

# EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD: THE TEMPLE PROGRAM OF LEVITICUS

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This paper explores the idea of seeing the book of Leviticus as an archetypal temple template which sets forth the “program” of the temple through which the presence of the Lord may be encountered, sensed, and experienced. Expressed in the voice of the Lord, who speaks no fewer than on twenty-nine occasions in Leviticus,<sup>1</sup> Leviticus is a “programme” in the sense of the British meanings of this word.<sup>2</sup> Although not the most popular book in the Bible, Leviticus should be near the top of the list of favorites among readers interested in temple studies.

On previous occasions, I have offered a definition of what can be considered a “temple text.”<sup>3</sup> In brief, a text can be seen as a temple text if it is obviously connected with the temple or with temple functions. Some texts, such as the Book of Exodus, are temple texts, as they comprise the historical, theological, or covenantal underpinnings of the ceremonies, symbols, and purposes behind the construction and ceremonies of the temple. In other cases, the connections between a text and the temple may be more veiled, so to speak. Any number of clues may signal to readers that a text has temple connections. These clues include background contexts, coded vocabulary, or holy pronouncements, but most indicative of all are references to encounters with the divine presence. Everything about the temple served to heighten temple visitors’ senses and sensitivities in order to enhance their ability to discern the presence of God. As temple texts and patterns have been identified recently in a variety of biblical texts,<sup>4</sup> one may well ask if these various manifestations of temple texts can be related back to a foundational source that one may look to for an explanation of these recurring patterns. Among other results, this paper will offer reasons to agree that the book of Leviticus can be seen as a masterplan that stands, to one degree or another, behind all temple texts in the biblical tradition.

While it may be difficult to speak with certainty about the connection between the temple and many biblical texts, such is not the case with the book of Leviticus. If any book is a temple text, this book is it. My purpose

is to show how the structure of Leviticus sets a primary pattern that can be recognized as an archetype of temple texts, based particularly on the temple floor plan, temple architecture, and temple ritual. Just as the floor plan of the temple leads the sacerdotal functionaries on an ascending path ending in the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, the text of the book of Leviticus escorts the reader closer and closer on a course of ascent into the divine presence, particularly into an auditory experience hearing and receiving the word of the Lord. My path in this regard follows and adds to the work of Mary Douglas.<sup>5</sup>

After briefly pointing to the central position of the book of Leviticus in the Pentateuch and after mentioning the views of those who have read Leviticus as a consciously closed literary unit, I draw attention to the salient features found in the step-by-step thematic order of the materials presented in the book of Leviticus. These themes include sacrifice, obedience, priesthood, penalties, perpetual fire of the Lord, guidance, presence, the avoidance of unholy or impure practices in daily life, the expulsion of evil, atonement to purify the sanctuary and the people, the extension of the concept of holiness to sexual purity and chastity, the promulgation of ethical duties, the consecration of all land and property to God, and his extension of the eternal covenant made with Abraham to all people who embrace the order of righteousness set forth in Leviticus. Here again strengthening and building upon the suggestions of Mary Douglas,<sup>6</sup> I reinforce and multiply the number of relationships that exist between the floor plan of the tabernacle and the sequence of materials presented in the book of Leviticus, particularly in the crucially culminating chapter of Leviticus 26, about which Douglas said very little. Finally, the depiction of the floor plan of the Jerusalem Temple in the elaborate mosaic in the priestly synagogue at Sepphoris will corroborate this floor-plan-based temple studies reading of Leviticus.

### **Reading Leviticus**

In 1995, a conference was held at Lancaster University entitled “Reading Leviticus,” and its publication was subtitled “A Conversation with Mary Douglas.” Although this conference occurred after the publication by Jacob Milgrom of the first volume of his 1991 magnum opus on Leviticus, it came well before the appearance of his second volume in 2001 and his third and final volume even later.<sup>7</sup> Glancing at the prevailing conditions in 1995, the introduction to the published proceedings of the Lancaster conference lamented:

A conference entirely devoted to Leviticus is a fairly rare occurrence. We had a few surprised and somewhat skeptical reactions to the very idea. One reason for this is, of course, that among the books of the Hebrew Bible, Leviticus has had a particularly bad press. Ritual texts, legal texts, and, for that matter, priests, are red rags to a good many Christian bulls, especially Protestant ones. But things are changing. A daily newspaper here recently had an article with the title, “The Revolutionary Moral Insights of Leviticus.” In it, Haim Maccoby exposed the ignorance and amateurishness that fuel that kind of prejudice, and his rehabilitation of the book continues in this volume. Graeme Auld’s unashamedly tendentious title, “Leviticus at the Heart of the Pentateuch?” shows he has something similar on his agenda.

Of course there may be other reasons why conferences on Leviticus are rare events, literary reasons for example. One of these is discussed by Rolf Rendtorff and Kathryn Gutzwiller, who tackle the question of the possibility of reading it as a separate book at all. Maybe it can be read only in the context of some larger literary structure. Jacob Milgrom’s paper on the redactional role of the Holiness School and John Rogerson’s response to it focus on another literary problem that has prevented people over the years from looking at Leviticus as a literary work in its own right. Maybe it is not a unity but is composed of several sources, each part of a larger literary unit.

Probably the most unusual feature of this colloquium, however, was its interdisciplinary approach. Not all participants are full-time biblical scholars: there are strong contingents of anthropologists and lawyers here, too — and surely that is how it should be.<sup>8</sup>

Even after that extraordinary conference, now twenty years ago, and after Milgrom’s remarkably exhaustive commentary, Leviticus still deserves more attention.

For example, since the 1970s when Yehuda Radday sent me the draft of his chapter “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative” for inclusion in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, I found myself convinced that Leviticus is the pinnacle, the central book of the Pentateuch. Its importance is clearly perceptible. In that chapter, Radday argues persuasively that Genesis and Deuteronomy form a flanking pair; Exodus and Numbers are an inner pair; and Leviticus stands at the apex of the Pentateuch, forming an ABCBA chiasm:

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

As Radday stated, Leviticus “is the central book in the Pentateuch and contains the Priestly Code of law, cult, and ritual purity to the exclusion of all narrative. It occupies the central position in the Torah, where, whether or not the modern reader likes it, the commandments occupy the ultimate position of preeminence.”<sup>9</sup> Others have observed this idea.<sup>10</sup> As for the claims that Leviticus is not a book and should not be read as a book, the arguments in favor of seeing Leviticus as an enclosed literary composition — with a distinct beginning and a corresponding conclusion — seem clearly to have carried the day.

Corroboration of the intentionality of this chiastic centering of Leviticus comes from the numerous subsections in Leviticus that are undeniably and expertly a chiastic structure. These can be seen most readily in the many instances displayed by Jacob Milgrom throughout his three-volume magnum opus on Leviticus, including 11:24–28; 11:43–44; 14:11–20; 14:21–32; 15:1–33; 17:13–14; 19:1–37; 22:2–16; 23:2–4; 24:13–23; 25:1–2; 25:14–17; 26:3–13.<sup>11</sup> The presence in Leviticus of extensive literary structures such as these is consistent with the observation that other forms of structural organization also can be legitimately perceived in the composition of that book.

Furthermore, the centrality of Leviticus in the Pentateuch can be tested by asking, “Where else might Leviticus have been positioned?” It could have made sense to position it after Deuteronomy instead of between Exodus and Numbers, or placing it after Numbers; interrupting the Sinai narrative the way Leviticus does makes little sense from a narratological point of view. But the central position of Leviticus makes sense because the covenant introduced in Exodus is then ritualized in Leviticus, so Leviticus can easily take its place right after Exodus. And Numbers, which begins by numbering the people — not just for population purposes but to record the names of all those who had entered into the covenant — assumes that the covenant has been consummated. Repeatedly ritualizing the essence of the covenant, Leviticus thus takes a natural, central place in the Pentateuch.

Some commentators, however, have seen this book as a chaotic, eclectic, and a random accretion of miscellaneous provisions dealing more or less directly with the regulation of activities associated with

the tabernacle or temple. Commentators often express frustration in trying to understand any logic behind the way in which the textual pieces in Leviticus have been assembled. Higher critics have spent enormous efforts trying to identify the literary sources from which these segments have been drawn, although the simple fact that they seem to have come from different literary hands or ideologically driven groups has little cohesion from such dissections. But wherever its pieces have come from, someone has put the pieces together, and that assemblage is not unprincipled. Seeing the book of Leviticus more synthetically and holistically, however, yields important insights brought to mind and validated by the sensitivities afforded by temple studies. Actually, the structure of the book of Leviticus is relatively straightforward. The text is divided into clearly identifiable blocks, both at the level of operational instructions and at the level of thematic groupings of those operational rules and regulations.

