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3-1-2021

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### Recommended Citation

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**The God Who is Affected by Human Problems:  
Atonement Through Israelite Purification Offerings**

Roy E. Gane

**Abstract:**

Ancient Israelite purification offerings removed sins and physical ritual impurities from those who offered them and brought residual defilement from these evils into the sanctuary of God. The defilements that accumulated at the sanctuary throughout the year were ritually removed by special purification offerings on the annual Day of Atonement. This two-phase process of ritual atonement, which was unique in the ancient Near East, acknowledged and highlighted the effects on God when he is involved in freeing human beings from problems that they have caused.

**Keywords:**

Sin, Impurity, Atonement, Purification Offering, Sanctuary

## Introduction

Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples were keenly aware of categories that could be regarded as “sin,” i.e., “moral fault,” which could be viewed as moral impurity, and various other kinds of “impurity,” such as physical ritual impurity or demonic impurity. Because sin could be viewed as defiling, the overall category of “impurity” in general included sin. Both sin and other forms of impurity were to be avoided if possible and remedied if necessary because they could negatively impact relationships between ANE people and deities, whose favor was essential for their well-being.

“Sin” is fairly easy to define as violation of a divine norm. A general definition of other “impurity” that applies within all ANE cultural contexts is more elusive and is still subject to debate.<sup>1</sup> However, we can tentatively suggest that such “impurity” was basically some kind of disorder that involved one or more extraordinary factors, such as a superhuman source (e.g., a demon), an adverse effect on the relationship between a human being and a superhuman being, or the need for a remedy that transcended ordinary human ability.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper will first establish an overall perspective and baseline for comparison by identifying concepts regarding sins and other kinds of impurities in the ANE outside Israel. Then the remainder of the paper will compare and contrast ways in which the ancient Israelite ritual system dealt with these evils, including through purification offerings that uniquely revealed the way in which Israel’s deity, YHWH, made himself vulnerable to human weaknesses in the process of remedying them.

## Impurities, Including Sins, of Ancient Near Eastern Peoples

This section begins with sins and then turns to consideration of other impurities.

### Sins of ANE Peoples

Some ANE texts identify divine norms of behavior to which humans are accountable, violation of which could be regarded as sinful. For example, according to the Ur III period (c. 2100-2000 B.C.) Sumerian text called “The Nanshe Hymn,” persons who gained their sustenance or other economic benefits from the temple of the goddess Nanshe were responsible for adhering to the cultic and ethical rules of the goddess.<sup>3</sup> Cultic rules included proper performance of duties at the temple, such as cleaning troughs of dough and maintaining the fire at night (lines 114-115). Ethical rules prohibited bullying, altering boundaries, dishonesty in the use of weights and measures,<sup>4</sup> and mistreatment of children by

their mothers (lines 136, 139, 142-143, 212-223).

At an annual review or judgment on the New Year, those who observed Nanshe's rules had their contracts for employment or economic assistance renewed for the coming year, but the contracts of those who violated the rules were terminated. A person whose contract was terminated could be cleared from blame and restored by the "ordeal river in the house of Nanshe" (line 130).<sup>5</sup> This river ordeal served as a test of whether a person was guilty or innocent, but it does not appear to have atoned for guilt.

Another example of a text that reveals divine norms is Spell 125 of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead," which contains two series of negative confessions by a dead person to an underworld tribunal of forty-two gods.<sup>6</sup> These expressions of innocence reflect an understanding of what would be acceptable or unacceptable to the gods, including mostly a wide array of ethical behaviors, but also some cultic ones. At the conclusion of the first series of negative confessions, the deceased person exclaims: "I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!"<sup>7</sup> This refers to an assertion of moral purity. A later passage in the same text lists good things that the person has done and repeats the claim of moral purity: "I am pure of mouth, pure of hands..."<sup>8</sup> However, this chapter of the "Book of the Dead" concerning judgment by the gods provides no opportunity for expiation from moral failure.

Some other ANE texts indicate means by which individuals attempted to atone for guilt. Notable examples are the "Plague Prayers of Muršili II," a Hittite emperor who pled with the Hittite gods to remove a terrible epidemic that was taking the lives of countless people in the land of Ḫatti over a period of many years.<sup>9</sup> Muršili says that he inquired of a god through an oracle and learned that the cause of the plague was guilt incurred years before by his father, Šuppiluliuma I, when he unjustly put to death a ruler named Tudḫaliya, thereby violating an oath to him. There were two serious violations of divine norms here: murder and breaking an oath.

