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Holiness, Imputation, Atonement, and Devotion: Hermeneutical Principles for Preaching Christ from the *Olah* Ritual in Leviticus

By
Ryan Christopher Doyle

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how Reformed pastors can apply hermeneutical principles to preach through challenging texts with gospel application, and will use a ritual text from Leviticus as its model. This study utilized a qualitative design blended with the execution of a literary dissertation to gather extensive literature review from resources related to hermeneutics; to Ancient Near Eastern ritual and ritual practice in general; and to homiletical principles for Christocentric preaching. The literature review focused on gaining data with three research questions: What are best practices in navigating hermeneutical challenges in interpreting Leviticus? What are best practices in determining meaning in the ritual texts of Leviticus? What methods can be helpful to seeing the work of Christ in the Old Testament and specifically in Leviticus?

The literature review focused on three key areas to understand in preparing for and preaching a text of scripture: the hermeneutical principles wisely applied to the study and preaching of any biblical text; the methods and mindset most helpful to the examination of a ritual text (for this study); and the theology and strategies conducive to Christocentric preaching from any text in scripture. Three areas of literature review were approved in order to make this a literary dissertation rather than a standard qualitative dissertation (one area). These areas of literature review yielded abundant fruit that came to harvest in the final chapter, a study of the *olah* ritual in Leviticus 1 as a model for a preacher approaching a challenging text.

This study concluded that there are necessary components to approach the study of a passage to preach: utilizing preparation, investigation, and application to unearth the

fullness of original context within a passage; and preaching every text with Christ as both the center and the focus in order to yield heart-transformation.

To my beloved Lindsey: You are a constant joy, an always-renewing treasure, and my best friend every day. I could never have done this work without the manifold gifts that you offer to me every day. Thank you for your support, patience, and encouragement through the duration of this work. Though I enjoyed every minute of study, it meant that I had a book in my hand at all times for several years. Your graciousness in allowing me to give so much of myself to this work is a significant contributor to its completion.

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To Mercy Presbyterian Church: It is an honor and a privilege to be your Pastor. As soon as the sermon is over, I cannot wait to write the next one, and you are no small part of that enjoyment. You are a faithful flock with which to follow our Good Shepherd.

Contents

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A preacher sits in the study gathering ideas prayerfully for a new series and feeling an internal nudge to tackle a challenging section of scripture, and then asks: “How do I preach on that? Will anyone listen? Can it realistically be used by the Holy Spirit for spiritual transformation? Am I sure that I fully understand? Do I even want to take on that challenge? Other Bible passages seem so much easier.”

Pastors and specifically preachers in the twenty-first century have struggled with being drawn to the frequently taught portions of scripture. Much more research has been devoted to certain books of scripture than others in terms of commentaries, sermon manuscripts of beloved preachers, and other resources.[1] Thus, preachers choose widely traveled paths more than the others when it is time to select sermon material.[2] A database search on sermoncentral.com reveals 161 hits for Leviticus, compared with 1,737 for Romans and 1,152 for Psalms.

The ancient world of the Old Testament feels foreign and primitive in the current context. How are preachers supposed to interpret scripture for the congregation using texts that are so embedded with cultural richness from a culture that congregants do not understand? Preachers and congregants may be thinking, "I don’t see how this pushes me forward in my understanding of Christ?" "Where is the gospel in this obscure text?" "How am I supposed to apply this in 2023?" "This world is so foreign, these commands

[1] ATLA Database Search, Covenant Theological Seminary Library, November 24, 2020.

[2] Database Search on Sermoncentral.com.

are so dated, and aren't some of these passages just for ceremony?" Dr. Richard Pratt, author and President of Third Millennium Ministries , says, "Reading Old Testament stories is like visiting a foreign country…Perhaps the greatest difficulty we face is an acute sense of the historical distance between ourselves and Old Testament stories… (they) often seem very strange to us."[3]

Dr. Daniel Doriani, author and Professor at Covenant Theological Seminary, talks about the struggle when facing a challenging text and not knowing where to begin to interpret it. Speaking to this struggle from the perspective of sermon listeners as well as teachers, Doriani writes, "Perhaps you have been confused when Bible teachers contradict each other, or when a sermon soars far beyond your simple thoughts on a text."[4] Cultural distance between scripture and the reader/listener presents a significant challenge. He writes, "That is why Mark, Luke, and John, writing for Gentile audiences, explained Aramaic terms and Jewish customs that arose in their gospel narratives."[5] A skilled interpreter has learned to cross this distance and will help others do the same by skillfully expositing the text. However, many preachers don't take the time during a sermon to do so, and in passing by that opportunity, leave congregants behind. Furthermore, a lack of desire to do it in their own study potentially keeps them away from difficult texts like Leviticus. This is evidenced by the lack of literature on preaching Leviticus. An ATLA search reveals that in the last thirty years, 501 resources exist for

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[3] Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Biblical Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1990) 13.

[4] Daniel M Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NY: P & R Publishing, 1996), 3.

[5] Doriani, 5.

"Preaching Luke," and 228 for "Preaching Romans," while only twenty exist for "Preaching Leviticus." In the last five years, there are forty-nine for Luke, forty-two for Romans, and none for Leviticus.[6] A preacher considering preaching Leviticus cannot find nearly as many quality homiletical resources. ATLA research further shows a disarmingly lopsided neglect of commentaries on Leviticus in comparison with other books of scripture. In terms of commentaries, 175 were available on Leviticus, compared to 1161 for Genesis and 1085 for Psalms. Since 2015, there are twenty-three Leviticus books, compared to 111 for Genesis and 105 for Psalms. Thus, there are consistently at least five times more scholarly resources available on other books within the Pentateuch and within the Old Testament than there are of Leviticus.[7] How can preachers be more confident in approaching the challenges of a difficult book like Leviticus?

A part of the answer is in exegesis. And exegetical skill aids preachers looking to preach more difficult passages. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart write:

> Although everyone employs exegesis at times, and although quite often such exegesis is well done, it nonetheless tends to be employed only when there is an obvious problem between the biblical texts and modern culture. Whereas it must be employed for such texts, we insist that it is the first step in reading EVERY text.[8]

Preachers can find themselves skipping through exegesis quickly, making embarrassing mistakes, and then shrinking from attempting a more challenging text again in the future. Exegesis is thus necessary in studying all texts for preaching. Fee and Stuart suggest contextual study applied to the process of exegesis, writing, "To avoid making such

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[6] ATLA Database Search. Nov 24, 2020.

[7] ATLA Database Search. Nov 24, 2020.

[8] Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 28.

mistakes one needs to learn to think exegetically, that is, to begin back then and there, and to do so with every text."[9]

Not only were commentaries on Leviticus shown to be under-represented comparatively, but homiletics resources are likewise scarce, with many homiletical texts not mentioning Leviticus once.[10] Biblical theology and covenant theology books are far less likely -- sometimes by a 20 to 1 ratio -- to discuss Leviticus than Genesis, Exodus, or Deuteronomy.[11] This lack of literature highlights the problem: Leviticus (and other biblical books viewed as more challenging) simply receives less focus and attention than other books. If commentaries, biblical theology texts, and homiletics texts, all central to seminary education, each face a lack of literature on Leviticus, it logically follows that preachers would be less likely to preach Leviticus.

Leviticus also suffers from the lack of significant narrative plot advancement or obvious sermonic-oriented texts. The Genesis and Exodus narratives, as well as the narratives of Joshua and King David in I and II Samuel and I Chronicles are familiar to Christians and contain a treasure trove of theology to mine again and again. Psalms gives such rich meditation for the soul, covers such a variegated myriad of emotions, and takes the reader to such deep places, it allows preachers to feel a deep connection with their congregation as they wade through the depths of those passages together. Wisdom literature gives the reader profound thought in short maxims as well as long developed propositions. The Prophets, especially Isaiah's memorable words and image-rich

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[9] Fee and Stuart, 29.

[10] ATLA Database Search. Nov 24, 2020.

[11] ATLA Database Search. Nov 24, 2020.

passages, as well as Jonah's story, Hosea's story, Daniel's stories, and Jeremiah's promises before and during the exile, draw preachers to familiar ground.

Additionally, the letters of Paul have such precise teaching, such rich theology, such clear instruction, and such precise exhortation, that any preacher, reader, or listener will want to camp there. The gospel accounts of the life of Christ are rich for manifold reasons, and it is understandable why preachers center their preaching there.

In his *Gospels* class at Covenant Theological Seminary, warning students as they learn hermeneutics to apply the principles to preaching the whole counsel of God, Doriani calls this small batch of common sermon fodder "the canon within the canon."[12] He warns students to beware of preaching only the readily approachable texts. The cost of this problem lies at the heart of this study.

What about portions less well-known because preachers never heard sermons on them during their own spiritual formation? What about the sections of scripture less known because they were not emphasized during training? The parts of scripture more obscure culturally? The parts of scripture harder to understand considering the work of Christ? The parts of scripture not as eloquently written? What about the daunting task of handling apocalyptic literature?

Reformed preachers and teachers thus tend toward certain books of scripture more heavily than others (the road often taken, the path of less resistance) in their preaching and teaching, Doriani's "canon within the canon". Scripture passages perceived as more difficult to interpret or less applicable are often given minimal attention. For example,

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[12] Daniel M. Doriani, *Gospels: Class Lecture*, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO. Spring 2009.

Readers often skip Leviticus because it reads as antiquated. Preachers can struggle with how to approach it from the pulpit. Is it relevant for today? How do preachers exhort life application from Leviticus? How do they relate ritual texts or purity/impurity texts to the concerns of a modern listener?

This omission leads to a malnourished scriptural diet for the congregation and leaves the preacher guilty of delivering less than the fullness of the revealed Word of God. There are understandable reasons why preachers would be tentative to enter those territories sermonically, but at the same time, preachers are called to be committed to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

Purpose Statement

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how Reformed pastors can apply hermeneutical principles to preach through challenging texts with gospel application for their congregants and will use a ritual text from Leviticus as its model. Part of the examination will explore what methods scholars use to help with hermeneutics and interpretation. What methods can be helpful to seeing the work of Christ in all of scripture? How can the most challenging passages of scripture be applied to a modern audience?

Research Questions

These are the questions that will guide this qualitative research:

1. What are best practices in navigating hermeneutical challenges in interpreting Leviticus? What methods can be discovered to help with hermeneutics and interpretation?

2. What are best practices in determining meaning in the ritual texts of Leviticus? How can more challenging passages of scripture be applied to modern learners?

3. What are best practices in illuminating gospel dynamics in any text? What methods can be helpful to seeing the work of Christ in the Old Testament and specifically in Leviticus?

Significance of the Study

Preachers seeking to expand their congregation's knowledge of Leviticus will find tools and strategies to aid them in such endeavors. This study also has significance for preachers who find themselves swimming in familiar pools of scripture and who seek to strengthen their homiletical muscles by diving into more challenging waters. This study will be a potential resource for Bible instructors at academic institutions, Sunday School teachers, and for those seeking greater skills and tools for personal Bible study and interpretation in challenging Old Testament passages.

Leviticus will center this study and may serve as a model by which similar principles and concepts can be applied elsewhere in Bible study. The research will use the hermeneutical approaches discovered to more closely examine a challenging text in Leviticus.

Definition of Terms

Hermeneutics -- the study of interpretation of a text. It includes, but is not limited to, factors such as literary context, historical context, biblical theological context, and authorial intent.

Biblical Theology -- the discipline of theological study that studies scripture as a whole, bringing insights to light only in the light of the entirety of the Bible, thus looking for a greater discerning of the internal unity of the Bible.[13]

Exegesis -- the process by which the preacher studies the text personally in order "to explain, interpret, or describe"[14] the meaning of the text for personal study and especially for exposition to the congregation.

Christocentric -- in the fields of homiletics and hermeneutics, the practice of bringing a redemptive historical contextual understanding to any text, thus keeping the person and work of Christ at the center of any exegesis, exhortation, and application.

Centripetal and Centrifugal -- Centripetal force is force that pulls an object or set of objects inward, toward the center and source of the force. Centrifugal force pushes an object or objects outward, away from the center and source of the force. In terms of covenant theology and missiology, these terms describe the dynamics of the call of covenant Israel first away from the nations (centripetal) and then later toward the nations (centrifugal).

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[13] Craig G. Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology," In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, ad N.T. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 90.

[14] Klyne Snodgrass, "Exegesis," In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, ad N.T. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 203.

Chapter 2

Hermeneutical Principles for Preaching Challenging Texts

The study of hermeneutics is not a new discipline, and it is not unique to biblical and theological scholarship. However, the purpose of this research is to utilize hermeneutical principles in difficult portions of scripture for the purpose of preaching the whole counsel of God without unnecessary intimidation. Therefore, the hermeneutical principles will be primarily drawn from biblical and theological scholarship, and the principles will assume a Christian and Reformed worldview, as well as a view of scripture as being inerrant and authoritative. Finally, while there are variegated approaches to hermeneutics, what is required for preaching is narrower. Several central principles address but are not limited to: author; original audience (hearers/readers); historical context; literary context; biblical theological context; grammatical/linguistic specifics; and author's intent. These can be grouped into Old Testament scholar Richard Pratt's categories of preparation, investigation, and application to the modern reader. For the sake of brevity, the categories that Pratt has used will serve as a framework for this research. In *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*, Pratt commends three facets of interpretation process:

> Three major facets [exist] in the interpretation of Old Testament stories: preparation, investigation, and application. These processes are not entirely separate; they depend on each other in countless ways. Yet each one is essential for understanding… In preparation, absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit for interpretation while applying oneself to diligent human study is the task. In investigation, understanding the relationships between author, text, and original audience are foundational to any proper

> interpretation. In application, crossing the hermeneutical bridge between the ancient world and the modern world is the crucial work.[15]

Though Pratt assigns equal value to the three aspects, this study will largely focus upon the "investigation" work of the preacher, incorporating the other two aspects as appropriate, and does not prioritize any aspect over the other two in the overall interpretive process.

Interpretation and Preparation

Dependence Upon the Holy Spirit

Any reading and interpretation of scripture must begin with the interpreter's reliance upon the Holy Spirit for illumination. This reliance includes not only cognition of submissive dependence but also active guidance by the Holy Spirit.

To discern meaning in a text, the reader must prepare internally to receive the full illumination that the Holy Spirit offers. Collaboration between the Holy Spirit and the reader yields faithful and reverent interpretation of the scriptures, because “hermeneutics involves interaction between human interpreters and the Holy Spirit.”[16] Any interpretation that finds divine meaning naturally submits to and yearns for divine guidance from the Spirit who first wrote the passage under study. Pratt reminds readers that the Holy Spirit personally interacts through and beyond impersonal tactics.

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[15] Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1990), 1-2.

[16] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:03:11- 00:03:19, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

Dependence upon the Holy Spirit can be further subdivided into the categories of inspiration and illumination.

Inspiration

The Holy Spirit moved human beings to write God's revelation as scripture[17] and superintended their work, rendering their writings infallible. Pratt contends, "We should seek insight on His book from Him."[18]

Divine Source

Third Millennium Ministries[19] teaches that preachers are called to be submissive interpreters who first affirm the divine inspiration…expecting and assuming it to be true and harmonious, even when (they) can't demonstrate or prove its truthfulness.[20] The Lord wants the reader to understand his holy Word. He could have kept his plans hidden from humanity, or he could have communicated them unintelligibly. But he condescended to teach his word within a language, a literary style, a cultural setting, and with societal customs that original hearers and readers could recognize and understand. Reformer and theologian John Calvin referred to God's revelation as divine baby talk, God stooping

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[17] 2 Peter 1: 20-21 (English Standard Version).

[18] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:04:36- 00:04:41, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[19] Third Millennium Ministries provides a video seminary curriculum. Often, the teaching comes from a special guest. For this study, when the teaching comes from the narrated voiceover, without crediting a guest speaker, the citation will go to Dr. Richard Pratt, President of Third Millennium Ministries.

[20] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:17:54-00:18:04, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

low so that his people can understand him. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin points out, "Who...does not understand that, as a nurse commonly does with infants, God is wont in a measure to lisp in speaking to us?... Such forms of speaking...accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity."[21]

Human Means

Though given and taught through God himself, scriptural texts were written by different people, and they reflect the diversity of that human authorship. The importance of this diversity will be developed when studying the author of a given text.

Illumination

The Holy Spirit of God gives not only the words of the text but also the illumination for the hearer/reader to receive and understand. The preacher can understand the meaning and value of a text through the Holy Spirit's illumination, and the Spirit is thus participating in the preaching of the Word of God. It is the obligation of the preacher to yield to this illumination, and to present heart-changing truth for the modern world to the congregants, rather than only to present facts about the ancient world. Pratt contends, "It may be fascinating to go back to the ancient world of these stories, but what good is it if we do not come back to our own day? Reading Old Testament stories without a keen interest in the Spirit's transforming influence can turn those texts into relics of ancient history."[22] The same Holy Spirit who provided the text and provides the preacher

[21] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Book I, Chapter 13, Section 1, 121.

[22]Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 12.

illumination ensures that the congregants are able to receive and understand the text with their own illumination. In this way, the preacher is wholly reliant upon the Holy Spirit for the transforming process of preaching God's Word to his people.

Need for Human Effort

However, overemphasis on the Spirit's role in interpretation can result in passivity. While the interpreter must fully trust in illumination from the Holy Spirit, he must actively engage intellectually with the text of scripture. Ezra is a model in this regard: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."[23] Thus, just as dependence upon the Holy Spirit is necessary, there is reciprocally a need for human effort. Fully trusting in illumination from the Holy Spirit, the interpreter must actively engage intellectually with the text of scripture. This study will focus on the human effort required as well as the influences upon human effort. To this end Pratt advises, "We must depend on the Spirit, who inspired Old Testament narratives and illuminates our minds. But the Spirit's inspiration and illumination still require extensive human effort in interpretation.[24]

Importance

It is vitally important that preachers not mistake diligent and responsible effort as ignoring the power of the Spirit. 2 Timothy 2:15 calls preachers to correctly handle the Word of God as a workman. Pratt warns against this error, stating plainly that, "Well-

[23] Ezra 7:10.

[24] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 5.

meaning Christians often minimize anything that looks like human effort when they prepare to read the Bible."[25] The Holy Spirit works with the preacher (or any interpreter/reader), providing illumination by the means of the effort put into understanding the text. This work will be an important foundational concept in learning hermeneutical principles to apply to the preaching of any text, and specifically to challenging and intimidating texts.

Influences

Exegesis

The preacher must therefore devote significant effort to exegesis, the process of drawing meaning out of biblical texts, through historical context, literary forms, grammar/vocabulary considerations, and the redemptive-historical setting. In *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, biblical scholars Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva define exegesis this way: "The analysis and explanation of a text, usually with reference to detailed, scientific (sometimes 'critical') interpretation of scripture in which the meaning is drawn from the text rather imposed over it."[26] Exegesis explains the intricacies of what the text holds within it. Kaiser and Silva helpfully add, "The term is

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[25] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:28:50-00:29:42, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[26] Walter C Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994, 334.

often distinguished from *hermeneutics*, which refers to the principles of interpretation, whereas *exegesis* has to do with the practice of explaining texts."[27]

The term "perspicuity," when applied to theology, refers to the clarity of scripture. What God wants his people to understand from scripture for salvation can be understood by any attentive mind. Yet while perspicuity for what is needed for salvation exists, some portions are very difficult, and most texts fall on a spectrum, with some being a good deal more difficult to understand. Therefore, adequate preparation requires increased effort to determine meaning. In *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application*, New Testament scholar Daniel Doriani writes of the critical importance of exegesis when he explains, "Though the boundary between interpretation and application is blurry, teachers must master exegesis if they wish to move correctly from the original meeting to the contemporary relevance of scripture. If we leap to the subjective question, 'what does this text say to me?' we are sure to moralize, sure to find the text saying trendy or self-serving things."[28] Some of what exegesis includes will be covered later in this chapter, but preparation to interpret a text includes a commitment to exegetical work.

Interaction

Any preacher brings to the text the experience of regular interaction within a tradition, a denomination, a local church, and the preferred scholarship to consult. These help in the interpretive process, but they affect the process as an extra-conversational

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[27] Walter C Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 334.

[28] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 158

voice between the Holy Spirit's Word and the preacher's interpretation. Interpreters can therefore acknowledge the presuppositions, traditions, convictions, and preferences they bring to the reading of the text. They must allow scripture's teaching to contradict their presuppositions and not fit perfectly with any accepted theological position.

Experience

As has been stated earlier, preachers naturally face the temptation toward bending scripture to their own desires rather than yielding and being sanctified as they are shaped by it. Preachers will bring their own background, education, and experiences to the reading and preaching of a text. In *The Art of Biblical History*, Old Testament scholar V. Phillips Long thus implores the interpreter to reflect on "one's own fundamental understanding of the world and reality" and stresses the importance of “divulging one's background beliefs to one's audience."[29] It is the natural temptation of any human when confronted with the Word of God to bring human will and logic to that same spoken Word, as evidenced in the first original sin in Genesis 3. To understand God's Word in a way that best serves the desires and ambitions of human will is at the heart of the original sin and is ever-present in ongoing sin. Thus, it is crucial to prepare oneself to yield to what the text will teach, even when, especially when, it exposes sin and offers correction to the reader. Flawed interpretations abound when personal biases have a say. New Testament scholar Craig Keener observes, “People wanting to read scripture in order to justify the way they live will read it that way.”[30]

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[29] V Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 175.

[30] Craig Keener, *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 3, "Investigating Scripture," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt,

Therefore, interpretation must recognize two notably unequal forces at work: divine inspiration and human effort. Preparation involves preachers yielding themselves to the Spirit and then rolling up their exegetical sleeves. Pratt concludes, “Preparation for interpreting Old Testament narratives involves both human and divine effort. We look to the spirit as the power enabling us to interpret, and we look to hermeneutical skills as the tools of our trade.”[31]

Interpretation and Investigation

In *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative,* Old Testament scholar Steven Mathewson contends, "We get intimidated by the language and literature of the Old Testament."[32] As this study has already shown, all the embedded context that makes the text more rewarding upon further study also makes it more intimidating upon first approach. Thus, the investigation of a text means taking steps to intentionally "enter the world of the text." In opposition to what is known as "atomistic exegesis," this study will instead propose gaining a thorough understanding of literary context. Instead of ahistorical exegesis, this study will also propose gaining an understanding of the historical context.[33] This combined approach is what scholars refer to as "grammatico-historical interpretation," and each will be examined on its own. Thus, the interpreter will

Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:40:56-00:41:56, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[31] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 7.

[32] Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 24.

[33] Atomistic and ahistorical exegesis are discussed in Third Millennium Ministries, *He Gave Us Prophets*, Lecture 1.

need to begin by as accurately as possible discerning the original meaning, which will include consideration of the document, the writer, and the audience.

The Crucial Task of Investigating/Discovering Original Meaning

Original meaning is the starting point for interpretation. Readers of the text in the twenty-first century are reading God's inspired Word, which is intended for modern application. However, the meaning in a modern setting is not necessarily the meaning or nuance intended by the author to the original audience. Pratt points out, “When we interpret Old Testament stories, we should always remember that we are not hearing text spoken directly to us; we are overhearing stories told to others. This fact creates tension, pulling us back-and-forth between the relevance and distance of these stories.”[34] Modern readers must be always aware of this "overhearing" reality in their approach to interpretation and application.

Pratt continues, “The original significance in the ancient settings is a crucial step. It is where the fully reliable, infallible authoritative meaning of the Holy Spirit and the inspired human authors is found.”[35] Preachers rightly apply scripture to the needs of their congregants, and Bryan Chapell's method of pointing out "situational specificity"[36] is appropriate and helpful. However, the preacher who is faithful to the text will begin with the original meaning, and only then move the text forward to modern application. Pratt reasons, “We don’t like to be misunderstood or misquoted, so the interpreter of scripture

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[34] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 15.

[35] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 18.

[36] See Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon, 3rd ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 194-197.

has a responsibility to slow down, ask questions, and do the work of investigation."[37] *Eisegesis* occurs when readers wrongly bring their own context, situations, and presuppositions into the text as appropriate or essential to meaning, thus bringing into the text an understanding not in the original text, and therefore inappropriate. In *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* Grant Osborne describes eisegesis as "reading into a text what one wants it to mean."[38] 2 Timothy 3:16-17 explains, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." With 2 Timothy 3:16–17 in mind, Third Millennium Ministries teaches, "The original meaning is found in the concepts, behaviors, and emotions that the divine and human writers jointly intended the document to communicate to its first audience."[39]

Finally, the doctrine of organic inspiration reinforces that the very words of scripture come from God, through the biblical writers, and are on the page as the actual Word of God. Scribes wrote the God-given but orally spoken words onto scrolls, and subsequent copies were made. Scribes receiving and copying the work of earlier scribes could make mistakes or other sources of variance in the copying process. Scribal variances account for any inconsistencies related to textual errors. These inconsistencies,

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[37] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:02:20-00:02:30, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[38] Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 57.

[39] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:03:09-00:03:16, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

due to changes and mistranslations and miscopied work, create hesitation and criticism in critical scholarship. Copies are not perfect, as scripture attests.[40] Critics argue that it is not possible to know what the original texts said. However, New Testament scholar Michael J. Kruger emphasizes that though there are scribal variations, words left out, spelling changes, etc., the (Dead Sea Scrolls) contain very little change, bolstering confidence that the earliest manuscripts use the original wordings.[41] In regards to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, only the original texts have the full authority of God, as copies can contain mistakes, and not every copy will be perfect, but as NT Greek scholar Daniel Wallace reports, "Not a single essential belief of Christian Doctrine has been impacted by any variance in text copies."[42] It is noteworthy that the original documents of the Old Testament did not exist in Jesus's day, and he and his apostles believed they were trustworthy, so the modern reader and hearer can have full confidence in the Word of God revealed in scripture. All of this affirms the value of the interpreter's study of the biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Though not the focus of this study, the original languages provide insight into linguistic and grammatical constructions not easily identified by those not familiar with the original languages. Pratt notes that this investigation of grammatico-historical context has been central to interpreters for two centuries, writing, “In grammatico-historical investigation, grammar and history were

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[40] Jeremiah 8:8.

[41] Michael Kruger, *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 3, "Investigating Scripture," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:26:42-00:27:35, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[42] Daniel Wallace, *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Investigating Scripture," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:27:42-00:28:30, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

central. Interpreters examined words and expressions and explored the historical circumstances in which the text was written, especially with the writer's background and purposes."[43]

This study will argue that the original meaning is discovered only when considering factors related to the text, the author of the biblical book, and the original audience.

Text

The text itself is the best place to begin any study. Dr. Jay Sklar's "Start with the Bible; not with the commentaries" is a maxim well-known to students at Covenant Theological Seminary, and it applies here. Setting theological convictions and presuppositions aside, preachers first investigate the text. What does the text say in light of the original context of the passage? In his book *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching*, Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser explains, "Good exegetical procedure dictates that the details be viewed in light of the total context. Unless the exegete knows where the thought of the text begins and how that pattern develops, all the intricate details may be of little or no worth... if the exegete falters here, much of what follows will be wasted time and effort."[44] No scholar of Greek mythology would approach the original texts through a modern lens. To do so would be to miss the intention of the author and the work altogether. Pratt notes that early scholars in biblical hermeneutics "reflected the growing conviction among orthodox theologians

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[43] Pratt, *Stories*, 8-9.

[44] Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching (*Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), 69.

that the Bible should be read as an ancient document. As Ernesti put it, 'the scriptures are to be investigated by the same rules as other books.'"[45]

The text must be studied on its own as part of exegesis and interpretation. This aspect of "text" within "original meaning" includes within it a sub-category of "context." To paraphrase Kaiser, "context" is composed of two Latin elements, *con* ("together") and *textus* ("woven"), and thus context refers to the connecting links running through a passage weaving it into one piece.[46] Context also connects to the world outside/inside of the text that informs the writing of the text. Context for the purposes of this study will include historical, literary, and biblical theological context.