Understanding the temple as an institution of ritual ascent, of progression from outer to inner courts, from lower entrance requirements to the culmination of more sacred principles and blessings takes the book of Leviticus out of the realm of sterile, functional minutiae into the expansive domains of spiritual growth. This growth can be viewed as progression from a worldly human beginning to a face-to-face look at the celestial realm.

The book of Leviticus is not just about Levites and their ordinances, although parts of the book clearly deal with the consecration of priests (8:1–36) and the instruction of priests (21:1–22:33). Although the book of Leviticus goes by this name in the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew word for Leviticus is the first word that appears in its Hebrew text, namely *weiqirah*, “and he called” (1:1). This refers to God calling Moses, but it can also refer to God calling any person, inaugurating into the path of holiness not only Moses, the high priest, and priests but also every member of the House of Israel. Although individual members do not pass through all the portals and veils of the temple into the Holy of Holies, ordinary people were aware of what was transpiring in each part of the Israelite temple and of how these ordinances were performed by priests vicariously in their behalf.

### **Looking for the Presence of the Lord**

The overriding question here is: What is meant by the presence of the Lord in the temple, and where can one best look for information helpful in answering that question? A helpful point of departure is to be found

in the observations offered by Menahem Haran. In his *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, Haran speaks of several ways in which the temple hosted the presence of God.<sup>12</sup> He argues that many sensory experiences were involved.

Symbolically, by re-instantiating the Holy Mountain of Sinai, the Temple Mount reverberated the reality of the presence of the Lord as he appeared on Sinai not only to Moses but also to the seventy: “In fact, the theophany [in the Holy of Holies] ... simply reproduces, in miniature of course, the basic features of the divine revelation on Mount Sinai,” where “seventy elders were vouchsafed a glimpse of the God of Israel upon Mount Sinai.” “When the glory of the Lord appears, [Moses] huddles in the cleft and sees only Yahweh’s back”; likewise, “the prophet usually hides himself, so to speak, as long as the cloud of glory stands at the entrance to the tent (unless Yahweh explicitly summons him outside).” In some cases, the presence of Jehovah and his glory is symbolized by the “still small voice,” with the cave for Elijah roughly what the tent of meeting was for Moses.<sup>13</sup>

The presence was manifested outside the tabernacle in the two pillars, one of cloud and the other of fire. As one moved farther inside, the relative quiet of the temple sharpened the senses of the priest or of the worshippers to hear the word of the Lord or to catch a visual glimpse of God’s presence: “The interior is simply a place set aside for concentration and for the sharpening of the worshipper’s faculties and preparation, so to speak, for the revelation of the divine presence. ... What we have here is ... a tent where the solitary worshipper might receive divine inspiration from outside its empty interior — not the deity’s permanent ‘abode,’ but a place appointed for a fleeting prophetic vision.”<sup>14</sup>

As a type of his dwelling place, the temple offered comfortable accommodations, pleasant smells, lamps, and no surprises. “What really gives P’s tabernacle the character of a divine ‘dwelling’ is neither the cherubim nor the ark as such, but the combination of this throne and footstool with a table, a lampstand, and an incense burner; and furthermore the fact that, when the high priest paces solemnly toward the deity, he is accompanied by a jingle of bells and is carrying ‘seal gravings’ stamped on stones and diadem to evoke divine remembrance and grace.”<sup>15</sup> “Taken altogether, it is they that endow the tabernacle with the character of a habitation.”<sup>16</sup> “P’s conception of the temple as the dwelling place of the deity is thus not hidden behind a veil of illusions — it is plainly visible as the foundation on which the whole structure is based.”<sup>17</sup>

The innermost Holy of Holies was the epicenter of the presence of the Lord, although not its exclusive point of being present: “The most that can really be deduced ... is that, in the ancient Israelite temples, the innermost room was also believed to be a place destined for theophanies. Such undoubtedly was the historical reality in the early stages of Israelite history. At the same time, it cannot be inferred that the focal points of cultic sanctity were, in those times, the only places where the divine presence was believed to reveal itself to prophets. There must have been, in those self-same times, additional places where members of the prophetic movement were believed to receive their divine inspiration.”<sup>18</sup>

The empty throne welcomed and influenced God to be present: “The divine holiness was concentrated not inside the ark but upon it, above the wings of the cherubim, and the deity was not actually visualized but only indirectly symbolized by the empty seat,” and “by placing an empty throne for the deity it was possible to influence him to be, as it were, physically present.”<sup>19</sup> “The throne and footstool indicate God’s very presence in that place, and therefore constitute the essence of the house of God,” and so the temple was, as it were, a home away from home: “Yahweh’s chief dwelling place is imagined to be in heaven, and there on high is his throne, ... in other words, the throne in the Holy of Holies is but a model of the throne on high.”<sup>20</sup>

Though no images of the Deity were found in the Israelite temple, the architecture still constructed a traditional framework in which all temple cultures expected to find the presence of their god or gods: “The innermost sanctum [in most temples] ... is the place where the living presence of the god was made perceptible, usually in the form of an image. In the aniconic symbolism of the Israelite cult, this function was fulfilled by the cherubim and the ark.”<sup>21</sup> But more than the observable objects associated with the divine presence in the Holy of Holies, it was there, primarily, that the voice of the Lord was heard (Isaiah 6:8-13), re-echoing the speaking of the Lord in Leviticus.

### **The Floor Plan of the Tabernacle and Temple Underlying Leviticus**

At this point, I wish to introduce the insight of Mary Douglas, who saw the book of Leviticus as being “structured as a tripartite projection of the tabernacle” whose presentation of divine laws “interrupted twice by narratives, only twice, and both about encroachment on the divine prerogative”<sup>22</sup> (see Figure 1).

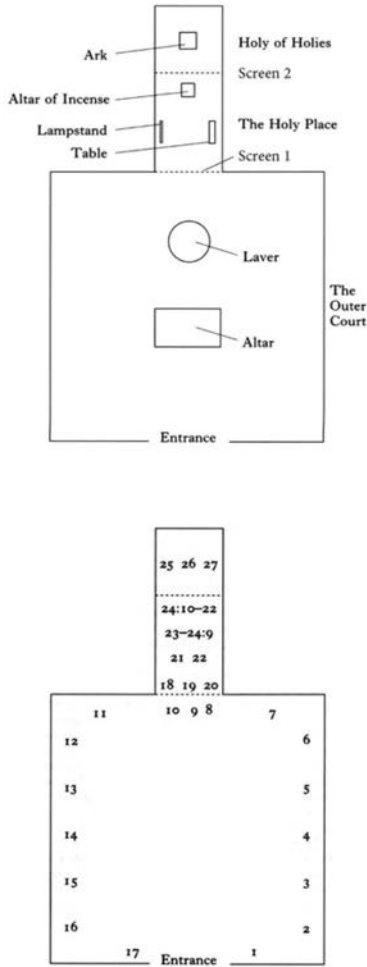


Figure 1. *Leviticus as a Tripartite Projection of the Tabernacle*

Douglas explains, “These two narratives explode violently in to the majestic sequence of laws. They are not any kind of narrative, each is a story of breach of the ordinances, one is about breach of the holiness of the tabernacle and the other about insult to the holy name,” and hence “they should be read as a matching pair, each a barrier to the next chamber of the tabernacle.”<sup>23</sup> In her reading, “the two stories would correspond to the two screens which, according to the instructions given in the Book of Exodus, divide the desert tabernacle into three sections of unequal size.”<sup>24</sup> Douglas, a structural anthropologist, finds that the “individual laws are placed where they are so the reader can locate the corresponding point on the procession round the inside of the tabernacle.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, *Leviticus*



is separated into three sections: the first part “deals with what happens in the court of sacrifice, the last part deals with what is contained in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, and the middle deals with the sanctuary, the precinct preserved for the priests.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore Douglas persuasively concludes, “The text is much more than a memory system: it is itself a microcosm. It holds together the meanings of many levels of existence.”<sup>27</sup> And indeed, all these meanings relate to the functions and purposes of the temple.

