes that the purity logic operative in Gen 4—like the judicial logic discussed above—is attended by a conspicuous non-resolution: "God's action toward Cain did not resolve the problem of the land's polluted state," but rather, "the land remained in a state of pollution."[224]

In any case, we are now better equipped to attend to the logic of ecology informing this text. We have seen that the ground opens to receive the blood of Abel. The ground now blends together with the blood that defiles it to produce an outcry (*ṣōʿăqîm*) to YHWH. William Brown perceptively notes that the significance of this event is intensified by an understanding of the kinship that exists between the ground and Abel: "As ʾādām was 'taken' from the ʾădāmâ and is eventually to return there, Cain has violated the ground by making it 'take' back his brother."[225] Building on this concept, Lynch suggests, "Abel's blood thus reconnects with its originating source, the land, which joins him as victim in a distressful outcry."[226] In addition to the outcry, the ground—which was once tilled by Cain—now refuses to yield produce for Cain (v. 12).

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[223] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 35.

[224] Ibid., 35–36.

[225] Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 167.

[226] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 38.

When Cain kills Abel, he thereby kills “the life of the land.”[227] All of this indexes a certain solidarity between humankind and the land; indeed, Lynch notes that, “humans and earth are so bound up with one another that each can act as a voice on the other’s behalf, particularly in situations of distress. The land can cry out for the human, and vice versa.”[228] In the case of Gen 4, it is the blood of Abel that kindles the advocacy of the land.[229]

Each of the various ‘logics’ informing this text (judicial, purity, and ecological) are helpful for interpreting homicide laws found later in the Pentateuch; but the ecological dimensions of violence in particular are also helpful for understanding how the shedding of blood upends the creative intentions of God in Genesis 1. I mentioned above that Lev 26 depicts a renewal of creation, one that is contingent upon the covenant obedience of Israel. In this renewed creation, YHWH explains that there is “peace [*šālôm*] in the land” (v. 6). By that same token, Lev 26 warns of the woeful state of creation if Israel apostatizes and chooses to break its covenant terms; the people are warned, “your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit” (v. 20). Put differently, if Israel breaks the covenant, the *šālôm* of the land described in verse 6 will be disrupted. Importantly, the verbiage of Lev 26:20 echoes that of Gen 4:12, where God tells Cain, “[the ground] will no longer yield its crops for you.” Abel’s murder and the resultant blood pollution has the same effect that breaking the covenant has: it disrupts *šālôm* in the land, and thus profoundly subverts God’s creative intention.

The murder of Abel is only the first in a series of violent acts belonging to the antediluvian period in Scripture. As the old saying goes, “violence begets violence.” Lamech, a

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[227] Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 168.

[228] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 43.

[229] This may explain why Joseph’s brothers speak of killing Joseph and covering his blood (Gen 37:26). Barmash avers, “Covering the blood is a means of hiding the slaying, while uncovering it brings certain punishment.” Barmash, *Homicide*, 97.

descendant of Cain, is characterized by his rash violence (Gen 4:23–24); and before long, violence plagues the entire earth (Gen 6:11). As was discussed above, nonviolence is a central characteristic of God's nature in Genesis 1. In just three chapters (Gen 4–6), "humanity proves itself incapable of imaging the nonviolent God."[230] God's nonviolent vice-regents were commissioned to fill the earth with more life (Gen 1:28); instead, the earth is filled with more violence and death (Gen 6:11).[231] Therefore, the shedding of blood also marks a profound distortion of the *imago* and a subversion of human vocation.[232]

The language of Genesis 6:11–12 recalls the language of Genesis 1: "Now the earth was corrupt [ruined] in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt [ruined] the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted [ruined] their ways."[233] Wenham rightly notes that the words "God saw" in Gen 6:12 echo the words "God saw" in 1:31.[234] But while God saw that all that He made was "good" (*ṭô<u>b</u>*) in Gen 1:31, He saw that the earth "was ruined" (*tiššāḥē<u>t</u>*) in Gen 6:11–12. Brown thus posits that in Gen 6, "Creation's goodness has been turned on its head. Instead of approbation, God finds only reprobation."[235] It was noted that "goodness" in Gen 1 relates directly to functional order. The inversion of goodness in Gen 6 thus signifies

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[230] Strawn, "From *Imago* to *Imagines*," 13.