Interpretation and Historical Context

In *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, Doriani further explains historical context:

> *Historical context is the culture, customs, languages, beliefs, and history of the author and his original audience.* The study of historical context (1) describes how a portion of the Bible fits into its world. It (2) gains access to the historical context through background study of the language, history, customs, and philosophy of the author and his audience... (3) To exaggerate slightly, historical context allows readers to overcome the feeling that the text belongs to another time or culture and allows them to enter the world of the original speakers, writers, and readers.[47]

Additionally, historical context study often includes several aspects to the work. Within the larger task of investigating a text, Pratt offers a threefold grid for interpreting in

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[45] Pratt, *Stories*, 8.

[46] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching (*Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), 71.

[47] Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 31.

historical context. Readers and preachers too quick to jump to immediate application within their own context can easily misinterpret what was originally intended by the author to a particular audience within a particular context. Pratt therefore suggests reading a text through the grid of three worlds in the text: “that world,” “their world,” and “our world.”[48] "That world” refers to the world of the text, the historical time and setting of the events taking place within a biblical narrative, discourse, prophecy. “Their world” refers to a text wherein the author is writing to an audience about earlier events (for example: Genesis, Ezra, Acts). Though both worlds are foreign and distant to a modern reader, the worlds in a "that world/their world" scenario are separated by decades or even centuries. That world and their world may have different historical context, socio-political/economic contexts, or literary contexts. Therefore, to lump them together as the same time (“a long time ago”) is a hermeneutical error. An additional and more egregious error occurs when the biblical world (either “that world” or “their world”) is looked over altogether in the act of interpretation. Readers and preachers confident that they know the meaning of a given text because it seems clear considering “our world” could commit serious error and misinterpretation by failing to consider the world of the text, the priorities of the author, and the needs of the original audience. However, Old Testament texts can seem so distant. It takes concentrated study to bring that world into a modern understanding. Steven Mathewson comments:

> Evangelicals struggle with preaching Old Testament stories… The language and literature of the New Testament seems more manageable. Choosing New Testament stories over Old Testament studies resembles specializing in United States history instead of the history of Western civilization. With United States history, there’s a smaller body of material to learn, and it’s more familiar. A college Greek professor explained to me

[48] Pratt, *Stories*, 21.

> that he pursued graduate studies in New Testament language and exegesis because there was too much to master in Old Testament studies. The sheer size of the Old Testament, the length of Old Testament history, and his difficulty in learning Hebrew steered him towards the New Testament.[49]

Studies of the ancient world will produce fruit for the modern audience encountering the Bible, and must not be skipped, no matter the tendency and temptation.

Wise hermeneutical practice includes beginning with the world of the text ("that world" and possibly "their world"), discerning original meaning, and only then reading a text in light of modern-day concerns and priorities. New Testament scholar Robert Plummer adds, "In seeking to apply commands that come to us with a 'cultural veneer,' it is important to determine the underlying theological principles and their applications in our setting today."[50] Because there is considerable distance between the world of the text and the modern world of the reader/hearer, the temptation exists to allegorize or even propositionalize the events taking place in the stories of the text, reducing them from historical event to simply a moral lesson. This is a mistake. The word of God is authoritative, and intended to be read as truth. Long warns against the temptation, asserting, "The Bible, as the Word of God written...is assumed to present truth and to be authoritative. This means, to put the matter plainly, that whatever the Bible -- rightly interpreted and applied -- affirms or enjoins is to be believed and obeyed."[51]

Taking the Word of God to be authoritative, and seeking to understand it in its historical context, the interpreter can now approach the text with a clearer picture of who

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[49] Mathewson, 24.

[50] Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 191.

[51] V Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, 175.

is speaking (God), through whom he is speaking (the author), and to whom he was originally speaking (audience). Interpretation becomes more approachable and informed. Thinking in terms of "that world, their world, and our world," Pratt bemoans how often this grid is not mentioned or disregarded altogether:

> How much difference does it make for most of us that Moses wrote Genesis? Do we care that the book of Samuel was compiled after the division of the kingdom? What does it matter that Kings was written during the exile and Chronicles after it? Often, we do not even know these facts, much less incorporate them into our interpretation.[52]

The historical context within which a scripture is written will be key to understanding its meaning. Pratt continues, "To understand written material, we have to look at the words on the page, but we also have to consider the time when the words were written. We deal not only with grammar but also with history."[53]

Within the category of historical context, it is often significant to consider the socio-political context. What is the governmental structure in the primary culture where the text is taking place? Are the people of God ruling or being ruled? Is it benevolent rule or antagonistic? Are they in a nomadic state without a clear governmental authority? How does this affect the interactions and expectations of God's people as a society living together? Though an important study on its own, the socio-political context will be grouped within historical context for the purposes of this study.

Thus, it is imperative, that before and during the application process, preachers keep in view the textures of biblical times. Preachers must remember how much revelation the people had and how they were appropriating it. Sensitivity to the original

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[52] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 8.

[53] Pratt, *Stories*, 7.

context is especially important.[54] Historical realities not only inform today's reader in terms of interpretation but also elucidate truth about the world of the text in terms of its historical realities. Pratt offers, “Everything from individual words to overarching literary style is fundamentally conventional. The assumptions that biblical authors shared with their audience become road signs directing us to the meaning of their texts. If we are unaware of these historical conditions, we cannot even translate the Bible, much less interpret it.”[55] Road signs are a helpful image for preachers to remember. Professors James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken claim, "Meaning depends on and is enhanced by information about the historical and cultural context around the passage."[56]

It can thus be concluded that failure to consider and find meaning from historical context is a costly error and likely to lead to misinterpretation. As this study will focus on preaching from Leviticus, these words from Old Testament scholar Allen Ross are especially poignant:

> Few books of the Bible are more demanding for the preparation of exegetical expositions than the Book of Leviticus. Expositors must be accurate in their interpretation of the text, taking full account of cultural, historical, textual, and critical concerns; they must be clear and correct in their correlation of the material with New Testament teachings, clearly distinguishing timeless revelation from ancient regulations; and they must be relevant enough to sustain the interest of the reader or listener.[57]

The task is indeed one that requires adequate preparation and investigation but need not be daunting with the proper hermeneutical principles employed.

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[54] Doriani, *Truth*, 158.

[55] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 9.

[56]James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching, 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 101.

[57] Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 65.

Interpretation and Literary Context

The literary context of a passage informs its interpretation. The pericope of a text within a literary work adds meaning, be that a few verses, a few paragraphs, or an even longer literary unit. Genre and even the author's style and methods will be part of interpretation. Doriani further explains literary context this way:

> *Literary context is the words, sentences, paragraphs, or chapters that surround and relate to a text.* The study of literary context (1) describes how a paragraph or some other unit fits into a larger section of the text, even the whole work. It (2) gains access to a literary context by reading the original document attentively. The study of literary context can go on, even if we know nothing about the writer and his times, and nothing about the original readers and their concerns. (3) To exaggerate slightly, literary context allows us to ignore the author and the audience to study the words of the text themselves.[58]

Wilhoit and Ryken also recommend interpreting a passage in light of its genre.[59] Textual interpretation will inevitably be tied to an understanding of genre and its usage in scripture. Its interpretation will furthermore be tied to the larger literary context within which the text finds its setting. Passages build on one another. Authors use themes and motifs to build continuity into a work. All these elements inform a text's interpretation.

There is also a need to understand what is referred to by hermeneuticians as the "hermeneutical circle or spiral". Theologian Anthony Thiselton explains it well, teaching:

> The term "hermeneutical circle" has two separable but closely related meanings. One concerns the relation between understanding the "parts" of the text and understanding it as a "whole." A "circle" arises because each process depends reciprocally upon the other. To understand the parts (grammar, vocabulary, and individual elements in their context), we need to have some inkling of the whole, including what the text is about. Yet to understand this "whole" depends on an apprehension of its elements.

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[58] Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 31.

[59] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective*, 97.

> These two processes together form a progressive dialectic. Hence, "spiral" may be less misleading than "circle."[60]

Kaiser suggests four categories for approaching literary context: sectional context, book context, canonical context, and immediate context.[61] Wilhoit and Ryken propose an almost identical formula.[62] It works its way outward from the text in this order: 2, 3, 4, and then back to 1. William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard simplify it further, proposing "immediate text, entire book context, context of the Bible."[63] Grant Osborne suggests a more complex approach, providing a seven-ringed circle of literary analysis moving outward from the text. The lower numbers (inner rings of the circle) have greater significance. But each ring carries a necessary component of literary analysis. Beginning at the outside, Osborne's circle includes these rings and principles:

> 7) Genre -- limit the rules of the language game;
> 6) Bible -- see passages part of whole/ apply parallels;
> 5) Testament -- see passage as part of the whole/ apply parallels;
> 4) Writer -- determine intention of the writer;
> 3) Book -- purpose/outline/ horizontal chart;
> 2) Major section -- narrative flow;
> 1) Immediate context – sentence diagram;
> And culminating at the center with the passage -- word study/ grammar/semotaxis.[64]

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[60] Anthony C. Thiselton, "Hermeneutical Circle" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Van Hoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 281.

[61] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 70-71.

[62] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective*, 98.

[63] William L. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert I. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 219.

[64] Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 39. "Semotaxis" refers to the semantic evaluation of a given word.

Osborne states, "As we move nearer the center, the influence on the meaning of the passage increases."[65] Whether the interpreter employs Kaiser's more broad method or Osborne's more finite approach, literary analysis aids the preacher in applying texts that are especially challenging. As Wilhoit and Ryken teach, "Meaning is usually derived from literary wholes -- whole books, whole chapters, whole paragraphs, whole stories, whole poems."[66] Agreeing with them, Old Testament scholar Allen Ross maintains:

> The best way to do all of this is to follow the standard method of interpreting and expounding the text, which deals first with the meaning of the passage in its original context and then determines what the passage means in the wider context of all of Scripture. Following a consistent procedure like this ensures that the exposition is drawn from the text being used and confirmed by the rest of Scripture. It confirms the unity of the Bible but will do so by tracing the gradual or progressive revelation of Scripture from promise to fulfillment.[67]

Certain genres come with their own interpretive and preaching challenges. Schreiner argues, "What role does the law have in preaching? We must consider where a command is in the storyline of the Bible and in terms of the redemptive-historical scheme we see in scripture. The moral norms of the Bible cannot be preached apart from canonical context and apart from the whole counsel of God."[68] In *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law,* he points out the importance of not only interpreting different genres in different ways (without abandoning principles) but also fitting that

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[65] Grant Osborne, 39.

[66] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective,* 97.

[67] Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 65.

[68] Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 229.

interpretation into a biblical theological framework, thus addressing two of the contextual worlds of this study.

An additional challenge when studying any text, and using literary analysis, is to determine whether details (and sometimes instructions) are prescriptive or descriptive.[69] In other words, is this text describing what happened (indicative narrative truth), or is it exhorting toward similar practice (imperative epistolary admonition)? These possibilities are a significant source of interpretive disagreement among traditions and denominations. In terms of investigation, discerning between the two is a necessary part of the work. This study will defend the position that certain parts of scripture are descriptive within the biblical world, rather than prescriptive, and should be taught as such.

Chapter 5 of this study will focus upon ritual texts, which are especially challenging to most interpreters and set within a book full of such texts, Leviticus. In his commentary on Leviticus, *Holiness to the LORD*, Ross elaborates:

> Few books of the Bible are more demanding for the preparation of exegetical expositions than the Book of Leviticus. *Expositors must be accurate in their interpretation of the text, taking full account of cultural, historical, textual, and critical concerns*; they must be clear and correct in their correlation of the material with New Testament teachings, clearly distinguishing timeless revelation from ancient regulations; and they must be relevant enough to sustain the interest of the reader or listener.[70]

Ross thus validates the hermeneutical and homiletical work prescribed by this study. In Leviticus, specific details crucial to ritual practice will require significant hermeneutical skills for faithful exegesis.

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[69] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective*, 99.

[70] Ross, *Holiness to the LORD*, 65.

Leviticus is situated within the Pentateuch and features many legal texts that arise from within a larger story and must be interpreted from within that story, rather than as stand-alone laws absent of historical and literary context. In his article on "Law" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham notes, "The laws in the Pentateuch are not embedded in straight covenant/treaty documents. Rather, the laws form a part of a narrative recounting the history of Israel from their enslavement in Egypt to the death of Moses."[71] In the case of Leviticus, readers face an additional challenge to application, dealing with legal texts that demonstrate great historical/cultural distance between the original audience and the modern reader. In their popular book on hermeneutics, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart offer these principles (paraphrased here) as words of counsel to the interpreter:

> The "Dos and Don'ts of Interpreting OT Law Passages"
> 1. Do see the Old Testament law as God's fully inspired word for you.
> 2. Don't see the Old Testament law as God's direct command to you.
> 3. Do see the Old Testament law as the basis for the old covenant and therefore for Israel's history.
> 4. Don't see the Old Testament law as binding on Christians in the new covenant except where specifically renewed.
> 5. Do see God's justice, love, and high standards revealed in the Old Testament law.
> 6. Don't forget to see that God's mercy is made equal to the severity of the standards.
> 7. Do see the Old Testament law as a paradigm -- providing examples for the full range of expected behavior.
> 8. Don't see the Old Testament law as complete. It is not technically comprehensive.
> 9. Do remember that the essence of the law (the Ten Commandments and the two chief laws) is repeated in the Prophets and renewed in the New Testament.

[71] Gordon J Wenham, "Law" in in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Van Hoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 444.

10. Don’t expect the Old Testament law to be cited frequently by the Prophets or by the New Testament. Legal citation was first introduced only in the Roman era, long after the Old Testament was complete.
11. Do see the OT law as a generous gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed.
12. Don’t see the OT law as a grouping of arbitrary, annoying regulations limiting people’s freedom.[72]

From these rules, the reader can deduce that OT legal passages are to be seen in continuity with the new covenant and received as characteristic and demonstrative of God’s unchanging character. There is, however, room for nuance in their application, as they must first be brought to and filtered through a New Testament lens as it applies to the Christian under the new covenant. Plummer notes:

> There are good biblical reasons for neglecting some scriptural injunctions. As participants in the new covenant, Christians must distinguish between moral commands with a binding authority and those civil and ceremonial regulations of the old covenant that find their fulfillment in Christ. The timeless moral commands of both the Old and New Testament, while fulfilled in Christ, find ongoing expression through the Spirit-led lives of Christ’s body, the church.[73]

Scholars agree that some laws have validity for believers, while some do not. In the book, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard maintain that in some cases, "the NT actually makes the OT laws more strict" and offer these principles of interpretation of OT legal texts:

> 1. Whatever its literary type, the collection, or series in which an individual law appears, serves as its literary context.
> 2. The student should seek to understand the original meaning in light of their cultural background.
> 3. Apply laws primarily to the NT counterpart of the original audience (Israel corresponds to Christians)

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[72] Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 186.

[73] Plummer, 191.

4. Whether a given law applies literally, in principle, or both, depends upon how it compares to (various categories of laws).[74]

Observing Grammar and Specific Details

The last aspect of hermeneutical skill in the category of literary context is examining specific grammatical or linguistic constructions, as well any specific details (arbitrary at first glance) in the text. Doriani exhorts, "Attend to all unexpected details. Notice details that appear to be unimportant at first...Observe figures of speech and unusual words or grammatical forms, such as pronouns and verb tenses. Take time to consider the importance of details. "[75] Specific details are given for a reason, and the author intends for the reader to notice them and use them. Likewise, grammatical constructions, as well as linguistic constructions, and especially keywords (not always easily translated), can punctuate an intended meaning to the original audience, and faithful interpretation must take them into account.

An important principle when focusing on Leviticus is highlighted by Wilhoit and Ryken when they instruct, "A related principle is to base interpretations of a passage on details that are relevant to the main concern of the passage, not on peripheral ‘stage props' in the passage. By 'stage props,' we mean details that are part of the surface level of the passage...but not part of the intended message or theme."[76] Because Leviticus is filled with details, many of them culturally and historically rooted, readers are quick to be

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[74] William L. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert I. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 349-350. The laws mentioned in #4 are categorized earlier in the chapter.

[75] Doriani, *Message*, 18.

[76] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective*, 99.

overwhelmed, missing the larger principle. These details are significant, and can provide help to interpretation, but they are not the place to start. Pratt maintains, at the most elementary level, “The grammatical and historical guides of grammar and context, as well as the original authors and audience serve as guides to discovering the meaning of scripture.”[77] This study will investigate key textual details in chapter 5.

A need for good literary interpretive skills is not only for preachers, since preachers will benefit richly if their parishioners are faithful and skilled readers of scripture. Doriani writes, “Perhaps you have been confused when Bible teachers contradict each other, or when a sermon soars beyond your simple thoughts on a text. Or you realize the stock Sunday school lesson you have will not work for the class, but you have no idea how to prepare your own lesson.”[78] Doriani then suggests that interpreters of a text should run the text through what he calls his CAPTOR system: Context, Analysis, Problems, Themes, Obligations, and Reflection.[79] One of the seemingly elementary but easily overlooked steps in the process of interpretation is that to which Doriani has also provided helpful steps, overlapping with Pratt's principle of "investigation." Doriani lays out his “observation of the text:"

> 1. Beware of preconceptions. Observe what biblical texts actually say.
> 2. Observe text first, then explain it.
> 3. Resist reshaping your observations so that they support your preferred theology.
> 4. Make note of details that are for any reason particularly striking— both

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[77] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 6, "Discovering Meaning," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:02:45-00:02:55, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[78] Doriani, *Message*, 3.

[79] His book *Getting the Message* covers these categories in CAPTOR in helpful detail.

details that mean everything and details that enrich.
5. Beware of our culture and our traditions shaping our reading[80]

Doriani highlights the tendency to bring one's theological presuppositions to the text and warns against those very tendencies. Preachers in the tradition of this study have undertaken and completed significant theological and biblical studies and can easily assume that any given text must fit within those theological categories and biblical fluency. But Doriani argues that these presuppositions can warp or even pervert an accurate reading of what the text actually says.

Interpretation and Biblical Theological Context

A biblical theological framework gives shape to theological propositions and truths within that larger biblical story. Biblical theology sees God's kingdom unfolding, his covenants binding his people to himself, and his Word being revealed and inscripturated into the biblical canon. Though commonly (and naively) explained as such, the Bible is far more than an instruction manual. In his article "Biblical Theology" in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, biblical scholar Craig Bartholomew contends, "The sense of discerning the inner unity of the Bible is an indispensable ingredient in theological interpretation if the latter is to take the authority of scripture seriously."[81] Inner unity of the Bible is at the heart of reading scriptural texts with a biblical theological lens and sensibility. Bartholomew continues as he recounts Irenaeus' articulation of the unity of scripture, "Two histories converge in the biblical

[80] Doriani, *Message*, 15-26.

[81] Craig G. Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology" in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed Kevin Van Hoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 84.

account, the history of Israel and the life of Christ, but because they are also part of God's actions in and for the world, they are part of a larger narrative that begins at creation and ends in a vision of a new, more splendid city in which "Lord God will be their light."[82] Two histories, but one story. One salvation. One Covenant LORD. One redeemed covenant people. That is biblical theological context, all texts are embedded within it, and reading in light of it is imperative to preaching any text. The more challenging the text may be to a preacher, then the more helpful biblical theological reading will be.

Within the biblical theological context, Israel in Leviticus is fully expecting to be directed as to how to worship their King, as per the customary expectations in an Ancient Near Eastern context. In that context, a "suzerain" is the stronger party in a covenant, has something to offer that the weaker party (the "vassal") needs, and has the right to set the stipulations of the covenant.[83] The vassal kept the obligations of the treaty, which the suzerain also kept, and only then expected to receive the blessing that the suzerain had to offer. To break those covenant stipulations was to invite curse. This biblical theological reality and historical context informs the reading of the Pentateuch from Exodus 20 onward. Sklar explains:

> That Exodus 20-24 is a suzerain-vassal covenant implies that the Lord is Israel's covenant King, and the Israelites are the covenant people of his kingdom. This, in turn, means that the laws he gives them in Leviticus are part of the stipulations of the covenant and are to guide them in kingdom living. That is what this book is about: how the king's covenant people can live as loyal covenant members of his kingdom.[84]

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[82] Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 84.

[83] Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2005), 140.

[84] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 38.

The tabernacle structure and the residence of the ark of the covenant within "the most holy place" provide a focal point for worship according to the demands of their king. Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce notes:

> The outward and visible sign of their covenant -- unity – was the sacred chest, the ark of testimony, constructed by Moses, housed in a tent-shrine. Some scholars have seen similarities with ancient Greek history; in Greece, sometimes a group of states or tribes bound themselves in an ‘amphictyonic league,' sharing a common sanctuary which served as the center and focus of their federation.[85]

The sanctuary was a gathering place around a deity. The sanctuary in this case was also the dwelling of the suzerain/king with his people. It was his royal palace and throne room. The importance of ornate decoration in and reverence for the king's residence was a well-understood concept in Ancient Near Eastern cultures, and the people of Israel would've expected to relate to their king in traditional ways.

Palace entry came with expectations. And temple, or in this case tabernacle, entry came with expectations. Ancient Near Eastern tribes and many "developed cultures" in later centuries had these expectations. The cultural gap makes Leviticus feel incredibly distant for the modern reader. Nothing about the extravagance (even though mobile) of the tabernacle structure would have seemed odd to the original audience. Timeless truth exists in even these seemingly antiquated details. Ross asserts that determining timeless theological messages in the text "is particularly important for the interpretation of laws not explained in the text. Symbolism and ritual is an important feature; but the text may

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[85] F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations: The History of Israel from the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 4.

not explain, for example, why people could not bring honey or why a piece of cedarwood had to be used."[86]

However, Israel was certain that they belonged to the LORD, that they were his covenant people. Even as they worshipped him in reverence and awe, their place in his kingdom had been clearly proclaimed to the people of Israel. In *The Hope of Life After Death*, New Testament scholar M. Jeff Brannon offers this biblical theological awareness for Israelites:

> Out of all the nations, Israel receives the privilege of a restored relationship with God. God calls Israel to worship him and to remain faithful to him and his covenant... God will be with Israel as he leads them to the land of promise, and he will dwell with them there.... God's people are explicitly referred to as his kingdom. God is at work to restore his purpose for humanity through Israel, and Israel will serve as his vice-regents and be his kingdom people.[87]

Holding fast to their identity as the people of God, Israel was prepared and expecting to receive instruction about how they were to worship God.

Preachers must also understand the principle of "divine accommodation through the text," indicating that the LORD chose a specific time and place and culture and language within which to communicate and used the norms of those cultures and languages to speak his words to his people in a way that they would understand. This is called "divine accommodation." Pratt teaches, "The words, grammar, and style of

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[86] Ross, 65.

[87] M. Jeff Brannon, *The Hope of Life After Death: A Biblical Theology of Resurrection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 45.

scripture rose out of the cultural and linguistic conventions of its day. A wise interpreter will pay attention to those conventions in order to interpret texts correctly."[88]

Author

Interpretation and Author

Crucial to interpreting a text, and thus preaching it, is knowledge (when possible) of the author of a scriptural text. The background, the profession, the historical and geographic context in which he writes, the other works he has written if any, will all play a part in helping the reader to interpret the author's meaning. Kaiser and Silva define authorial intention as, "the meaning intended or affirmed by the original author of a text, in distinction from other possible meanings that readers may claim to discover in the text."[89] In his *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation,* Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman contends, "The view that the author is the locus of the meaning of a text provides theoretical stability to interpretation. Our interpretation is correct insofar as it conforms to the meaning intended by the author."[90] A brief word of caution is however necessary, warning against limiting the readers' understanding of a text if the knowledge of the author is limited, or overemphasizing information about the author in interpretation when a plethora is known. As New Testament scholar Jonathan Pennington states, "This

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[88] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:29:23-00:29:32, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[89] Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 333.

[90] Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1987), 65.

knowledge of author is a good servant but a bad master."[91] It is helpful but not irreplaceable. Thus, it is important to try to learn as much as possible about the author and to allow it to assist interpretation, but not make it the primary focus. Scholar Peter Walker adds, "The authority of scripture is in what is written, not in a reconstructed background, even if we do not know or understand the writer."[92]

Organic inspiration has built within it an understanding that God is the true and ultimate author. Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, breathed out by God. Longman thus instructs, "God is the ultimate author of the scriptures, so it must be said that final meaning resides in His intention."[93] At the same time, it also means that God delights to work through the personalities, styles, and writing characteristics of individual writers. Through organic inspiration, the document reflects the author's thoughts, intentions, feelings, and literary skills. He uses flawed and talented people to deliver his perfect message. He uses those who are not-yet-whole to script what is divinely inspired and without error. Thus, while there is no lack of clarity that the message was provided and shaped by the Holy Spirit, it is organically inspired and written through the hand of an individual author. The preacher and the reader are thus wise to take into consideration all that can be learned about that author as part of the process of interpretation.

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[91] Jonathan T. Pennington, *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 3, "Investigating Scripture," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:11:48-00:12:08, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[92] Peter Walker, *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 3, "Investigating Scripture," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:12:26-00:12:38, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[93] Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 65.

Though some hermeneutical scholars may disagree,[94] this study argues that knowledge of the author is incredibly helpful to accurate interpretation because his purpose for writing must lie in his relationship to his audience. In his volume *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Longman declares, "If literature is an act of communication, then meaning resides in the intention of the author. The author has encoded a message for the readers. Interpretation then has its goal the recovery of the author's purpose in writing."[95] Moses' relationship to his Exodus Israelite audience shapes how he communicates what God has revealed. They are a people in need of understanding the character and covenantal nature of this God who has rescued them from captive Egypt, redeemed them from slavery, and whom they now serve. A different author writing the same legal prescriptions and righteous exhortations would have a different effect than that of the one who has been there with the people, witnessing the saving acts of YHWH.

In the "Pentateuch/Law," Moses was bringing the Word of God to the people redeemed from slavery in Egypt, that they may know the God who delivered them and that they might worship him according to his purposes, commands, and exhortations. Since Moses was the prophet par excellence[96], it is appropriate to evaluate his intention as that of "a prophet". In describing the prophets, Old Testament scholar Abner Chou comments:

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[94] Hans- Georg Gadamer notably argues that subject matter, not the author, is the sole determiner of meaning in *Truth and Method: Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics, English trans (New York: Seabury, 1975).*

[95] Longman, 65.

[96] Numbers 12:6-8.

> (The prophets are) a motley crew, from a herdsman (Amos) to people in the royal court (Isaiah). Despite such diversity, these people are united in how they thought about God's word. They knew what God had revealed and showed care in handling the scriptural texts. They were good exegetes. Furthermore, they were aware of the theological implications of past revelation and developed those concepts via new revelation in ways consistent with the original intent. The Old Testament writers were also therefore theologians. Thus, the prophets were not simplistic in their thinking and writing. Rather, being guided by the Holy Spirit, they were precise and sophisticated.[97]

Moses was aware that he was passing along words that were not his own and that carried the weight of the authority of God. He was therefore, a mouthpiece for the thrice-holy God. He was aware of being a prophet.

The writers of scripture were all aware that they were guided by the Holy Spirit, and they were aware that the words they wrote, though unique to their own style and craft, were the very words of God. Thus, working under organic inspiration, the prophets wrote the words God revealed to them with a purpose for a specific audience at a particular time and place. Speaking to this specificity of context, Pratt claims, "The organic view of inspiration gives us another reason to pay attention to the original settings... Biblical revelation came through human authors whose circumstances, interests, and intentions gave each story its particular shape and content. If we fail to return to their original historical settings, we cut ourselves off from proper understanding."[98]

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[97] Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles (*Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), 48.

[98] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 10-11.