Douglas invites the reader to use Leviticus “as a guide around the tabernacle. It starts at the entry, from where the Lord called Moses in the first line (Leviticus 1:1). The visitor starts accordingly, at the entrance and walks down the right side, following chapters 1–7. ... these chapters make a literary ring, with a peroration in chapter 7, clinched by the double reference to Sinai.”<sup>28</sup>

Douglas continues with the tour:

Walking in this direction the visitor encounters the screen that in the building separates the court from the sanctuary. In the book, the narrative at chapters 8–10 corresponds to the first screen.<sup>29</sup> The narrative ends calamitously with the deaths of Aaron’s sons who approached the sanctuary with unconsecrated (or unholy) fire in their incense burners.

At this point a guide always has to make a choice. Should he lead the way through the screen? The courtyard is very big: if the visitors go through the screen when they come to it, when will they ever see the other side of the courtyard? It would be advisable to complete the tour of the court so they can appreciate the correspondences between the two sides. But if they go right round they will be at the entrance again and they will have to be led back to the screen. In this case the guide, the Leviticus writer, has taken the visitors first down one side and then past the screen and along the opposite side of the outer court to the entrance before returning to the guarded opening into the sanctuary. ... Chapters 1–7 are about how the people should bring their gifts to the altar for sacrifice and how their sins and defilements need atonement; chapters 11–15 give examples of defilement; chapter 16 describes how atonement is made. The bodily microcosm of the sacrificed animal in the first part is matched by a complementary microcosm in the second. The noble domestic animals to whom the covenant

is extended stand opposite the zoo of animal kinds not to be eaten or touched. Thus the second half, 11–16, expands and completes the theme of the first half, 1–7.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, Douglas discusses the route of Leviticus:

[T]o confirm that this is the chosen route, when we get to chapter 16 we find that we have walked right round the outer court — here we are, back at the door where we came in. Our tour of the outer court is complete. Like Aaron, we will now make a backward trajectory: first we find God telling Moses (Lev 16:1) to teach Aaron how to proceed, when he is presumably still at the entrance to the court where he had been left at the end of chapter 10. The instructions tell him how to go into the most holy inner sanctuary, then running the story backward, what animals to bring, then how to dress before entering it, then backward again, to wash himself before dressing, and finally to make the sacrifice of atonement.<sup>31</sup>

Douglas has made a strong and useful case that the layout of Leviticus corresponds with the floor plan of the tabernacle. As Gary Rendsburg has opined, “I for one am ready to accept her position.”<sup>32</sup> Surveying the content of each section of Leviticus, I concur that the correspondences between the book of Leviticus and “the greater Tabernacle structure cannot be a coincidence.”<sup>33</sup>

The following sections will provide a detailed analysis of the individual chapters of the book of Leviticus and demonstrate, building on the framework set out by Douglas, how these chapters follow the floor plan of the ancient Tabernacle and Temple.

### **In the Court of the Altar and Outer Spheres**

**Chapters 1–5 set forth the principles constituting the sacrifices to be offered.** The discussion of guidelines regarding sacrifices is to be expected in these chapters that correspond to the outer courts of the temple, including the altar of sacrifice. As these provisions set forth the requirements for burnt offerings, cereal offerings, well-being offerings, purification offerings, the graduated purification offering, and the reparation offering, they make clear that many things can and should be sacrificed to the Lord for a wide variety of purposes. The law of sacrifice is intended to be a broad entry point, affecting all parts of life and inviting temple worshippers to bring all kinds of sacrifices into the storehouse

of the Lord. Sacrifices are to be offered under all kinds of conditions, whether in sickness or in health, well-being or in impurity, in good standing with the Lord or in need for forgiveness and reestablishment of a righteous relationship with God. Out of all with which the Lord has blessed his people, they shall make sacrifices.

Some sacrifices are burnt offerings out of their cattle, herds, and flocks (1:2–17), made as voluntary offerings brought to the door of the sanctuary. The person making the offering places his hand on the head of the animal to be offered, and it is then accepted vicariously as an offering of atonement in his behalf (1:4). The blood of the animal is sprinkled and its parts are burned upon the altar, but his entrails and legs are washed in water (1:5–9). Similarly, sheep and goats without blemish are washed and sacrificed. Poultry also may be offered. An evening offering of flour or cereal may also be brought to the temple, and oil poured upon it (2:1–7), but it shall not be leavened or made with honey (2:11). A sacrifice of first fruits may also be made and shall not be burned on the altar but shall be offered with salt (2:13), with oil and incense, and burned on the altar (2:15–16). The well-being offering can be made of either a male or female animal from the herd, without blemish, and it likewise shall be burned with fire after the priest has placed his hand upon the head of the animal (13:1–17).

The seriousness and procedures involved with the various sin offerings depend on the status of the person who has sinned through ignorance (4:2). If an anointed priest has committed a sin against God, he must offer a bullock and sprinkle its blood seven times before the veil of the temple (4:3–12). If the whole collective congregation of Israel sinned through ignorance, the elders of the people shall offer a young bullock as a sacrifice after laying their hands upon the head of the bullock and sprinkling its blood seven times before the Lord before the veil of the temple. (4:13–21). If a ruler or chieftain of the people has sinned through ignorance, when his transgression has come to his knowledge, he sacrifices a kid of the goats, a male without blemish (4:2–26). If one of the common people similarly sin, he shall offer a female kid without blemish, or he may offer a lamb instead (4:27–35).

A person who becomes aware of a transgression has a duty to report or confess the problem and also to bring a female lamb or kid as an atonement concerning this sin (5:1–6), but if he is unable to bring a lamb, he may bring two doves or pigeons, and if unable to bring any of those, he can bring one tenth of a *ephah* of fine flour without oil (5:7–13). If the transgression involves some holy things of the Lord (5:15), a ram without

blemish must be brought (5:15–16) or the same if the transgression involves something forbidden done by the commandments of the Lord (5:17). If the transgression involves taking the name of the Lord in vain by lying about something that was delivered to a neighbor to keep or which was lost, then also a ram without blemish must be offered, and the property fraudulently taken away must be restored (6:1–7).

**Chapters 6-7 stress the precision with which these sacrifices are to be carried out.** The administrative order of how these sacrifices are to be performed is stated in considerable detail (6:1–7:38). Rules regarding the perpetual burning of the fire on the altar all night (6:9) and all day (6:12) are given, together with rules about the eating of the offerings by Aaron and his sons (6:14–30). If a person unclean eats of any of these sacrifices, the punishment is that the person will be “cut off from his people” (7:20, 21, 25, 27). Obedience to all these rules is crucial; the manner of burning the fat and giving the breast and the right shoulder to Aaron and his sons must be followed scrupulously (7:28–34).

The laws regarding the most holy trespass offering are given special attention (7:1–10) along with the handling of peace offerings, thanksgiving offerings, and voluntary offerings connected with voluntary vows (7:11–19). While people are always welcome to make voluntary offerings by the process of vows and free will donations to the poor, especially in making acceptable sacrifices to the Lord (see Numbers 30), as the Lord has required, this calls for a higher sense of obedience and a strict compliance. This is not because the letter of the law is an end in and of itself but because these sacrifices are a part of a covenant relationship; in order to attain holiness (*kodesh*), compliance with the covenantal terms allows the complete fulfillment of the promises and spirit of that covenant relationship.<sup>34</sup>

**Chapter 8 deals with the inauguration of the priestly administration.** Once the people in general and the priests in particular have complied with the laws of sacrifice and obedience, the temple priests were consecrated and empowered to carry out the operations of the temple. The book of Leviticus establishes an archetypal general pattern, clearly evident at this point in the book because the sacrifices and the priestly administrative order set forth in chapters 1–7 already assume that priests have been consecrated and are fully operational. The anointing and presentation of Aaron and his sons authorizing them to minister unto the Lord in the office of priests are given (7:35–38), and the manner of Aaron’s ordination; robing in garments; anointing with oil; washing of priests with water; and placing upon them the coat, girdle, robe, ephod,

the curious girdle of the ephod, the breastplate, the miter, the golden plate, and the holy crown are then detailed (8:1–9). Sacrifices of bulls and rams follow to consummate the consecration of Aaron and his sons; blood is put on the tip of their right ears (8:24), upon the thumbs of their right hands, and upon the big toes of their right feet (8:24). Their heads are then anointed with oil and their garments sanctified (8:30). For seven days and seven nights, they are consecrated (8:31–33). All this was done strictly as the Lord had commanded (8:34–36).