After the murder, Šuppiluliuma himself performed a ritual to expiate bloodshed, and later Muršili did the same, although the people of the capital city of Ḫattuša did not. Nobody carried out any expiatory ritual on behalf of the land. However, Muršili promised in his prayer:

They will perform before you, [the gods], my lords, the ritual of (transgressing of) the oath which was ascertained for you, [the gods], my lords, and for your temples in regard to the plague. They will purify [... before you]. And I will make restitution to you, the gods, my lords, with reparation and propitiatory gift on behalf of the

land.<sup>10</sup>

Muršili also sought to restore the favor of the gods by offering bread and a libation, by worshiping all the gods during festivals, and by confessing and pleading in prayer, but to no avail. Obviously, Muršili believed in the possibility that any or all of the strategies that he tried could atone for the guilt of his father that the land bore and that he had inherited, but their efficacy depended on the will of the gods to accept or reject them.

The partly broken Mesopotamian “Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” recounts the horrible experience of a person who suffered in many ways, which he believed to be the results of a sin that he had committed, of which he was ignorant.<sup>11</sup> He petitioned his god Marduk and goddess Sarpanitum (Marduk’s consort) in prayer and tried to find out what he had done wrong and resolve the problem with the help of a diviner, a dream interpreter, and an exorcist who performed a ritual. He did not understand the displeasure of the gods because he was a pious man who regularly made libations, gave food offerings and performed rituals, including sacrifices, bowed down, prayed, and observed holy days and festivals. Finally, the pious sufferer gained relief and restoration, which he attributed to reconciliation with his god, who mercifully forgave his sin.

Now we can summarize several key aspects of ANE thought regarding “sin.” First, sinful violations of divine norms could be cultic or ethical. Second, punishments for sin could affect individuals or groups, and punishment affecting a whole country could be referred to as resulting from guilt borne by the land. Third, some divine judgments did not allow for atonement. Fourth, the success of attempted atonement depended on the will of deities. Fifth, various strategies for atonement could be attempted, including expiatory rituals and gifts for propitiation and reparation to remedy specific, known offenses, and/or offerings and other forms of worship to regain divine favor in general. Sixth, people could suffer divine punishment without knowing what they had done wrong.

### **Other Impurities of ANE Peoples**

ANE peoples were concerned about a wide variety of impurities. Mesopotamians and Hittites generally thought that impurities came from the underworld and should be returned there if possible.<sup>12</sup> Mesopotamians viewed such impurities as demonic. For example, on the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year Festival of Spring, there were two stages in the ritual purification of the Ezida apartment of the god Nabû that was located in the great Esagila temple of Marduk, whose title was Bēl, which means “Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Marduk was the city god of

Babylon and Nabû's father. This purification prepared for the arrival of Nabû, represented by his idol, from his home city of Borsippa to participate in the festival. The Ezida had been vacant all year, and it was believed that one or more demons had taken up residence there.<sup>14</sup> So the purification of this cella involved exorcism.

The first stage of purification involved application of purgative agents, including water, cedar oil, incense, and torch light, and wiping the decapitated carcass of a ram on the walls of the Ezida to absorb impurity, after which the exorcist was to dispose of the impurity-laden ram by throwing it into the Euphrates River. Significantly, the Akkadian word for "wiping" is *kuppuru*, the cognate of Hebrew *kipper*, which refers to purgation of the Israelite sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:16, 18).

The first stage performed by the human exorcist was regarded as successful in removing lesser demons, but there could remain a greater, more powerful demon, whose expulsion required divine power. Therefore, in a second stage of purification, a kind of golden canopy was stretched over the Ezida, and the high priest and other temple personnel recited a loud cry calling on the gods to purify the temple. The incantation included the words: "Any evil that is in this temple, get out! Great evil demon, may Bēl kill you! Wherever you are, be suppressed!"<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the Mesopotamians, the Hittites regarded most impurities as non-demonic and impersonal.<sup>16</sup> Hittites were obsessed with maintaining and regaining purity, the absence of impurity, apparently more than any other ANE people group. Impurities could cause a vast range of afflictions, including serious and fatal illnesses. Some impurities could be avoided, but some could be incurred unintentionally, and others were impossible to prevent.<sup>17</sup>

For the Hittites, there were many sources and forms of impurities,<sup>18</sup> which were contagious and could attach to persons, animals, objects, buildings, or places. Most Hittite impurities can be grouped into three kinds. First, impurities could come from human bodily discharges, physical activities, or conditions, including blood, sexual intercourse, childbirth, or death.<sup>19</sup> Second, impurities could be abstract pollutions from social evils, including gossip, slander, theft, murder, and bestiality. Third, impurities could be of superhuman origin, such as occult sources through sorcery and witchcraft, or from gods as results of curses and/or divine anger.