[231] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 171.

[232] Strawn points out that later in the Genesis narrative, Joseph "models the nonviolent primordial image in a way that Cain does not." Whereas Cain killed his brother, Joseph chooses to forgive his brothers. Strawn, "From *Imago* to *Imagines*," 20. Strawn closely follows the work of Matthew Schlimm, who has called Joseph the "anti-Cain." See Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 178.

[233] While most modern English translations (including the NIV) render *tiššāḥē<u>t</u>* in v. 11 as "was corrupt," the translation "was ruined" is preferrable. Given that 6:11–12 echoes and inverts Gen 1:31, and Gen 1:31 describes the state of the entire created order, it is likely that the entire created order (and not just human morality) is in view in Gen 6:11–12. This makes sense of the ecology of violence that was just teased out in Gen 4; the violence of humans ruins the land. This usage also matches the usage of this verb/stem elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 8:20; Jer 13:7; 18:4). For an extended argument, see Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 55–56.

[234] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 171.

[235] Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 54.

disorder; “Chaos has arrived, enveloping the earth and prompting its dissolution.”[236] Mark McEntire is correct when he suggests that violence “reorders human existence.”[237] The shedding of blood subverts God’s creative intention by disordering what God has ordered, by producing chaos rather than subduing it. Moreover, Cain’s expulsion from the presence of God in Gen 4:14–16 demonstrates that bloodshed threatens God’s presence among His people.

God’s solution to the problem of widespread violence and bloodshed—to the disruption of *šālôm*, the distortion of the *imago*, and the disordering of creation—is to “ruin” the creation (Gen 6:13). But, as was just noted, the creation was already ruined (Gen 6:11–12). Lynch helpfully elucidates this seeming paradox:

> God ruins an already ruined creation. The narrator affirms two things at once. God facilitated the flood – it was not beyond his control – but the same flood was a natural outcome of creation’s own collapsing state. Yhwh determined to ‘mediate the consequences’ of a world gone violent. The divine act ‘is not externally imposed but rather internally related to the sin [of violence]’. The earth was already ‘ruined’ (6:11–12), so he determined to ‘ruin’ it (6:13). Its ‘end’ had come, so he decided to make an end of it (6:13). Just as Cain was driven ‘from upon the face of the ground’ (מעל פני האדמה; 4:14), so God wiped out all creatures ‘from upon the face of the ground’ (מעל פני האדמה; 6:7; 7:4). God’s agency and the agency of creation itself worked in tandem.[238]

God’s work in the flood is ultimately recreative. God sees to it that the chaos wrought by “violence run amok” is met with a “watery holocaust.”[239] God’s agency in the flood is first recorded in Gen 8:1, which clearly echoes Gen 1:2: “But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.” As Lynch notes, “God brought the flood as a pre-creative response to the

[236] Ibid.

[237] Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: Violence in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 27.

[238] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 68–69.

[239] Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 59.

destructive forces of evil and violence, and then used his re-creative רוח to restore the cosmos… God's primary act finds clear expression then in 8:1…The divine potter begins to re-form the world."[240] In this new, postdiluvian world, God must now pointedly and preemptively address the threat of ruin from violence and bloodshed.

3.2 Homicide Law in the Pentateuch

3.2.1 Postdiluvian Commission: Genesis 9:1–7

Gen 9 is an important coda to the Noah story; particularly important for our purposes are verses 1–7. In these verses, God offers a new blessing/commission. This blessing echoes the one offered in Gen 1:28–29, with some new revisions:

> Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

Once again, we see that God wants to fill the earth with life; the pericope is bookended with God's familiar command to "be fruitful and increase in number" (vv. 1, 7). This further confirms that the flood was indeed an act of recreation. As John Goldingay writes, "God is committed to humanity's having a new beginning."[241] The decision to open and close the

[240] Lynch, *Portraying Violence,* 71–72.