Study of an Author's Work in a Single Book within the Whole of Scripture

Investigation of an author for the sake of interpretation is best done by first working within smaller literary units, and then working outward toward larger literary units. Each book of the Bible stands on its own as a singular work first, and then fits according to God's redemptive purpose within the full revelation of scripture. Nicholas P Wolterstorff's article in *The Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, teaches, "One can both interpret each book by itself, honoring its integrity by trying to discern its particular message, while also interpreting all the books together for God's discourse. Indeed, doing the latter presupposes that one has done the former. Scripture is the polyphony of human discourse through the totality of which God's discourse comes to us."[99] If an author has written several books, each is helpful for investigating the author and his purposes, beginning with the particular book that features the sermon text.

Interpretation and Author's Relationship to Original Audience

The author will also have a unique relationship to the audience.[100] This must be factored into a preacher or congregant's reading of the text for the sake of interpretation. It is helpful for devotional reading, but crucial for interpretation. New Testament scholar (and experienced preacher) Doriani suggests that one of the first things to do in preparing to teach or preach a book of scripture is to read the whole book, looking for themes, issues, and divisions. Then one can ask, "Who is the author? What prompted him to

[99] Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, "Authorial Discourse Interpretation" in *The Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 80.

[100] This study will also look at the audience's relationship to the author (from the other perspective), later in this chapter.

write? Who is the intended audience? Are they believers or not, faithful or not, or Jewish, Gentile, or mixed? How much do they know? What are their needs and concerns?"[101] These questions will immediately color one's reading and help readers to enter the world of the text and interpret it from within that context. Paul's relationship to a church that he planted (Philippians) will be different than his relationship with a church whom he hopes to visit (Romans). Jonah's relationship with those to whom he was sent was contemptuous, even vitriolic. Jeremiah loved the city that he would later weep over but offered his prophetic words to a people who would almost entirely reject his message. The two lovers in Song of Songs should not be expected to treat one another in the same manner as Nahum delivers his news about Nineveh's impending doom. The individual relationship of these authors to their original readers (and implied readers) is significant for proper understanding of any text, but especially when facing a more challenging text.

Author's Intent

When all these contextual factors have been investigated and considered, the preacher can deduce a reasonable understanding of the author's intent. This intent will shape interpretation if the text is a challenging one. This author wrote to these people in this context, with their specific needs, and the prescient issues of the day in "their world." Discovering the author's intent with the acquired knowledge the interpreter has available is the fruit of this investigative harvest into the author.

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[101] Doriani, *Message*, 31.

Audience

The original audience likewise had a relationship to the author and received the scripture in light of what they knew about God first and foremost and also what they knew about the human author. Their relationship to him also informed their understanding of meaning. Israel, though hard-hearted and willful, largely trusted Moses as a messenger of the Word of the LORD. They associated Moses with YHWH, as a spokesman on behalf of their Covenant LORD. This relationship of audience to author is integral to interpretation. Both the Holy Spirit and the human author crafted the document that spoke to them in their own context and circumstances. Pratt maintains, "Some Old Testament books focused more on specific audiences than others… All books of scripture accommodated their original recipients to some degree. We can understand these books more fully as we become aware of the ancient world of those to whom they were written."[102] These audiences were receiving the Word of God with specificity to their immediate context. The LORD spoke to them in a way that they understood in their particular setting. The job of the preacher is to re-create that context to help the congregants hear the original meaning as the original audience heard that meaning.

Relationship between Modern Reader, Author, and Original Context

Crucial to interpreting a text, and thus preaching it, is knowledge (when possible) of the author's relationship to the audience of a scriptural text. Likewise, the maxim "Context is King" applies to all aspects of the interpretative process: the context of those within the textual narrative if it is a narrative text, the author and original reader, and

[102] Pratt, *Stories*, 11.

finally the context of the modern reader. An author is irremovably located within a context, an historical, cultural, and socio-political setting. That context will shape the priorities, color the nuances, and make immediate the application for the original readers. Longman notes that each culture has its own conventions of literary communication and that the task of the modern reader is to recover those conventions to learn their intended effect on the original reader.[103] Readers are therefore *etic* rather than *emic* readers, meaning they read from *outside* the original culture, rather than from *within* it. Keeping this *etic* relationship in mind, the preacher will orient *etic* congregants to the text as modern audience, while recognizing that there is an original audience *emic* to the text. Therefore, faithful interpretation must begin there, in the world of the text. Chou claims, "[Evangelical scholars] articulate how authorial intent delineates evangelical hermeneutics. They also show how it distinguishes evangelical approaches to the New Testament's use of the Old from postmodern approaches. Thus, authorial intent is a critical and defining presupposition for evangelical hermeneutics in the quest for authorial logic."[104] To understand and communicate ancient authorial intent is part of the preacher's task in expository preaching. This is not an easy task, as cultural and historical distance creates a significant gap to be bridged (which will be addressed later in this chapter). Chou teaches:

> A breakdown of communication occurs between author, text, and reader. The author cannot remain in control of the text once he has written it. After all, the author does not travel with his texts to clarify or enforce his

[103] Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 66.

[104] Chou, *Hermeneutics of Biblical Writers*, 26-27.

> ideas to the readers. Instead, the text disconnects from him and as a result, can no longer exclusively communicate the authors ideas.[105]

Once delivered, the text and its interpretations cannot be controlled down through history. Thus, a gap to be bridged opens and widens. The preacher will work to overcome this challenge by "bridging the gap" and explaining the original meaning brought forward through the centuries into modern application.

The modern reader of the text must realize that they are one of many readers in multiple contextual settings. Hermeneutics applied to author and audience will ask readers to see themselves not as the original reader, or even the implied reader, but as the later reader. The implied reader is the one intended by the author to be reading the text in antiquity or even Ancient Near Eastern settings. Often, the implied reader is also removed from the context of the original readers, who would have been alive within the world of the text and involved in the narrative or receiving the discourse. Longman offers as an example the prophecy of Nahum. The original readers would be the inhabitants of Judah who were under the vassalage of Assyria. The later readers would include today's reader. But the implied readers were the Assyrians, which explains why Nahum is filled with taunt and satire.[106] The reason that a reader is wise to keep in mind that they are not the implied audience or the original audience is because of the temptation to move quickly to present day personal application and bypass the proper interpretation that precedes personal application. The cultural distance between the original readers and the later readers is extensive and variegated, and though the principles and promises of God

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[105] Chou, *Hermeneutics of Biblical Writers*, 27.

[106] Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 67.

do not change, the needs of the people separated by distant cultures have changed and will change. If the original context of both author and audience is not kept at the forefront of the modern reader's mind, gross mistakes in interpretation and application will occur. Acquaintance with the conventions and strategies that guide the original composition will strongly enhance the likelihood of accurate interpretation.

Divine Accommodation to the Audience

The doctrine of divine accommodation reminds readers that God designed his revelation to be understood by its first audience. God ensures that his audience will be able to understand his message and learn and apply it by delivering it in a medium and in a language they can understand. As noted earlier, Calvin likens it to divine baby talk, that God stoops low to mankind so that man can understand with a slight capacity, like a nurse to an infant. In the pages of scripture, God accommodated His revelation to the specific people to whom He spoke. Scripture was originally given to a particular people in a particular setting, and God speaks into that setting and to those people. "God accommodates the strengths and weaknesses of peoples, churches, and individuals, and accommodates their specific needs… so interpreters first need to understand the original audience."[107]Ancient Near Eastern treaties serve as a model for this accommodation. God could have chosen any method for relating to his people relationally. But God revealed himself in the Ancient Near East and thus made relational connection through "covenants" appropriate to that cultural setting.

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[107] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:19:01-00:19:05, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

Importance of Original Meaning from Medieval Church and Reformation to Today

It might be supposed that only recent attention to critical scholarship has yielded the views proposed in this study. That is an incorrect supposition. The church has held to the importance of original meaning in biblical interpretation since its earliest days. Throughout the history of the church, theologians have urged that pursuing the original meaning of scripture is an essential part of biblical interpretation.[108] Irenaeus wrote in *Against Heresies,* "They know not how to read Paul." Later Thomas Aquinas wrote that the "*sensus literalis*," the literal meaning, was the only meaning of from which right interpretation springs.

During the Protestant Reformation, scholars investigated the scriptures in their original languages in historical context, rather than only in Latin translations handed down through the church. Philipp Melancthon's slogan "*ad fontes,"* meaning "to the sources," emphasized that interpretation from the original text was the path to find the original meaning, but that claim was counter to what the Roman Catholic Church taught.[109] Luther and Calvin were determined to study the texts in their original languages and historical contexts and developed the grammatico-historical method of bringing out the original meaning, setting, and context.[110] Thus the phrase "Sola Scriptura" argues that only the Bible teaches truth with authority.

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[108] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:34:40-00:34:52, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[109] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 2, "Preparation for Interpretation," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:37:50-00:38:08, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

[110] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 4, "Approaches to Meaning," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:38:16-00:38:52, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

Interpretation and Application

The work of the preacher is not finished until he has applied the text to the life and situation of the congregation. The preacher does not and must not begin with the needs of the modern reader/hearer, but the work of interpretation must press forward into a modern context. Scripture is still speaking to the reader, and a preacher bridges the cultural and historical and linguistic gap to bring the truths to the modern hearer. Pratt warns, “To treat the Old Testament as a relic of the past with no significance for today contradicts the Bible’s own treatment of the Old Testament. We must strive to know how these texts relate to the modern world.”[111] There is a necessary conscious linking of the world of the text "their world" to the modern world "our world." Renowned preacher John Stott's classic book *Between Two Worlds* describes the preacher's job as bridging the gap between the ancient world of the text and the perceived modern needs of the congregation.[112] Pratt's illuminative words are again applicable here: “When we interpret Old Testament stories, we should always remember that we are not hearing text spoken directly to us; we are overhearing stories told to others. This fact creates tension, pulling us back-and-forth between the relevance and distance of these stories.”[113] This tension adds to the intimidation a preacher faces in dealing with certain texts, but proven hermeneutical processes can bring the truth to congregants. The work of preaching is not finished with explanation. Lectures explain scripture. Sermons are meant to go further. Pratt cautions, "Ignoring explicit application can devastate the church. Congregations are

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[111] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories,* 14.

[112] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 102.

[113] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 15.

left spiritually malnourished and with little ability to see how Old Testament stories have any bearing on their lives. This practice results in the lifeless orthodoxy plaguing many evangelical churches."[114]

Recognizing the Gap to be Bridged

Worlds of the Text

The preacher is wise to remember Pratt's "three worlds of the text" when looking for modern application. The preacher will speak to "our world," while the text was written to "their world," and even sometimes described "that world." Thus, at least two historical contexts, and sometimes three, are in view as application work ensues. Bridging the gap between the worlds of the text will be crucial work for this reason. Both worlds bring meaning to the preached Word of God. The preacher looking to enrich the church will himself be richer for having entered the world of the text before preaching to his congregants. Anthony Thiselton writes, "The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and text, in such a way that the interpreter's own horizon is re-shaped and enlarged."[115] Picking up on Hans-Georg Gadamer's work, Third Millennium Ministries reminds listeners that Gadamer pointed out that understanding a text is always a fusion of two horizons: the ancient world of the passage and the contemporary world of the reader.[116] Since interpretation always involves

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[114] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 51.

[115] Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans 1980), xix.

[116] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 4, "Approaches to Meaning," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:32:49-00:33:34, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

interaction between the present and the past, neither world may be neglected without skewing, even forfeiting, proper understanding.

Visiting a Foreign Country

Encountering the ancient world of scripture, with its customs, traditions, languages, people groups, and socio-political structures has been likened to visiting a foreign country.

Pratt describes this sense of disconnectedness:

> Perhaps the greatest difficulty we face is an acute sense of the historical distance between ourselves and Old Testament stories. We are at ease in the gospels; we are comfortable in the New Testament epistles; we are even familiar with the Psalms and Proverbs. But Old Testament stories often seem very strange to us. Reading Old Testament stories is like visiting a foreign country. The people speak a different language; their customs are perplexing. The literary forms of these stories often seem alien to us… moreover, many Old Testament narratives offend our modern sensitivities…. We feel like strangers in a strange land.[117]

The preacher's job is to bridge that gap, take the listener into the world of the text, and then bring the listener back across the bridge with modern application. The preacher's job is to close the distance. Theologian Louis Berkhof writes:

> Hermeneutics is usually started with a view to the interpretation of the literary productions of the past. The special task is to point out the way in which the differences or the distances between an author and his readers may be removed. It teaches us that this is properly accomplished only by the readers' transporting themselves into the time and spirit of the author.[118]

Berkhof's "transporting oneself to another time" is a helpful image, since passports and time travel are appropriate to the task and always have been. This work is not new to

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[117] Pratt, *Stories*, 13-14.

[118] Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 11.

preachers today. Pratt states, "Old Testament writers depended heavily on contemporary application of previous revelation…Throughout the Old Testament, Biblical figures have much more than antiquarian interests in previous revelation. They applied revelation from long ago to their own day."[119]

Relevance and Distance

A feature of these ancient texts that is to be cherished, even as it must be addressed, is that they are indeed ancient. Each text has an historical context with an ancient people, overheard and appreciated, generation after generation. The distance is valuable.

It is also relevant to the preacher/listener/reader today because the Bible is living and active[120] and intended to continue to change and shape lives today. Pratt advises, "When we interpret Old Testament stories, we should always remember that we are not hearing text spoken directly to us; we are overhearing stories told to others. This fact creates tension, pulling us back-and-forth between the relevance and distance of these stories."[121] The Bible was written for modern hearers and thus carries relevance. But it was not written only for modern hearers, so there is requisite distance.

> Paul acknowledged that the Corinthians did not live in the days of the Old Testament. They lived after the death and resurrection of Christ. The Corinthians stood in a different place in the history of redemption. While these Old Testament stories applied, the Corinthians had to read them not as their original recipients, but as Christians living in the eschatological

[119] Pratt, *Stories*, 14.

[120] Hebrews 4:12.

[121] Pratt, *Stories*, 15.

> age. From Paul's perspective, we have to keep in mind both the relevance and distance of Old Testament stories.[122]

Bridging the Gap

A great deal of this study is dedicated to bridging cultural and historical gaps. All aspects addressed as investigation are applicable under this sub-point. It is an especially important work when the text is intimidating because this distance is more prominent, and the gap is more daunting to cross. Pratt reasons:

> Even if we have confidence that we understand the original meaning, it is difficult to extend that meeting into our world. We know the stories have something to say to us, but we know just as plainly that we live in a different world... Application of Old Testament narratives involves building bridges from the ancient world to our day; we seek to span the gulf between ourselves in the Bible. On one side of the historical gulf, we carefully investigate scripture. We do our best to understand Old Testament stories in terms of their original settings. On the other side, we become aware of our own situation we learn of needs and opportunities for the word today. At times bridging the gap will be easy, at other times extremely difficult.[123]

Known for his commentaries making the complicated simple, Warren Wiersbe exhorts, "To preach biblically means much more than to preach the truth of the Bible accurately. It also means to present that truth the way the biblical writers and speakers presented it."[124]

Homiletics professor and pastor Haddon Robinson states, "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through

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[122] Pratt, *Stories*, 15.

[123] Pratt, *Stories*, 16.

[124] Warren W Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994), 304-5.

historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."[125] Leviticus is filled with commands, exhortations, instructions, procedures, and precise details. Each of these elements contributes to the whole counsel of God. Applying certain texts can be difficult, but no passage of scripture is beyond what preachers are called to preach. Truths about God and truths about humanity can be found in even the most finitely detailed and culturally distant of texts. Old Testament scholar G. Geoffrey Harper poses the following eight questions that will aid the preacher in approaching a text in Leviticus:

1. What cultural factors do I need to consider?
2. How is this instruction connected to the wider storyline of the Pentateuch?
3. How does the rest of the canon bear on this instruction?
4. What does this instruction reveal about the lawgiver?
5. In what ways does the instruction foster love for God and/or love for one's neighbor?
6. How is this text trying to shape the moral imagination of readers?
7. What is this text doing?
8. How is this instruction useful?[126]

These questions provide entry to the eternal truth of a text in Leviticus. Historical, literary, and biblical theological context are in view in the first five, and application alluded in the last three. Reflecting on the book as a whole, Harper declares the central concern of Leviticus is quite clear: "preparing people to live near Yahweh's earthly

[125] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 21.

[126] G. Geoffrey Harper, *Teaching Leviticus: From Text to Message* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2022), 51-55.

presence and survive the encounter."[127] This central theme will be revisited throughout the latter portion of this study.

Truth for the Head, Heart, and Hands

Finally, this study will present the goal of application as transformation of "head, heart, and hands." Pratt refers to these as the three dimensions for application: conceptual, emotional, and behavioral.[128] The goal of a preacher is that people's hearts would be transformed by the power of the gospel present on every page of scripture. Certain texts will emphasize one of this triad of application wings more than the others, but in every text, preachers should be looking for how to apply the text to the head, heart, and hands of their congregants. Mere information transfer to the head is not the whole of preaching. Reaching the heart of the congregant is important but also not the whole task. Exhortations for mobilizing the hands and feet with tasks/duties/character remedies are empty of power if divorced from truth that first transforms head and heart. Therefore, the faithful preacher must apply texts to head, and heart, and hands. This work will be taken up in greater length in chapter 4.

Having looked at the approach to application, this study now moves to the method of application. How do eternal truths apply to mind, heart, and action? Where should the preacher look for specific applications? Doriani offers us seven sources of application:

1) Rules;
2) Ideals;

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[127] Harper, 20.

[128] *He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation* (video curriculum), Lesson 1, "Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics," produced by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Michael Briggs, written by Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Scott Simmons, and Ra McLaughlin, 2013, 00:55:17-00:58:00, http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153.

3) Doctrine;
4) Redemptive Acts in Narrative;
5) Exemplary Acts in Narrative;
6) Biblical Images or Symbols; and
7) Songs and Prayers.[129]

These seven sources locate applications in preaching. Different sources will likely yield different kinds of applications due to the differences in their literary context and character. Returning to language used earlier in this chapter, redemptive acts and exemplary acts are more often descriptive, whereas rules, ideals, and doctrine are prescriptive. The appropriate applications will thus show correspondent variegation commensurate with the descriptive or prescriptive purpose of the text. Clear procedures, instructions, and exhortations birth corresponding action different from a narrative of God's sovereign omnipotent action on behalf of his people. God's people have sanctified access to changed behaviors by God's grace. God's people are not expected to act in ways that only God can act by virtue of His incommunicable attributes. However, there is no scriptural literary unit from which God's people cannot draw possible application. The preacher must therefore determine what kind of application is appropriate, utilizing various methods of application. The application might speak to the conceptual, the emotional, or the behavioral. In terms of the method to application, Doriani suggests focusing on these 4 aspects:

1. Duty: What should I do? That is, what is my duty?
2. Character: Who should I be? That is, how can I become the person or obtain the character that lets me do what's right?
3. Goals: To what causes should we devote our life energy? That is, what goals should we pursue?

[129] Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82-91.

> 4. Discernment: How can we distinguish truth from error? That is, how can we gain discernment?[130]

The preacher's application of a text that focuses on one of those four aspects will render application of the truth principles tangible, thus moving the exposition of the text from a lecture to a sermon. The preacher will now be preaching to see the Holy Spirit illumine minds, renew hearts, and transform lives, rather than simply provide an information transfer. Each component is necessary: head, and heart, and hands.

Wraparound to Preparation

This study now returns to where it began in "preparation," with reliance upon the Holy Spirit. Personal strengths and weaknesses lead each interpreter to bring out different aspects of a passage's original meaning. The preacher will bring gifts, training, and experience to the preaching of the Word but will remain a vessel of God's message through his Word. Kaiser encourages:

> The demonstration of the Holy Spirit is what is needed to make our poor and inadequate words the power of God. Yes, even when we have faithfully discharged our full range of duties as exegetes and when we have pressed on to apply that exegesis by principlizing the text paragraph by paragraph into timeless propositions which call for an immediate response from our listeners, we still need the Holy Spirit to carry that word home to the mind and hearts of our hearers if that word is ever going to change men's lives.[131]

Lest the preacher believe that the preaching of the Word of God rests primarily within the mind or upon the shoulders of the preacher, this study returns to humble, absolute reliance upon divine guidance and leading.

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[130] Doriani, *Truth*, 98.

[131] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 236.

Chapter 3

Reading and Interpreting a Ritual Text

A Preliminary Note on Ancient Near Eastern Ritual and Interpretive "Distance"

Cultural and linguistic distance makes elements of interpretation difficult. Akkadian texts, representing the *lingua franca* of the Ancient Near East in the fourteenth century B.C., were found in 1929 at Ras Shamra, Syria, in the former city-state of Ugarit, and have been studied extensively by scholars since that time. The rituals described lend insight to this portion of this study because they were contemporary with those of the Israelites. In *Ritual in Narrative: The Dynamics of Feasting, Mourning, and Retaliation Rites in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat,* Old Testament scholar David P. Wright argues, "(Ugaritic) ritual texts...theoretically promise to reveal much about ritual practice and thought in this place and time. But certain difficulties make them less informative than one might hope...many of the terms used in the ritual texts are opaque."[132] Historical distance obscures details concerning the usage of materials not used in the same ways in modern society. What was the purpose of this material at this time in this ritual? Wright continues, "They...lack a certain context that might help explain the use of materials and their setting. All of these difficulties combine to make it extremely difficult to formulate confident assessments of the characteristics, purposes, and significance of ritual in and around Ugarit."[133] Acknowledging this difficulty, this study will argue that meaning can

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[132] David P. Wright, *Ritual in Narrative: The Dynamics of Feasting, Mourning, and Retaliation Rites in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 2-3.

[133] Wright, *Ritual in Narrative*, 3.

be found when the ritual is read through the various contextual worlds within which the ritual text resides.

Discerning Meaning in a Ritual Text: How to Approach the Text

Approaching a ritual text to gain understanding of its meaning is no small task. Though Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham notes, "Analysis of national customs gives us an insight into what a particular society holds dear,"[134] many Old Testament theologies outlining biblical theology largely ignore the ritual texts central to the books at the heart of the Pentateuch.[135] Yet secular anthropologists share Wenham's understanding of the centrality of ritual to a culture. Anthropologist Monica Wilson comments, "Rituals reveal values at their deepest level...men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies."[136] Given the importance of rituals to a culture's identity and self- understanding, how is the reader to approach a particular ritual to determine meaning?

Gaining access to an understanding of the meaning of a ritual, as opposed to common traditions and ceremonies, is not easily done. Scholars have long attempted to explain the connection between ritual and meaning. Are certain rituals performed simply

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[134] Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch, Vol 1*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 83.

[135] Wenham, 83.

[136] Monica Wilson, *American Anthropologist* 56, 1934, p. 242 quoted by V. W. Turner *The Ritual Process, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul*, 1969.

because they have always been done that way? In *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences,* Asian ritual/cultural scholar Frits Stall claims that they are merely "performed because it is a tradition to do so."[137] Staal also suggests that ritual actions have no inherent meaning, no symbolic meaning, and that a given ritual may have more than one meaning.[138] This study is going to argue that ritual actions have deep meaning, and that rituals are performed for a specific purpose and with profound intention and understanding.

Old Testament scholar Frank H. Gorman defines ritual as " a complex performance of symbolic acts, characterized by its formality, order, and sequence, which tends to take place in specific situations, and has as one of its central goals the regulation of the social order."[139] Formality, order, and sequence of actions in specific situations separate particular actions as ritual from any singular occurrence of them taking place in everyday life. It separates them as ritual. In *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences,* and in contrast to Staal, Gorman maintains, "Ritual is a way of enacting meaning in one's existence in this world. It is a way of construing, actualizing, realizing, and bringing into being a world of meaning and ordered existence. Ritual is, thus, seen as a means of enacting one's theology."[140] But what is that meaning? How can a reader know and interpret meaning correctly?

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[137] Frits Staal, *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 115-116, 134.

[138] Frits Staal, *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 115-116, 129-129, 131, 134, 330, 433.

[139] Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in Priestly Theology* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990), 19.

[140] Gorman, *Ideology*, 232.

Finally, studying the ritual texts of the Old Testament, and thus the culture and theology of Ancient Israel, brings its own challenges. Wenham explains:

> Old Testament scholars have a much more difficult task penetrating the mind of Leviticus and its rituals because there are no living informants who can explain the rationale for different procedures. What makes it even more difficult is the absence of the words that accompanied the actions: Leviticus tells us what had to be done when a leper was cleansed, but not what was said. If we knew more about what was said, we should have a much clearer picture of the significance of each gesture in a rite, as well as the overall purpose of the rite.[141]

The reader seeking to interpret meaning in the rituals of Leviticus must employ a variety of strategies and methods. This broad approach comes to a narrow focus and will bring clearer understanding to the reader, who can then bring greater understanding to the congregation.

Entering the Cultural World of the Text: How Does One Need to Prepare for a Ritual Text?

A Brief word on Ancient Near Eastern Rituals

Ancient Near Eastern rituals shared much in common, but also had distinctions within different cultures. Rituals contained many aspects, including readiness for ritual. For example, this study's look at Leviticus 1 will discuss the three ritual states of Israel. The concept of ritual states was "very familiar to the ancient Israelites and their neighbours and remains familiar to many cultures today."[142] What feels foreign to a modern reader was not unprecedented to Israel. However, Israel was looking to the

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[141] Wenham, *Exploring*, 84.

[142] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 45. Also see Milgrom, 1991: 764-765 and 932-933.

LORD, rather than her neighbors, for guidance. God is the master communicator, and thus speaks to Israel in ways they can understand. Similarities to existing cultural practices are to be expected. Therefore, ritual states and ritual culture in general were familiar and widely practiced in the Ancient Near East, requiring little explanation to the original audience. The modern reader, however, will need some help to discern what is of greatest importance in a text that seems muddled and confusing upon initial reading.

Ritual practice existed across the full spectrum of Ancient Near Eastern cultures and was "central to the cultural life and governance of all Ancient Near Eastern societies."[143] And in antiquity there was a wide spectrum of religions. Polytheistic cultures all over the Ancient Near East had religious procedures and practices for a wide spectrum of aspects of daily life. In *Antiquity: From the Birth of the Sumerian Civilization to the Fall of the Roman Empire,* antiquities scholar Norman F. Cantor speculates, "What interested the urban dwellers of antiquity were the gods...The chief theological formats were polytheism (many gods); monotheism (one god); dualism (two gods, one good, the other evil); and dying and reborn savior gods that could also be fitted into the other three categories of divinity."[144] Cultic practice in general and ritual practice in particular were not unique to Israel. Cantor notes, "Just as other aspects of Mycenaean civilization showed the influence of native (pre-Greek), Indo-European, and Minoan cultural forms, so the gods of the classical Greek pantheon were drawn from these same cultures, served a variety of functions, and were worshipped according to a variety of

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[143] John H. Walton, "Leviticus" in *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 180.

[144] Norman F. Cantor, *Antiquity: From the Birth of the Sumerian Civilization to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 52.

rites."[145] These rituals served a variety of purposes according to the beliefs of each culture. Cantor continues:

> The specific practices and beliefs that prevailed in any one place were largely determined by historical circumstance. Each locality had its special body of gods, heroes, and rituals on which it depended to protect its army in battle, to ensure the regular and beneficial workings of nature, and to dilute and render tolerable the fears and anxieties that always threatened to overwhelm primitive man.[146]

Thus, in the early societies of the Ancient Near East and Ancient Mediterranean, different cultures, different occasions, and different theistic structures yielded ritual practices, and yet there was variety within the processes of those rituals, despite considerable similarities. For example, cultic worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility in Greek religion, centered around wild and frenzied dancing and music, with the purpose of losing oneself and escaping reality.[147] This practice is vastly different in form and intended result from the rituals in Leviticus, and yet cultic ritual practice was accepted across cultures as standard.

Wenham points out the need for imagination to fill in some of the gaps that Leviticus leaves the reader, advising, "Readers need to use much imagination to recreate the mood and atmosphere of the rites as well as attending carefully to the exact procedures set out in the text."[148] The people understood the standard concepts of ritual practice in the Ancient Near East. Certain specifics of these rituals were laid out while

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[145] Cantor, 118.