Purification procedures took many forms, depending on the nature of the impurities that they targeted. Purification could be as simple as bathing after sexual intercourse, or it could be more complex.<sup>20</sup> A ritual could eliminate evils by banishing materials, animals, or humans (probably captives) to remote locations or by burning, burying, or sealing materials

associated with them.<sup>21</sup>

Hittite temples and their sancta required maintenance of purity, and purification from impurities that affected them. For example, the Hittite “Instructions for Temple Officials” (CTH 264) recorded rules for the royal temple in Ḫattuša, the imperial capital.<sup>22</sup> Temple personnel who served the gods were to be washed and trimmed, and the kitchen for baking the bread for the gods was to be swept and sprinkled down. These would be ordinary mundane activities outside the temple, but because this was the sacred space, maintaining its cleanliness to retain the favor of the gods carried transcendent significance.<sup>23</sup> It seems that ANE peoples did not sharply distinguish between physical cleanliness and ritual purity in such contexts because they regarded the divine and human spheres as interactive components of a single natural cosmic community, without a division between “natural” and “supernatural.”<sup>24</sup>

One activity that required temple officials to wash before serving food and drink to the gods was sexual intercourse. Incurring impurity at home in this way was permitted, but purification was needed before coming in contact with the sacred domain in order to avoid polluting holy things and places. The impurity itself was not a sin, but violation of the rule “is a sin for him” (§14; cf. §10 of guards).

Sacred objects belonging to the temple could become impure through contact with a pig or dog if it forced its way in to wooden or ceramic vessels belonging to the kitchen. The vessels could not be purified, presumably because they were porous and absorbed the impurity. So they were to be discarded (§14).

In the “Instructions for Temple Officials,” temple personnel need not only physical ritual purity, but also moral purity of their minds, as pointed out by Ada Taggar-Cohen.<sup>25</sup> The “Instructions” warn against various sins of commission, such as stealing things that belonged to the gods (§§5-8, 16-19), and sins of omission, such as neglecting to properly celebrate a festival (§12). The text does not mention the possibility of atonement for such sins. By including concern for both ritual and moral purity, the “Instructions” reinforce the close connection between these categories.

Another Hittite text that concerns cultic purity prescribes rituals for the Ninth Year Festival of the god Telipinu.<sup>26</sup> On the fourth day of this festival, cultic functionaries were to use a wagon to carry the images of Telipinu, his consort, other gods, and a cult pedestal in a procession from Telipinu’s temple to a river. There they were to ritually wash these sacred objects in the river and perform animal sacrifices, after which they would transport the sancta back to the temple. The text does not specify the nature of the impurity that had to be

removed, but it clearly accumulated on the idols and the pedestal over a period of time. These objects were not immune to the impurity, but it did not negate their sanctity if they underwent periodic purification. The impurity was not just ordinary dirt, which could have been cleaned off at the temple, rather than having to be ritually removed at the river.

Purification of an Anatolian temple could involve the use of blood. Ritual activities for initial purification of a new temple for the underworld “Goddess of the Night” included the following: “They offer one sheep to the deity...and slaughter it down in the hole...They bloody the golden (image of the) deity, the wall and all the implements of the new [dei]ty. Then the [ne]w deity and the temple are pure” (§32).<sup>27</sup>

We can now summarize some points regarding ANE conceptions and treatment of “impurity” that was not sin, keeping in mind that ANE cultures differed somewhat in their views of impurity. First, impurities could be physical, social, or superhuman in origin and nature. Second, physical impurities that were seemingly mundane carried additional significance in cultic contexts because they could affect relationships with deities. Third, impurities were generally to be avoided if possible, but if they were incurred, they were to be remedied by means of appropriate purification rituals. Fourth, while impurity itself was not sin and incurring an impurity could be permitted, violation of a rule concerning impurity was sinful. Fifth, impurity was opposed to holiness, so it had to be kept out of temples and sacred objects if possible, but if they became polluted, they were to be ritually purified or, in some cases, objects lost their sanctity and had to be discarded.

## **Impurities, Including Sins, of Ancient Israelites**

Concepts and treatment of sins and other impurities affecting ancient Israelites, according to the Hebrew Bible, are similar in many ways to those of these evils elsewhere in the ANE, although there are some differences. This section summarizes the same kinds of points regarding Israelite sins and impurities that were earlier observed in the context of the rest of the ANE, thereby showing comparisons and contrasts.