**Chapter 9 then grants priests authority to stand in the service of God.**

The powers given to these priests (9:1–24) come with a strict expectation that they will render righteous and proper service only to the Lord. Once installed as a priest, Aaron made sacrifices on behalf of the people, promising them “the Lord will appear unto you” (9:4), and the entire congregation “drew near and stood before the Lord” (9:5). Aaron then made another sacrifice of the calf for himself, followed by a sacrifice of a goat for the people, after which he “lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them” (9:22) and “the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people, and there came a fire out from before the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burned offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell upon their faces” (9:22–24).

**Chapter 10 imposes penalties if priests performed sacrifices improperly.**

They suffered the death penalty (10:2). Penalties for disobeying or misusing any of these priestly powers in offering unlawful sacrifices result in a tragic aftermath. Aaron’s sons were therefore given additional strict commandments as to the proper performance of their priestly functions, not uncovering their heads or tearing their clothes, not drinking wine or strong drink as they come into the tabernacle, also that they “may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses” (10:6–11).

**Chapters 11–17 require purity and holiness in virtually every aspect of everyday life.**

Those connected with the temple must maintain holiness in the family home. For example, dietary laws (11:1–47) regulate what can be eaten on the daily table. Rules regarding childbirth (12:1–8) celebrate and sanctify the most holy and exquisite purpose of family life, bringing human beings into this world. Nothing is more ordinary in the daily routine of life than washing and caring for the skin, which is the front line defense of the body against disease, injury, and infection. All other forces that arise from unholy and impure practices are discussed,

including washing, discolorations, boils, burns, and baldness, and which fabrics can be worn on the skin (13:1–59). In ways such as these, the book of Leviticus calls all its adherents to a daily life of holy observance of the covenant relationship instituted by God through Moses on Mount Sinai, avoiding all impure practices.

If any of these rules are broken, whether intentionally or unintentionally, atonement must be made to repair damaged relationships and expurgate impurities between God and his people. The scapegoat offering, to be performed on the Day of Atonement to carry away all the sins of the people, is spelled out in Leviticus 16 so the mercy of the Lord may reach out to all his people (16:2). This vicarious cleansing begins with the killing of a goat “for the Lord” as a sin offering to make atonement for the sanctuary and to reconfirm the sanctity of the temple (16:15–17). Then Aaron placed both his hands on the head of a second goat, confessed over him all the sins of the children of Israel, and sent the goat away “for Azazel” by the hand of a strong man into the wilderness (16:21). As Jacob Milgrom observes, “The most plausible explanation is that Azazel is the name of a demon ... who has been eviscerated of his erstwhile demonic powers by the priestly legislators.”<sup>35</sup> Aaron then again washed himself and offered an atonement sacrifice for himself and for the people with the offering of a bull, and the high priest’s assistants were also purified (16:26–28). On this day, all the people are required to humble themselves and do no work (16:29).

Four final provisions turn attention to the broader interests in holiness and thereby form a transition into the next stage of the book of Leviticus and the holiness code. The killing of any ox or lamb or goat must be performed at the temple; any offending person will be cut off from the people (17:3–4). In an effort to drive out the influence of satanic forces, all sacrifices to devils or evil spirits are particularly prohibited, and this shall be a perpetual regulation (17:7). Any non-Israelites who would not be worthy to go beyond the court of the Gentiles and approach the altar are prohibited from making sacrifices on pain of being expelled from the community (17:8–9), and the eating of blood is not allowed (17:14). This completes the provisions in the book of Leviticus involving the altar and sacrifices. These guidelines provide information regarding the priests’ preparations and duties performed in preparation for entry into the sanctuary.

### Into the Holy Place: Leviticus 18-23

Chapters 18 and 20 are like twin pillars supporting chapter 19 as the pediment over the portal leading from the court of the altar into the holy place [the Hekal]. Douglas calls these three chapters the “first screen.”<sup>36</sup> At this placement, the reader is fully warned of the heightened responsibilities and risks assumed by those moving closer to the presence of the Lord. The entrant “is faced by a trilogy of chapters, 18 and 20 repeating each other, and between them chapter 19, which must be considered to be of central importance if only because of the way it is framed by the other two.”<sup>37</sup> Just as “the pedimental style puts the climax in the middle,” so the two pillars of strikingly similar content frame and emphasize the all-important chapter 19.<sup>38</sup>

These two pillars call out a paired list of prohibitions mainly concerning all kinds of incest, illicit sexual practices, adultery, and unchastity, along with laws against abusing children by devoting them to Molech or cursing one’s father or mother. In all this, the pillars of the pediment, through which one must pass from one domain to another within the tabernacle, comprise the law of chastity, which took seriously prohibitions on sexual acts outside of marriage.<sup>39</sup> In essence, one advances from the outer area of sacrifice into a higher priesthood domain by observing rigorous injunctions regarding sexual relations and procreation.

The almost complete duplication in the text of Leviticus 18 in Leviticus 20, these two matched pillars, is not a mere repetition. While the relationship between the two lists of prohibited sexual relations in Hittite Laws 187–200 and Leviticus 18 is one of *direct* correspondence, the relationship between the two lists in Leviticus 18 and 20 is one of chiasmic *inversion*.<sup>40</sup> The overall tendency here is for the items at the top of the list in Leviticus 18 to move to the bottom of the list in Leviticus 20, and for those on the bottom of the list in Leviticus 18 to move to the top of the list in Leviticus 20. For example, the mention of foreigners, which comes at the bottom of the list in Leviticus 18, appears as the first item in the sequence in Leviticus 20.

This structural phenomenon opens ways to understand the reasons behind the existence of the second list in Leviticus 20, which intensifies Leviticus 18 in several ways. First, Leviticus 20 adds punishments throughout this text. No punishments are mentioned in Leviticus 18, and that omission was probably not an oversight. The matter of punishments was simply reserved as intensification for the second iteration of the list in Leviticus 20. Burnside has identified a chiasmic arrangement among

the punishment clauses in Leviticus 20 themselves.<sup>41</sup> More basically, incidents to be punished by man have been moved to the first half of the list, and those to be punished by God appear in the second half.

In addition, the framing passages of Leviticus 20 uniquely add an intensified double prohibition and double warning against idolatrous whoring after ghosts and wizardry (20:6, 27). This double warning enhances the moral imperative of this matched set of texts. Being told again, a person is warned twice about what the law requires; therefore, the person is without excuse, a point which was not lost on the biblical writers: “For God speaks once, yea twice, yet man still perceives it not” (Job 33:14). Idolatry belongs on this list of unpermitted sexual relations because the unfaithfulness of idolatry was to the Hebrew mind a close cousin of adultery; sexual misconduct was seen as both a social offense and a sign of apostasy against Israel’s god and religion.<sup>42</sup>

And whereas the motivation behind Leviticus 18 was to ensure that the Israelites would not be cast out of the land as had been its former inhabitants, the more elevated priestly motivation behind Leviticus 20 was to ensure that the Israelites would not profane the sanctuary or God’s name (20:3).<sup>43</sup> Instead, they would be a pure and holy people, separated from unclean people and beasts in order to belong to God and be worthy of his presence (20:25–26). Thus, Leviticus 20 twice adds to this structure the ultimate demand to “be holy” (20:7, 26), obey the statutes (20:8, 22), and maintain the statutory boundaries between the clean and the unclean (20:25).<sup>44</sup>

The two columns in this portal sustain essence of the holiness code, stated in Leviticus 19, which culminates with its central pinnacle, “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (19:18). As Rabbi Hillel once remarked, paraphrasing Leviticus 19:18, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor, that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.”<sup>45</sup> Famously, Leviticus 19 begins with the injunction to become holy or perfect, saying, “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2). The chapter details rules regarding honoring one’s mother and father, keeping the Sabbath day holy, turning not to idols, consuming peace offerings within the first two days, leaving the corners of fields for gleaners, not stealing, not dealing falsely, not lying, not swearing by God’s name falsely, not profaning the name of God, dealing honestly with one’s neighbor, not withholding wages, not cursing the deaf or tripping the blind, not judging falsely, not spreading rumors, and not hating one’s brother in one’s heart or rebuking or ridiculing or speaking evil against one’s neighbor but loving



thy neighbor as thyself (19:3–18). The second half of the chapter similarly concludes that a holy or covenant person should not crossbreed animals or mix seeds or fabrics, not have sexual relations with a slave girl, not eat fruit for the first three years (19:23), not eat blood, use magic, trim hair or cut flesh in mourning for the dead (19:26–28), not sell a daughter into prostitution (19:29), reverence the temple (19:30), not practice divination (19:31), honor the elderly (19:32), not oppress the foreigner (19:33–34), and not use dishonest weights and measures (19:35–36).