[146] Cantor, 118-119.

[147] Cantor, 120.

[148] Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch, Vol 1.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 83.

many other specifics were not since they were assumed as common knowledge. Wenham gives as examples the fact that (though it was standard practice in Ancient Near Eastern sacrificial ritual), Leviticus never says that the animals have to have their legs tied, nor does Leviticus give any indication of the words exchanged between priest and worshipper during these ceremonies, though the reader would hardly assume that these words did not take place.[149]

Determining What is Most Significant

Old Testament scholar Jay Sklar suggests two questions in studying ritual meaning: "What does a ritual do?" and "How should it be read?"[150]

What Does a Ritual Do?

Readers of scripture can read the details of the ritual to gain understanding of meaning in a ritual. The modern world is filled with ritual, and Sklar observes, "The more important the person, time or event, the more elaborate the ritual tends to become."[151] The significance of a person or event is revealed by the intricacy of the ritual associated with that person or event.

In studying Leviticus, Sklar points out two important conclusions for the reader, which will be focal points for this study. He lists, “1- The more elaborate the ritual, the more likely it is that we are reading of something significant. 2- It is not necessary to look

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[149] Wenham, *Exploring*, 82.

[150] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 69.

[151] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 69.

suspiciously at the Israelites' use of elaborate rituals in the worship of God. In fact, just the opposite: their use of elaborate rituals demonstrates the high value they placed on worshipping him."[152] The elaborate nature of these rituals points to their significance, as Sklar argues, and shows that the particularity and specificity of details signifies importance, rather than being an arbitrary demand from a capricious god. Sklar contends, "...by commanding the Israelites to use these rituals, the LORD was helping them to understand that worshipping him was an incredibly important matter. They were coming to worship the King of Kings and were therefore to treat this time as special."[153] As this study will show, there was rich meaning to every aspect of these actions. Regarding a wedding ceremony's details, Sklar concludes, "The overall purpose of the ceremony makes sense of [the] details. The same is true with the rituals in Leviticus."[154] Following Sklar's questions, this study now looks deeper into ritual texts.

How Should a Ritual be Read?

Israel did not need everything in the ritual explained, which presents a challenge to the modern interpreter. Within the performance of a ritual, several actions take place. The one seeking ritual to be performed or the one performing ritual himself (which varies in different cultures)[155] will perform specific actions in a specific way. Sklar observes that, "Leviticus itself usually does not offer explanations about the meaning of individual ritual actions, probably because the meaning was already evident to the Israelites...

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[152] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 69.

[153] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 70.

[154] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 70.

[155] In Leviticus, that will be the offeror and the priest.

Knowing a ritual's overall purpose helps us understand the significance of various events within the ritual."[156] Metaphorically, the larger forest does in this case help one to gain understanding of the trees. The Israelites understood the meaning of the individual actions.

Modern interpreters can still gain insight, however, by paying attention to the overall context. If God's primary purpose in giving this scripture to his people was to elucidate those specific actions, the text would tell us more on those finite aspects. And, the overall context of the passage does provide insight into the meaning of the individual actions. Beginning with the contextual approach focuses the reader on the significance of the whole. Sklar advises, "While this approach may not answer every question about ritual actions, it will help to protect us from purely subjective readings of these rites and provide insight into the values that various ritual actions were meant to convey."[157] The cultural context within which a ritual is performed will attach meaning to the activities performed that a secular setting or a different religious environment will not.

The reason we can gain insight by paying attention to context is because the ritual actions work together to make meaning. In his book *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, Old Testament scholar Roy Gane reports, "A certain collection of activities makes up a 'purification offering' because the Israelite religious system has attached meaning to physical activities that would otherwise be

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[156] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 70.

[157] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 71.

incoherent and meaningless."[158] Gane lays out these corollaries for studying ritual in Leviticus:

> 1) The religious system can assign different meanings to an activity.
> 2) A given activity can have more than one meaning at the same time.
> 3) Different activities can carry the same meaning.
> 4) We are dependent upon ritual tradition to provide us meanings at every stage of development as we must rely on that tradition for rules governing performance of activities.[159]

Seeing from the Text What the Text Deems Most Important

This study will now look into what the text itself reveals about the significance of various rituals. An important concept in biblical hermeneutics is "Let scripture interpret scripture." So, can a preacher find meaning by what the text itself says about the importance and meaning of the ritual? Unfortunately, ritual texts often do not indicate to the reader the meaning behind all of the individual ritual actions. Their exact meaning often remains clouded. Gane advises:

> Since rituals involve activity, the ideal way to study them is by direct observation. But our only access to ancient rituals is through texts, which only reflect rituals, without fully capturing the ritual experience. Since we must view such rituals through the filter of texts, one quest for the locus of their ritual meaning must take into account both the nature of ritual itself and the nature of ritual text.[160]

To find meaning, one must study what is (as scholars say) behind and underneath the text -- its background and worldview. Interacting with the work of ritual scholar Ronald L. Grimes, Gane states, "Investigation of ritual as performance should inform readings of

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[158] Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 8.

[159] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 8-9.

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

ancient ritual texts even though usual methods of field study, which are difficult enough, are not possible, 'because in all but the most bookish traditions, ritual texts exist to serve ritual enactments, not the other way around.'"[161]

Interaction with Scholarship: The Structuralist Approach to Meaning vs. Gane's Approach

One approach to determine meaning in a ritual is a study of the structure of that ritual, hereafter referred to as the structuralist approach. Proponents argue that the meaning of symbols is best found by studying the ritual from an objective, distant perspective, achieved by closely examining the structure, rather than by an up-close analysis of each individual symbol and detail within the rites of any culture's rituals. In *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World,* Old Testament scholar Philip Peter Jenson argues:

> It is preferable to begin with the movement and structure of the sacrificial ritual as a whole, since this larger context should determine the primary significance of the individual symbols. The value of a structuralist approach is that it looks for patterns at the level of the complete ritual. The symbols and actions will be combined in such a way as to communicate the nature and purpose of the sacrifice.[162]

In other words, a focus on the whole structure, rather than the finite minutiae, helps the interpreter determine the macro-meaning that otherwise could be swallowed up or misinterpreted if the focus remained on every detail. Gane concedes, "The advantage of such a structural methodology is that it takes into account the fact that rituals are

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[161] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 4. The citation is from Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essay on Its Theory* (SCR; Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 9.

[162] Phillip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (London: T & T Clark, 1992), 152.

hierarchal systems of activity in which individual activities are included and shaped by higher-level goals to which they are intended to contribute."[163] The lesser is given meaning by the greater in a structuralist approach. The small details get meaning from the larger structure.

Jenson further argues, "The problem of interpreting ritual is akin to interpreting sentences, particularly when they are highly metaphorical. A word derives its particular force from the context, as does a symbol, and the multivalence of a symbol can be compared to the fruitful ambiguity of poetry."[164] Given that "Context is King" is one of the hermeneutical foundations of this study, and given that literary context plays a central role in that context, looking at the overall structure is applauded as an informative aspect of ritual study. Scholars disagree on the merit of a structuralist approach, but structural analysis to enhance semiological understanding is both appropriate and helpful.

Social anthropologist Mary Douglas contributed to this discussion in her scholarly article "Deciphering a Meal" published in *Daedalus* in Winter 1972." Having studied people groups whose origin was very different than her own in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Douglas studied the ritual surrounding a family meal within her own family, finding that meals, like language, are a code and speculated, "If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries

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[163] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 10.

[164] Phillip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (London: T & T Clark, 1992), 152.

and transactions across the boundaries."[165] There are differences in the meal ritual Douglas studied and in the rituals of the Israelites, but (with Douglas having studied Leviticus extensively herself) her conclusions aid this study through similar degrees of distinction between priest and worshipper, purity and impurity yielding inclusion and exclusion, and the need for a boundary to be crossed. Douglas' most helpful conclusions address the purpose of a boundary. Douglas contends:

> We should not conclude this essay without saying something more positive about what this boundary encloses. In the one case, it divides edible from inedible. But it is more than a negative barrier of exclusion. In all the cases we have seen, it bounds the area of tructured relations. Within that area rules apply. Outside it, anything goes. Following the argument we have established by which each level of meaning realizes the others which share a common structure, we can fairly say that the ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it.[166]

This positing of a boundary as establishing a distinction between two different social "zones" applies to the rituals of Israel in that there were a series of boundaries in the sanctuary, beyond which one was not allowed without increased states of ritual purity: impure--pure--holy. Boundaries existed for the protection of the Israelite worshippers.

Gane, summing up Jenson and Douglas and the structuralist approach, remarks, "The analyst should begin from the contextually conditioned top of the systems hierarchy rather than working from the bottom up by starting with the individual activities."[167] Though structuralism carries verisimilitude in its prioritizing aspects, Gane also sees the limitations of a structuralist approach. Gane maintains:

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[165] Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal" *Daedalus* Winter 1972; "Implicit Meanings" in *Mary Douglas: Collected Works, Vol. 5* (New York: Routledge, 1975), 231.

[166] Douglas, 250.

[167] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 10.

> While the structuralist approach is attractive, it is inadequate by itself. As Staal has pointed out, actions have no inherent meaning. So, whether you begin from the top of a collection of activities or from the bottom, meaning will not appear as the sum of the parts if these parts consist exclusively of physical actions. In fact, because activity systems are defined by their goals, we may not know that one constitutes a ritual system at all unless we have some clue regarding its goal.[168]

Interpreting physical actions separate from learned understanding of the worldview informing those actions renders that interpretation meaningless. Structure alone does not give answers to meaning when separate from worldview. Gane explains it this way:

> Even if we continue to watch the subsequent behavior [of a man who is washing his feet],[169] without knowing how his actions fit into his world view, we will remain unsure whether his actions constitute a complete activity system or belong to a larger activity system, let alone whether they are ritual in nature and, if so, what they might mean.[170]

Structure alone does not answer meaning behind what takes place within the structured ritual. Worldview behind the ritual is necessary for determining meaning. Gane feels that making *a priori* assumptions about structure is inherent in a structuralist approach and thus invalidates the analysis.[171] Gane will propose a different approach to be shown later this chapter.

Jenson suggests taking a historical approach as well as structural, given that elements of rituals can go through a process of fossilization and/or reinterpretation.[172] Seeing how elements of a ritual continue into later ritual, as earlier rituals are replaced,

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[168] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 10.

[169] Observing him washing his feet might represent a) cooling himself, b) making sure he does not soil the carpet, c) ritually purifying himself prior to worship, or d) engaging in a core act of worship. See Gane, *Cult and Character*, 10-11.

[170] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 10-11.

[171] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 11.

[172] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 11.

can give insight into meaning. However, there will still be unknowns. Knowing if the man washing his feet/hands is Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, or Christian adds meaning to the ritual if one knows the background and worldview of those religions.[173] The theological background and worldview of the one seeking the rite will influence the meaning they see in the ritual. As Gorman states, "Ritual is... seen as a means of enacting one's theology."[174]

Douglas Davies advocates a structuralist/anthropological approach and brings an understanding of covenant context into this discussion.[175] The Israelite worldview does inform its proper understanding. Gane, picking up on that concept from Davies, explains:

> Within the Torah, cult and covenant are inextricably linked. The divine covenant with the patriarchs and the nation of Israel provides background for the special manifestation of that relationship through the residence of YHWH among the Israelites at the tabernacle. Continuation of YHWH's Presence there depends on observance of his laws, including those that directly relate to the cultic center by regulating the ritual system.[176]

However, we need to understand not only the overall covenant context but also the functions/meanings[177] of the ritual forms.[178] A key to unlocking the approach that Gane will suggest, and that this study will support, comes from the work of anthropologist Brian Wilson, who proposes that transformation through an activity process is the goal of nonritual human activity systems. Thus, "It is not the activities themselves that define the

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[173] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 11.

[174] Gorman, *Ideology*, 232.

[175] See Douglas Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," *ZAW 89* (1977) 392. For a study of cultic expiation in the context of covenant, also see R. Larry Shelton, "A Concept of Atonement," *WTJ 19* (1984) 92-96.

[176] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 12.

[177] This work will be taken up with relation to Leviticus 1 in Chapter 5.

[178] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 12.

system, but the goal that determines which activities are necessary for the desired change."[179] Gane uses Wilson's theory to propose that this concept applies to ritual activity systems, which are also dynamic transformation processes.[180] Gane continues, "Leviticus 16:16 expresses the goal of special purification offerings: to purge the inner sanctum from ritual impurities and moral faults. The goal is to effect transformation (purging) through activities, namely, by sprinkling blood (vv.14-15). The goal defines the activities that are included and the way they are performed. Achieving the goal constitutes the basic function/*raison d'etre* of the ritual, which is the same thing as the meaning assigned to it by a religious authority."[181] Covenant Israel was coming to understand, through the words recorded in Leviticus, that these rituals were providing the path to substitutionary atonement for their sins and thus reconciliation with their covenant suzerain, YHWH. Puritan theologian and scholar John Owen observes:

> "Reconciliation, the covering of sins and the resulting forgiveness, must be secured through bloody sacrifice. Several commandments had already taught this, notably the offering of sacrifice on the day of atonement, from which we understand those words of the Apostle, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no remission (Heb 9:22)."[182]

These rituals have the potential to aid restoration between the worshipper and God. And the worshippers in ancient cultures believed that the rituals accomplished more than forgiveness alone. Walton contends that in Hittite culture, "Sacrifices should not be

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[179] Brian Wilson, *Systems: Concepts, Methodologies, and Applications* (Chichester: Wiley, 1984) 16, 26.

[180] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 12.

[181] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 13.

[182] John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*, translated by Stephen P. Westcott (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), Book 4, Chapter 3, 346.

viewed as simply a way to redress offense or deal with sin. Sacrifices are the means by which worshippers built relationship with the gods."[183] These rituals are far more than a procedure to be followed. The "sought-for transformation" in the ritual practices of Leviticus is central for discerning the purpose of the entire ritual and the actions within the ritual.

Wilson distinguishes between ceremony and ritual, clarifying, "A ceremony is an appropriate and elaborate form for the expression of feeling, but a ritual is action believed to be efficacious...both ritual and ceremonial have a function in rousing and canalizing emotion, but ritual, by relating its symbols to some supposed transcendent reality, affects people more deeply than a ceremony."[184] The actions performed are different than they would be when performed in the ordinary and mundane daily course of events because they are performed toward a purpose. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,* scholar Catherine Bell also distinguishes between ritual and mundane activity:

> (Ritual is) a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane," and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.[185]

In contrast to Staal, Bell's phrase, "culturally specific strategies," captures that these actions do in fact have great inherent meaning, greater even than the ceremony. The

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[183] John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018) 94.

[184] Monica Wilson, "Nyakussa Ritual and Symbolism", *American Anthropologist* 56 (1954), 240.

[185] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, University of Oxford Press, 1992), 74.

larger purpose of the ritual makes certain that they do. The worshipper and the priest knew that these were not merely ceremonial actions. They had a purpose.

Summation of the work of these scholars leads to this conclusion: ritual activity is distinct from mundane activity because it is transformative. Therefore, Gane concludes that what separates ritual from ceremony is the belief that ritual is efficacious through connection to a transcendent reality. Gane defines a ritual this way, "A ritual is a privileged activity system to carry out a transformation process involving interaction with a reality ordinarily inaccessible to the material domain."[186] This transformation process does not come from the ritual but from Israel's covenantal God. It means something because God has told them it means something. Gane observes, "To accept the rules and efficacy of the rituals, the priest and his people would need to believe in the existence of YHWH, the reality of pollution that needed to be removed, and the effectiveness of the prescribed ritual actions required to carry out the desired transformation."[187]

Conclusion

This study deduces that Gane's reasoning comes together in this: Israel's covenantal context with YHWH provides the background for Torah rituals, and the reason for the processes and elements used in the rituals is transformation. This understanding and approach will be used to teach preachers how to gain meaning from a ritual text. For this study, this method will be called a "Covenant Transformational

[186] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 15.

[187] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 17-18.

Approach." Therefore, this study proposes these "Three Takeaways for Interpreting a Ritual Text":

1. Interpret a ritual text in light of cultural context
2. Interpret a ritual text in light of covenant theological worldview
3. Interpret a ritual text in light of perceived transformation for the one seeking the rite.

Chapter 4

Christocentric Preaching

This study aims to give practical application to applying Christ from even the most difficult to interpret texts. It will employ a threefold process: 1) adopting the principles of Christ-Centered Preaching; 2) help for seeing Christ in the text; and (especially specific to this study) 3) a plan for applying Christ in law passages.

Adopting Christ-Centered Preaching

Dr. Bryan Chapell's lauded resource *Christ- Centered Preaching* covers every aspect of the preaching process, from the heights of theological overview through the minutiae of introductions and conclusions. Among the variegated aspects of the book that apply to this study, three aspects are: A) where to begin -- Fallen Condition Focus, B) a theology of Christ-Centered Preaching, and C) a biblical theology for preaching.

Fallen Condition Focus

Chapell writes, "Determining a sermon's subject is only half done when a preacher has discerned what a biblical text was saying. We do not fully understand a biblical passage until we have determined why the Holy Spirit included it in scripture. Knowing a text's purpose is essential to really understanding it."[188] This study does not impose a strict dichotomy between the Spirit's transformation of the believer's heart and mind but addresses each aspect of the sermon preparation process. Sometimes, the

[188] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon, 3rd ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 28.

sermon needs a corporate calling for repentance, over-emphasizing the mind at the expense of the heart. The work of the preacher is to ensure that neither is strengthened at the cost of muting the other. Chapell further explains:

> The compulsion to display our knowledge can cause us to preach on a doctrinal topic or an exegetical insight without considering the spiritual burden of the text for real people in the daily struggles of life. In doing so, preachers relieve themselves of having to deal with the messiness and pain of human existence. The greater intellectual and spiritual task is to discern the human concern that caused the Holy Spirit to inspire this aspect of Scripture so that God would be properly glorified by his people.[189]

The greater task, according to Chapell, is fleshing out how the task applies to the lives of those who belong to Christ and the lives of those image-bearers who do not yet belong to Christ. Why is this text in scripture? What does it mean in a modern context? What principles will cross the cultural and historical distance and impact the hearts of the people? How is Christ ministering to his church by his Spirit through this text? Is there an aspect of a broken world on display in this text that will resonate with these congregants on this day?

Chapell's solution is what he calls the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF*)*, which allows the modern hearer to apply any passage to their own situation. He explains:

> Since God designed all scripture to complete us, the necessary implication is that in some sense we are incomplete. Our lack of wholeness is a consequence of the fallen condition in which we live...Preaching that is true to (God's encouraging) purposes (1) focuses on the fallen condition that necessitated the writing of the passage and (2) uses the text to explain how the Holy Spirit addresses that concern then and now. The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is the mutual human condition that contemporary persons share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him.[190]

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[189] Chapell, 29.

[190] Chapell, 31.

This focus brings immediacy, relevance, and timelessness out of any text. The Word of God is living and active,[191] and a concentrated centering upon an FCF throughout the sermon preparation and delivery process orients an ancient text to a modern congregation. Chapell continues, "Because an FCF is a human problem or burden addressed by specific aspects of a scriptural text, informed preaching strives to unveil this purpose in order to explain each passage properly."[192] Working from an FCF not only gives relevance and imminence to a text, it also "unveils the purpose" of the text for modern readers/hearers. It gives preacher and hearer a clear purpose for reflection upon sacred scripture, no matter the text and no matter the setting. Chapell advises, "We preach in harmony with (the Holy Spirit's) purpose by saying how a text indicates people are to respond biblically to the FCF as it is experienced in our lives -- identifying the gracious means that God provides for us to deal with the brokenness in or about us that deprives us of the full experience and expression of his glory."[193] One of the immediately daunting obstacles for a challenging text of scripture is its practical applications. An FCF brings difficult passages into homiletical conversation with gospel truth and Christ-centered theology right away. Applications will flow naturally from this conversation.

A Theology of Christ-Centered Preaching: Sola Gratia vs. Sola Bootstrapsa

Having dealt with that initial obstacle, how do preachers orient themselves to a theological foundation from which to preach? How do they intend for the preached word

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[191] Hebrews 4:12.

[192] Chapell, 31.

[193] Chapell, 31.

to change hearts? How should exhortation be considered and expressed? What will be the outcome of the preaching of this week's particular text? Chapell addresses those concerns by providing what this study will call a theology of preaching and speaks to the common tendency to create self-governed to do lists:

> Preachers who are not Christ-centered (i.e., not oriented to the Bible's redemptive flow) inevitably become human-centered, focused almost entirely on increasing human performance or competence. Such preachers do not deliberately exclude Christ's ministry from their own, but by consistently preaching messages on the order of 'Five Steps to a Better Marriage', 'How to Make God Answer Your Prayer,' and 'Achieving Holiness through the Power of Resolve,' they present godliness solely as a product of human behavior.[194]

Effort-centered preaching may draw large gatherings, but it does not and cannot save souls. Chapell instructs:

> By making human efforts alone the measure and the cause of godliness, listeners become subject to the simultaneous assaults of theological legalism and liberalism -- which, despite their perceived opposition on our social/political scales, are theological twins, making one's relationship with God dependent on human goodness. True Christianity cannot be found on any scale that makes our relationship with God dependent on what we do rather than on faith in what Christ has done.[195]

Human-centered preaching resulting in action items to be achieved, self-powered transformation to fix oneself upon, and behaviors to modify in order to achieve godliness, and these takeaways are the opposite of what the good news of Jesus teaches. Christ's work is sufficient, and man's good works are the worshipful response.

In perhaps the most memorable phrasing of this particular teaching, Chapell continues, "The merits of our actions do not win us God's acceptance. Were this true, then the essence of our preaching would have to be, 'Pick yourself up by your own

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[194] Chapell, 275.

[195] Chapell, 275.

bootstraps so that God will have reason to love you.' But *sola bootstrapsa* messages will never be the gospel, and faithful preachers must not only avoid this error but also war against it."[196] Attentive Homiletics students of Chappell will know his "3 Deadly Bes," which can be especially tempting with Law passages, are "Be Like," "Be Good," and "Be Disciplined."[197] Preachers looking to preach Christocentrically must resist this temptation, pointing only to Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law, rather than any motivational sermon to propel congregants to believe that they can/must do so themselves. Chapell concludes, "There are many 'be' messages in scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior. 'Be' messages are not wrong *in* themselves; they are wrong *by* themselves."[198] Preach obedience, preach repentance, preach fidelity, preach a life of works that bring glory to God, yes, but only preach those things as possible through the ministry of the Spirit and by power of Christ and by the grace of God.

Chapell on "A Biblical Theology for Preaching"

Additionally, it is important for preachers to weave the history and progressive unfolding of redemption into their sermon to lay out a passage's connections to the person or work of Christ. Biblical- theologically sound preaching lays this foundation week after week, thus establishing "the theological world of the sermon" and thus

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[196] Chapell, 275.

[197] Chapell, 275-280.

[198] Chapell, 281.

creating a homiletical environment where the work of Christ is ever-present, no matter the text.

Chapell asks, "How do expository preachers infuse gospel essentials into every sermon without superimposing ideas foreign to many texts?"[199] One of Chapell's axioms answers: context is part of a text.[200] Using context-based hermeneutical principles, the preacher brings the full interpretive process to the preaching of any challenging text. All of those aspects of context heretofore covered will now go into the Christocentric homiletical process. Chapell contends:

> No text exists in isolation from other texts or from the overarching biblical message. Just as historico-grammatical exegesis requires a preacher to consider a text's terms in their historical and literary context, correct theological interpretation requires an expositor to discern how a text's ideas function in the wider redemptive context. Some meanings we discern by taking out our exegetical magnifying glass and studying a text's particulars in close detail. Other meanings we discern by examining a text with a theological fish-eye lens to see how the immediate text relates to texts, messages, events, and developments around it. Accurate expositors use both a magnifying glass and a fish-eye lens, knowing that a magnifying glass can unravel mysteries in a raindrop but can fail to expose a storm gathering on the horizon.[201]

Chapell places himself in a long line of homileticians and theologians emphasizing this biblical theological understanding in the preaching of the Word. This biblical theological foundation is critical to Christocentric preaching.

Renowned theologian Geerhardus Vos outlined key principles to "keep preaching consistent with scripture's redemptive contexts,"[202] and Chapell interacts with Vos in

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[199] Chapell, 255.

[200] Chapell, 255.

[201] Chapell, 255.

[202] Chapell, 255.

formulating those principles for homiletics. Chapell teaches that a biblical theological anchor for preaching is one that sees God's revelation as 1) progressive, 2) organic, and 3) redemptive. Vos teaches that it is progressive in that the ultimate message is getting clearer over time. Vos continues, "The progressive process is organic: revelation may be in seed form, which yields later full growth accounting for diversity but not true difference because the earlier aspects of truth are indispensable for understanding the true meanings of the later forms and vice versa."[203] That which may be seen in full bloom was always present in seed form, according to Vos and Chapell.

In scripture, the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates this truth in its systematic discourse revealing the superiority of Christ to the priesthood and the entire sacrificial system. This is because those shadows were gifts from God for the purpose of redemption and substitutionary atonement, because they pointed toward the ultimate fulfillment of those signs and shadows in the person and redemptive work of Christ. Chapell writes, "We must relate even seed aspects of (the biblical) history to the mature message they prepare us to understand in order to interpret fully and rightly what the passage means,"[204] much as the sacrificial system contained the seeds of faith for Israel.

Finally, Vos teaches redemptive biblical theology, writing, "Revelation is the interpretation of redemption."[205] By this, Vos indicates that the preacher must relate any passage of God's revelation to the unfolding plan of redemption shown in the story of scripture. The Word that has been fully revealed to Christians is a metanarrative of the

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[203] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2003), 7.

[204] Chapell, 257.

[205] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation of all things according to the purpose and plan of God. To remove any text from that larger narrative is to isolate it and therefore misinterpret the text. Chapell concludes, "No aspect of revelation can be fully understood or explained in isolation from God's redeeming work that culminates in Christ's ministry."[206] Taking this pre-understanding of any text according to principles of biblical theology will aid the preacher in the next aspect of this study: seeing Christ in every text.

Help for Seeing Christ in the Text

Christ as Both the Center and the Focal Point of the Text

Preachers look into challenging texts for a way to make the message relevant and a way to apply the ancient biblical principles to modern lives. This task can be doubly challenging in the more ancient world of the Old Testament and especially daunting in legal passages. Renowned preacher Edmund Clowney speaks to this challenge between teaching the ancient and applying to the modern, extolling, "Sermons have often been divided between explanation and application...Presenting Christ in the message dissolves this problem, for now we present Christ both in what he says and does to reveal *himself*, and in what he says and does to direct *us*."[207] Increasing aptitude in seeing Jesus in the Old Testament will be a crucial skill.

Old Testament scholar Christopher J.H. Wright, reflecting upon a *Themelios* article from John Goldingay, proposes a six-part framework of theses for seeing Christ in the Old Testament:

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[206] Chapell, 257.

[207] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003*), 49.

> 1) The OT Tells the Story That Jesus Completes; 2) The OT Declares the Promise That Jesus Fulfills; 3) The OT Paints an Identity That Jesus Accepted; 4) The OT Programs a Mission That Jesus Accomplished; 5) The OT Reveals Ethical Values That Jesus Endorsed; and 6) The OT Reveals the God Whose Authority and Presence Jesus Embodied.[208]

Story, promise, identity, mission, ethical values, and the presence of God Himself -- Old Testament texts are pregnant with meaning revealed in Christocentric preaching. It is unhelpful to squeeze Jesus into an Old Testament story without biblical theological context. It is flawed to separate Christ from the larger story within which the four gospel accounts serve as an advancement of the narrative. Wright instructs:

> For the OT is not just any story. As Scripture, it constitutes the story. The Christian worldview is constituted by the grand narrative, which of course begins in and runs a substantial part of its course through the OT. Creation, fall, redemption in history, and future hope are described in the Scriptures of Israel. But the NT claims that in Christ we have the keystone of that whole great arch of the biblical narrative stretching from creation to new creation.[209]

Wright would have the preacher see Christ at the center of all that unfolds in the Old Testament and New Testament. But Christ is more than that. He is the focus. He is the climax. He is whole point. Wright explains, “Christ is not just the *terminus* of the OT story but also its *telos*; not just the end of the journey but the point of the journey."[210] Wright says that in his experience it has been helpful for preachers in training to understand this Christo-telic reading of the OT "without trying to make every

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[208] Christopher J.H. Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, Vol 2, No. 1, Spring 2008, 12-16.