### **Sins of Ancient Israelites**

First, sins could be violations of cultic rules, such as the prohibition against eating the meat of a well-being offering on the third day after it is slaughtered and offered to God (Lev 7:18). On the other hand, sins could be violations of ethical principles, such as those of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20) and laws related to them (e.g., in Exod 21-23).<sup>28</sup>



Second, punishments for sins could fall on individuals or on groups, including the entire Israelite nation (Lev 26). Furthermore, sexual offenses (Lev 18:6-20, 22-23), idolatry (Lev 18:21), and murder (Num 35:33-34) morally polluted the land, ultimately leading to exile of the people from the land if enough of this moral impurity accumulated there (Lev 18:28). Another kind of moral pollution was the automatic defilement of the sanctuary from a distance if an Israelite or resident alien living in the land offered any of his children to the god Molech (20:3) or if someone deliberately committed the sin of failing to undergo purification from impurity that they received from a corpse (Num 19:13, 20). The penalty for these sins was the divinely administered punishment of being “cut off” (verbs from the root *k-r-t*) from one’s people, that is, forfeiting one’s afterlife.<sup>29</sup>

Third, some divine judgments by YHWH did not allow for Israelites to receive atonement through expiatory sacrifices, although he could mercifully forgive apart from sacrifice (Exod 34:7; 2 Sam 12:13; Ps 51; 2 Chr 33; see below). There was no sacrificial expiation for those whose serious sins incurred the terminal penalty of being “cut off” (e.g., Lev 7:20-21, 25, 27), including those who committed “high-handed” sins, that is, in defiance of YHWH (Num 15:30-31). On the Day of Atonement, all Israelites and non-Israelite resident aliens were to gain moral purification as a result of the purgation of the sanctuary when they showed loyalty to YHWH by practicing self-denial through fasting, etc., and by abstaining from all work (Lev 16:29-31). But those who failed to do this were to be “cut off” or “destroyed” (Lev 23:29-30). Thus, the Day of Atonement was Israel’s judgment day.

Fourth, as elsewhere in the ANE, the success of an Israelite in gaining atonement depended on the will of the deity. Atonement did not automatically result from performance of an expiatory ritual like a kind of magic. Divine acceptance of a sacrifice was necessary for atonement (Lev 1:4). Forgiveness to complete the process of atonement, i.e., reconciliation, was granted by YHWH himself, following an expiatory sacrifice officiated by a priest, as in Lev 4:26, for example: “Thus the priest shall make expiation for him from his sin, and he will be forgiven” (my translation). The priest made expiation, that is, removing the consequences of the sin from the sinner, but he was not authorized to forgive the sinner. The implied agent of the passive expression “he will be forgiven” is YHWH himself,<sup>30</sup> who alone could forgive because it was his law that had been violated. While such forgiveness was not automatic, God promised that he would grant it if the sacrifice was properly performed. However, this assumes that the sinner is sincere and repentant. Elsewhere in the Bible, YHWH rejects sacrifices and other forms of worship, even prayers, offered by hypocritical individuals (e.g., Isa 1:11-15).

Fifth, Israelites could seek atonement in various ways, especially including expiatory sacrifices (e.g., Lev 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35), some of which followed confession (5:5; Num 5:7), and some of which followed payment of reparation to the wronged party (Lev 5:16, 23-24 [Eng. 6:4-5]; Num 5:7). Unlike other ANE peoples, repentant Israelites who offered the types of sacrifices specified for their kinds of offenses by YHWH's ritual law were guaranteed atonement. A sinner who committed so great a wrong that its penalty was terminal, whether death or "cutting off," with no kind of animal sacrifice available to expiate it, could nevertheless pray to God, confessing the sin and pleading for reconciliation. Kings David and Manasseh received divine mercy in this way (Ps 51 [cf. 2 Sam 12:13]; 2 Chr. 33:12-13). Individuals who were ignorant of what they had done wrong, but whose experiences led them to believe that they must have sinned, could receive expiation through reparation offerings (Lev 5:17-19; see below).