[241] John Goldingay, *Genesis*, BCOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 160.

pericope with this refrain reinforces the idea that human life and its proliferation are central to God's creative intentions. Starting in verse 2, however, Gen 9 departs from the original blessing/commission of Gen 1. For example, there is no reference to subduing/subjugating in Gen 9. There is no explicit justification given for this omission, but Goldingay reasonably suggests that the omission might be informed by "humanity's turning proper subjugation into improper violence."[242]

Another key difference in the blessing of Gen 9 is that "the peaceful coexistence that once characterized creation as well as life in the ark no longer carries the day."[243] God now allows animals to become a source of food for humans. Nevertheless, the consumption of an animal's blood is strictly prohibited (v. 4). Gilders posits that this prohibition is implicitly rooted in the Priestly conviction that all life belongs to God: "God grants lifeless animal flesh for human consumption but holds back the blood, the life itself."[244] Furthermore, God now requires the blood (that is, the life) of any creature (whether animal or human) who takes the blood of a human being (v. 5). As Lynch submits, this "means not only that God maintains some measure of cosmic balance, but that he retains prerogative over life."[245] In this way, Lynch agrees with Gilders regarding God's sovereignty over life.

The climax of this pericope is verse 6, which states, "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans [*bāʾāḏām*] shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind." The shedding of blood is what ultimately brought about the ruin of the cosmos in Gen 4–6; God works to preempt this fate in Gen 9 by instituting a stringent prohibition of homicide. As

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[242] Ibid.

[243] Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 56.

[244] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 19.

[245] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 82–83.

Milgrom states, "Man's nature will not change; he shall continue sinful (Gen 8:22), but his violence need no longer pollute the earth if he will but heed one law: abstain from blood."[246] Lynch notes that while v. 6 appears almost legal in nature, the rationale given in v. 6b is theological: in the image of God has God made humankind." According to Middleton, a human being as the *imago dei* is "gifted with real historical power and agency"; and when blood is shed, that power and agency is "tragically being exercised against other human beings instead of used cooperatively in stewardship of the earth."[247]

Nevertheless, there is some ambiguity surrounding the nature of the punishment that God institutes. In particular, there is contestation over the proper rendering of the term *bāʾāḏām* (typically translated "by man" or "by humans") in v. 6a. The preposition that appears at the beginning of the word is a *beth* preposition; and there is disagreement over whether this is a *beth instrumenti* or a *beth pretii*. The former is more commonly used in English translations and indicates instrumentality ("by man shall his/her blood be shed"); the latter is less commonly used in English translations and indicates price or exchange ("in exchange for man shall his/her blood be shed").[248] However, Milgrom makes a compelling argument for the *beth pretii* that is grounded primarily in the grammatical structure of v. 6a: *šōp̱ēḵ dam hāʾāḏām bāʾāḏām dāmô yiššāp̱ēḵ*. According to Milgrom, "the chiastic structure of this verse, …(ABC C'B'A'), makes it certain that both *ādām* words (CC') refer to the same man, namely, the victim, and the prefixed *beth* must therefore be the *beth pretii*."[249] He then proceeds to demonstrate that context

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[246] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 705.

[247] Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 221.

[248] On the *beth pretii*, see Bruce K. Waltke, and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §11.2.5d.
[249] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 705.

substantiates this rendering. In verse 5, for instance, *God* is the agent who “demands an accounting.” Lynch recognizes further that the *beth pretii* creates continuity between Gen 4 and Gen 9: “Just as Yhwh had promised to avenge Cain’s blood should any kill him (4:15), now God would require the life of anyone who murdered his fellow human.”[250] According to Gen 9, then, God (the giver of life) had a right to exact vengeance when blood was shed and life was taken. This passage foreshadows pentateuchal homicide laws.

3.2.2 Homicide and Asylum: Deuteronomy 19

In our analysis of Gen 4, we were briefly introduced to the ancient legal concept of bloodguilt (lit. “bloods,” *dāmîm*). This concept is elucidated in Deut 19:1–13, a pericope in the Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 12–26). According to the logic of Deuteronomy, when an individual is murdered, the victim’s blood (*dāmîm*) “attaches itself to the responsible party” and is only removed when the responsible party is killed.[251] Blood, when spilled out on the ground, ‘cries out’ for aid, and a “blood-avenger”/“blood-restorer” (*gōʾēl haddām*) avenges the victim’s death by killing his/her killer. According to Barmash, this legal procedure “both assures the redress of wrongs and controls the violence to a level tolerable in a community.”[252]

The one typically given responsibility for enacting blood vengeance is a member of the victim’s family (probably the nearest male relative, cf. 2 Sam 14:6–7). Even though violent retaliation is permitted in this legal framework, there are many strictures in place. Only the *gōʾēl*

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[250] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 84.