[209] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 12.

[210] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 13.

passage be 'about Jesus' (a tendency that produces very strange interpretive and hermeneutical gymnastics).”[211]

Homiletical and Christological scholars can argue whether "Christo-centric" or "Christo-telic" language is ultimately more helpful, but this study will operate on the principle that both are. Christ is the point (telos), which is why an FCF can only be resolved in a grace-centered application, rather than a human-centered one. Christ is also the center, which is why biblical theological understanding must undergird any sermon from any text anywhere in scripture.

The Old Testament and Jesus' Hermeneutical Strategy

Reflecting upon Luke 24 as a key text for understanding Christ in relation to the Old Testament, Wright observes, "On the Emmaus Road, we read that Jesus' hermeneutical strategy was to 'begin with Moses and all the prophets' in order to explain the things concerning himself; he did not begin with himself in order to explain the law and the prophets. It was as much true that the Scriptures were the key to understanding him as that he was the key to understanding them."[212] Luke 24 demonstrates for preachers that true interpretation and Christ-centered application allow the scriptures to present and explain Christ, rather than working him into the text to make the preacher's pre-decided point. Allowing the Old Testament text to present Christ on its own, rather than bringing presuppositions to the text, cooperates with the power of the Holy Spirit to bring truth and transformation to the reader from Scripture's own texts. In *The Shadow of Christ in*

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[211] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 13.

[212] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 14.

the Law of Moses, biblical scholar Vern Poythress notes, "Before Jesus was finished, and even before He revealed who He was, a remarkable transformation began to take place in the hearts of the disciples...The Old Testament Scriptures began to open up to them, and they were awed, amazed, and overwhelmed all at once."[213] Not simply a few individual texts, but the whole of the Old Testament, can be better understood with this view of Christ presented by the text, as Poythress notes, writing, "He promises to give them the substance and heart of what is written in the Old Testament...'That Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:46-47). The whole OT finds its focus in Jesus Christ, His death, and His resurrection."[214] He is the focal point of all the Old Testament teaches.

Furthermore, Jesus taught the disciples a messianic and missional hermeneutic,[215] opening their minds to what Wright explains as, "Disciples of Christ must read the OT both for its messianic significance and for its missional significance, pointing to God's plan for the nations and our role in that plan."[216] Disciples of Christ are called to see in scripture the dual purpose of God's plan revealed in "Christ as Savior of His people" and "Christ as King of a Kingdom to which believers are called to be ambassadors of the good news." Preaching salvific and missional aspects of Christ's work brings out different scriptural truths from various texts. Wright continues, "Jesus launched his

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[213] Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1991), 4.

[214] Poythress, 4-5.

[215] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 14.

[216] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 14.

mission to call Israel to repentance and restoration and to bring about the ingathering of the nations (a double mission that is clearer in Luke 1-4), amidst fierce satanic opposition."[217]

Genesis 12:1-3 teaches that God's covenant with Abram was to bestow blessing so that God's people would be a blessing to the nations. The promise was never for the salvation of individual recipients alone, but for the extension of blessing to the nations for the sake of God's creation-wide Kingdom.

Christ and Continuity of the Covenant

God's purposes for his people and for their calling as ambassadors of his blessing has not changed since Genesis 12. Wright clarifies:

> Jesus' teaching...goes beyond the OT and deepens it, but at many points it is founded on fundamental OT teaching given to Israel that was set apart intended to the people of God from the surrounding society. Very much as OT law does, Jesus also stressed fundamental principles like the priority of experiencing the saving grace of God before attempting to live in obedient and grateful response, imitation of God's character, and action in ethical conduct, concern for the needy, compassion and social justice, and moral distinctiveness ('holiness,' salt and light). Therefore, in my view, there is ethical continuity between Christ and the OT, even while there is radical newness.[218]

Continuity is a key concept upon which to continue to focus preaching. The false dichotomy that separates the kind of salvation in Old Testament from that in the New Testament is profoundly unhelpful even though widely practiced. The God of the New Testament is the God of the Old Testament. The covenant is the same. Salvation is the same. The way to salvation is the same. Thus, the work of Christ can be seen in every

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[217] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 14.

[218] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 15.

portion of scripture. Wright exhorts, "In reading the OT's rendering of God, I do not look for forced hints in every text, believing that Jesus must be in there somewhere. Rather, I am aware as a Christian reader that the God who presents himself to me in these pages is the God whom I know and 'see' in the face of Jesus in the NT."[219] Christ is one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit eternally. Though the incarnation revealed this in a new way to the eyes and ears and experience of mankind, it has always been true. It is not new. And preachers need not wonder whether Christ is present in the Old Testament, before the incarnation gives humanity something new. As God is revealed in Christ in Trinitarian fullness, Wright declares, "Christ is included in all the affirmations about the actions and words of YHWH in the OT. This is theologically true, even if we strenuously resist 'seeing Jesus' in every verse. To do the latter seems to me to dissolve the historically unprecedented and unique quality of the incarnation."[220]

This new way of seeing and understanding the eternal and unchanging God, anchored to his covenant with his people, is unchanging in its scope and unchanging in its efficacy, even if it was only fully revealed in the New Testament. The Covenant LORD, YHWH, was always going to be faithful to His promises. "In the process of this great story of deliverance, God acquires a new name alongside this fresh dimension of his character: "Yahweh," the God who acts out of faithfulness to his promise, in liberating justice for the oppressed...Three months after the Exodus, God ...through Moses... gave them his law...and entered into a covenant with them as a nation."[221] Their entire

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[219] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 15.

[220] Wright, "Christ and the Old Testament", 16.

[221] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Christ through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992) 10.

understanding of God is to be rooted in his covenant faithfulness toward them, As he was faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he would continue to be faithful to their descendants. Wright explains:

> He would be their God and they would be his people, in a relationship of sovereignty and blessing on the one hand, and loyalty and obedience on the other. It is important to see that this covenant was based on what God had already done for them (as they had recently seen in Exodus 19:4-6). His grace and redemptive action came first. Their obedience to the law and covenant was to be as a grateful response, and in order to enable them to be what God wanted them to be as his people in the midst of the nations.[222]

Because YHWH was and is and always will be faithful, His people are to respond in obedience. That order never has been and never will be reversed. Actions flow from a heart of gratitude for the grace of God, even if Israelites only understood in part the fullness of that grace. Their faith in the promises of God is what saved them. From Genesis through Malachi, Christ is the Savior in the Old Testament. Wright states, "It is Jesus who gives meaning and validity to the events of Israel's Old Testament history...For the Old Testament is much more than a promise box full of blessed predictions about Jesus. It is primarily a story of the acts of God in human history out of which those promises arose and in relation to which only they make sense."[223] Poythress echoes this truth as he reasons, "Christ himself is the key that unlocks the riches of the Old Testament."[224]

Christ is the key to the treasure box of the Old Testament's riches, and that treasure box is built with and founded upon God's covenant promises. As the suzerain in

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[222] Wright, *Knowing Christ through the Old Testament*, 10-11.

[223] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Christ through the Old Testament,* 27.

[224] Poythress, 5.

the covenant between God and Israel, God himself sets the terms of the covenant. Wright illuminates the reality of this ancient practice, noting, "In the world of biblical times, covenants of all kinds were common in secular life. There were international treaties between a superior, imperial power, and its vassal states, in which the 'benefits,' protection, and services of the conqueror were granted in exchange for political and military loyalty and allegiance."[225] This suzerain God invited them into his kingdom, and they will serve as royal priests,[226] and they will reign with the King of Kings, who is the Lamb in the midst of the throne.[227] Poythress invites readers to this whole redemptive-historical picture, exhorting:

> But it is legitimate to read the first part of the story again in light of the end. By doing so we may understand more clearly how the beginning already introduced the teaching and tensions that are completed and resolved at the end. Jesus Christ himself is the center of New Testament revelation. Since the New Testament completes the story begun in the Old, Christ is also the center about which the Old Testament begins to speak in its preliminary way, and to which the Old Testament points forward.[228]

Old Testament Scholar Alec Motyer in his book *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to our Understanding of Christ*, contributed a list of biblical realities and truths personified in Jesus. This list gives the preacher an instant connection point between Christ and any text that connects to the Fallen Condition Focus or narrative or doctrine. Though laid out over a whole book rather than a quick list, the book itself provides what to look for in preaching. At a summary level, Motyer's list is: Christ as

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[225] Wright, *Knowing*, 77.

[226] Exodus 19:4-6, I Peter 2:9.

[227] Revelation 7:17.

[228] Poythress, 8.

Fulfillment (King and Kingdom); Christ as Climax (Covenant, Grace, and Law); Christ as Revelation 1 (The Image of God); Christ as Revelation 2 (The Theme of the Word of God); Christ Our Life 1 (Sin); Christ Our Life 2 (Death); and Christ Our Hope (Creation and Consummation).[229] These are not only in continuity with the Old Testament but also point to the consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns.

Christ and the Invitation to Draw Near and Then Go Out

The relationship between the people and the tabernacle is instructive for a modern understanding of God's presence with his people and for the need for atonement for sin and cleansing for impurity. Sacrifices served a purpose. Atonement and restoration were possible through the sacrificial system. This all took place at the tabernacle. God met his people at the tabernacle, and invited them to reverently draw near. His glory had filled the tabernacle at the end of Exodus, and now he invited his people to come worship him there. But there were entry restrictions related to ritual purity. The tabernacle was divided into sections, with each section forbidden to those not meeting the qualifications to enter that section. Motyer explains:

> (The) basic Passover concept is continued in the Levitical sacrificial system by the recurring assurance that the sacrifices are made in order 'that (the offeror) may be accepted before the Lord' (Lv 1:3). The drama of this can be caught by reading straight through from the end of Exodus into the beginning of Leviticus. No sooner was the tabernacle inaugurated (Ex. 40:33) than it was found to be a system of exclusion: not even Moses could enter, because of the presence (cloud) and glory of the Lord (40:35). But out of this forbidden Tent (Lv 1:1) a voice came speaking about 'coming near.'[230]

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[229] Alec Motyer *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to our Understanding of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 23-188.

[230] Motyer, 49-50.

The LORD was inviting his people to come near, and he had made a way for drawing near to take place, a way for atonement to be granted. The rituals pointed toward the One who made reconciliation in the broken relationship between a Holy God and a sinful people. Motyer encourages, "In Leviticus 1:2, the verb 'brings' and the noun 'offering' both alike express the idea of 'being near'/'bringing near'. Those who are excluded in their own right can 'come near' by the right which the blood of sacrifice confers and, coming near in this way, find 'satisfied acceptance' by the holy God."[231] The tension between "reverent distance-keeping" and "drawing near" will be explored in greater detail in chapter 5.

Specific practices were put in place for the Israelites to live in faithfulness and approach God in purity, as well as practices that Israel was to avoid. Robert L. Plummer notes, "Some of the biblical commands imply that the surrounding nations engaged in the exact practices God forbid, apparently with pagan religious connotations (Leviticus 19:26-28). God preserved the Jews as his chosen people, through whom he revealed his saving plan and finally brought the Savior at the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4)."[232] This resistance to that which was forbidden, in cooperation with acting in the ways which God prescribed in the law, demonstrated to the nations the character of the God of Israel.

The Word of God is embodied in the actions of his people, not because they act perfectly, and not because they have any hope of saving themselves by their obedience, but because the law is beautiful, and those who live by it can be used to show the beauty

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[231] Motyer, 50.

[232] Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 187.

of his revealed will to Israel's unbelieving neighbors.[233] Even their obedience as seen in the sacrificial system demonstrates this embodiment. Motyer points out, "In Israel the sacrifices too were (not a human technique to manipulate God but) a divine gift for the salvation of sinners (Lv. 17:11). In this sense Israel here was intended to be an acted oracle: as she embodied his word by obedience, so the potency of the word that God first spoke through Moses was released with doubled and contemporary efficacy for her blessing."[234] This "acted oracle" reminded Israel of God's promises on a daily basis and also demonstrated his greatness, holiness, and mercy to those who did not know him. The Covenant LORD of Israel invited them near and showed them the way they could approach him despite their sinfulness. The stipulations and requirements of the sacrificial system must not cloud the vision of the good news of Jesus. Poythress contends:

> The entire contents of Leviticus are in principle related to the tabernacle and to the obligations of purity that derive from it. Leviticus sums up the matter in the words, 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy' (Leviticus 19:2; cf 1 Peter 1:16). The people could not survive alongside the tabernacle unless they respected the holiness of God and maintained holiness among themselves. Or, to put it another way, now that the people themselves had in some sense become a dwelling place of God through the erection and consecration of the tabernacle, they had to maintain practices exhibiting the principles of God's dwelling. Such principles are fulfilled in Christ as the final dwelling place of God.[235]

Those who had been reconciled were now not only those who had God in their midst in the camp but also those who had God alive in their hearts. This double-dwelling is rich fodder for preaching the good news. And God in their midst and in their hearts is the power source for the obedience called for in the texts of the Pentateuch.

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[233] Deuteronomy 4:1-8.

[234] Motyer, 106.

[235] Poythress, 42.

Preaching Christ and Movement through the Text

Renowned preacher Timothy Keller picks up on Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus approach in his book, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, and adapts it. Keller believes the standard expository pattern of "what the Bible teaches, what we must do, and how to do it" leaves the listeners believing it is up to them to develop the resources to be obedient to scripture. This is like Chapell's warning against *sola bootstrapsa*.[236] Keller teaches that it is vitally important to convey all of the above ideas, but that when the preacher helps the listeners see Christ in the passage, and inverts the order of those ideas, the resources for obedience in what Christ has done and in the Holy Spirit can enable believers with those resources through their union with Christ. Keller proposes this movement through the text:

> Intro[237]: What the problem is; our contemporary cultural context: here's what we face
>
> Early: What the Bible says; the original readers' cultural context: here's what we must do
>
> Middle: What prevents us; current listeners' inward heart context: why we can't do it[238]
>
> Later: How Jesus fulfills the biblical theme and solves the heart issue: how Jesus did it

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[236] Chapell, 275.

[237] Keller doesn't specifically call it "FCF" in this quote, but that is the contextual meaning in his larger passage, and this study will propose this outline with a combined Intro and FCF.

[238] While Keller focuses on the current context, it would be important to begin with a discussion of this spiritual reality in the ancient context, and how an Israelite would understand/struggle against this challenge to devotion due to their own sin. The burnt offering seen in Leviticus 1 (Chapter 5 of this study) was their way of repenting of that sinfulness.

Apply: How through faith in Jesus you should live now.[239]

Having seen Christ in the passage through any of the above prescribed methods, knowing that Old and New Testament teach the same redeeming work of God in continuity, and determined not to preach obedience through *sola bootstrapsa*, the preacher can now employ Keller's movement through the text to preach Christ from any passage.

However certain places can yet contain additional hurdles to the preaching path. This study now takes up the challenge of legal passages.

A Plan for Applying Christ in Law Passages

The Use of the Law in Light of the Work of Christ

The law draws us to Christ. The law does not offer a different path to salvation. There is continuity in the promises of God and in the means of salvation. Salvation by faith alone finds its full fruition in the work of Christ. Scripture is therefore to be read in light of that biblical theological context. These truths provide the foundation for preaching the law in light of the work of Christ.

Preachers may find it especially intimidating to preach from Torah/Pentateuch passages containing instruction in the "law," as it can be tempting to draw conclusions that veer toward "Be like, be good, or be disciplined." Preachers can instead reflect upon Calvin's "third use of the law" when facing that tension. In addition to the law being "a fence" to restrain evil and "a mirror" to convict humans of sin, the law's third use is as "a lamp" to guide believers. Calvin asserts:

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[239] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 231.

> The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns...They still profit by the law in two ways. Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire and confirm them in the understanding of it.[240]

If the third use of the law is as a lamp[241] to guide believers, then that lamp shines most brightly in Jesus. It is not that believers need to "be good enough" or "be disciplined enough" to merit the Lord's favor through obedience to the law. Rather, they cling to and proclaim their union with Christ, who is the perfect fulfillment of the law, and the lamp shining the light of the Lord's brilliant way upon their path of faith. Obedience is then a grateful response to an identity already eternally assured. And that obedience as a response to God's saving grace yields rich blessing. Scholar O. Palmer Robertson writes, "The fullest state of blessing in the life of the Christian comes from keeping the law of God... your life will experience the fullest blessing as you keep God's law."[242]

Preaching Christ from the Law is to be done with an emphasis on the continuity of God's promises and of salvation by faith alone. The advent of the incarnate Christ did not change the nature of salvation from merit-based to grace-based. God's saving of his people by their faith in his covenantal promises can be found in all of scripture. Old Testament scholar Sydney Greidanus suggests the following seven ways of preaching according to Christocentric interpretation: 1) redemptive-historical progression; 2) promise-fulfillment; 3) typology (especially pertinent to ceremonial laws in Leviticus); 4)

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[240] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.7.12, 360.

[241] Psalm 119:105.

[242] O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants: God's Way with His People* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1987), 77.

analogy; 5) longitudinal themes (traced from Old Testament through Christ into the New Testament); 6) New Testament references; and 7) contrast.[243] These seven ways provide a variety of entry points into interpreting meaning in the text in light of the work of Christ. From the overarching sweep of God's saving work in the redemptive historical narrative down to the finite details revealing "types" of Christ, preachers can find Christ in the text without having to imagine meaning that is not there. Speaking to the last item on this list, contrast, which he suggests is the least common, Greidanus concedes, "There is discontinuity in the midst of continuity. Many Old Testament laws no longer hold for Christians. We do not worship at a tabernacle, do not offer animal sacrifices, do not need a priest as an intermediary to approach God-- all because Christ has come. Christ is our eternal Priest who offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice. (cf Heb 9:1-10:18)."[244] Despite occasional discontinuities on finite points, Greidanus' proposed seven ways of preaching Christ show that the whole of the covenantal relationship is continuous and unchanging.

In his book *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law,* Schreiner writes, "We must consider where a command is in the story line of the Bible and in terms of redemptive-historical scheme of scripture. The moral norms of the Bible cannot be preached apart from the canonical context and apart from the whole counsel of God."[245] "Context is King", as Sklar teaches, and this study has continued to propose. In this case, redemptive-historical and biblical-theological context shapes the meaning of the passage

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[243] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 29-31.

[244] Greidanus, 31.

[245] Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 229.

in the light of full revelation of God's purposes. The meaning in the historical moment is crucial to understanding but gains even greater meaning in the light of fuller revelation in the fullness of Christ's redemptive work. Schreiner adds:

> When we preach God's commands, we must always preach them in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God saves us by his mercy, and then he gives us commands by which we respond to his grace. It is incredibly easy to turn things around so that law precedes grace, and thereby the moral norms of the law of the law become a ladder by which we try to be right with God or to impress him with our works. Obeying God is always a response to his grace; it is never a means by which we become right with God.[246]

Again, the temptation is strong to create sermons with simple, clear takeaways of obedience as signposts which, when passed, indicate faithfulness. But this is not preaching the gospel. Nowhere in scripture will a reader find works preceding grace. Schreiner concludes, "We should preach the law to drive people to Christ. The law exposes our sins and puts us to death, so that we realize that salvation can never be found in ourselves but gained only through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ."[247]

Preaching Christ and the Law

The finished work of Christ does not abolish the need to obey the law of God, but shows it as even more beautiful, as fulfilled completely in Christ and enacted in faithful Christians as a response to God's covenant of grace. A transformed heart looks beyond the letter of the law and longs to also walk in step with the spirit of the law. It requires more than obedience and is empowered not by will but by heart transformation. Doriani writes, "We anchor Jesus' legal use of Scripture in his affirmation that every stroke, every

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[246] Schreiner, 229.

[247] Schreiner, 230.

command of the law must be fulfilled (Matt 5:17-20). His interpretations both deepen the demand and expand the scope of the law. He deepens the law's demand by addressing the motives behind overt sin (Matt 5:21-48).[248] This would seem an impossible task if hearers were exhorted to a *sola bootstrapsa* obedience. Preachers must return their congregants again and again to gazing upon the finished work of Christ and the grace offered therein. Doriani continues, "He invites those who cannot keep the law to turn to him for aid. He blesses the poor in spirit, who know their spiritual inability (Matt. 5:3). He offers his light yoke, in place of the heavy yoke of the law (Matt. 11:28-30). He gives himself as a ransom for sinners (Matt 20: 25-28)."[249]

Again, a transformed heart looks beyond the letter of the law and longs to also walk in step with the spirit of the law. Jesus deepens the law's demand by addressing the motives behind overt sin. Therefore, preachers must look to address not only the visible fruits of sinful behavior, but also the roots below the visible sin, at the motivational level. This tilling work provides rich soil for a Christocentric preaching harvest. For example, when Exodus 20:15 says, "You shall not steal," preachers will need to address what is taking place at the heart level in the act of stealing. Stealing is symbolic of a lack of trust in God's provision of good and necessary gifts to his image-bearers. "Taking what is not mine to ensure that my own needs are met" demonstrates a desire for autonomy over the provision for oneself. It reflects the same impulse for control over one's own future as Adam and Eve's sinful act in response to the serpent's temptation, "You will be like

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[248] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 48.

[249] Doriani, *Truth*, 48.

God."[250] Stealing is indicative of a desire to be the god of one's own needs, illustrating no trust in another for provision, and therefore no trust in God. The Bible shows readers that God is the provider of all of our needs, both physical and spiritual. This is most fully demonstrated in the provision of our Savior. God has provided for not only our temporal physical needs, but much more so for our eternal spiritual need. Charles Spurgeon expresses this reality in saying, "I have a great need for Christ. I have a great Christ for my need." Believers recognize that Christ has everything under his power, and yet offered himself as a sacrifice for sinners, a total offering (the ultimate *olah*, as seen later in study).

Special challenges in preaching Christ come when the legal passage is focused on ritual matters. That will be the focus of the next chapter.

[250] Genesis 3:5.

Chapter 5

Leviticus: Gospel Oasis

This study has addressed the problem of pastors facing intimidation at the prospect of preaching challenging portions of scripture and thus preaching largely from what Doriani calls the "canon within the canon." Leviticus fits comfortably into many preachers' list of uncomfortable books from which to preach. This chapter will feature a ritual text from Leviticus and demonstrate what can be learned from this study. This ritual text is also the first text the preacher finds when he opens Leviticus. It feels like a perfect place to begin. Heading into this challenge, we are well reminded of what Pratt advised regarding interpretive work and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, “Preparation for interpreting Old Testament narratives involves both human and divine effort. We look to the Spirit as the power enabling us to interpret, and we look to hermeneutical skills as the tools of our trade.”[251]

Entering the World of the Text to Discover Original Meaning

One potential hurdle that brings preachers to a reflective pause is antiquated and culturally specific language. What happens when legal passages are filled with details, object-oriented vocabulary, and procedures with which the reader is unfamiliar? The preacher might feel as if making sense of the passage personally and then for the audience requires so much work as to make it not worth the time. In these cases, Sidney Greidanus exhorts, "Read and reread the text in its original context and jot down initial

[251] Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*, 7.

questions."[252] Its literary setting will help bring illumination as to the meaning of these details. Greidanus points to the work of Julie Smith, who maintains:

> Leviticus relies on analogical thinking, which means that each part of the law cannot be understood on its own but only by comparing it with other parts of the law of Moses...In Leviticus, there are usually no explanations given for why something is done; rather the explanation is to be found in comparing one part of the text with another part of the text."[253]

The details make sense in the light of the larger work. Asking initial questions and knocking down the subsequent hurdles from within the text is valuable for the exegesis of the text and is excellent practice for all kinds of texts. Leviticus 1 is a passage filled with these details and naturally poses an array of questions. In addition to using all that has been gleaned from chapters 2-4, this study will ask these questions of Leviticus 1, and answer them as faithfully as possible.

A Mirage or an Oasis?

Keying in on a “Fallen Condition Focus," the preacher will want to make it as situationally specific as possible, while at the same time remaining broad enough to reach a majority of congregants. However, for this study, the FCF is simple: the people of God, without the grace of God, are unable to approach the presence of God. They are unable to make atonement for their own sins. They are unable to live in a way that glorifies God and draws others to his glory. God's people cannot (of their own resources) live in such a way as to be able to have the relationship with God for which the ritual prescribed in this

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[252] Greidanus, 26.

[253] Julie M. Smith, "Point Our Souls to Christ: Lessons from Leviticus," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 67-82, here 67, with credit for this insight to Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

text makes provision. Sin is the boundary. It is thus impossible for them to approach the throne of God...unless it is a throne of grace.[254]

This study proposes *two abiding images* for Leviticus to provide aid and comfort.[255] The first is an *oasis*. Leviticus captures a moment in redemptive history when God's people are camped at Mt. Sinai on their way to the Promised Land. To get from Mt. Sinai to Canaan, they must cross a great deal of desert/wilderness. Among the many trials encountered in a desert crossing is thirst and the need for water. Crossing a barren desert landscape, a known travail for travelers is a mirage, which appears to be a water source, food source, shade source, or maybe all the above. If the travelers can get to the mirage, their troubles will be temporarily assuaged. However, upon arriving at the spot, the desert sojourner finds that it was an illusion. There is no source of refreshment. It is a mirage. No relief can be found. The effort to find relief must continue. Is peace with God, reconciliation with the One against whom they have sinned, and being welcomed into his presence only a mirage? Is the barrier of sin and inability to keep God's holy law a boundary that will never be crossed, no matter their endless striving? Are they forever crossing the desert and unable to find relief to overcome corruption and ever-polluting sin? The law does not and cannot satisfy, and the people of God will always continue to thirst if following the Law alone. Is it all a mirage? If so, Leviticus is the cruelest of books. God's people will thirst for a holiness and peace with God that they can never reach.

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[254] Hebrews 4:14-16.

[255] The two images are an "oasis" and "4 tent frames."

But thanks be to God, this is not the story that has been revealed in the redemptive story revealed in the pages of scripture. Christ, fully God and fully man, has offered himself as the ultimate substitutionary atonement sacrifice, has mediated a better covenant as High Priest, and sits enthroned at the right hand of God the Father, where believers will reign with Him for eternity, because of the work of Christ. It is not a mirage! The gospel oasis not only exists but is more delightful than anyone can imagine. They will thirst no more, and the Lamb will give living water from among his people.[256] The gospel oasis is a reality, and has been eternally won for us by our great Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Come to the throne of grace that is the gospel oasis and thirst no more. Leviticus shows us shadows of this reality in every chapter of its text. It is a gospel oasis in the middle of the desert for those looking for the Promised Land. His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23), and we have a Mediator who has made atonement once for all time (Hebrews 9:26). Come to the oasis, meet the King, and thirst no more. Tim Keller famously teaches the gospel formula this way: Religion says, "I obey, and therefore I am accepted," but the gospel says, "I am accepted (because of what Christ has done), and therefore I obey."[257]

Why is Leviticus Immediately Challenging?

Three immediate challenges command attention in the opening pages of Leviticus: a. literary genres and how they inform; b. settings/context of Leviticus seems incompatible with the modern world; and c. ceremonial/ritual law and the details

[256] see Revelation 7:16-17.

[257] Timothy Keller, "Lectures on Preaching to the Heart", Gordon- Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006.

surrounding culturally distant practices. We will deal with "a" briefly, with "b" in more depth, and with "c" later in the chapter and not at all here.