Sixth, a person could experience results of divine displeasure without knowing the nature of his/her offense. However, this should have been rare because YHWH, unlike other ANE deities, made a unique covenant/treaty with a nation, in this case Israel, and the covenant stipulations consisted of laws (especially in the collections of Exod 20-23; Lev 17-27; Deut 12-26) that specified in detail what he wanted his people to do or not do.<sup>31</sup>

It is true that other ANE peoples also had laws, such as the Laws of Hammurabi and the Hittite Laws. Such regulations governed various kinds of behaviors, violation of which could be regarded as crimes, or as sins in the sense that the social order governed by a human ruler was viewed as subject to the overall jurisdiction of the gods.<sup>32</sup> However, there was a much more direct connection between the biblical laws and the will of the one deity YHWH than there was between the other ANE law collections and any particular deities. The fact that Israelite religion was monotheistic greatly simplified matters for people who believed that they had sinned because they did not need to employ diviners to figure out which superhuman being they had offended.

Further reducing uncertainty and stress, Israelites who unintentionally violated divine commandments were required to offer expiatory purification or reparation offerings only when they came to know that they had done wrong (Lev 4:13-14, 22-23, 27-28; 5:14-16). Those who perceived that they were experiencing negative consequences of sins without knowing what they had done wrong could offer a particular kind of sacrifice—a reparation offering—to remedy the problem (Lev 5:17-19).<sup>33</sup>

### **Other Impurities of Ancient Israelites**

First, for the Israelites, non-moral impurities did not come from the underworld, nor were they demonic in origin. Rather, some came from contact with certain impure species of animals when they were dead (Lev 11:24-44; cf. 5:2), but most of them originated from physical conditions and activities of human beings (Lev 12, 13-15; Num 19). Human impurities were notable manifestations of the birth-to-death cycle of human mortality,<sup>34</sup> including corpses (Num 19), male or female genital flows (Lev 15), or surface disease, commonly referred to as “leprosy,” including scaly-skin disease on persons, as well as outbreaks of mold or other kinds of fungus on garments or houses (Lev 13-14).

In biblical narratives, YHWH sometimes punished people by afflicting them with skin disease (Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27; 15:5; 2 Chr 26:19-20), but although the origin of the impurity was superhuman, the impurity itself affected physical conditions.<sup>35</sup> Non-moral Israelite impurities were conceptual in the sense that they involved categories, rather than just ordinary physical dirt. For example, washing a corpse could not make it pure. However, impurities were physical in the sense that they could adhere to Israelite persons, objects, or places. Social evils, such as slander (Lev 19:16), were treated as sins, rather than as other kinds of impurities.

Second, as in other ANE countries, some physical impurities that were seemingly mundane carried additional significance in Israelite cultic contexts. Israelite priests were required to wash their hands and feet with water drawn from the sacred basin in the sanctuary courtyard before they entered the sacred sanctuary tent or officiated at the outer altar so that they may not die (Exod 30:17-21). The impurity that they removed may have included some ordinary dirt, but the importance of this purification went far beyond what would be expected in a non-cultic context.

Third, as elsewhere in the ANE, impurities were generally to be avoided if possible, but if they were incurred, they were to be remedied by means of appropriate purification rituals. Incurring some Israelite physical impurities, such as secondary contamination by touching a person having a genital flow or tertiary contamination by contacting an object that the person had made impure (e.g., Lev 15:4-12), was to be avoided, if possible. However, some impurities could not be avoided because they resulted from involuntary bodily functions, such as healthy or unhealthy genital flows (Lev 12, 15) or scaly skin disease (Lev 13-14). Others were permitted and even necessary, such as the impurity resulting from sexual intercourse that was needed to maintain and grow the nation (Lev 15:18), and incurring corpse impurity to bury dead relatives (Num 19). Some impurities were forbidden, at least to

some categories of Israelites. For example, all Israelites were prohibited from eating small swarming creatures that would make them impure (Lev 11:43-44) and ordinary priests were not to become impure from corpses, except for those of close family members (21:1-4).

Rituals for purification from light one-day impurities, such those caused by male nocturnal emission (Lev 15:16-17), by sexual intercourse (v. 18), or by secondary contamination through physical contact with a person having a genital flow (e.g., vv. 7, 11; cf. v. 8—or his spittle), or by tertiary contamination through contact with an object made unclean by a person with a severe impurity resulting from a genital flow (vv. 5-6, 9-10) were simple: All that was necessary was to wash one's clothes, bathe in water, and wait until the evening. However, purification from severe impurities, that is, from primary sources of impurity that continued for an extended period of time, also required sacrifices from the individuals undergoing purification (e.g., vv. 14-15, 29-30; Lev 14:10-20).