[251] Barmash, *Homicide*, 98. She also notes that the only context in which shed blood does not function this way is that of capital punishment: “when a person deserves death because of his own misdeed, his blood falls on his own head.”

[252] Ibid., 23.

haddām is permitted to enact vengeance; and the person responsible for killing the victim has access to various cities of refuge. The cities of refuge, or 'asylum cities,' are designed to be equidistant, so that one is always readily accessible to a killer (Deut 19:2–3). These cities function to protect the killer until he/she is given a fair trial.[253] The trial helps to determine the intentionality and/or deliberation behind the killing act. By taking into account the intent and/or deliberation of the killer, biblical criminal law departs from earlier systems of blood vengeance.[254] Furthermore, the asylum city laws allow the practice of blood vengeance to be more state-controlled.[255] The *gōʾēl haddām* is allowed to pursue the killer to an asylum city (v. 6); and *if* the killer is found guilty by the city elders and released from asylum, the *gōʾēl haddām* is responsible for killing the killer (thus negating the bloodguilt). But this is the extent of the jurisdiction that Deuteronomy allots to the *gōʾēl haddām*.

Important to note is the fact that "Deuteronomy regards the manslayer as innocent."[256] When a killer acts unintentionally and without malice (v. 4), their blood is described as "innocent blood" (*dām nāqî*; v. 10). Therefore, when a manslayer's blood is spilled, bloodguilt is not resolved but is instead produced. Because the manslayer is innocent, the shedding of his/her innocent blood is not justified and it therefore places bloodguilt "upon" the people of Israel (v. 10b). Lynch rightly notes that in the Deuteronomic Code, "one of the greatest threats to Israel's relationship with the land was 'innocent blood' (דם נקי) in its midst."[257] Verse 10b reinforces the

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[253] Ibid., 25. See also Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation and Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996), 179.

[254] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 179.

[255] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 170.

[256] Kevin Mattison, "Contrasting Conceptions of Asylum in Deuteronomy 19 and Numbers 35," *VT* 68 (2018): 234.

[257] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 172.

idea that the people of Israel are inextricably bound up with the land because God, the "ultimate owner of the land," has given it to them as a "land grant."[258] Lynch suggests this is the reason that innocent blood affects both the land *and* the people: "just as the people's infractions threatened their hold on the land, the innocent blood on the land threatened the people."[259] The intricacies of this "relational bond" are never laid out explicitly, but the bond is nevertheless assumed by the Deuteronomic author.[260]

All of this points to the fact that in Deuteronomy, Israel is *corporately* held responsible for addressing the problem of (innocent) shed blood; Lynch sums things up nicely when he says that "*intra-personal violence brought guilt upon the whole people and threatened their collective relationship to the land.*"[261] Berman rightly notes that it is thus the "entire polity that is ultimately responsible for the proper administration of justice" (cf. Deut 16:18).[262] The "you" in Deuteronomy more often than not refers to the collective people of Israel; and that is certainly the case in Deut 16:10.[263] Therefore, the people of Israel had a collective duty to ensure "that the innocent not be wrongly executed."[264]

3.2.3 Homicide, Asylum, and Blood Pollution: Numbers 35

Similar legal procedures are described in Num 35:9–34, a text that has now been

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[258] Berman, *Created Equal*, 90–91.

[259] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 173.

[260] Ibid., 175.

[261] Ibid., 177. Emphasis his.

[262] Berman, *Created Equal*, 69–70.

[263] Ibid., 69.