Literary Genres

Genre informs interpretation. Readers come to a given piece of literature with a pre-expectation of what they are about to read, and how they approach reading it for interpretation. For example, one who reads a comic in the newspaper does not read it as they would read William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. They have different styles and purposes. One would not read David McCullough's biography *John Adams* in the same way as a novel by John Grisham. These works are not attempting to do the same thing. A distracted glance at a post on Twitter and a reading from a theological work by a Puritan writer will yield very different experiences, and these two types of work would never be presupposed to be read with the same intensity or expectation. The attentive reader knows these things before he reads these different types of works. So, he will not expect the same from two different genres of literature. The reader submits to the purposes of the author and leans into the reading of the work based on that specific purpose.

Genres within scripture should be treated the same. Paul's Epistle to the Philippian church is an irreplaceable gift to the church. The poetry of Song of Songs and the prophecy of Zephaniah are equally invaluable. Learning about the growth of the early church in Acts is descriptive narrative at its finest, and the word of exhortation that we read in Hebrews is of matchless soteriological beauty. And each of these are different from the others in terms of genre. Psalms and Revelation cannot be understood if read in the same way. Their genre and style make them immediately different, though both are the inerrant Word of God. Leviticus is quite different from what has preceded it in

Genesis and Exodus 1-18 (though Exodus 19-40 share much in common with Leviticus). Leviticus slows the narrative down and focuses on YHWH, his abiding presence, and on worship of him. Those following a narrative now find themselves reading case laws. We will discuss more on "case law" later in this chapter, but an orientation to genre with associated expectations is of great help to the reader of Leviticus.

In chapter 2, we looked at descriptive and prescriptive texts, and how readers are to interpret each. Leviticus is prescriptive for the people of Israel at that moment in redemptive history. Leviticus is legislative in that it gives laws from the suzerain to be followed by the vassal. Sacrificial texts within Leviticus were "prescriptive" for the people of Israel as the original audience, but are now descriptive for Christians, as these rituals pointed toward the substitutionary atonement of Christ and have been fulfilled in Christ's offering of himself once for all time. They describe the practices of the Israelites, but they need not be repeated as they have been fulfilled. So, they are not prescriptive to the Christian, even though they were originally prescriptive. This is an example of the reality that there is continuity in the story of redemption, and in the nature of the Lord's covenantal relationship to his people, but that certain Old Testament laws no longer need to be repeated. There is room for nuance. The laws are fulfilled in Christ.[258] The passages, however, remain informative, rich in meaning, and beautiful in foreshadowing the work of Christ.

[258] Hebrews 9:11-15, 23-28; Hebrews 10:1-10.

The Setting/Context of Leviticus

Students at Covenant Seminary will carry a great deal of what they hear regularly in their daily lectures so deeply in their hearts that they do not remember the first time they heard a principle. But once they have heard it, they cannot "un-hear" it, and they are forever sanctified by that instruction. Beginning the study of a text with "Where are we in the story?" is one of those permanent pedagogical deposits. Thus, wanting to be thoroughly embedded in the world of the text to fuel better interpretation, the questions of setting and context come to the fore.

Where Are We in the Story?

Geographical Context

Israel is camped at the base of Mt Sinai, where the tabernacle has been completed according to the instructions in Exodus, and upon completion, the *shekinah* glory, the dwelling glory of the LORD, has filled the tabernacle! They are heading toward the Promised Land, but they are currently encamped while Moses receives further instruction.

Historical Context

Leviticus takes place over one month, in Abib, nine months after arriving at Sinai,[259] about one year after the Exodus, 1444 BC (according to most scholars, although there is a later date in the 13th Century BC also held by many scholars.) This is taking

[259] Robert I. Vasholz, *Leviticus: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2007), 25.

place in the time of what many call the "Exodus Generation" (those who were personally rescued from captivity in Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and have been provided manna each day), and perhaps recorded while the nation was still encamped at Mt. Sinai. Deuteronomy was recorded at the end of the forty years, and spoken to the "Conquest Generation," but Leviticus may have been recorded much earlier.

Gordon Wenham offers this helpful perspective for the laws found therein and their historical context, explaining:

> In interpreting Leviticus, and especially in seeking to apply it to the modern situation, the historical context of the laws should be kept in mind. They are not timeless universal precepts such as are found in the book of Proverbs. The laws of Leviticus were revealed to the covenant nation at a particular phase of their history. They were designed to mold Israel into a holy people in a particular historical environment. Though God's holiness is unchanging, its expression may vary from age to age.[260]

Thus, Pratt's instruction[261] regarding "that world, their world, and our world" applies. Whereas in Genesis, Moses wrote to the people of Israel in "their world" about the events which took place in "that world," only "their world" is directly a part of the historical context here. However, their world is culturally distant, and their practices regarding tabernacle ritual are drastically different from what is experienced in worship in "our world." We must work hard to enter the world of the text, embedding our reading within the context of this historical period and its customs and culture.

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[260] Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 50.

[261] Pratt, *Stories*, 21.

Socio-Political Context

Theocracy exists among the people of Israel, whom God has called his chosen people, his treasured possession, and whom have been called out of Egypt to worship the LORD their God and to begin reclaiming their inheritance of land, seed, blessing, promised in Genesis 12:1-3. However, they are surrounded by kings of other lands and traversed by nomadic tribes and peoples. Ancient Near Eastern custom and culture are present throughout the Pentateuch. We will bring forth only what is most necessary for understanding our particular text, but this is a subdivision of thought and study which is fascinating, and extremely helpful to the interpretation of Old Testament texts. If separated from this socio-political context, a text can be extremely challenging.

Redemptive Historical/ Biblical Theological Context

On specific and intentional occasions, Dr. Jay Sklar would don full costume and persona, and place himself in the biblical theological context of a passage, inviting students in "Covenant Theology" to enter the world of the text with him as he brought out contextual meaning and richness that would easily be missed if not given attention. It was riveting and memorable. We will do a modified and far less potent version of that here. Israel has existed as a people but not as a land for centuries, having been in slavery for 400 years in Egypt. Familiarity with Abrahamic ancestry and corresponding strong ethnic bonding would be widespread, but deep understanding of the covenant relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would not have been descriptive of an average Hebrew slave now redeemed. However, these people have seen signs and wonders from this God who has delivered them from Egypt. They have heard that his name is YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who will be faithful to them in the present and in

the future as he was faithful to those patriarchs in the past. They are the recipients of a miraculous redemption and largely wanting to know more about this redeeming God. As of Exodus 19, they are a people who have heard the LORD declare them his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. And as of Exodus 40, YHWH's glory is dwelling among them. They long to know how they can relate to and worship him according to his will. They expect stipulations for worship. They revere his presence in the camp.

In the "Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation" narrative, and specifically within the narrative of Abraham's descendants, they are 700 years from the time of Abraham, and approximately 400 years before the kingdom of Israel will be united under Saul, David, and Solomon. They are approximately 860 years from the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the exile that followed. We are with Israel circa 1444 BC, that is "during the second half of the second millennium BC."[262]

Israel has a new understanding of themselves and their relationship to YHWH. Old Testament scholar John Hartley offers, "As soon as Israel became the people of God under a covenant, their sacrificial practices, which had roots reaching far back into the patriarchal era, had to be regulated to conform to the worship of the one true God. Pure worship was essential in order to fulfill the commandment, 'You shall have no other gods before me.' (Exodus 20:3)."[263]

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[262] John H. Walton, "Leviticus" *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing Life to the Ancient World of Scripture,* ed by John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 180.

[263] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 5.

Additionally, the proximity of YHWH is striking. Old Testament scholar Jerry Shepherd notes, "As we come to Leviticus 1:1, there has been a startling development. The glory of the LORD is no longer on top of the mountain. Rather, it is now in the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. This tent is not atop Mount Sinai. Rather, it is right in the middle of the camp."[264]

Literary Context

Leviticus is set within the Pentateuch/Torah, authored by Moses. It narratively flows from the Exodus-Red Sea-Lawgiving-Tabernacle narrative and precedes the failed conquest at Kadesh-Barnea and subsequent 38.5 years of wandering. In other words, their wilderness wandering starts only a year into the 40-year period and takes place over a month within that larger narrative. Leviticus represents a continuation of the Exodus story,[265] but Leviticus is largely filled with "divine speech in a narrative setting."[266]

Furthermore, Leviticus 1 is to be read within the genre of 'case law' (protasis/apodosis).[267] This was a common literary form in the Ancient Near East (and in many societies today). "A case law[268] first states the condition in which the law will apply (the 'protasis') and usually begins with 'if' or 'when.' The law then states what

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[264] Jerry E. Shepherd, *Leviticus: The Story of God Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 33.

[265] Vasholz, 26.

[266] John H. Walton, "Leviticus" *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing Life top the Ancient World of Scripture,* ed by John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 180.

[267] Sklar, *Leviticus,* 87.

[268] Sklar, *Leviticus,* 89 explains that Leviticus 1:2 - 6:7 follows the basic structure of case law.

should happen if the condition is met (the 'apodosis')."[269] We have been with the whole of Israel on their journey toward the Promised Land with a focus on the whole scene (full stage lights), and now we focus upon an individual in a particular situation/case. This shifting to a "spotlight" on a moment moves the reader away from the larger narrative for now. Shepherd states, "Time has slowed down to a crawl."[270] Whereas the narrative has thus far covered thousands of years, we now sit still at Sinai for a month. Many readers of Leviticus have found this jolt in time and focal point disorienting. The temptation to just get back to narrative and plot is understandable, but in so doing, the reader would skip over the treasures offered in Leviticus. Preachers are called to instruct their congregations to read with a more informed understanding of what they will find as they move into this gospel oasis.

"And the LORD called"...what an opening! We dare not miss its significance. The Hebrew title for Leviticus is "and He called" (*wayyiqra*). The "And" indicates the tense of the Hebrew verb, which appears in the *wayyiqtol*, the narrative tense. In other words, it begins with "and," as it is intended to be the next verse in the ongoing narrative from the ultimate verse of Exodus 40. These are the first words of the text, and "the only place in Leviticus where it specifically states that the Lord called Moses and serves as an introduction to the thirty-four times when the Lord speaks to Moses again in the book of Leviticus."[271] God is speaking directly. Don't miss this key detail. Leviticus is anything but boring! Furthermore, beloved nineteenth century Scottish Free Church Pastor Andrew

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[269] Sklar, *Leviticus*, 87.

[270] Shepherd, 34.

[271] Vasholz, 27.

Bonar[272] points out, "The first clause of this book declares a reconciled God, 'The Lord called to Moses,' as a man to his friend."[273] Remember our oasis? This is no mirage. God wants his people to draw near.

These are the very words of God, intended to be delivered to the people of Israel by Moses without delay, and prescribed as the necessary course for the worship of Israel's LORD and King. Sklar clarifies this spoken-word relationship, "Just as in Exodus, the Lord commands his prophet Moses to speak the following laws to the Israelites (Exodus 19:6; 30:31; see also Leviticus 4:2; 6:8-9, etc.). Leviticus is thus a divinely communicated word from the Lord to the Israelites, through his servant Moses."[274] It is worth noting, and meditating on the reality that no book of scripture contains as much direct divine speech. In his book *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch,* T. Desmond Alexander writes, "Almost 90 percent of the book consists of divine speeches."[275] The reader tempted to skip over these laws and rituals should give pause to such a notion as these are God's direct words to His people.

Walter C. Kaiser suggests these four categories for approaching the literary context of a text: immediate context, book context, sectional context, and canonical context.[276] Using those simplified categories, readers can study Leviticus 1:1-9 within its

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[272] Bonar was the best friend of my personal pastoral hero, Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

[273] Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus, Geneva Series Commentary*, (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 11.

[274] Sklar, *Leviticus*, *Tyndale*, 89.

[275] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch, 3rd edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995), 237.

[276] Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), 70-71.

relation to a) the rest of Leviticus 1; b) within Leviticus as a whole; c) within the Moses-written Pentateuch, especially the later portions of Exodus and the earlier portions of Numbers; and then finally d) within the canon of scripture. Wilhoit and Ryken teach, "Meaning is usually derived from literary wholes -- whole books, whole chapters, whole paragraphs, whole stories, whole poems."[277]

Author, Audience, and Author's Intent

This study does not look to engage with critical scholarship on this issue, and assumes Mosaic authorship. Moses was a Hebrew by birth, grew up in Pharaoh's house in Egypt, committed murder out of righteous anger (that crossed the boundary and resulted in murder), fled to Midian, and established a married life there. He encountered YHWH at the burning bush and received instructions from YHWH for the larger purpose for his life, before returning to Egypt at age 80 to bring Israel out to the wilderness to worship YHWH. His connection to Israel, to Egypt, to YHWH, and to the relationship between YHWH and Israel's worship is vital to the context of Leviticus. He is hearing directly from God, and those words are being spoken to and recorded for Israel. They know him and (largely, if fickly) trust him. He is a mediator for a stiff-necked people, conversing with YHWH at Sinai. His trustworthiness in reporting what YHWH has spoken would not be questioned by Israel.

We are reminded by Longman, "Our interpretation is correct insofar as it conforms to the meaning intended by the author,"[278] We would be remiss to bring our

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[277] Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective*, 97.

[278] Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1987), 65.

own thoughts to the meaning of the text without first reading them in view of the author and audience, as "meaning resides in the intention of the author. The author has encoded a message for the readers. Interpretation then has its goal the recovery of the author's purpose in writing,"[279] so this background will ensure a faithful interpretation.

Moses' personal relationship to his Exodus Israelite audience shapes how he communicates to them. They are a people who need to understand the character and covenantal nature of this God who has rescued them from captive Egypt, redeemed them from slavery, and whom they now serve. A different author writing the same legal prescriptions and righteous exhortations would be received differently than one who has been there with the people, witnessing the saving acts of YHWH.

In the Pentateuch, Moses was bringing the word of God to the people redeemed from slavery in Egypt, that they may know the God who delivered them and that they might worship him according to his purposes, commands, and exhortations. It will also be helpful to see how Moses describes the burnt offering in other places in the Pentateuch,[280] since Leviticus 1 is not in isolation as to its meaning.

To discern Moses' relationship with his audience, Doriani's questions are useful. "What prompted him to write? Who is the intended audience? Are they believers or not, faithful or not, or Jewish, Gentile, or mixed? How much do they know? What are their needs and concerns?"[281] The original audience is "Exodus Israel," those who were brought out of slavery, and/or their children. They needed to know what YHWH

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[279] Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 65.

[280] Genesis 8:20-21; Exodus 24: 5-6; Exodus 29:15-40, 42; Exodus 30:28, and Numbers 28-29.

[281] Doriani, *Message*, 31.

expected in terms of worship now that they have been redeemed and rescued from slavery and brought to the wilderness specifically for that purpose.

When all these contextual factors have been investigated and considered, a reasonable understanding of the author's intent becomes clear. This intent will shape the interpretation of meaning when there arises a lack of clarity on a particular text. An author is irremovably located within an historical, cultural, and socio-political context. That context will shape the priorities, color the nuances, and make immediate the application for the original readers within that context. In Leviticus, Moses' intention was to relay to Israel the very words spoken to him by YHWH. There is no book in scripture that contains as much direct speech from the LORD as Leviticus. Moses gave them the words from YHWH to direct their worship and make known His purposes for His covenant people.

How Can We Meaningfully Approach, Interpret, and Appreciate Leviticus?

For this question, we now return to where we began, with an abiding image to help us. Let's look at our second *abiding image for Leviticus* to aid the reader in personal study. The reader encountering Leviticus will face a number of challenges as they read laws that seem culturally distant and irrelevant. The reader might ask, "What am I supposed to learn from this? Why is this in here?" The solution to this problem is to identify and then to place 4 "tent frames." A central image of Leviticus is the Tabernacle, a large tent (although it is far more than that). A tent of this size can be daunting. If you are underneath the weight of the canvas of a tent, two things are an immediate problem. First, the weight of a tent that size could crush you, or in any case, you would not be able to get out from under it without help. You would be suffocated. Second, with no tent

frames, no light can get in. Darkness is the only perspective from underneath the canvas. It is absent of light, absent of hope, absent of illumination to understanding. These two realities (weight and darkness) would cause Leviticus to be both inescapably suffocating and hopelessly confusing without the placement of tent frames. The law without the gospel has that effect, as with the character "Christian" under the mountain in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The 4 tent frames, however, allow the weight of the "law" to be taken off us and also allow us to bask in the light of the full revelation of God's glory, revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. These 4 tent frames thus serve as an antidote to legalistic reading, and as an illuminative to the redemptive historical reality already true in Leviticus. The 4 tent frames anchor us to solid ground amidst sinking and shifting sand. Along with the image of an oasis, the image of these tent frames will help the reader confused by a passage in Leviticus, and wondering, "what am I supposed to make of these seemingly irrelevant details?"

What are the 4 Tent Frames?

1. The King is in His Palace Throne Room

The focal point from Israel's perspective is that our neighbor in the desert community is our God and King. Israel is always struck by the abiding presence and earthly dwelling of their King in the center of the camp. This is unprecedented in their history, and there will never be a time when reverence for the King is not central to the worldview of Israel at this stage in her history. As we have seen, and will see again later in this chapter, palace entry came with expectations. Israel is expecting to be informed how to relate to this King in their midst. He is a suzerain King who has initiated a

covenant relationship with them, and they as the vassal party are to abide by the stipulations of this covenant.

2. The King is also Their LORD in Covenant Relationship with Them

The focal point is the relational and covenantal character of our God. The King in their midst is also their covenant LORD. As he recounts to Moses how he knows his people and their suffering, his name YHWH is evidence that he has been with them, is with them, and will be with them as he was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[282] He is unchanging. He is faithful. He is knowable. He desires relationship. He is great, good, present, and relational. This is no distant and capricious king. This is their LORD who has drawn them to Himself by covenant and will keep them in His presence safely. His presence dominates their every action in the camp. And, coupled with their awe at his holiness is their gratitude at being invited to draw near. Sklar teaches, "The covenant King (the LORD) has come to dwell in his earthly palace (the tent of meeting) in the midst of his covenant people (the Israelites)."[283]

3. Israel is Called to be a Holy Community

The focal point is the need for holiness, and that a mediator and atonement are required because of the inability of Israel to live in a perfectly holy manner. Holiness is the key word in Leviticus. When we think of holiness, we may first think of piety, faithfulness, and moral uprightness. These are certainly appropriate! What we may not think of is what

[282] Exodus 3:6-22.

[283] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 87.

is most directly meant by holiness in Leviticus, to be set apart and distinct. The Hebrew word *kadesh,*[284] translated "holy," means "set apart," "separate," “devoted,” and thus corresponds to ritual states discussed later in this chapter: "impure"-"pure"-"holy." Scholar Joel Kaminsky contends, "Israel is commanded to be holy because the most holy God lives in proximity to the people of Israel (Exodus 25:9, 40; Numbers 8:4)."[285] God's presence in their camp demands their holiness. Holiness in Leviticus carries *centripetal force,* drawing people inward toward God's presence, growing together in community and in faith and worship, unpolluted by polytheistic and pagan peoples. They are a people with a future because they are a covenant people. Leviticus addresses the sin, impurity, holiness, and cleansing related to this call to be holy to the LORD. Wenham explains:

> It is important to recognize that the laws in Leviticus form part of a historical narrative. They are recorded to show how Israel became the nation it did. They show what was involved in being called to be the people of God. They illustrate how God's covenant purpose to make them " a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) was worked out in an all-embracing system of religious services and law.[286]

Israel is called to be set apart from other nations. Distinct in their devotion to Yahweh. A light shining toward the surrounding darkness of their pagan neighbor nations. Deuteronomy 4:1-8 expresses this beautifully. Israel will be tempted to imitate the pagan cultures in Canaan when they get to the Promised Land, but the LORD is warning them that they must not do so. The will of the LORD is unchanging, regardless of their location. When they get to the land that has been promised to them, in order to be a

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[284] Also *qodesh.*

[285] Joel Kaminsky, "Who is My Neighbor?", *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol 13, Issue 1, April 2008, 126.

[286] Wenham, *Leviticus,* 49.

blessing to them and their descendants, and to the nations, they must remember the LORD who brought them there, and remain wholly devoted to him and his word. It is centripetal force pulling them away from that which would draw them to the ways of the world, and drawing them towards their center, which is YHWH, represented by his presence in the center of the camp. All the purity laws, all the rituals, all the ceremony- it is all about devotion to God. We can easily get intimidated by the minutia, distracted or even repelled by what seems like legalism. But if we do so, we are missing the point of the original text, which was to draw them toward the LORD, and draw them together as a community devoted to him. Return to this truth any time Leviticus seems needlessly particular about finite details. There is a reason.

4. Israel Has a Missional Calling

The focal point is the answer to the questions, "Why are we here? What does YHWH want from us and for us?" Israel is a people called to be a witness to his holiness, his beauty, his power, his purity, his redemption, his covenant care, affection, and loving discipline, his dwelling presence, and his mighty defense and righteous shepherding. There will be time for God's people to be sent outward to the nations by God's *centrifugal force*, but for now they are to show justice and mercy and humility and compassion to those in need who are in their midst, and to those who pass through their midst. "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"[287] and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"[288] work together. Israel's calling is to be separate, distinct, set

[287] Leviticus 19:2b.

[288] Leviticus 19:18b.

apart from the other nations, and devoted to God. Israel is called to be holy, so that they can be built up in the faith, grow into maturity, and learn to walk according to the LORD's ways.

But it is not so that they can be separated from the other nations relationally forever. God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all the families of the earth has not changed, and Israel has a call to bless the nations around them, which is most proximately fleshed out by loving their neighbor and demonstrating the holiness of God by the holiness of their character. Centrifugal force thus sends God's people out to be a blessing to the nations. While this will not be a reality in terms of "commissioned evangelism" during the time of the original audience, it is the abiding mission of God 's people through redemptive history and is most clearly expressed in the Great Commission Jesus gives to his followers in Matthew 28 and Acts 1. Sklar comments, "(The laws) let the Israelites know how to reflect the holiness of their covenant King (Leviticus 11:44-45), so that they could fulfill their covenant mission: being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' to 'all the earth' (Exodus 19:4-6)."[289]

Closer Investigation Within the Text

Leviticus 1:1-9

1:1 The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,
1:2 "Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, 'When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.
1:3 If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.
1:4 He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

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[289] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 87.

1:5 Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of tent of meeting.
1:6 Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,
1:7 and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.
1:8 And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar;
1:9 but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Investigating These Challenges in Leviticus 1:1-9

There are eight challenges that we will investigate, and then our study will conclude with some "treasures" to take with us as a gift from this text. The eight challenges are: the best understanding of *olah*; distinguishing sanctuary/tabernacle/tent of meeting; understanding zones of ritual purity and boundaries; strategy for investigating Leviticus 1 as a ritual text; distinguishing the duties of the worshipper/duties of the priest; is this bloody ritual necessary?; the relationship of the five Leviticus offerings and the frequency of the *olah*; and preaching Christ in Leviticus 1.

A Ritual Text: The Olah Offering

Readers find a significant cultural gap as soon as they open Leviticus, beginning with the series of five ritual offerings. The first of these is the *olah*, or "whole burnt offering." Its placement at the beginning shows its importance, yet the practices prescribed do not fit into modern settings. Thus, the task of interpretation and the application of the principles of hermeneutics will be helpful to pastors looking to preach this text, as well as readers looking to understand it more deeply.

The natural places to start are to use hermeneutical principles as interpretive tools, approach its meaning as a ritual text, and commit to Christocentric preaching. Readers

will find a few particular challenges, some unique interpretive challenges, and some suggestions about how to preach from this text.

Doriani recommends a thorough "observation of the text" that makes note of striking details that are for any reason particularly striking— details that mean everything and details that enrich.[290] There are abundant details in Leviticus, immediately starting in Leviticus 1:1-9. The plethora of details in Leviticus 1 certainly "enrich" this text. Doriani exhorts, "Attend to all unexpected details. Notice details that appear to be unimportant at first...Observe figures of speech and unusual words or grammatical forms, such as pronouns and verb tenses. Take time to consider the importance of details."[291] This chapter will focus significant time to the details. Specific details are given for a reason, and the author intends for the reader to notice them and use them in their interpretation.

Doriani also advises us to pay attention to "biblical images and symbols," especially for the sake of application. Once a reader has closely investigated the text of Leviticus, the imagery, symbolism, and foreshadowing are everywhere. Imagery and symbols point toward deeper and fuller meaning in God's redemptive plan in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This imagery and symbolism is found throughout Leviticus.

For example, the people of Israel understood their relationship to YHWH as their LORD and as their King. They had reverence for his divine holy power and for his royal majestic authority. In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu would too late realize the uncompromising precision required of priests in approaching the LORD. It was

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[290] Doriani, *Message*, 15-26.

[291] Doriani, *Message*, 18.

uniformly the expectation among the people of Israel that ritual obedience did not allow for creative interpretation. Mathews clarifies:

> If the gift were to be accepted, it must also be offered in the proper way. Any departure from the prescribed course of action resulted in the rejection of the offering. The Lord required strict observance to show the importance of approaching him for the purpose of worship and for the forgiveness of sin. Proper protocol when receiving a dignitary evidences respect for the person and for the office that person holds.[292]

Thus, Mathews contends that the worshipper must "bring the *proper gift* to the *proper place* and to worship him by the *proper presentation* of the offering."[293] This image will be important to remember as we examine the offering found in Leviticus 1.

The Proper Gift: Olah
(The Whole Burnt Offering)

Leviticus 1:1 The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,
1:2 "Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, 'When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.
1:3 "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

How is the meaning of "olah" best understood? Is the term "holocaust offering" more appropriate? Should that be used instead? Was the sacrifice of animals as an atonement offering present in other cultures? Why was the whole animal offered?

For the sake of brevity, this study will focus on the *olah* offering in reference to a bull from the herd. While sheep/goat and bird options also exist, this was based on the differences of wealth and variegated access to a bull to offer as a sacrifice. In his work

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[292] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 30.

[293] Mathews, 26.

The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature, Old Testament scholar David P. Wright notes, "Sacrifices are brought according to one's ability. An *olah* may be a bull, sheep or goat, or bird."[294] Thus, those offerings follow what is in essence the same procedure and have the same result (atonement). The bull offering is found in Leviticus 1:1-9. Longman teaches that the Hebrew word *olah* means "rising up," and referred to the smoke that rose up from the altar during the ritual.[295] L. Michael Morales thus calls it the ascension offering.[296] Lloyd R. Bailey helpfully adds, "Thus, the name of the act derives from the fact that the offering ascends to the realm of the Deity in the form of odor, heat, and smoke."[297] Holocaust is a painful word, for understandable reasons. While it is appropriate within the range of meaning, it is not helpful for preaching. Bailey concedes that it is rendered 'holocaust' in JB and NAB (which means 'the burnt whole').[298] Sklar points to a better translation, writing, "The Hebrew word for this sacrifice ('*ola*) is variously translated: 'burnt offering' (RSV, NIV, etc.), 'whole offering' (NEB), 'whole burnt offering' (LXX). 'Whole burnt offering' does especially well in conveying that the entire animal was burned up on the altar."[299]

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[294] David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 112.

[295] Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 80.

[296] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 122.

[297] Lloyd R. Bailey, *Leviticus-Numbers, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 45.

[298] Bailey, 45.

[299] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 89.