Corpse impurity was secondary contamination, but it was serious and lasted seven days (Num 19:11) because of its close association with death, and it was transmitted not only by direct contact, but also to anyone under the same roof (v. 14). So purification required the red cow purification offering, but this was offered for the whole community (vv. 1-10), and individuals only needed to be sprinkled by a small amount of its ashes, mixed with water, on the third and seventh days (Num 19:17-19).

Fourth, physical impurity itself was not sin, as shown by the fact that Israelites who offered sacrifices to remove their physical impurities needed and received purification, but not forgiveness (e.g., Lev 12:7-8). However, violation of a rule concerning impurity, for example, by incurring a prohibited impurity (see above) or failing to undergo timely purification (5:2-3), was a sin.

Fifth, Israelite physical impurity conflicted with the holy domain of the deity. This was not only because such impurity showed lack of decorum and respect to YHWH, but because he is the God of life, the Creator (Gen 1-2), who must not be associated with impurity that comes from death and the birth-to-death cycle of mortality (see above) that results from sin (Gen 3; cf. Rom 6:23).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Israelites were to keep impurities away from sacred places and objects. For example, a woman with a flow of blood following childbirth was not permitted to enter the sanctuary precincts (Lev 12:4). It was categorically forbidden for an Israelite to eat meat from a holy well-being offering while in a state of physical impurity, and the penalty for the sin of violating this rule was "cutting off" (Lev 7:20-21). Failure to undergo purification from corpse impurity even defiled the sanctuary from a distance, and the penalty was "cutting off."

## Israelite Cult Affected by Remedies for Sins and Other Impurities

Thus far, we have found that Israelites and other ANE peoples shared key concepts regarding sins and other impurities, although there were some differences between them. ANE people could sin or incur other impurities so that they would need to offer expiatory sacrifices or undergo purification, and their sacred places and objects could become impure so that they would require periodic purification. But never did their *remedies* for personal sins or impurities cause these evils to pollute their temples or sancta in any way, and there is no evidence that purification of holy spaces and/or their contents ever removed any effects of expiation or purification of sins or impurities of individuals. These were entirely separate.

By contrast, there was one important feature of the Israelite ritual system that was completely unique: Purification offerings (*ḥattā't* sacrifices; so-called “sin offerings”) that removed residual defilements of minor sins (Lev 4:1-5:13) and what had been serious physical impurities (12:6-8; 14:19; 15:15, 30) from those who offered them left some defilement at YHWH’s sanctuary residence and on his priests (6:20-21 [Eng. vv. 27-28]; 10:17). So this defilement had to be purified from the sanctuary with its sacred furniture once per year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Thus, individual expiation and purification were linked to purgation of sacred space and objects. Remarkably, the ritual remedy prescribed by the deity (4:1; 6:24) for problems of persons negatively affected that deity at his sanctuary residence throughout the year until the Day of Atonement. The remainder of this paper analyzes the ritual details and their implications.

## Transfer of Sins and Impurities to the Sanctuary Throughout the Year

Leviticus 4:1-5:13 presents the primary instructions for performance of purification offerings, which remedied inadvertent sins and minor sins of omission, mainly due to forgetfulness. The ritual procedure began with the offerer laying one hand on the head of the animal victim, after which he killed the animal, presumably by slitting its throat (cf. 2 Kgs 10:7).<sup>37</sup> A priest collected the blood in a container (cf. 2 Chr 29:22) and applied it to part of the sanctuary, after which he disposed of the remainder of the blood by pouring it out at the base of the outer altar in the courtyard. Then the offerer removed specified parts of suet, i.e., hard fat, and burned the suet on the outer altar.

There were two basic kinds of purification offerings. The first kind applied if the sacrifice remedied a sin that involved the entire community, whether it was committed by the high priest, who represented the community before YHWH (e.g., Exod 28:29-30, 38), or by the entire community itself. The high priest took the blood into the sanctuary tent, sprinkled

some of it seven times in the area of the outer sanctum in front of the inner veil, and put some of it on the four horns of the altar of incense (vv. 5-7, 16-18). After the high priest burned the suet on the altar, the rest of the animal carcass was disposed of by incinerating it outside the camp in a pure place (vv. 11-12, 21), excluding, for example, a place of human burial (cf. Num 19:16).

A purification offering to expiate a sin committed by a chieftain or common Israelite could be officiated by an ordinary priest, who would only put blood on the horns of the outer altar (Lev 4:25, 30, 34). This procedure, officiated by an ordinary priest, was the same when a purification offering remedied physical impurities (cf. ordinary priests in 12:6-8; 14:19). Leviticus 4 does not say what should be done with the rest of the animal. However, Leviticus 6 answers this question in the context of additional instructions that were especially for the priests: "The priest who offers it as a purification offering will eat it. It must be eaten in a holy place, in the meeting tent's courtyard" (v. 19 [Eng. v. 26] CEB).