[264] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 180.

referenced several times in passing. One of the most distinctive characteristics of this passage is that it is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that explicitly attributes land pollution to the shedding of blood.[265] We noted that this logic is potentially operative in Gen 4, given that the land responds negatively to the blood of Abel (Gen 4:12); but Num 35 is unique in its explicit recognition of this principle, and in its concern with the ritual purgation of land pollution caused by shed blood.[266] Lynch clarifies that in this passage, it is the spilled blood of the victim that defiles the land; it is not "a concrete form of the deed itself"; this is because the blood of a victim functions as "an instantiation of innocence, and hence, seems to signal an affront to God."[267]

In Chapter 2, we established that animal blood was a sufficient ritual detergent in many cultic contexts; but this passage explains that the purgation of *land* pollution caused by homicide can only be effected by the blood of the killer. As was stated in 2.3.5, Num 35 rejects the notion that a ransom could be paid for the taking of a human life. No rationale is offered for this stipulation; but Timothy Ashley (following the work of A. Noordtzij) offers a couple of possibilities: "The practical reason behind this law may very well be…to avoid giving the rich who could afford such payments a loophole to commit murder at will, or a method of making an incident of human death an occasion for enrichment."[268] Whatever the case may be, this passage clearly underscores the profound significance of human life.

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[265] It was noted above (51n181) that Num 35 is an H text. The fact that H conceptualizes shed blood as a land pollutant may explain why the cities of refuge in Num 35 are to be Levitical cities rather than merely equidistant cities (as in Deut 19). As Mattison notes, "Deuteronomy's maximally-accessible asylum cities are ideally-suited to protect the manslayer, whereas the Holiness Legislation's Levitical cities are equipped to contain the manslayer and the pollution he bears." Mattison, "Contrasting Conceptions," 247.

[266] As we noted in 2.3.3, purgation is clearly in view in v. 33. Gilders notes, "the earth *has* been polluted, and its ability to sustain the divine presence has been called into question. It is not guilty and certainly is not in danger of death. Thus, a *kōper* would not be paid for it. Rather, it needs to be purified." Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 165.

[267] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 248.

[268] Timothy R. Ashley, *The Books of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 655.

Mattison has offered a salient argument that in contrast to the writer of Deut 19, the Holiness writer in Num 35 "regards the manslayer as guilty."[269] This argument is substantiated by the fact that the shedding of blood pollutes even in cases of unintentionality; and even the manslayer cannot be exonerated without purgation (v. 32). For this reason, the *gōʾēl haddām* can kill the manslayer with impunity if he/she leaves the asylum before purgation is effected (v. 27).[270] Despite this difference, however, Num 35 (like Deut 19) does make provisions for the manslayer (albeit less radical provisions). The manslayer can remain protected in the asylum city until the death of the high priest, which functions to purge the bloodguilt of the manslayer. Mattison calls this "an exceptional kind of expiation" in which "the unique expiatory power of the high priest's death would parallel his unique expiatory role in life."[271] Mark Awabdy locates in this provision a theology of protection: "just as God, by this law, protects those who faithfully remain in a town of refuge, he protects his covenant people who remain under his protection."[272]

Verse 34 is crucial to understanding H's concern for the pollution of spilled blood: "Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites." The concern for land pollution is informed by a concern for God's presence in the land. Christian Frevel rightly argues that in Numbers, "the congregation [of Israel]…is constituted by the presence of God in its midst."[273] This verse illustrates that the primary

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[269] Mattison, "Contrasting Conceptions," 236.

[270] Ibid., 236–237.

[271] Ibid., 246. Mattison follows Milgrom here. See Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation and Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 294. For reasons explicated above, I would suggest (contra Milgrom) that this exceptional form of expiation has a purgative function rather than a ransoming function.

[272] Mark Awabdy, *Numbers*, BCOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 553.

[273] Christian Frevel, "Purity Conceptions in the Book of Numbers in Context," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism* (ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 377. Furthermore, Israel Knohl has argued that God dwelling among His people is a

motivation for addressing pollution from bloodshed should not be vengeance; it should instead be a concern for maintaining Israel's relationship with God by attending to the land in which He dwells.[274] Bloodshed, as impurity, "threatens Yhwh's presence in a most direct way."[275] The purgation of that defilement invites God's sustained presence.