Particularly relevant to the present argument, at this point in the architecture of the text of Leviticus the reader (or auditor) quite stunningly begins to hear, over and over, the words of the Lord expressed in the divine first person: “I am YHWH your God” (18:2), the land “to which I am bringing you” (18:3), “my rules alone” (18:4), “I YHWH (have spoken)” (18:5). In heightened density here, first-person statements appear some nine times in chapter 18, fifteen times in chapter 19, and thirteen times in chapter 20. Thus the screen that leads from the court of the altar into the Hekal is the unmediated reception of the Lord’s concentrated and continuously repeated first-person communications, above all the personal invitation to hear and receive the divine call, “You shall be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy” (19:2).

Thus passage into the Hekal runs between the twin pillars of the two matched laws of sexual purity in chapters 18 and 20 as well as through chapter 19, the epitome of the holiness code. As Douglas observes, “There could not be a stronger framing of the central chapter at the apex of the pediment. Leviticus’ scheme very deliberately puts the laws of righteous and honest dealings at the centre.”<sup>246</sup> Positioned between the “hair-raising anathemas” of chapters 18 and 20, chapter 19 is “bound to seem tame. It can easily be overlooked because it surveys and enlarges upon some of the laws that Leviticus has given already.” Douglas continues: “As the elaborate rhetorical framing suggests, it is in fact the most important chapter of the whole book, the chapter on the meaning of righteousness.”<sup>247</sup> This being true enough, however, as we shall see below, what Douglas says about chapter 19 may prove even more descriptive of chapter 26.

**Chapters 21–22 then deal with rules and regulations regarding the conduct of priestly activities in the Hekal.** These commandments assure the holiness of priests who offer the bread of God (21:8, 17, 21), officiate in setting out the daily showbread, and are worthy to partake of it. To be worthy to serve in this sacred space, priests must avoid corpse contamination with certain exceptions (21:1–4); must not profane the name of God (21:6); must not marry any woman not a virgin (21:7, 13);

must not have any blemishes (21:17-23), leprosy, or impurity by touching unclean animals or carrion (22:5, 8); and must not allow any impure members of their families to eat of the sacrificial meat the priests are allowed to eat (22:11). Rules also prescribe when such offerings shall be eaten (22:30).

Chapter 23 sets out laws regarding the weekly Sabbath, the holy convocation days of Passover, the festivals of first fruits and Pentecost, of Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Atonement, and the feast of Tabernacles. This calendric material connects the temporal terrestrial times of temple performances with the eternal celestial cycles, that all may be done on earth as it is in the heavens.

The first part of chapter 24 then gives instructions regarding the pure oil to be used in the lamps that are to burn continually in the Hekal. Except for certain times in Israelite history, the menorah was not taken out of the temple.<sup>48</sup> The menorah stood in the Hekal before the veil that separated the Hekal from the Holy of Holies (24:3). The recipe for the making of the twelve cakes of showbread is then described (24:5-9).<sup>49</sup> With this, chapter 24 completes the discussion in Leviticus of the activities and implements in the Hekal.

### **The Second Screen: At the Entrance to the Holy of Holies**

The reader now stands before the second screen, namely the story of the trial and execution of the son of an Israelite woman who blasphemed the name of God, found in Leviticus 24:10–23, which Douglas’s reading identifies as the second screen of the tabernacle or temple.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, an explicit reference to the veil of the temple is found in Leviticus 24:3, right before this narrative account, using the unique expression, *pārōket hā’ēdut*, “the curtain of the pact,” or “veil of the covenant.”<sup>51</sup> In Douglas’s view, the writer of Leviticus has used the law of *talion* here “to make a statement about exact restitution. The doctrine is in line with the precision of the rules of sacrifice. Crime and penalty are part of a pattern of reciprocity in which good things are repaid by good things and figure even more largely than violent crimes repaid in violence. Perfect reciprocity is the intellectual grounding for the covenant.”<sup>52</sup> To read this text out of context “does imply a harsh, unmerciful God,” but “the full context of talion in Leviticus puts the negative reciprocity into balance with positive reciprocity, gift with gift, as well as crime with punishment. The other half of the comparison, the positive reciprocity, is the central theme in Leviticus. God’s compassion and God’s justice would be revealed to anyone allowed to pass through the [two] screens and able to

read the testament of the covenant hidden in the most holy place. Only the high priest can do that [literally], but anyone [and everyone] can know what is there from reading the book.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the final step that leads into the Holy of Holies and into the intimate presence of the Lord is obedience to the law of supreme reverence for the sacred name of God.

### **The Presence of the Lord: In the Holy of Holies**

Leviticus 25:1 begins: “And YHWH spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying ...” The reference here to Sinai here has puzzled scholars.<sup>54</sup> The solution may be to realize that at this very point the text enters the Holy of Holies, corresponding to the summit of Mount Sinai,<sup>55</sup> where Moses stood in the presence of God. Douglas explains: “When the second screen has been passed the reader is standing, as it were, inside the Holy of Holies. This is the apotheosis of the principle of containing forms. Jerusalem is the centre of the world, in the centre of Jerusalem is the tabernacle, in the centre of the Tabernacle is the ark of the covenant. The virtual pilgrim with book in hand knows that he has arrived at this hidden place because in chapter 26 the Lord God proclaims his covenant no fewer than eight times (26:9, 15, 25, 42 (three times), 44, 66). Another elaborate literary construction makes chapters 25 and 27 into a massive frame for honouring chapter 26.”<sup>56</sup> It is here, as Milgrom translates,<sup>57</sup> that God declares, “I will establish my *presence* in your midst” (26:11).

Again, an A-B-A pattern is evident here, with the two chapters 25 and 27 on the flanks, almost like the two cherubim on the sides. Chapter 26, with its blessings and promises, is like the mercy seat, and the ark of the covenant at the heart of the Holy of Holies is at the center of this triad. The overriding idea in these three chapters “is essentially to achieve justice and righteousness in the land. ... To be able to promise this, Leviticus has to insist that the land belongs to God, he is the owner, and the people are his tenants using it by right of a divine grant or contract.”<sup>58</sup>

**Chapters 25 and 27 detail ways in which all life and land belong to the Lord.** They famously deal with the laws of the sabbatical years and the jubilee, with the promise of life and liberty, and the prolonged celebration as the land itself rests (25:4), as if to say that everything and everyone is inextricably linked with the pervasive presence of God. The themes of these two sabbatical chapters include atonement (25:9), holiness (25:10), family (25:10), the ownership of the land by God, “for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me” (25:23), redeeming the land

for family members who have grown poor (25:25), perpetual or eternal inheritance (25:26), redemption of slaves and hired servants (25:47–55), redeeming people from their personal vows (27:2–8), redeeming animals (27:9–13) in recognition that they otherwise belong to God, sanctifying or consecrating a personal home “to be holy unto the Lord” (27:14), sanctifying fields (27:16–25), devoting or dedicating animals to the Lord (27:26–29), and bringing to the temple the tithe affirming that “all the tithe of the land” is holy unto the Lord (27:30). All these ritual or legal actions proceed on the premise that everyone and everything belongs to the Lord, that he and his people are bound together by covenant,<sup>59</sup> and that he acts in righteousness, holiness, and power seated upon his throne and mercy seat. These elements all point in the direction of concluding with Douglas and Rendsburg that in these chapters the reader has reached not only the end of the book of Leviticus but also “the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle, and the summit of Mount Sinai.”<sup>60</sup>

**Chapter 26 reaffirms the blessings and curses that are entailed through the covenant between God and Abraham.** This culminating chapter, at the heart of this concluding A-B-A triad, declares numerous blessings of rain, peace, military success, fertility, posterity, prosperity, and the presence of God (26:2–13);<sup>61</sup> correlatively, it also invokes numerous curses of disease, military failure, plagues, invasions of wild beasts that will kill children and domestic animals, pestilences, poverty, destruction, scattering, and desolation (26:14–39). Treaties and covenants in the ancient Near East almost universally set forth stipulations, laws, and requirements (as are found in Leviticus 1–24), followed by blessings and benefactions for compliance on the one hand, and curses or threats of sanctions to be imposed on the other hand in cases of violations or infringements.<sup>62</sup>