The *olah* was profoundly significant to Israel's worship, as indicated by its frequency. It could be voluntary but could also be mandatory (for example, Leviticus 12). In fact, scholars point to the *olah* as the most significant offering. Longman, stating what many scholars echo, writes, "With the exception of the Day of Atonement, where the sin offering took center place, the *olah* was the most important sacrifice at Israelite festivals (Numbers 28-29)."[300] Old Testament scholar Robert I. Vasholz reports, "The burnt offering is referred to more times in the Old Testament than any other sacrifice."[301]

Furthermore, an important image and concept for the overall meaning of this offering is that it was a fragrant offering with "a pleasing aroma (1:9)." Several aspects of this sacrifice will add to its overall meaning, but the fragrant offering that was always burning and ascending to the omnipresent YHWH is a symbolic treasure for understanding Israel's worship. Reflecting on the text, Gane asserts, "Leviticus 1:9 tells us that the *overall goal* of the burnt offering is to provide a gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord...The Lord receives his food 'gift' in the form of smoke by 'smelling it.' So, the smoke functions like incense."[302]

By this offering, Israel is showing itself as wholly devoted to YHWH. Other offerings used different parts of the animal for different purposes, but the *olah* is whole. It represents total offering by the worshipper, and therefore by all of Israel, due to its frequency and ever-present smoke ascending. Old Testament scholar L. Michael Morales explains:

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[300] Longman, *Immanuel*, 79.

[301] Vasholz, 28.

[302] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers,* 60, 61.

> This public ascension offering, focused upon the *hiqtir* rite of transforming the animal into smoke, was offered up on behalf of Israel, morning and evening, and signified Israel's consecration to God. The offering would create a pillar of smoke, ascending to the heavenly abode of God as a soothing aroma. Through this rite YHWH communicated his approval and met with his people.[303]

Just as the resurrection of Christ showed that the Father accepted the sacrifice of the Son as sufficient, the LORD's approval of this offering was of maximum importance, and the text speaks to it (1:4). When followed according to instruction, the offering was received, and God's approval was assured.

The *olah* is thus an interesting way to begin a new book of the Bible. While it might intimidate casual readers away from meditation upon the riches of Leviticus, Allen Ross weighs in with his soteriologically significant perspective: "The Book of Leviticus thus begins with the good news of the way to find acceptance with God."[304] The meaning of the *olah* is a great gift to the church today.

The Proper Place: Sanctuary/ Tabernacle/Tent of Meeting

There is no more dominant image in Leviticus than the Tent of Meeting. It would be easy to see sanctuary, tabernacle, and tent of meeting as synonymous. But the distinction adds rich meaning to the text. The three names given to the place where the Lord dwells each carry their own significance. However, it is relatively easy for a reader

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[303] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 142.

[304] Ross, 89.

to get confused as to which is which, or to amalgamate them all together, losing the distinctiveness of each.[305] Sklar helpfully distinguishes, teaching:

> The Lord's dwelling goes by three main names in Exodus, each referring to a different aspect of the physical structure and emphasizing a different aspect of the Lord's character. The Hebrew word for "sanctuary" (25:8) often refers to the sanctuary complex as a whole, from the tent to the courtyard. The term is built on the root for "holiness" and points to the holy nature of both the dwelling and the one who lives within it. The Hebrew word for "tabernacle" (25:9) refers especially to "the interior…frame and the first covering stretched over it (cf. Ex. 26:1–6, 15–30 with 26:7–14)." The term is built on the root for "dwelling, living;" its verbal form can describe someone dwelling in a tent (Gen. 9:27). In other words, the Israelites live in their tents, and the Lord will live in their midst in his. He wants to be near them (Ex. 29:45–46; 40:34–38). Finally, the phrase "tent of meeting" refers to the entire tent structure, that is, the tabernacle and its covering as well as the other coverings stretched over it as a tent (26:7; 40:29). The phrase highlights that here is where the Lord will "meet with the Israelites and receive their worship (Ex. 29:42–46)" and also "meet…with Moses, giving him laws for the people (Ex. 25:22)." The Lord does not simply want to be in the Israelites' midst. He wants them to come before him in repentance and worship so they might experience his forgiveness and mercy and have their hearts filled with the joy and love that stream from him like beams of light from the sun.[306]

The tent of meeting (*ohel moed*) refers to the tent housing the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place within the larger sanctuary structure.[307] The tent of meeting is the most commonly used name in reference to "Israel's sacred shrine,"[308] but the broader term "sanctuary" includes the whole structure (courtyard, altar, basin, and the tent of meeting).

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[305] Note that even within the scholarship cited in this study, usage of the terms can be inconsistent. When authors are paraphrased, the language will be made consistent with what Sklar writes above, but quotes will not be changed.

[306] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: A Discourse Analysis of the Hebrew Bible*, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023).

[307] Exodus 25-27.

[308] Vasholz, 25.

The Portable Sinai

The tabernacle was a place of the LORD's palpable presence and power. As the Lord's dwelling, the tent is a visible structure to house what Israel has been experiencing (YHWH's presence with them) since leaving Egypt. Sklar lays out the continuity in YHWH's presence and revelation:

> The Lord's glory descends on Mount Sinai twice in Exodus (Exodus 19:16-20; 24:15-17). Each time, the Lord summons Moses (Exodus 19:20; 24:16) and gives him laws for the Israelites. The pattern now repeats itself: the Lord's glory now descends on the *tent of meeting* (Exodus 40:34), and the Lord calls Moses (Leviticus 1:1) in order to give him laws for the people (Leviticus 1:2-27:34). The *tent of meeting* is thus 'a portable Sinai,' a place of the Lord's presence (Exodus 29:43) and revelation (Exodus 25:22) that will travel in the Israelites' midst.[309]

Thus, the sanctuary, among other things, serves as the dwelling place of the King amid his encamped people. The sanctuary structure represents a change from "worship everywhere" seen throughout Genesis, to worship in a central place,[310] and this was a significant moment. Their King, who is their God, was encamped in the center of the camp, as the sanctuary was surrounded by the temporary residences of three tribes on each of its four sides. It was not only the spatial center of the camp but also the focal point. The God who brought them out of Egypt was dwelling with them as they journeyed toward the land he had promised them, and he was enthroned in the tent of meeting. Vasholz indicates that the tabernacle is mobile and central (in the middle of the camp), thus allowing close contact for all of the tribes to have access.[311] Those familiar with the theological doctrine of the LORD's omnipresence should not be concerned that

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[309] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 86.

[310] Vasholz, 26.

[311] Vasholz, 25-26.

the Bible in any way teaches that this portable Sinai meant that the LORD only dwelled in this singular place. He was, is, and always will be omnipresent. However, The LORD's shekinah glory indicated something distinct about this place, having been built according to the standards laid out in the latter half of Exodus. Vasholz asserts, "(God's dwelling at the tabernacle) does not imply that the discerning Israelites believe that their God is present in only one place, nor that His sphere of influence is limited there...Rather, the tent tied Israel to the theophany of Sinai and all of the history that led to it. In particular, it linked Israel with the covenant that Israel made there."[312]

It is therefore key to the interpretation of Leviticus that the tent of meeting (Holy Place and Most Holy Place) within the sanctuary structure was intended to be viewed as the King's palace residence.[313] And, Sklar's language of the tent of meeting serving as a portable Sinai[314] will be an immeasurably helpful image for exploring the procedures of the ritual that follows. Exodus 40:34 says that the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle, thus demonstrating that God was dwelling there as the Israelites journeyed to the Promised Land. Ornate decoration and costly materials would be expected. If it were plain and stripped down, that would have been odd and inappropriate for its purpose. The Israelites found the tabernacle[315] and tent of meeting as described in Exodus to be as expected, only more beautiful.

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[312] Vasholz, 29.

[313] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 85.

[314] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 86.

[315] For a vivid, but simple and clear "cut-away diagram of the Tabernacle", see Alexander, 229.

Visualizing The Sanctuary

It is not likely that a detailed description of every detail of the construction of the sanctuary will be needed in a sermon, but an overall understanding will illumine beautiful truths in its symbolism and will also prevent mistakes. The sanctuary was constructed of materials well-known and accessible to the people of Israel. Old Testament scholars Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman III note, "Nothing is essentially problematic about the biblical description of the tabernacle...Kenneth A. Kitchen argues that the technology used to produce the tabernacle was well known by the time of Moses, and indeed that the tabernacle described in the biblical text is quite simple compared to near contemporary worship sites in the ancient Near East."[316]

The entrance into the tabernacle complex on the east side brought one into the courtyard, and the entire courtyard was enclosed by a linen screen 150 feet long by 75 feet wide.[317] The ash pit, altar, and wash basin were between the entrance of the court and the tent of meeting, and in that order.[318] The courtyard was otherwise empty. The tent of meeting was on its west side. Sklar notes, "The *tent of meeting*...was ornately designed, with interior linen walls embroidered with angelic cherubim."[319] Sklar delineates these instructive details, further establishing the royal nature of the tent of meeting, "The tent's royal overtones should also not be missed: like a palace, it was decorated with costly

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[316] Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 135. Also see K. Kitchen, "The Tabernacle: A Bronze Age Artefact," *Eretz Israel* 24 (1993): 119-129 as well as idem, "The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?" *BR* 16 (2000): 14-21.

[317] Mathews, 28.

[318] Helpful diagram on Wenham, *Leviticus*, 53.

[319] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 86.

materials (cf, I Kings 7:1-12); the ark within the Most Holy Place was the Lord's royal 'footstool' (I Chronicles 28:2), while the cherubim on top of the ark served as his royal throne (2 Samuel 6:2)."[320] Inside the Holy Place, there was a table for the loaves, an incense altar, and a gold lampstand.[321] The curtains described in Exodus 26:1-37 were around the outside, and the veil described in Exodus 26:31-35 separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The Ark of the Covenant was within the Most Holy Place. This Most Holy Place was separated by the veil because none could enter it except for the High Priest, and he only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement.[322] This separation logically leads to questions about the necessity of these boundaries.

Zones of Ritual Purity and Boundaries

Holiness, Sin, and Boundaries

Nothing about the extravagance of the sanctuary structure would have seemed odd to the original audience. Palace entry came with expectations. Therefore, tabernacle entry came with expectations. Ancient Near Eastern tribes (and many "developed cultures" in later centuries) had these expectations. The cultural gap makes Leviticus feel incredibly distant for the modern reader. But the lavishness (even though mobile) of the sanctuary structure was culturally appropriate to the original audience. And within the tabernacle, there was a boundary before the Holy Place and again before the Most Holy Place.

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[320] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 86-87.

[321] Exodus 25:23-40.

[322] Leviticus 16.

Within the biblical theological context, Israel is fully expecting to be directed as to how to worship their king, as per the customary expectations in an Ancient Near Eastern context. In that context, a suzerain is the stronger party in a covenant, has something to offer that the weaker party (the "vassal") needs, and has the right to set the stipulations of the covenant.[323] The vassal kept the obligations of the treaty, which the suzerain also kept, and only then expected to receive the blessing that the suzerain had to offer. To break those covenant stipulations was to invite curse instead of blessing. This biblical theological reality and historical context inform the reading of the Pentateuch from Exodus 20 onward. Sklar explains:

> That Exodus 20-24 is a suzerain-vassal covenant implies that the Lord is Israel's covenant King and the Israelites are the covenant people of his kingdom. This, in turn, means that the laws he gives them in Leviticus are part of the stipulations of the covenant and are to guide them in kingdom living. That is what this book is about: how the king's covenant people can live as loyal covenant members of his kingdom.[324]

Israel is expecting to have the "how" answered with these stipulations. And Leviticus provides the answer. We are again wise to remember what Mathews wrote, "The Lord required the Israelite worshiper to bring the *proper gift* to the *proper place* and to worship him by the *proper presentation* of the offering."[325]

Sacrifices served a purpose. Atonement and restoration were possible through the sacrificial system. This all took place at the sanctuary. But the sanctuary was divided into sections, each forbidden to those not meeting the qualifications to enter that section.

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[323] Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2005), 140.

[324] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 38.

[325] Mathews, 26.

Motyer points out, “The drama of this can be caught by reading straight through from the end of Exodus to the beginning of Leviticus. No sooner was the tabernacle inaugurated (Ex 40:33) than it was found to be a system of exclusion: not even Moses could enter, because of the presence (cloud) and glory of the Lord (Ex 40:35).”[326] Leviticus invites readers into this drama of human sin and the shalom of God. The boundaries represent visually what is true existentially and theologically.

Sin and holiness are taken with uttermost seriousness in Leviticus. Alexander clarifies, "Terms based on the Hebrew root *qadash* (e,g., 'holy', 'holiness', 'sanctify') appear 152 times in Leviticus, representing about one-fifth of all Old Testament occurrences."[327] Alexander continues, explaining that the word for "clean" occurs seventy-four times, more than one-third of OT occurrences, and that "unclean" appears 132 times, more than one-half.[328] Therefore, ritual states identify one's purity and holiness before the LORD. It is an inescapable reality that Leviticus takes ritual states seriously, and that the informed reader must pay close attention to ritual purity states of persons and places and things as he investigates the text.

Boundaries that existed were for the protection of the Israelite worshippers. The separation of an object as “holy” was never to be treated flippantly or casually.[329] Alexander emphasizes, "Holiness and uncleanness are totally incompatible. Not only is it not possible for anyone or anything to be holy and unclean at the same time; more

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[326] Motyer, 49.

[327] Alexander, 239.

[328] Alexander, 239.

[329] Cf. Joshua 7; II Samuel 6.

important, no holy object or person is normally permitted to come into contact with anything unclean."[330] Every page of Leviticus is saturated with this dynamic.

Sklar provides helpful language and a diagram. "Clean" and "pure" are interchangeable as ritual states, and Sklar prefers the term "pure." He illustrates that "cleansing" results in an object becoming "pure" and "sanctifying" in an object becoming "holy". "Profaning" moves a "holy" object down to "pure", and "defiling" moves an object to become "impure."[331] The movement is from "impure-pure-holy" by cleansing and sanctifying; "holy-pure-impure" by profaning and defiling. The ritual states were distinct from one another, and ritual objects and persons and places were kept strictly in the quarters corresponding to the state of ritual purity.

Courtyard, Altar, and Tent

The *olah* offering took place within the sanctuary, at the entrance but still outside the tent of meeting.[332] This is where the altar was found. Bonar explains, "The altar was near the door of the Tabernacle; it faced it. It was the first object that met the eye of a worshipper coming in. The priest met him there, and led the offerer with his sacrifice to the altar."[333] Thus, the *olah* offering took place in the courtyard. Exodus 27:1-8 describes the altar for burnt offerings as 7 feet 6 inches square and 4 feet 6 inches high, found

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[330] Alexander, 245.

[331] The visual representation found on Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 47 is most helpful.

[332] Leviticus 1:3.

[333] Bonar, 14.

outside the tent but within the courtyard. Sacrifices were to be offered on the outer altar in the open courtyard, visible to all worshippers.[334]

What was the significance of the altar's location within the sanctuary? Mathews offers this dynamic visual perspective; "The altar was located near the entry to the courtyard...upon entry to the courtyard, the worshiper saw the altar and could see in the background the sacred tent. The symbolic message was plain: to approach God, the Israelite first made a sacrifice at the altar."[335]

Where was the actual offering in relation to the altar and in relation to the Holy Place and Most Holy Place? The offering was in the courtyard at the north side of the altar, but outside of the tent of meeting. Vasholz notes, "The slaying of animals is to be at the north side of the altar to avoid contact with refuse dumped at the east side, at the place of ashes...anything that smacks of defilement has no place in the tent-sanctuary, a principal theme in Leviticus."[336]

While making atonement was an effectual result of the *olah* offering, there was no confusion that the offeror himself could go into the tent of meeting. The altar was clearly on the outside, and the offering included duties for both parties, but was ultimately made by the priest. Mathews notes, "The layperson was permitted to enter the courtyard for the purpose of presenting his gift to the Lord. However, he could not venture any further. Only the approved priests could enter the sacred tent. In bringing the offering to the tent

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[334] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, *Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN; Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 21.

[335] Mathews, 28.

[336] Vasholz, 30.

of meeting, there could be no confusion as to whom the presentation was made. The Lord God alone was the recipient of the gift."[337]

At this point, it will be helpful to note the Hebrew word for "offering", which is transliterated as *qorban*. Keil informs us that *qorban* clarified that this offering was a gift, taken from the word for "to draw near, to bring near, or present, an offering."[338] Keil also tells us that *qorban* has rare usage; this word is used only in Leviticus and Numbers, plus two verses in Ezekiel.[339] Expanding even further on the meaning of *qorban*, Bailey teaches, "The word used in Leviticus for "offering' in 1:3 means literally 'a presentation' (Hebrew: *qorban*). The sacrifice is presented either in gratitude for the past or in expectation for the future."[340] We will look at the frequency and occasion later in this chapter, but *olah* could be voluntarily presented and was not necessarily tied to a specific sin at a specific time.

Profound boundaries existed, and ritual purity states were taken with utmost seriousness, but the invitation to draw near was still extended by a holy and loving God. Motyer writes, 'In Leviticus, the verb 'brings' and the noun 'offering' both alike express the idea of ‘being near'/'bringing near.’ Those who are excluded can 'come near' by the right which the blood of sacrifice confers and, coming near in this way, find 'satisfied acceptance' by the holy God."[341] There would be no confusion that the boundary still

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[337] Mathews, 29.

[338] C.F. Keil, *The Third Book of Moses, Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1,* translated by James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 282.

[339] Keil, 282.

[340] Bailey, 49.

[341] Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock*, 50.

existed or that sin still remained, both original corruption and continual pollution. But the LORD made a way for Israel to approach. Motyer continues, “He came to their houses in judgment; he passed over in peace. This basic Passover concept is continued in the Levitical sacrificial system by the recurring assurance that the sacrifices are made in order ‘that (the offeror) may be accepted before the Lord’ (Lev 1:3).”[342]

Where was any unusable portion of the carcass discarded, and is this significant in terms of tabernacle cleanliness? A few verses deeper into Leviticus 1, we find the passage prescribing procedure for an offering of a bird. In regards to the offering's feathers, YHWH instructs, "Cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes (Leviticus 1:16)."

Reading Leviticus 1 as a Ritual Text

Before getting into the specifics of the ritual procedure, it is helpful to revisit what we learned in chapter 3 about finding meaning in a ritual text. Animal sacrifice may seem foreign and even repulsive today,[343] but there was nothing peculiar, and certainly nothing perceived as barbaric, in these ritual practices. Gane teaches, "Sacrifices and other rituals that utilized all kinds of materials and victims, including animals and sometimes even human beings, were an essential part of religious life all over the ancient world, including Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt, Syria/Palestine, and Greece...Thus, for them this form of worship was not strange at all."[344] While other Ancient Near Eastern cultures have

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[342] Motyer, 49.

[343] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 57.

[344] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 57.

similar cultic practices, renowned Jewish scholar Jacob Milgrom argues that Israel's priesthood distinguished their practices from the ritual practices of the surrounding pagan nations in multiple ways.[345] On this topic of divine distinction, Vasholz notes that God distinguishes himself from pagan gods[346] by having a permanent residence in the movable sanctuary, the portable Sinai. Most notably for this study, Milgrom credits Israel's priesthood with "eviscerating every trace of (the Mesopotamian notion that religion was for the care and feeding of the god) from the sacrificial system. Pagans regularly set food and drink on their god's table, but the Priestly legists banned all food rites inside the shrine."[347] Mathews picks up on this argument, contending, "The Biblical picture of sacrifice...is not the feeding of a god, such as was found among the nations, but a symbolic act of worship by the Israelite."[348]

We spent time in chapter 3 looking at how to find meaning in a ritual, but these key reminders will aid us in this journey of investigation of Leviticus 1. Sklar suggestions two questions in studying ritual meaning: "What does a ritual do?" and "How should it be read?"[349] Sklar's to the point maxim assists the preacher as he dives into this detail-laden text, "The more elaborate the ritual, the more likely it is that we are reading of something significant."[350] This is a helpful reminder when we consider that the ritual in Leviticus 1

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[345] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics, Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN; Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 21.

[346] Vasholz, 26.

[347] Milgrom, 21.

[348] Mathews, 29.

[349] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 69.

[350] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 69.

includes fourteen activities to be performed: lean one hand on the animal; slay (slit the throat of) the animal; collect blood; present blood on the altar; dash blood against the sides of the altar; flay (remove the hide of) the animal; dismember/quarter the carcass; stoke the altar fire; arrange wood on the altar; present body pieces, head, and suet on the altar; arrange the body pieces, head, and suet (hard fat) on the altar fire; wash entrails and shins; present entrails and shins on the altar; burn (turn into smoke) the entrails and shins on the fire.[351] A "covenant transformational" approach assumes that these actions are performed with the expectation that transformation takes place through the ritual, and that the LORD grants atonement.

Sklar considers, "How should a ritual be read?" Covenant Israel was coming to understand that these rituals were providing the path to substitutionary atonement for their sins and thus reconciliation with their covenant suzerain, YHWH. The ritual should be read with that substitutionary atonement understanding in mind.

As we move into our examination of the details of this ritual text, it is good to be reminded of the takeaways learned earlier in this study about how to interpret a ritual text. In chapter 3, we encamped in the teaching of Old Testament scholar Roy Gane as we sought a method to determine meaning. And we concluded that Gane's reasoning all comes together in this: "covenantal context" within the Israelite relationship with YHWH provides the background with which readers view Torah rituals, and "the goal of transformation" provides the reason for the processes and elements used in the rituals. Thus, it is most helpfully called a "covenant transformational" approach. Therefore, this study proposes three takeaways for interpreting a ritual text:

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[351] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers,* 59.

1. Interpret a ritual text in light of cultural context
2. Interpret a ritual text in light of covenant theological worldview
3. Interpret a ritual text in light of perceived transformation for the one seeking the rite

The Proper Presentation: The Procedure

With the *proper gift* being offered at the *proper place*, now the *proper presentation* comes into focus. What was the significance of the distinction between the offeror's duties and the priest's duties?

Duties of the Offeror

Leviticus 1:5 Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of tent of meeting.

As might be expected, the LORD has made clear how the offering is to take place, with duties assigned to the two parties involved in this offering. Matthews explains, "In the presentation of the burnt offering, the layperson and the officiating priest each played vital roles. Both were essential to the success of the ritual. Their respective parts in the ritual alternated between layperson and officiating priest. There was a symbiotic harmony between (the two). The choreography began at the initiation of the worshiper."[352]

We will invert the order briefly and discuss verse 5 and its actions before looking into verse 4. This is just to show which parts clearly belong to each party before digging deeper into the meaning behind certain aspects. Verse 5 shows that the bull was killed by the worshipper, with the offeror here identifying with him as a gift. Later in the

[352] Mathews, 31.

procedure, Wenham condenses what Leviticus reports, namely that the bull will be chopped up by the worshipper and the viscera will be washed for cleanliness.[353] This was not done callously, as the procedure for ritual slaying was known throughout the Ancient Near East and was anything but capricious. Mathews writes that the term "kill" (*shachat*) is a technical term that describes a ritual slaying of an animal.[354] Wenham echoes that sentiment, writing, "The word for killing the animal is a special term usually saved for sacrificial slaughter in the OT."[355] In daily sacrifices, this *shachat* would regularly be done by priest but is here done by the worshipper on the north side of the altar. There was a designated place and a designated procedure. This was an offering that showed devotion, and care for the procedure of the *shachat* reflected that devotion.

Why was it significant that the olah offering was a male? What is symbolized by it being spotless? Leviticus 1:3 makes it clear that this was not a detail up for debate: male animals were required for the offering. This distinction had rich symbolic meaning as well as economic costliness for the offeror. Mathews clarifies:

> The significance of the male was more symbolic than the actual value. Practically, the female was more valuable since it produced milk and was essential to reproduction. The male, however, was viewed as the symbolically significant animal since it was representative of the whole herd as the chief animal and the most virile. By calling for the male animal, God demanded the best of the worshiper's herd as a token of the worshiper's all.[356]

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[353] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

[354] Mathews, 31.

[355] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 53.

[356] Mathews, 27.

The Father likewise sent his Son to be the offering for the atonement of his people. The *olah* needed to be a spotless male to not only show purity and lack of obvious signs of corruption but also to demonstrate value. Sklar explains, "Animals with a blemish would be of less economic value and thus not worthy to present to the covenant King (cf Malachi 1:8)."[357]

Olah and Bull/Lamb/ Bird...Does it Matter?

The text indicates that the offering can be from the herd, from the flock, or a bird. Is one offering more acceptable than another? Does greater monetary value lead to greater chance of acceptance? The offering would never be accepted on the merits or means of the offeror. The account of Abraham and Isaac demonstrates that the LORD himself has always provided the way[358] for the burnt offering to be accepted. Here is what is universally true for the people of Israel and their *olah* offering: it must be costly, given from one's livestock, and not wild game. The larger point is that the worshipper is bringing this act of worship and devotion with awareness of sin, with reverence to a holy God, and at cost to himself. Mathews teaches, "The layperson did not benefit from the sacrifice. It is an expression of complete surrender to the Lord, an act of total devotion. There was no holding back, no stingy parceling out of favors. It was a costly sacrifice. Worship begins with a heart devoted to God."[359] Mathews articulates this balance:

> A poor Israelite had the option of offering an inexpensive bird. The wealthy person gave a costly gift. A person could not worship 'on the cheap,' as we would say today...King David said it best: 'I will not offer

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[357] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 89.

[358] Genesis 22:8.

[359] Mathews, 26.

> burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing (2 Samuel 24;24). Every person should give and should give sacrificially to the Lord's work if there is to be true worship.[360]

If the offeror had the means to offer a bull, then that was the acceptable offering. If he did not, the LORD provided another way for all offerings to be accepted, regardless of means. The means of the offeror do not yield additional merit. Rather, Mathews contends, "God provided a system of offering that enabled all economic classes to present a gift that the Lord welcomed. What was required was the worshiper's heartfelt devotion."[361]

Heartfelt devotion is a central concept in understanding *olah.* This is no half-hearted, flippant, forgettable procedure. Let's enter the world of the text. Imagine the scene for a moment. Put yourself in the place of the offeror. You bring a prized bull to the sanctuary, enter inside the court, go to the altar, and hold the massive bull, likely having to wrestle it on certain occasions. You lean a hand upon it, identifying yourself with this offering. You then hold it still while you ritually slaughter it, thus emptying it of lifeblood as you still hold on to this muscular animal. This is a visceral activity. It is exceedingly memorable worship. The worshipper would never leave the *olah* act callous and unmoved and would never simply forget that he had done it that day. It is physical. It is symbolic. It is memorable. It is symbolic of heartfelt devotion.

The offeror is sacrificing this bull for the sake of making atonement. The bull must die because "...under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22)." Sklar illuminates, "A

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[360] Mathews, 27.

[361] Mathews, 27.

basic purpose of [the hand-leaning] rite was to establish some sort of relationship between the offeror and the animal, so that the animal would be accepted *on* the offeror's behalf. This relationship would result in the benefits of the sacrifice -- such as *atonement* -- being credited to the offeror."[362] Morales claims that the ritual slaughter (*shachat*) act also "demonstrates a willingness to die to oneself, along with an acknowledgement and submission to the judgment of God...accepting its judgment and being delivered through it. In a sense that will not be fleshed out until the ascension of Christ, yet no less legitimate here: God must be approached through death."[363]

Flaying the Offering

Leviticus 1:6 Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,

The worshipper was also responsible for flaying the animal, including skinning and quartering it. Balentine notes the careful ordering and placement of the items (meat quarters, head, suet, entrails and legs) on the altar shows special attention.[364] Mary Douglas suggests that the body parts have been stacked in a hierarchy that corresponds to hierarchical gradations of holiness in the tabernacle.[365] Reflecting on this whole process, Balentine points out, "At the apex of the burnt offering, the place where the sacrifice begins the last step in the ascent to God, the priest places the most holy part of the

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[362] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 90.

[363] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 129.

[364] Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 24.

[365] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 66-86.

animal's anatomy: the entrails, the innermost being of the body, the place from which life itself -- human being or animal -- is generated."[366]

What is Symbolized by the Leaning Hand?