A purification offering could be supplemented by a burnt offering so that the combination would amount to a greater purification offering. Thus, for example, a poor person who could not afford a sheep or goat for a purification offering (5:6) could instead offer two birds, first one for a purification offering and the other as a burnt offering (5:7-10). The function of this pair was equivalent to that of a single purification offering.

The function of purification offerings throughout the year to remedy sins was to expiate, i.e., effect removal (*kipper*, Piel of *k-p-r*), on behalf of the offerers, in this case the sinners, from (privative preposition *min*) their sins (4:26; 5:6, 10). That is, the sin was removed from the offerers. If the problem was physical impurity, rather than sin, a purification offering effected removal for the offerer from (also privative preposition *min*) that person's impurity (12:7; 14:19; 15:15, 30), i.e., removing the impurity from the offerer.<sup>38</sup>

Jacob Milgrom has argued that sins would be removed from sinners by repentance and physical impurities would be removed from impure persons by washing with water before they would offer purification offerings. Therefore, purification offerings would not remove evils from their offerers.<sup>39</sup> James A. Greenberg agrees because an impure person would not even be allowed to come to the sanctuary to offer a sacrifice.<sup>40</sup> But he, like Milgrom, does not adequately recognize that purification from a severe impurity took place in stages that progressively diminished and then removed the impurity.

For example, in the case of a woman who has given birth to a boy, for the first seven days she has contagious impurity, as during menstruation (Lev 12:2), so that she communicates impurity to persons and objects through touch (cf. 15:19-24). For the next

thirty-three days, her impurity is not contagious in that way, but she is still forbidden to touch anything holy or enter the sanctuary precincts “until her time of purification is completed” (12:4 CEB). Then when her “time of purification is complete, whether for a son or a daughter, the mother must bring a one-year-old lamb as an entirely burned offering and a pigeon or turtledove as a purification offering to the priest at the meeting tent’s entrance” (v. 6 CEB, supplying “the mother” for clarity). By now her impurity is weak enough that she can come to the sanctuary, where the purification offering, supplemented by the burnt offering, removes the last residue of impurity: “She will then be cleansed from her blood flow” (v. 7 CEB).<sup>41</sup>

The additional instructions in Leviticus 6:20b-21 [Eng. vv. 27b-28] add the following regulations regarding the purification offering: “If some of its blood splashes on a garment, you must wash the bloodied part in a holy place. A pottery container in which the purification offering is cooked must be broken, but if it is cooked in a bronze container, that must be scrubbed and rinsed with water.”

Because the purification offering was most holy and the priests were required to eat it in a holy place, and anything that touched its flesh became holy (vv. 18, 20a, 22 [Eng. vv. 25, 27a, 29]),<sup>42</sup> most scholars have interpreted these verses to mean that the reason for washing the bloodied part of a garment and for breaking or scrubbing and rinsing a vessel in which the meat is cooked for the priests is to remove contagious holiness.<sup>43</sup> However, this interpretation does not work because, as pointed out by Jacob Milgrom and David P. Wright, these rules concerning bloodied garments and cooking vessels only applied to purification offerings. If the rules dealt with sancta contagion, they would necessarily also apply to reparation offerings, which were also most holy (7:1, 6) and made things holy by direct contact (6:10-11 [Eng. vv. 17-18]).<sup>44</sup> But there is no evidence that reparation offerings were subject to these regulations, so they must be required by the unique dynamics of purification offerings, which served the function of removing sins and physical impurities.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, what was to be removed by washing the bloodied part of a garment and breaking or scrubbing and rinsing a vessel was not holiness, but defilement from the sin or impurity that was removed from the offerer by means of his/her animal victim.<sup>46</sup> There is no solid evidence elsewhere in the Israelite ritual system for ritual removal of holiness,<sup>47</sup> but there is plenty of evidence for washing impurity from garments (e.g., 11:25, 28, 40; 15:5-8, 10-11).<sup>48</sup> There is also evidence for breaking earthenware vessels that have become impure (11:33, 35; 15:12).<sup>49</sup>