But if Israel will confess their iniquity, God promises that he will remember the covenant that he made “with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham” (26:42), as he will remember the land and his people (26:40–46). Ending in the Holy of Holies with this central and culminating reaffirmation of the Abrahamic covenant is *a propos* here, as one stands in the presence of the ark of the covenant. Moreover, the unusual order of the names of the three patriarchs found in Leviticus 26:42 — namely Jacob, Isaac and Abraham — oddly reverses the normal sequence, perhaps to emphasize the overall progression of the text of Leviticus, which runs step by step, deeper and deeper, farther into the holy place, moving back in time as well as in space, into the presence of God and unto the source of the oath

and covenant made by God to his people. As Douglas concludes, “At the end we see how Leviticus is in a large sense all about the things that have been consecrated and the things that belong to the Lord: blood, the priests, the land, and dedicated animals. ... Even going as far as we can go into the interior of the tabernacle, expecting to unveil its secrets, what we find is not secret: still, only and always, the justice of God and his fidelity to the covenants he made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.”<sup>63</sup>

And perhaps most distinctively, as was seen in Leviticus 18-20, here again in Leviticus 26 the Lord even more abundantly speaks in the first person. A few first-person expressions are scattered throughout Leviticus, but at the first screen and then especially in the Holy of Holies the presence of the Lord is encountered and heard the most directly. In Leviticus 26, sixty-nine first-person statements appear. Sometimes the Lord speaks sternly (“I am the Lord your God,” “I have broken the bands,” “I have walked contrary,” “I will rid,” “I will punish,” “I will scatter,” “I will chastise,” “I will break,” “I will destroy”), but God also speaks here persistently and lovingly, with promising reassurances (“I will give,” “I will have respect,” “I will set,” “I will walk,” “I will do,” “I will appoint,” “I will make,” “I will bring,” “I will send”), and also reiteratively and emphatically (“I will remember,” “I will remember,” “I will remember,” “I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors”).<sup>64</sup> It could not be said more clearly: for Leviticus, in the Holy of Holies the presence of the Lord<sup>65</sup> was encountered in hearing him speak. His words are unmediated, direct, personal, and in the first person, with blessings and curses in fulfillment of his covenantal promises.

In the end, the book of Leviticus closes with the punctuating inclusio that marks it as a single volume: “These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai” (27:34), closing the revelation with which the book had begun: “And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying” (1:1).

### **The Floor Plan of the Temple in the Synagogue Mosaic at Sepphoris**

Much as the book of Leviticus conforms to the floor plan of the temple, so does a mosaic on the floor of a synagogue at Sepphoris, and the climactic appearance of the Abrahamic covenant in Leviticus 26:42 helps to explain why the mosaic in the synagogue at Sepphoris ends with two scenes from the life of Abraham and Sarah, namely the binding of

Isaac and the visitation of the three messengers, in the space comparable to the Holy of Holies in its depiction of the temple floor plan.

Excavated and published in the 1980s and early 1990s, the remarkable mosaic on the floor of a Byzantine period synagogue in western Galilee is clearly connected with Levitical recollections of the temple in Jerusalem. The inscriptions that accompany this mosaic make it clear that the benefactors who financed it were Levites. The mosaic is constructed in seven rows,<sup>66</sup> a good Levitical number.<sup>67</sup> This mosaic, it would seem, should be read from the top (the end closest to the bema, where people would stand to read, pray, or preach in the synagogue), with people looking from that point onto the floor as if moving into the courts and rooms of the temple, following the floor plan and moving up in increasing degrees of holiness from row 1 to row 7, interpreted as follows:

*Row 1:* The sequence begins in the world, outside the walls of the holy temple. A central wreath of conquest is flanked by two scenes of a lion killing a bull. If this scene evokes thoughts about the land of Israel, the lion represents Judah, which conquers paganism, represented by the bull, which is sacred to Baal, Zeus, Mithra, and other gods. In ancient Near Eastern temple architecture and symbolism, lions typically guard the entry to holy spaces.

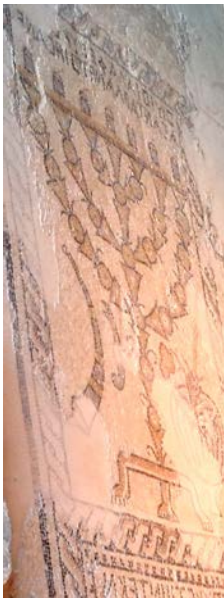


Figure 2. Row 2:  
*Menorah and Shofars*

*Row 2:* Here one enters into the outer court of the temple, where one encounters the monumental menorah, observes incense shovels, smells the incense (Leviticus 4:7; 10:1; 16:12–13), hears the blowing of the shofars (Leviticus 23:24), and stands facing the two-pillared façade of the temple. From this, one may recall God's presence with the camp of Israel in the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day (Numbers 14:14) and also the two pillars that flank the screens architecturally and literarily in the temple and in Leviticus.

*Row 3:* Central to the court of the priests is the altar of sacrifice (Leviticus 1-5), shown here with sacrificial animals on the left and the adjacent brazen sea on the right.<sup>68</sup>

*Row 4:* In the center of this panel, as one would find next in the Hekal, stands the table of showbread (Exodus 25:30; Leviticus 24:5-9; Numbers 4:7) shown with the twelve loaves on the table and two

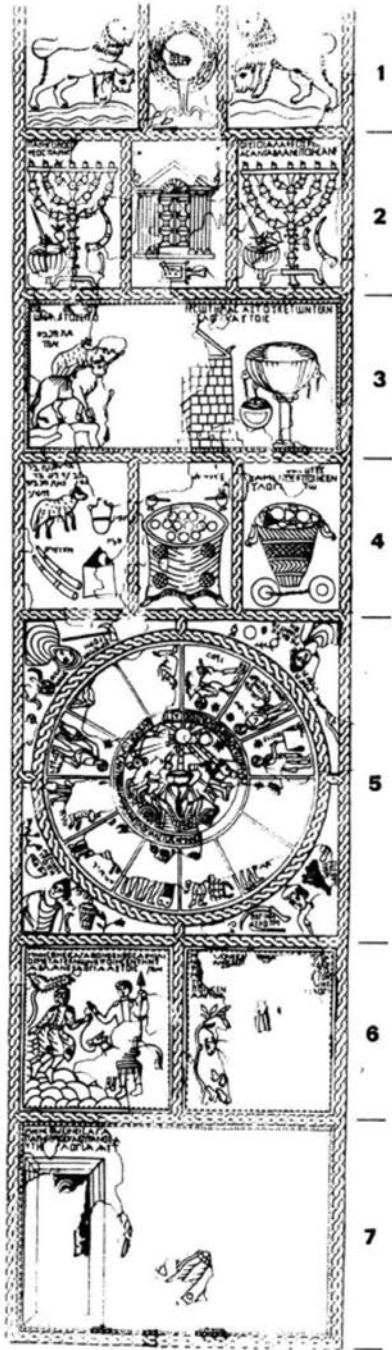


Figure 3. : Line Drawing of the Mosaic on the Floor of the Synagogue at Sepphoris



Figure 4. Row 5: *The Calendar, with the Four Seasons in the Corners, and the Twelve Months of the Zodiac and the Sun at the Center*

incense shovels above it. On the one side are depicted two trumpets, a wine jar, and a sheep; and on the other side is a basket full of the first fruits of the Promised Land: figs, grapes, and pomegranates (Leviticus 23:10, 17, 20).