Leviticus 1:4 He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

Now we can look back to verse 4, and pay special attention to an action loaded with symbolism and meaning, both for the ancient Israelite and for the believer in Christ. In other words, it is not only meaningful now upon biblical theological reflection; it was deeply significant to the Israelite offeror. More descriptive than simply stating that the bull was held, Leviticus 1 teaches that the offeror would lay his hand upon the animal. Wenham recognizes that, "'Lay' is perhaps a weak translation of the Hebrew (*samak*); 'press' might be preferable. The worshipper was not just to touch the animal; he was to lean on it. This action forms part of many sacrifices. Here its importance is specially emphasized by the context. It is the imposition of the man's hands that make the sacrifice acceptable as an atonement (vv. 3 and 4)."[367] This was no incidental action. It was intentional and methodical. Lauded nineteenth century German scholar C.F. Keil emphasized that it was "a forcible pressure of the hand upon the head of the victim."[368] Holding the bull while at the same time placing pressure upon his head, the worshipper was aware of far more important meaning than might be immediately apparent. Wenham suggests, "It was at this point that the worshipper said his prayer...this is an important

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[366] Balentine, 25.

[367] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 61.

[368] Keil, 282.

theological principle. Sacrifice without prayer is useless. All a man's powers must be active in worship, heart and mouth as well as hands and feet. Mere ceremonial or church attendance is inadequate by itself. They must be accompanied by heartfelt prayer and praise."[369]

One of Doriani's seven "sources" for application was "biblical images and symbols." Clearly the symbolism is a tactile, visceral action, something much deeper the action itself. Keil contends that (the leaning of the hand) is a "symbol of the transfer of the feelings and intentions by which the offeror was actuated in presenting his sacrifice, whereby he set apart the animal as a sacrifice, representing his own person in one particular aspect."[370] This spotless bull from the herd is now no longer like the rest of the herd. He is now representative, and this sacrifice is a symbol of what is expected in terms of transformation and exchange in this atonement ritual. Keil continues:

> Now so far as the burnt-offering expressed the intention of the offeror to consecrate his life and labour to the Lord, and his desire to obtain the expiation of the sin which still cling to all his works and desires, in order that they might be well pleasing to God, he transferred the consciousness of his sinfulness to the victim by the laying on of hands, even in the case of the burnt-offering. But this was not all: he also transferred the desire to walk before God in holiness and righteousness, which he could not do without God. This, and no more than this, is contained in the words, “that it may be well-pleasing to him, to make atonement for him."[371]

Since first reading about this offering and giving it thoughtful investigation many years ago, it remains one of the most powerful images in scripture, one that Paul repurposed as "living sacrifices" in Romans 12:1. The sinner should have to die. The

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[369] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 61.

[370] Keil, 283.

[371] Keil, 283-284.

sacrifice would rightly be his own life. His slaughter and lifeblood. But, because of the work of Christ on his behalf, he gets to live. He is thus called to be a living sacrifice, offering himself wholly to the worship and mission of YHWH. Pastorally, the *olah* offering with its visceral worship is highly instructive for the worshipper tempted to complain about tertiary issues within their weekly worship context.

We noted in chapter 4 that Vos taught that revelation is *progressive* in that the ultimate message grows clearer over time. Vos wrote, "The progressive process is *organic*: revelation may be in seed form which yields later full growth accounting for diversity but not true difference because the earlier aspects of truth are indispensable for understanding the true meanings of the later forms and vice versa."[372] That which is later seen in full bloom was always present in seed form. Wenham explains, "The laying of hands may indicate that the animal is taking the place of the worshipper. The worshipper is offering himself to God through the sacrificial victim. The plain implication is that, in some metaphysical sense, the victim is a vicarious substitution for the donor himself."[373] Upon reflection on the full bloom of gospel revelation, it can now be seen that the leaning hand in Leviticus 1, identifying sin with the sacrifice, and imputing sins upon the sacrifice, is pointing toward the imputation of the people's sins upon the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

The sin will be transferred to the animal to be sacrificed. With the reminder of Vos' teaching on Progressive Revelation in mind, we can look back on this element of the ritual in light of what Christ has done with our sins and find rich meaning here. Christ

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[372] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2003), 7.

[373] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 62.

fulfills all that the OT rituals anticipated and shadowed. There is a transfer of sin to the animal.[374] In Leviticus 1, the sins of the offeror are "imputed" on to the animal to be sacrificed.

The Epistle to the Hebrews provides a systematic discourse on the superiority of Christ to the priesthood and the entire sacrificial system. The system offered signs and shadows of Christ as gifts from God foreshadowing his redemptive purposes and Christ's substitutionary atonement. Chapell advises, "No aspect of revelation can be fully understood or explained in isolation from God's redeeming work that culminates in Christ's ministry."[375]

Even though the worshipper had more acts still to perform, Bonar captures the theological perspective of the worshipper well, stating, "When the worshipper had thus simply left his sins, conveyed by the laying on of his hand, upon the sacrifice, he stands aside. This is all his part. The treatment of the victim is the Lord's part...Faith in the Lord's testimony was the ground of an Israelite's peace of conscience, nothing of it rested on his own frame of mind, character, or conduct."[376]

Duties of the Priest

Leviticus 1:5 Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of tent of meeting.
1:6 Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,

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[374] In the atoning work of Christ, there is a transfer of sin onto the atonement Lamb of God and there is also a transfer of holiness to the sinner, what Luther referred to as "The Great Exchange" and the soteriological term, "double imputation." Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner. Thus, in double imputation, the sacrifice of the great Lamb of God is all the more greater than that of an animal in Leviticus 1.

[375] Chapell, 257.

[376] Bonar, 15.

1:7 and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.
1:8 And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar;
1:9 but its entrails ad its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

The roles for priest and worshipper are carefully defined in the laws dealing with cattle and sheep. Each has several tasks within this rite. But they are definitively separated.[377] Ritual purity laws are the reason for this division of duties. Wenham reports, "The law is concerned that the clean and the holy priest be kept from pollution. Therefore, the worshipper must undertake the messier tasks associated with sacrifice."[378]

For the priest, there are ritual actions to do. Though we are not explicitly told in the text, Wenham finds it is reasonable to suggest that the priest would have said something to assure the worshipper that his sacrifice was accepted (1:4).[379] Having witnessed the leaning hand and the *shachat*, the priest will now deal with the blood of the slain bull. Longman asserts, "Anything having to do with the blood and the altar was the responsibility of the priest."[380] Lifeblood being vital in the making of atonement, the handling of the blood for atonement would of necessity fall into the ritual duties of the priest, serving as a mediator. The prescribed procedure for the blood is made clear in Leviticus 1:5, rendered "throwing" the blood in ESV. Wenham finds a different term more accurate and reports, "The priest would splash the blood against the sides of the

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[377] Duties associated with the altar are clearly the role of the priest. There is debate whether some of the other actions (the flaying, for example) were performed by the offeror or by Levites or by another priest. However, only priests can do things at the altar itself.

[378] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

[379] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 53.

[380] Longman, *Immanuel*, 80.

altar, not on top of it."[381] Likewise, Sklar clarifies, "The priests would take the *blood* -- perhaps collecting it in a bowl (Exodus 24:6-8; 27:3)- and *splash* it on the altar. The verb *splash (zaraq)* appears to refer to large amounts of liquid being 'thrown,' compared with smaller amounts of liquid that were 'sprinkled' (*naza*)."[382] This spilt, collected, and splashed blood, both plentiful in portion and potent in its vitality for life, is a robust symbol of the life that has been spilled over sin, the power of blood for forgiveness and reconciliation, and the provision by which YHWH welcomes sinners to approach his holy presence.

The offeror would then flay the *olah*, and it was cut it into pieces (1:6) before the priest placed fire on the altar and arranged the wood pieces (1:7). The priest would arrange the pieces, and the head and the fat on the altar's firewood (1:8). Finally, the priest burned up the sacrifice on the altar as the *olah* offering required burning everything, apart from the skin,[383] on the altar (1:9).

As we have seen meaning in the ritual actions of the priest, let's observe that there is great purpose in the division of the roles. Expiation deals with the sinner's guilt that needs to be extinguished. The sinner cannot do this without a mediator. As the *olah* is an offering that makes atonement for the offeror, a mediator plays a pivotal role in expiation. Keil explains, "The expiation was always made or completed by the priest, as the sanctified mediator between Jehovah and the people, or, previous to the institution of the

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[381] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

[382] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 91.

[383] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

Aaronic priesthood, by Moses, the chosen mediator of the covenant."[384] Keil further explains that a mediator "intervenes between the holy God and sinful man, and by means of expiation averts the wrath of God from the sinner and brings the grace of God to bear upon him."[385] While ritual purity laws certainly explained the division of roles between offeror and priest, we must continue our observation beyond those laws to see that mediation is accomplished on behalf of another's atonement. The preacher is thus given rich material for preaching the gospel from the duties of the priest. Leviticus 1:1-9 is filled with gospel shadows and meaning, and a thoughtful reflection on the meaning of the duties of the priest could provide sermonic fodder for weeks. Bonar contends, "Anyone (2 Chronicles XXX. 17) might kill the animal -- any common Levite, or even the offeror himself -- for there may be many executioners of God's wrath...But there is only one appointed way of dispensing mercy; and therefore only priests must engage in the act that signified the bestowal of pardon."[386] The "dispenser of mercy" is not a commonly used descriptor for Jesus' work as High Priest, Mediator, and Messiah, but perhaps it should be!

A Bloody Ritual

Leviticus 1:6) Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,
1:7) and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.
1:8) And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar,

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[384] Keil, 284.

[385] Keil, 284.

[386] Bonar, 16.

1:9) but its entrails ad its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Were the pieces separated (butchered) by the worshipper or by the priest? It is not entirely clear,[387] but as the butchering of the bull is an intricate exercise of some skill and expertise, Sklar suggests that it would not be surprising if it were performed by the priest or by another Levite.[388] Wenham contends that this procedure was done by the worshipper,[389] with the priest burning the parts upon the altar after they had been brought to him by the worshipper.[390] Regardless of who did the butchering, the offeror personally ensured that the hind legs and the entrails were washed to remove impurity, and then presented to the priest.[391] Hermeneutically, all of this is quite foreign to the experience of the modern evangelical worshipper, and presents a challenge for discerning practicable concepts and finding situational application.

Sprinkling the Blood

A preacher may ask, “This is a bloody ritual. It seems quite out of place today. What was the necessity and significance of all of this blood? Why was it so visceral and gruesome?" The sacrificial system in Leviticus, and the sprinkling of blood specifically, was a provisional system, pointing the people of God toward the greater substitute that was to come. This substitute would be the fulfillment of all that the old covenant and

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[387] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 92.

[388] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 92, cf. Ezekiel 44:11.

[389] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

[390] Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54.

[391] Leviticus 1:9.

Levitical worship was picturing and foreshadowing. Kruger maintains, "The old-covenant infrastructure was inadequate and temporary and would soon be replaced by a 'better' covenant (Hebrews 7:22). This doesn't mean...that the old covenant was sinful or wrong. No, it was simply provisional, pointing forward to the One who would ultimately achieve redemption for us: Jesus Christ."[392] Thus, the sprinkling of the blood represented the spilt lifeblood that provides the basis for the making of atonement. Sklar illumines this further meaning in the blood, stating, "(In Leviticus 17:11, the Lord) states the main purpose of sacrificial blood: 'And I myself have given (the blood) to you *on the altar* to atone for your lives...' Thus, in placing the blood 'on the altar' the priest presents the animal's lifeblood to the Lord, accomplishing atonement for the offeror."[393] It needed to be bloody because blood contains the vitality of life.

Keil notes that blood was "swung all round against the walls of the altar."[394] Outside the tent of meeting, at the altar, with the priest, the offeror sees the lifeblood of a substitute that brings atonement. YHWH gave this to Israel as a gift, for their reconciled relationship in the present, and to demonstrate how humanity would be saved through the lifeblood of the Messiah. Morales explains:

> Having traced the overall logic of the sacrificial system in a general manner, we see that the Israelite journey was a cultic journey into YHWH's heavenly abode; a journey that entailed the blood atonement and the fires of consecration, but one that also led to joyous communion and fellowship with God -- beatitude. This is the way YHWH has opened for

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[392] Michael J. Kruger, *Hebrews for You* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2021), 101.

[393] *Sklar, Leviticus, Tyndale, 91.*

[394] Keil, 272.

> humanity to dwell in his Presence; that is the journey of redemptive history.[395]

Though the curtains and the veil still separate and provide boundaries, the LORD has opened a way. And he will ultimately provide the ultimate and better sacrifice through the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life." The blood is significant, it provides rich meaning and is symbolic of a much deeper truth, and thus it was handled with care. Bailey reports, "The disposal of the blood reflects the idea that it is the location of the vital force that distinguished life from death. As such, it must be treated with awesome respect and placed on the altar in acknowledgement that 'life' comes ultimately and only from God. Leviticus will later specify that unless sacrificial blood is treated properly the sacrificer is guilty of murder."[396] The profound meaning of the blood was not lost on offeror or on the priest. This is no superficial gift. This is no careless engagement at the tabernacle. This is not casual faith practice. Seemingly overcome by the power and glory of what is taking place, Bonar practically sings these words, "The priest *'brings forward the blood*.' As he bears it onward, in one of the bowls on the altar, all gaze upon the warm crimson blood! *It is the life*! So that when the blood is thus brought forward, the *life* of the sacrifice is brought to God! It is as if the living soul of the sinner were carried, in its utter helplessness and in all its filthiness, and laid down before the Holy One!"[397]

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[395] Morales, 141.

[396] Bailey, 48.

[397] Bonar, 16.

Olah and the Five Offerings

Scholars agree that the *olah* is the costliest sacrifice, as it had to be burned up completely on the altar. There was no food portion taken; it was complete sacrifice, representing total devotion. Sklar comments, "Unlike grain, purification and reparation offerings (of which the priest ate), and unlike fellowship offerings (of which the priest and the offeror ate), no one ate any of the burnt offering: it was all given to the Lord."[398] Old Testament scholar Frank H. Gorman, looking at the five offerings, summarizes that all five sacrifices share these features: they were offered at the tent of meeting; they have a common structure; all sacrificial animals must be domestic animals, and spotless.[399] Thus, there are similarities common to all the offerings, even as there are a few distinctions. Scholars agree that the *olah* is the most important, and that is likely why it is prescribed first.

Frequency

The *olah* offering was in effect always being offered because it was offered daily in the morning and evening, thus representing the fullness of each day. Bailey notes that, along with grain and fellowship offerings, these sacrifices were made when the worshippers found it appropriate, rather than mandated by calendar or situation.[400] However, Numbers 28:1-6 makes clear that the *olah* offering itself took place every day, morning and evening.

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[398] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale,* 94.

[399] Frank H. Gorman, "Sacrifices and Offerings", *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 5 S-Z,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 22.

[400] Bailey, 43.

While it is beautifully symbolic of the total devotion of the people to their covenant LORD that the fires were burning morning and evening, this perpetual offering of sacrifices is no longer necessary because of the substitutionary atoning work of Christ. Hebrews 7:26-27 states, "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself."

Preaching Christ in Leviticus 1

We will be wise to take the task of bridging the gap seriously, and to remind our congregants of Pratt's phrasing, that we are overhearing words spoken to another audience. They are true for us, but we are foolish and presumptuous to remove them from their original context. So, we will seek to take the distant and make it relevant. As we do so, let's be reminded that Chapell advises, "There are many 'be' messages in scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior. 'Be' messages are not wrong *in* themselves; they are wrong *by* themselves."[401]

Keller teaches that when the preacher helps the listeners see Christ in the passage, and inverts the order of the sermon, it puts the resources for obedience in what Christ has done and in the Holy Spirit, enabling believers with those resources through their union

[401] Chapell, 281.

with Christ. Keller proposes this movement through the text, to which we can add *our own talking points* from this Leviticus 1 text:

> Intro[402]: What the problem is; our contemporary cultural context: here's what we face
>
> *the need for atonement*
>
> Early: What the Bible says; the original readers' cultural context: here's what we must do
>
> *exemplify total devotion*
>
> Middle: What prevents us; current listeners' inward heart context: why we can't do it
>
> *selfish interests, desire for self-rule*[403]
>
> Later: How Jesus fulfills the biblical theme and solve the heart issue: how Jesus did it
>
> *Phil 2:6- 11 Despite equality with God, Jesus emptied himself*
>
> Apply: How through faith in Jesus you should live now.[404]
>
> *offer ourselves as living sacrifices*

The Fallen Condition Focus shows the church today that the Israelites were expected to exemplify total devotion and so should we. However, our desire for self-rule will keep us from total obedience as it did Israel. Thus, the expectations are the same, and the sin problem is the same. And, Jesus shows how it is fulfilled and exemplified in his life and death for his people. In total devotion to His Heavenly Father, Jesus offered himself as a

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[402] Keller doesn't specifically call it "FCF" in this quote, but that is the contextual meaning in his larger passage, and this study will propose this outline with a combined Intro and FCF.

[403] While Keller focuses on the current context, it would be important to begin with a discussion of this spiritual reality in the ancient context, and how an Israelite would understand/struggle against this challenge to devotion due to their own sin. The *olah* offering was their way of repenting of that sinfulness.

[404] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 231.

sacrifice, and we live as living sacrifices. Christ has shown us what this total devotion looks like, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to obedience as we are in union with Christ.

Preachers, now fully equipped to handle what is encountered in Leviticus 1, we find an assortment of sermon-ready themes to be exposited and applied:

Offering, Lifeblood, and Atonement

The implications of Leviticus 1 in their fulfillment in Christ offer the single most life-changing truth to a dying world. And the meaning can all be found here in Leviticus 1.

Over 1440 years before Jesus came in the flesh to reconcile humanity to God by the offering of his own lifeblood, these words were given to Israel. Sklar explains, “Lev 17:11 identifies a general theological principle that applies to the atoning sacrifices: the lifeblood of the sacrificial animal atones for the life of the offeror.”[405] This significant Leviticus text, though occurring later in the book, describes what Israel believed about the offering being efficacious for atonement. We know this because Sklar later clarifies that in Lev 17:11 (*kipper*) refers to atonement in the sense of 'ransom'... (and) "applies to all atoning sacrifices, namely the purification, guilt, and burnt offerings."[406] The life-containing blood of the substitute both ransoms and purifies.[407] Summing up a valuable and beautiful topic over which dozens of volumes have been written, Sklar skillfully details the dual aspects of this work with the following precision:

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[405] Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005*)*, 181.

[406] Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, 181.

[407] Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions,* 182.

> The animal was accepted by the Lord to *make atonement* for the offeror. The verb t*o make atonement (kipper)* has been much discussed. In general, it communicates two ideas: ransoming and purifying. On the one hand, sin or impurity puts the offeror at risk of the Lord's judgment. As a result, the offeror needs ransoming. On the other hand, sin and impurity are defiling. As a result, the offeror also needs purifying. The verb *kipper* refers to both of these: it is 'ransom purification', taking place by means of the animal's lifeblood. At times the emphasis might be more on ransoming, and at other times on purifying (just as Jesus' death is at times described as 'ransoming' sinners and at other times 'purifying' them; cf Matt 20:28; Titus 2:14).[408]

Kipper carries with it the positive sense of ransom and acceptance. Sklar explains:

> The positive sense of (*kipper* is) a legally or ethically legitimate payment which delivers a guilty party from a just punishment that is the right of the offended party to execute or have executed. The acceptance of this payment is entirely dependent upon of the choice of the offended party, it is a lesser payment than was originally expected, and its acceptance serves both to rescue the life of the guilty as well as to appease the offended party, thus restoring peace to the relationship.[409]

In view of the larger biblical story, we can say that Christ is himself the sacrificial payment; that he was offered as a substitute not by the offending guilty party but by the One offended, and that the LORD graciously accepted the payment in lifeblood that the fully man Son of God offered as a representative of mankind.[410] If there is a more compact expression of the manifest love and grace and sovereignty and mercy of the Triune God, I have never heard it. It took my breath away when I first heard it in the classroom. I was stunned, in awe and gratitude of the LORD's love for his people.

The sacrifice was prescribed and it needed to be carried out to make atonement. Jesus would perfectly and ultimately enact this sacrifice for the sake of fallen man. Shepherd writes, "God called to the Israelites and gave them instructions about sacrifices.

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[408] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 90.

[409] Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement,* 78.

[410] Jay Sklar, Class Lecture, "Pentateuch", Covenant Theological Seminary, September 24, 2009.

Jesus is the one who ultimately heard that call and determined to offer himself as the full and final sacrifice. And it is by that determination, by his sacrifice on the cross, and by the will of the Father that we have been saved, made holy, and have been granted life in God's presence- forever."[411]

Preachers are given verse after verse, image after image, and opportunity after opportunity to preach soteriological truths in the text of Leviticus 1. They simply must enter the tabernacle structure, so to speak, and see what the *olah* means for today. Imagery-rich and meaning-laden, Mathews extols the salvific-symbolic power of the altar for the Israelite:

> The altar signaled sorrow by virtue of its identity as the place of death. The burnt offering was the regular daily offering, offered each morning and at twilight (Exodus 29: 39, 42). The animal smoldered on the altar all night (Leviticus 6:9). Yet, the altar was also a place of great joy, for sacrifice characterized festivals of celebration (Numbers 10:10) ...Like the cross of Jesus Christ, the altar had the dual effects of repelling and attracting the worshiper (2 Corinthians 2:16,17). The altar was a perpetual reminder of human sin but also a provision of divine grace that resulted in the joy of receiving forgiveness (Psalm 32: 1,2).[412]

Shepherd explains, "In Ephesians 5:2, Paul tells us that Christ 'loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God.' While we understand that Jesus did this to rescue us from our sins, it is equally important to recognize that this is also something Jesus did for God his Father. His sacrifice, just like the (*olah*), is a fragrant offering...an aroma pleasing to God."[413]

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[411] Shepherd, 45.

[412] Mathews, 30.

[413] Shepherd, 44.

Dual Goals of Blessing

Israel is a people loved by their covenant LORD and King. He has called them to himself to worship him, and in so doing, has redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. This covenantal relationship will be a blessing to them eternally henceforth. And it is a blessing to be reciprocated by their outward manifestation of that love in their relations to their neighbor, both within the camp and beyond. Sklar emphasizes, "In both (their centripetal and centrifugal calling), the goal was relational: to guide the Israelites in their relationship with their covenant King, as well as with those who live in this world. As Jesus would later affirm, the Lord's laws always have this dual goal in mind."[414]

Israel is called to live separate from the nations, to be holy, and wholly devoted to the LORD. And they are to do so in order that they may grow in maturity and in faithful practice of God-honoring worship so that the surrounding nations may see their God, see their holy laws, and thus desire to serve and love such a great God. Their holiness to the LORD will cause surrounding peoples to also want this relationship to this holy God. Alexander writes, "To be holy is to live in a way that reflects the moral perfection of God; it is to live a life marked by love, purity, and righteousness, which are the three most important hallmarks of perfect behavior."[415] This is at the heart of the mission of the church. No dichotomy needs to exist between honoring the LORD and engaging the cultural idols to demonstrate love of neighbor. God has provided a way for both to be demonstrated in the lives of his people. That is our mission.

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[414] Sklar, *Leviticus, Tyndale*, 87.

[415] Alexander, 244.

Total Devotion

This one is simple and needs not be overstated. The *olah* was costly, and it was a total sacrifice. The kind of distracted "Sunday going through the motions ritual" that takes place in many churches is irreconcilable with Leviticus 1. Total devotion is called for. Total devotion is what God demands. Total devotion is seen by our covenant LORD.

Vasholz reminds us, "Total devotion does not go unrewarded. And it is reasonable to conclude that a never-ending fire to consume a complete burnt offering thoroughly on the altar symbolizes a never-ending attachment to God."[416] Our worship is not reserved for one day, and certainly not a distracted day for church attendees looking to get on with their "Sunday Fun-day" activities. The Sabbath is to be kept holy. And our worship is not restricted to the Sabbath alone. *Olah* offerings happened daily. Wholly devoted worship is to be continual. Israel was always aware of this reality as the perpetual *olah* smoke ascended. Motyer illumines, "…onwards from Sinai, the people do actually live with the burning fire at the heart of their community (Leviticus 6:8-13)."[417]

Christ Our Tabernacle

Finally, and briefly, the LORD does live among his people even now. Christ lives in the hearts of his people, and God is omnipresent in the cosmos-wide creation. The living tabernacle presently tabernacles among us. Alexander delineates:

> The New Testament draws a close parallel between Jesus and the tabernacle/temple. In Jesus, God is viewed as inhabiting human flesh, just as he previously inhabited first the tabernacle and then the temple. John alludes to this when he writes, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (literally 'tabernacled') among us. We have seen his glory...'

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[416] Vasholz, 32.

[417] Motyer, 49.

> (John 1:14) ... A significant transition takes place as God moves from dwelling within the Jerusalem temple to living with the post-Pentecost followers of Jesus.[418]

Christ lives in and serves from the eternal tabernacle as High Priest, and he tabernacles among us as the abiding, dwelling "God with us", Emmanuel. Alexander notes, "Jesus was viewed as entering the heavenly sanctuary, rather than the earthly sanctuary, to serve as a high priest."[419] Though atonement has been made once for all, this High Priest will never stop mediating from the heavenly sanctuary.

Crossing the Jordan: Truth Treasures for the Head, Heart, and Hands

We now walk onward from Leviticus 1, having been given treasure to carry with us as we walk together with Christ and with the body of Christ on this journey to the Promised Land. These treasures are to be reflected upon and allowed to transform hearts. They are to be applied to life together in Christ, and preachers should hold them forth to their congregants.

Come Boldly to the Throne of Grace

The means by which those who are unclean can be made clean and holy has taken place once for all time in Christ Jesus. Therefore, the boundaries have been removed. The curtain was torn from top to bottom[420] and Christians have free access to reconciled

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[418] Alexander, 235.

[419] Alexander, 236.

[420] Mark 15:38.

relationship with the King. Hebrews 4:14-16 thus exhorts believers to come boldly to the throne of grace.

Lay Down Sins at the Foot of the Cross

Colossians 2:13-14 notes that the record of death that stands against God's people is nailed to the cross. They must not "sneak back up and take it off of the nail" and continue to carry it around. "Once for all time" has the power to transform hearts away from shame over sin. Jesus is the High Priest, the Lamb of God, and the Mediator, and praise be to God, the giving of the perfect offering is finished. It has been accomplished. It does not need to be repeated. We can lay our sins and impurity and uncleanness down and stand on the solid rock that is Christ, covered in his pure and holy robes, and fully reconciled to the LORD.

Receive the Free Gift of Grace through the Atonement of Christ

Grace that saves is a free gift. A *qorban* from YHWH has been offered freely but at great cost. He didn't give it to us in exchange for anything. Double imputation means that the work was fully accomplished in Christ and imputed to all who believe. His merit earns their forgiveness. Their sin is imputed to and fully punished upon him. Thus, the gift of our salvation doesn't come from the gift that we bring, but it comes from the gift that Christ gave in his lifeblood when he offered himself for us. Take hold of this gift and know that the LORD will not allow it to be taken away.

Be Transformed by This Reconciled Relationship with God

It would not have been possible for the worshipper to go to the tabernacle to worship; to bring a costly bull for an offering; to hold the bull; to ritually slaughter the bull, spilling its blood; to watch his blood thrown at the altar; and then to walk away un-phased by that experience. It could never simply be on the list of things that the worshipper did that day. It's transformative. Transformation takes place at the metanarrative level in that this atonement foreshadows the once for all time atonement made for us in Christ. The transformation also happened in the worshiper, his faith was renewed again, and he walked away with assurance that he had been pardoned.

Offer Yourself as a Living Sacrifice

Life, life, eternal life! What other response can we have to our reflection upon this text? A sacrifice is called for, to be freely offered, and I am indeed called to die to myself, in terms of my autonomy and self- interest, yet I get to live. Live eternally. As we read in I Corinthians 6, "I am not my own, for I have been bought with a price." But Christ is my life,[421] and so I live as a living sacrifice to honor him, and to spread everywhere the fragrance of eternal life offered in the free gift of the gospel.

[421] Colossians 3:1.

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