This conception of blood pollution may be operative in the plague narrative of Exod 7:14–24. In that passage, all the waterways and bodies of water in Egypt are turned to blood by Moses and Aaron. Suzanne Boorer argues that this sign "evokes the cosmic power of YHWH as creator who plays havoc with his creation in the land of Egypt. With all the waters of Egypt transformed into blood, with blood throughout all the land of Egypt (Exod 7:19, 21b), the primeval elements of creation, the water and land, in Egypt, have been polluted and rendered unclean."[276] The idea that pollution is in view is further substantiated by the fact that this passage shows signs of priestly redaction. In the original story, it seems that only the waters of the Nile are turned into blood (vv. 14–18, 20b–21a, 24); by contrast, vv. 19 and 21b suggest that blood affects *all* water sources in Egypt. Furthermore, the use of the word *miqwēh* to describe the gathering of the waters in v. 19 echoes the usage of the same word in Gen 1:10, an H text.[277]

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central motif in H texts (Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 99).

[274] So Awabdy, *Numbers*, 555.

[275] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 249.

[276] Suzanne Boorer, *The Vision of the Priestly Narrative: Its Genre and Hermeneutics of Time*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 27 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 256.

[277] Ibid. Boorer attributes these redactions to Pg. What Boorer labels Pg would perhaps be better labeled H material. This material has been integrated with Priestly manuals and non-Priestly materials to form the narrative thread that I have called the H composition.

3.2.4 An Unsolved Murder: Deuteronomy 21

Having addressed the homicide laws in Deut 19 and Num 35, we can now turn our attention to a peculiar ritual prescribed in Deut 21. In this passage, instructions are given for how to address the discovery of a slain corpse in one of Israel's fields. This passage is unusual for the Deuteronomic Code in that it assigns ritual significance to the corpse.[278] Verse 9 signals that innocent blood is once again a predominant concern; as was noted above, innocent blood introduces a potential threat to the relationship that exists between God, Israel, and the land. It can be deduced, then, that this ritual "seeks to protect the nation from bloodguilt that would befall it because of an unpunished homicide."[279]

The ritual is conducted primarily by the elders of the town nearest the corpse; the priest has surprisingly little to do with the process. The elders of the town are required to take a heifer and lead it to a flowing stream. There, the elders slaughter the heifer, wash their hands over it, declare their innocence, and pray for purgation and exoneration. Much of these ritual actions are never given an explanation, making precise interpretation difficult.[280] Nevertheless, there are some details worth noting.

First, the ritual requires that the selected heifer "has never been worked and has never worn a yoke" (v. 3); and this points to the ritual character of the heifer (cf. Deut 15:19, Num 19:2, and 1 Sam 6:7).[281] Whereas the elders were required to hand over a murderer to be avenged in Deut 19:12, so now the elders are required to hand over a heifer to be killed.[282] Second, the

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[278] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 186.

[279] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 191.

[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid., 192.

[282] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 187–188.

phrase "*wəʿārəpû-šām ʾet-hāʿeglāh* is often translated something like, "and they shall break the heifer's neck there"; but this is likely not the precise meaning. As Lynch notes, breaking the neck of a heifer would be an exceedingly difficult physical feat. The verb *ʿārap* can refer to all kinds of actions done to the neck—and in this instance, it probably refers to the slitting of the throat.[283] David Wright argues that this makes sense of the apparent flow of blood in verses 6–7. Thus, when the elders declare, "Our hands did not shed this blood," the term 'this blood' signifies the blood of the heifer *and* of the original victim. This "leads to the conclusion that the cow equals the victim and that, consequently, the killing of the cow is a reenactment."[284] Therefore, the heifer ritual functions as a kind of elimination ritual; the flowing stream removes the blood of the cow (and thus symbolically, the blood of the victim), and thereby purges bloodguilt.[285] In this way, it mirrors the elimination rite of the *ʿăzāʾzēl* goat in Lev 16; only this time, bloodguilt is removed rather than sin and impurity. Lynch is therefore correct when he says that this ritual "is judicial rather than strictly cultic in nature."[286]

At the heart of this heifer ritual, there is once more a concern both for justice and the land. In both Numbers and Deuteronomy, the shedding of innocent blood impacts Israel's relationship to the land. In Deuteronomy, Israel must deal with spilled blood properly, otherwise the entire polity will assume bloodguilt, and their relationship to the land will be threatened. Just as Israel is held collectively responsible for the "innocent blood" of a manslayer (Deut 19:10), they are also held responsible for the innocent blood of a victim of an unsolved murder (Deut 21). We see in these homicide laws that God's people are "liable before God for all bloodshed

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[283] Ibid., 188. See also David P. Wright, "Deuteronomy 21:1–9 as a Rite of Elimination," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 394.