*Row 5:* This section prominently displays the zodiac as the dome of heaven or the universe. It features the sun in the center circle, the twelve months in the outer ring, and the four seasons in the corners. This feature is positioned to represent the vault of heaven separating the world below from the heaven beyond. Josephus describes the heavy curtain that hung in the gate “opening into the building,” embroidered with blue, scarlet, and purple linen threads. These four typified the elements of the universe: fire, earth, air, and sea. “On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens,” but without the images of the zodiac (*plēn tōn zōidiōn*).<sup>69</sup> While Josephus “gives no detail of the inner curtain,”<sup>70</sup> that veil between the Hekal and the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33) also “represented ‘heaven,’ the boundary between the material, temporal creation and the divine presence which was beyond both time and matter and yet within them,” signifying “the firmament that separated what was above from what was below.”<sup>71</sup> Because the sacred ritual calendar was crucial to the proper observance of the festivals and Sabbaths (see Leviticus 23), finding heavenly bodies on the veil of the temple seems meaningfully suitable. Perhaps Josephus made the point that the images of the zodiac





Figure 5. Row 6: *Eliezer and Ishmael Waiting at the Foot of Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount*

were absent from the outer curtain, which portrayed “all the visible stars of the sky” (*hapasan tēn ouranion theōrian*),<sup>72</sup> to distinguish it from the inner curtain, on which the schematic organization of the calendar may have been represented, as it is here in this mosaic.<sup>73</sup> These points draw to attention a possible new reading of this mosaic, connecting it with the calendrical instructions in Leviticus 23 and making good sense of this otherwise strange appearance of a zodiac in a Jewish religious context. Although several proposals have been advanced concerning the meaning of the use of these zodiac depictions in Jewish synagogues in the early Byzantine period and the variety of cultural divergencies and interrelated contemporary phenomena that undoubtedly influenced the array of surviving mosaics,<sup>74</sup> the temple floor plan sequence highlighted here would seem to offer new leverage in explaining the role of the zodiac-like part of this particular mosaic through its sequential connection to Leviticus 23.

*Row 6:* If row 5 indeed represents the veil of the temple, then in rows 6 and 7 the mosaic takes the viewer into the Holy of Holies. On one side of row 6, the two servants Eliezer and Ishmael wait at the bottom of the mountain (as identified through *Vayikra Rabba* 26:7), while Abraham goes further, just as the high priest goes alone into the Holy of Holies. The gesture of the two raised fingers signifies blessing. On the right, all that remains are parts of a tree, the head of the ram, two pairs of upturned shoes (that have been taken off and left as Abraham and Isaac went up

onto the most sacred place); in the center is, possibly — as archaeologists Weiss and Netzer suggest — “the blade of a vertically held knife,” all of which were symbolic of the binding of Isaac, the mercy of God, and hence the mercy seat in the holy place.<sup>75</sup>

*Row 7:* Finally, it was in the Holy of Holies that God speaks. Here, in what little is left of row 7, was the scene of the three angel-messengers who visited Abraham and Sarah, revealing to them the promise of God. As mentioned above, the crowning blessing in Leviticus is that God will remember the covenant he made with Abraham (and Sarah), Isaac, and Jacob (26:42).

Weiss and Netzer read this mosaic in the opposite direction,<sup>76</sup> from the apparent bottom of the mosaic to the top (where the bema seems to have stood), thereby understanding its organization as following the sequence of (1) the promise given to Abraham in rows 6–7, (2) the power of God in the zodiac, row 5, and (3) the redemption of Israel through the Torah in row 2, the consecration of Aaron and daily offering in rows 3 and 4a, and the showbread and basket of first fruits in row 4bc. These scholars are very knowledgeable, and this view is supported by the fact that most of the inscriptions in the mosaic as well as the artifacts and scenes are oriented from that vantage point. However, this reading order (namely 6, 7, 5, 2, 3, 4) ignores row 1, proceeds throughout in an awkward leapfrog sequence, and does not allow for the meaningful possibility that this mosaic was intended to be viewed from the divine perspective looking back from the focal point of the presence in the Holy of Holies.<sup>77</sup>

The floor plan of this mosaic at Sepphoris follows the floor plan of the temple very accurately. The designers, it would seem, quite consciously saw the temple as their template.<sup>78</sup> This might mean much for temple studies and the Jewish memory of, yearning for, and envy of the temple in that time and place.

## Conclusions

The sequence of the temple floor plan offers a way to explain the organizing structure, if not the very existence, of the book of Leviticus. As Rolf Rendtorff writes, “On the one hand I appreciate Mary Douglas’ approach to reading Leviticus as a separate book, but not so much because she reads it separately from the rest of the Pentateuch as because she reads it holistically, leaving aside the traditional rules of dividing it according to ‘P’ and ‘H’ or the like. ... I am convinced that [Leviticus is] structured as a whole according to certain literary and theological

principles. ... More [time should be] aimed at a reading of the texts in their given form and in their larger context. I should be glad if the discussion would focus not so much on the questions of right or wrong, as on striving together for certain common insights that could lead us to an appropriate approach to our biblical texts.”<sup>79</sup> Philip R. Davies joins with Rendtorff’s ideas:

I would like to be able to convince myself that I have any idea as to why there is a book of Leviticus at all. Is it the product of (at one extreme) a working Temple cult, one of whose members jotted down lists of things to be remembered? Or is it the outcome of a very peculiar individual mind, such as the writer of Ezekiel had? Does it perhaps owe something to both of these origins, or rather belong in the very large area between them? I may have my preferences, but the question is not what I think, but how I go about the business of arguing for it.<sup>80</sup>

In response to these observations and questions from Rendtorff and Davies, the discipline of temple studies offers a way to go about arguing for the meaning behind the book of Leviticus. As an archetype, the temple orients worshippers to the cosmos, the calendar, and the ceremonial order that purifies observant participants, and qualifies them to enter into the presence of God. Its stages of pressing forward exemplify life as a journey, epitomized as a ritual ascent which progresses stage by stage into the inner sanctum of holiness. Those stages begin with sacrifice and obedience, then step forward into a life of holiness and sexual morality.

While the Lord is pleased with sacrifice, preferable traits are mercy and a broken heart and contrite spirit. As the book of Leviticus progresses, attention to purity in daily life and individual expiation of sin (Leviticus 11–17) expands into duties to family members (Leviticus 18, 20–22) and neighbors and spouses (Leviticus 19, 25), all leading into the holy presence of God with full consecration of land and property, liberty, covenant blessings, and vows of dedication. Ultimately in Leviticus 26 is heard the voice of the Lord God emphatically pronouncing in the first-person promises of temporal well-being and of eternal inheritance through the blessings of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (Leviticus 26:42) to those who have YHWH as their God, walk in his statutes, and keep his commandments, while at the same time inveighing curses and dire consequences, also in the first person, upon those who do not. The mosaic at Sepphoris, commissioned by Levite survivors of the loss of the

temple, confirms that Mary Douglas was not the only person ever to see the floor plan of the temple as serving architecturally and literarily as an ideal structural pattern for finding God at home in the temple and for dwelling in his presence in the house of the Lord forever.

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### Figure Credits

1. *Leviticus as a tripartite projection of the Tabernacle*. From Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 221, 223.
2. *Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic, row 2, displaying the menorah and shofars*. Photograph by John W. Welch.
3. *Line drawing of the mosaic on the floor of the synagogue at Sepphoris*. Courtesy of Prof. Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Excavations*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Drawing by Pnina Arad.
4. *Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic, row 5, representing the calendar, with the four seasons in the corners, and the twelve months of the zodiac and the sun at the center*. Photograph by John W. Welch.
5. *Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic, row 6, showing Eliezer and Ishmael waiting at the foot of Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount*. Photograph by John W. Welch.

## Endnotes

1. See the chart in W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 40-41.
2. Meanings include an official decree, an edict, a written list of events, or a planned series of steps or performances.
3. See most recently John W. Welch, "The Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition* (Logan, Utah: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 65; available at <http://www.templestudies.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MormonismAndTheTemple.pdf>
4. Such as the Sermon on the Mount, for which see John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009); *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo: FARMS, 1999).
5. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
6. For another application of Douglas's schematic approach to Matthew 5-7, see Welch, "The Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew," 85.
7. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); *Leviticus 23-29: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2085.
8. John F. A. Sawyer, *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 9-10.
9. Yehuda Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 86.
10. For example, Angelico di Marco, "Der Chiasmus in der Bibel, 1. Teil" *Linguistica Biblica* 36 (Dec. 1975): 21-97, on p. 48, centering the Pentateuch on Leviticus 19:18; and Duane L. Christensen, "The Pentateuchal Principle within the Canonical Power," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39, no. 4 (Dec. 1996): 537-48.
11. These and other examples provided in the literature can be located most easily by using the index on the chiasmus resources web site: <http://chiasmusresources.johnnwelchresources.com/hebrew-bible>.

12. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1985).
13. *Ibid.*, 276-68.
14. *Ibid.*, 266.
15. *Ibid.*, 226.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 274.
19. *Ibid.*, 246.
20. *Ibid.*, 256, 257.
21. *Ibid.*, 281.
22. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 195.
23. *Ibid.*, 199.
24. *Ibid.*, 195.
25. *Ibid.*, 195–196.
26. *Ibid.*, 196.
27. *Ibid.*, 197. For an excellent summary and endorsement of Douglas’s “discovery of the literary structure of the Torah’s most inscrutable book,” see Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Two Screens: On Mary Douglas’s Proposal for a Literary Structure to the Book of Leviticus,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15 (2008): 175-189, quote on 182.
28. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 222–223.
29. Called the *māsāk* in Exodus 26:36-37; 36:37-38; see Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 178, 180-81, pointing out that in Leviticus 8-10 are included four explicit references to this first veil or screen in 8:31-36, 9:23, 9:24, and 10:2. “Such a concentration of passages focusing on this particular locus within the greater Tabernacle structure cannot be a coincidence. Their placement here in chs. 8-10 accords with Douglas’s view,” 181.
30. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 224–25.
31. *Ibid.*, 225.
32. Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 180.
33. *Ibid.*, 181.

34. Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 1-12.
35. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 168.
36. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 234.
37. *Ibid.*, 234.
38. *Ibid.* 59.
39. *Ibid.*, 239. Joshua Berman notes that the same word that is used to refer to ritual impurity in these texts, *tum'ah*, "is also used to describe the spiritual defilement" of the sinner, as in Leviticus 18:24. Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 121.
40. The basic ABA structure of Leviticus 18, 19, and 20 has been noted by Mary Douglas but not developed further. See her "Poetic Structure in Leviticus," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 249-56, seeing all of Leviticus 1-27 as a ring structure. "Chapter 18 is very similar to chap. 20; the main difference is that the order is reversed," p. 251.
41. J.P. Burnside, "Rethinking 'Sexual' Offenses in Biblical Law: The Literary Structure of Leviticus 20," in *Jewish Law Association Studies XVI: The Boston 2004 Conference Volume*, ed. E. Dorff (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2007), 43; and Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 357.
42. For example, Hosea 3:1.
43. Berman suggests that the sins of the people constitute a breach of the covenant and that when the covenantal bond is tainted, the Temple (the symbol of the covenant), by association, is defiled. See Berman, *The Temple*, 143.
44. A comparison can be made between the giving of standards of conduct in these chapters and the similar language in Psalms 15, 24, and others, which scholars have designated as "temple entrance liturgies." See Craig C. Broyles, "Psalms Concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 249.

45. TB Shabbat 31a.
46. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 236.
47. *Ibid.*, 239.
48. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2085.
49. The tending of the lamps on the menorah is mentioned first in Leviticus 24:2 because this chore had to be tended to daily and “the more frequent (use) precedes.” Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2085 quoting Zebah 10:1.
50. Called the *pārōket* in Exodus 26:31-35; 36:35-36, and discussed in Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 178, 181. As Rendsburg adds, “At this very point in our text we enter the holy of holies, corresponding to the summit of Mount Sinai. ... To reach [that point] Moses must have passed through the second screen!” pp. 181-82.
51. Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 181.
52. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 216.
53. *Ibid.*, 216–217.
54. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2151-52.
55. Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 181.
56. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 241.
57. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2272 (emphasis added).
58. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 243. See also Berman, *The Temple*, 154.
59. Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 188, and sources cited there, most notably Jer. 34:13-15, which collocates the making of the covenant and the sabbatical proclamation of release.
60. *Ibid.*, 188.
61. Berman notes the parallels between the language of these blessings and the biblical imagery of the Garden of Eden. See Berman, *The Temple*, 24-25. The imagery of Eden should be expected in a chapter designed to represent the Holy of Holies.
62. See extensively Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).
63. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 244.



64. The full sequential list of divine statements in Leviticus 26 containing the first-person pronouns I, my, or me is: I YHWH am your god (26:1), You shall keep my Sabbaths (2), Venerate my sanctuary (2), I YHWH (have spoken) (2), Follow my laws (3), Keep my commandments (3), I will grant you rains (4), I will grant peace (6), I will eliminate vicious beasts (6), I will look with favor (9), I will uphold my covenant with you (9), I will establish my presence (11), I will not expel you (11), I will walk about in your minds (12), I will (continue) to be your God (12), You shall be my people (12), I YHWH am your God (13), I broke the bars of your yoke (13), If you do not obey me (14), If you despise my laws and loathe my rules (15), Do not observe all my commandments (15), Breaking my covenant (15), I in turn will do this to you (16), I will bring panic (16), I will set my face against you (17), You do not obey me (18), I will go on to discipline you (18), I will break your proud strength (19), I will make your skies like iron (19), Continue in opposition to me (21), Refuse to obey me (21), I will go on smiting you (21), I will let loose wild beasts against you (22), You are not disciplined for me (23), You continue in opposition to me (23), I too will continue (24), I myself will smite you (24), I will bring a sword against you (25), I will send pestilence (25), I break your staff (26), You disobey me (27), Continue in opposition to me (27), I will continue (28), I myself will discipline (28), I will destroy you (30), I will heap your carcasses (30), I will expel you (30), I will lay your cities in ruin (31), I will not smell your pleasant odors (31), I myself will make your land (32), I will scatter among the nations (33), I will unsheathe the sword (33), I will bring faintness (36), Committed sacrilege against me (40), Continued in opposition to me (40), I, in turn, had to continue (41), I will remember my covenant with Jacob (42), Also my covenant with Isaac (42), Also my covenant with Abraham (42), I will remember (42), I will remember (42), My rules they spurned (43), My laws they loathed (43), I have not spurned them (44), My covenant with them (44), I YHWH am their God (44), I will remember (45), I freed from the land of Egypt (45), I YHWH (have spoken) (45).
65. The term for the presence of the Lord (walking, *mithalekh*) used in Leviticus 26:11-12 is the same used in the Eden story in Gen. 3:8. See Berman, *The Temple*, 26.
66. Ze'ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1996), schematic below is on p. 14.

67. “Seven” appears forty-five times in Leviticus: sprinkle seven times, cleanse seven times, seven days, seven sabbaths.
68. Reminiscent of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 1–10.
69. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.212-14.
70. Margaret Barker, “The Blue, the Purple and the Scarlet. The Making and Meaning of the Coloured Fabrics of the Temple,” presentation at the London Temple Studies Group (2014), 4.
71. Barker, “The Blue, the Purple and the Scarlet,” 9.
72. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5:214.
73. M. Avi-Yonah emphasizes the importance of the calendar in interpreting this panel of the mosaic in the synagogue at Sepphoris. M. Avi-Yonah, “The Caesarea Inscription of the Twenty-Four Priestly Courses,” *The Teacher’s Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham*, ed. E. J. Vardaman, J. L. Garret, and J. B. Adair (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1964), 55-57. Stuart Miller concurs: “There should be little doubt that M. Avi-Yonah’s calendrical understanding of the zodiac in synagogue art is correct.” Stuart A. Miller, “Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 53.
74. See, for example, Jodi Magness, “Heaven and Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005), 1-52; Miller, “‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis,” 27-76; L. A. Roussin, “Helios in the Synagogue: Did Some Jews Worship the Sun God?” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 27, no. 2 (2001): 53-56.
75. Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 172, stating that the mosaic “indicates that, when Abraham and Isaac reached the sacred spot, they removed their shoes out of respect for the sanctity of the site.” See also 1 Chron. 16:15-17, attributed to David as he appointed certain Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord and admonished all to be mindful of God’s covenant, which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac, which was confirmed to Jacob.
76. As Stuart Miller summarizes their position: “The whole transports the worshipper from the promise made to Abraham to the future redemption of the Jews, when the Temple will be restored.” Miller,

“‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis,” 71; see Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 34-39.

77. Likewise, while the mosaic at Beth Alpha is a little simpler than the mosaic at Sepphoris, its border more obviously separates its three scenes from the surrounding outside world, while the stars and extended hand between its zodiac and the scene showing the binding of Isaac more obviously represent the veil of the Temple. See Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 39.
78. “These synagogue floors were often ornamented with mosaic panels. ... [Some of their symbols] preserve a memory of the Temple and its ceremonies.” Rachel Hachlili, “Synagogues before and after the Roman Destruction of the Temple,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 41, no. 3 (May/June 2015): 34-35.
79. Rolf Rendtorff, “Is It Possible to Read Leviticus as a Separate Book?” in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, 35.
80. Philip R. Davies, “Leviticus as Cultic System in the Second Temple Period: Remarks on the Paper by Hannah K. Harrington,” in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, 237.