[284] Wright, "Deuteronomy 21:1–9," 394.

[285] Ibid., 398.

[286] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 190.

even if not directly culpable."[287]

3.3 Conclusion: A Summary and Theology of Bloodshed in the Pentateuch

In conclusion, the Pentateuch has much to say about the conceptualization, function, and theological significance of bloodshed. By placing Genesis 1 at the start of the canon, the final redactors of the Pentateuch intended to cast all subsequent material in the light of H's creation theology. According to the creation theology of Genesis 1, the creation of the cosmos was a process of ordering what was non-ordered, a process of bringing order out of chaos. The cosmos was a kind of sacred space, a temple, in which God could dwell with His creation. This was a hospitable space, characterized by *šālôm*—by wholeness, peace, and flourishing. In this space, God created human beings as divine 'images,' and endowed them with certain ethical and vocational responsibilities. God saw that the creation was *ṭôḇ*, meaning it possessed functional order.

It did not take long for humanity to ruin God's *ṭôḇ* creation. This ruin was brought about by sin—and more specifically, by violence and bloodshed (Gen 6:11–12). Humans proved incapable of properly imaging the non-violent God. Their spilling of innocent blood had not only juridical but ecological consequences (Gen 4:12). It disordered what God had ordered and promoted chaos. It disrupted the *šālôm* that God intended for creation. Eventually, the proliferation of bloodshed led to an ecological crisis—namely, the flood. God mediated the flood and used it as a means of ordering creation anew.

Because life is central to God's purposes (Gen 9:1, 7), God worked to preempt a similar tragedy from befalling the newly-ordered creation. In the commission of Gen 9:1–7, God made it

[287] Ibid., 191.

clear that He would now demand an accounting for the shedding of innocent blood (v. 5). As the sovereign giver of life, God has the right to exact vengeance when innocent life is taken via bloodshed. To reinforce the notion that life is sacred, God did not even allow the blood of animals to be consumed when humans ate meat (v. 4). These new arrangements served to not only mitigate the severity of violence in the new world, but to underscore the profound value and significance that God assigned to life, particularly human life.

These principles were further developed in Israel's homicide laws. In Deuteronomy, when an individual was murdered, the victim's blood (*dāmîm*) was attached to the killer. If the murder was intentional, this bloodguilt could only be removed by the talionic death of the killer. According to Numbers, the victim's blood also polluted the land on which it was spilled. Therefore, the death of the killer also served a purgative function, and cleansed the land of the blood's defilement. Until the killer was deemed either innocent or guilty, he/she could find refuge from the "blood-avenger"/"blood-restorer" (*gōʾēl haddām*) in an asylum city. These asylum cities were provisions from God that promoted a fairer judicial process and offered protection for those who were innocent.

The protection of the innocent was of utmost importance to God. For this reason, the spilling of innocent blood impacted the entire congregation of Israel; it threatened their relationship not only to the land, but to God. Because God had given the land to the people as a land grant, the people of Israel were collectively responsible for (and impacted by) what happened to the land. The proper administration of justice was thus a corporate concern. Moreover, because God dwelled in the midst of the land, defilement from innocent blood threatened His sustained presence. Rituals like the one described in Deut 21 served to protect Israel from the dangers of innocent blood, and allowed them to maintain a more hospitable

environment for God’s presence.

While sacrifice and homicide are certainly divergent contexts for pentateuchal rhetoric about blood, we can locate in each of these contexts very similar theological principles. We noted in 2.3.5 that sacrifice is ultimately oriented around communion with God. Similarly, Israel’s homicide laws are oriented toward maintaining communion with God. Addressing the stain of innocent blood through the proper administration of justice allows Israel to maintain a hospitable environment for God. Furthermore, draining sacrificial blood at the altar is a means of returning life to God, the giver of life. This action signifies God’s sovereignty over life. In the same way, God reminds Noah’s family in Genesis 9 that He is sovereign over all life, and can therefore demand an accounting for slain life (v. 5). Just as sin has both individual and corporate dimensions in Israel’s cultic system, so too does bloodguilt and the administration of justice have individual and corporate dimensions. Whereas Israel is collectively responsible for the purgation of the sanctuary, so too are they collectively responsible for the purgation of bloodguilt. Of course, blood’s power as a purgative agent is tied to its identification with life; and the conceptualization of blood as life is prevalent all throughout pentateuchal passages about bloodshed.

These texts about bloodshed teach us that if we wish to image the non-violent God and maintain a relationship with Him, we must honor and protect life. We must earnestly seek to promote the order and *šālôm* that God intended in creation. In a post-Fall world, this will involve our acceptance of both individual and corporate responsibility for the shedding of innocent blood; it will involve us working together to promote justice and peace; and it will involve us choosing forgiveness over violence. At the heart of the Pentateuch’s rhetoric about bloodshed is the message that all life belongs to God, and that all life is profoundly valuable in His eyes.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This study began with a consideration of the words of the author of Hebrews: "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). As we have seen, these are true words. The Pentateuch conceptualizes blood as a vital and sacred lifeforce that has the ability to purge and cleanse that which has been stained by sin, death, and mortality. In contexts of sin and impurity, ritual blood application offers a means of purgation and forgiveness. Nevertheless, the death of the sacrificial victim is not the source of purgation. It is not slaughter as a concrete act that is accorded ritual significance, but the blood of the sacrificial victim, a force of life. In the strange calculus of biblical religion, life, given by God, has the power to overcome death. Furthermore, atonement is but one facet of the portrayal of blood in the Pentateuch. Because of its sacred quality, blood has the ability not only to purge but to sanctify. Blood application often serves to facilitate one's metaphysical transition toward a holy status, and to ratify covenant agreements.

That said, the function of blood in the Pentateuch is not always positive. Blood is a matter of life *and* death. For instance, blood that is directly associated with cycles of human mortality (e.g., menstrual blood and blood in childbirth) has a pollutive effect. Moreover, the improper spilling of blood has dire consequences, both juridical and ecological. The shedding of innocent blood actively disorders God's good creation, pollutes the land on which it is spilled, and demands an accounting. In this way, bloodshed impacts the triangular relationship that exists between God, people, and land. For this reason, it is not merely a private concern, but a corporate one. In the pentateuchal worldview, the community is expected to work together to foster a culture of justice and flourishing, and to assume corporate responsibility for sin, impurity, and injustice.

It is also worth noting that the pentateuchal vision for justice and flourishing extends not only to human beings, but to the land itself. In the Pentateuch, the people and the land are integrally bound up together in a kind of reciprocal relationship. Sin and bloodshed have a holistic, negative impact on creation. The apostle Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 8:20–21, when he writes that “the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” As divine imagers, human beings should steward the earth benevolently and nonviolently, and thus work to cultivate an environment that is characterized by *šālôm*.

Our canonical study of blood in the Pentateuch has introduced us to a rich taxonomy of theological categories: vocation and sin; order and disorder; *šālôm* and violence; justice and injustice; and purity and pollution (to name only a few). Foundationally, however, these fit under the umbrella of a larger theological category: life and death. In the Pentateuch, YHWH is the God of life. He is the giver of life and the sovereign over life. All life comes from Him and belongs to Him. Sin, disorder, violence, injustice, and pollution work to separate us from God and the life that He gives. By contrast, proper imaging, order, *šālôm*, justice, and purity all belong to the realm of life as God intended it. Because of His abundant grace and mercy, God makes concessions for His people when they choose the way of death; He provides the means for restoring His vision of life. In God, life always triumphs over death. For this reason, God’s people can confidently await the day that it will finally be said: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). Thanks be to God.

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