Sancta contagion does not make good sense in Lev 6:20-21. Aside from the points already mentioned, if purification offering blood spatters on a priest's garment or he boils the meat in a vessel, why would sancta contagion matter? The priest's garment is already holy and belongs to the sanctuary, and presumably so do the vessels used to boil such meat there. If the concern of verse 20 is restricted to clothes of laypersons, which could be confiscated if holiness were not removed from them, and does not also apply to priests' garments, why doesn't the text say so? On the other hand, impurity from the offerer makes sense because it would be a problem for both lay and priestly garments.<sup>50</sup>

If purification offering animals, including their blood, bore defilement that was removed from their offerers, we can understand why such blood was never physically applied to the offerers: Why put the sins or impurities back on the offerers when the ritual purpose was to remove the evils from them?<sup>51</sup>

Now consider this. If purification offering blood carried defilement that could be transferred to an object, such as a garment, that came in contact with the blood, what happened when the priest applied such blood to the sanctuary, whether in the outer sanctum and on the horns of the incense altar (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18) or on the horns of the outer altar (vv. 25, 30, 34)? The ritual activity would have communicated defilement to the sanctuary. This explains how *ḥattā't* sins and physical impurities got into the sanctuary so that they had to be purged from there on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

### **Weakness of Defilements Affecting the Holy Sanctuary**

An objection to the interpretation that Leviticus 6:20-21 concerns impurity is the fact that the purification offering was most holy and was to be eaten in a holy place. How could such a sacrifice carry defilement from sin or physical impurity that came from the offerer?<sup>52</sup> We have seen that elsewhere in the Israelite ritual system, holiness and impurity were antagonistic and had to be kept apart from each other (e.g., Lev 7:20-21). Following instructions in Leviticus 15 concerning treatment of impurities from genital flows, verse 31 warns: "You must separate the Israelites from their uncleanness so that they don't die on account of it, by making my dwelling unclean, which is in their midst" (CEB).

However, we cannot escape the biblical evidence: Paradoxically, purification offerings bore defilement even though Leviticus 6 repeatedly affirms that they were most holy. It was not their purpose to bear this defilement. Their function was to remove sins or



physical impurities from offerers. The defilement that they carried was an inevitable side-effect. There is no question that the sanctuary bore pollution because Leviticus 16 says that it was removed from there on the Day of Atonement (esp. vv. 16, 19).

Lessening the problem of defilement brought into the holy sanctuary by purification offerings is the fact that this defilement would be very minor. These sacrifices did remedy what had been serious physical impurities, but remember that the impurities were weakened before the individuals undergoing purification were allowed to come to the sanctuary in order to offer the sacrifices (see above). If they could enter the sacred precincts while carrying a residue of impurity without disrupting the holiness of the sanctuary, it would be less problematic for the sanctuary to bear an even weaker trace amount of pollution that was tertiary because it was transmitted from a person to an animal and then by a priest to the sanctuary.<sup>53</sup> Remember that in the Israelite system of impurities, secondary and tertiary impurities resulting from contact with the primary source of impurity were weaker than the impurity of that source (see above).

Regarding defilement of the sanctuary from *ḥaṭṭā'î* sins, this was mitigated by the fact that purification offerings only remedied minor sins. These included unintentional sins (Lev 4), sins of temporarily forgetting to fulfill duties to undergo timely physical purification (5:2-3) or to fulfill vows/oaths (v. 4), or temporarily withholding testimony regarding crimes committed by others (v. 1). Repentance of the sinners, as indicated by their bringing purification offerings to the sanctuary to receive expiation, in some cases after required confession (5:5), presumably further lessened the defilement. Then the small amount of remaining pollution went from the offerer to the sacrificial victim and only then by the priest to the sanctuary, again, as tertiary defilement.

Notice the following points. First, the fact that sins expiated by purification offerings caused defilement that polluted the sanctuary, a physical structure with sacred space, exemplifies the fact that sin is a form of impurity. Another example is the ritual of Azazel's goat on the Day of Atonement: The goat carries only sins, i.e., moral faults (Lev 16:21-22), but the man who leads it into the wilderness must subsequently undergo physical purification by laundering his clothes and bathing (v. 26). Second, while purification offerings transferred defilements to the sanctuary only in trace amounts throughout the year, the defilements accumulated so that they had to be removed once per year in order to not become excessive. Third, all of these defilements were symbolic and abstract; they did not exist in physical form.

### **Removal of Sins and Impurities from the Sanctuary on the Day of Atonement**

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest removed the sins and impurities that had accumulated at the sanctuary throughout the year by means of special purification offerings, in which he applied the blood to the various parts of the sanctuary: the inner sanctum, the outer sanctum, and the outer altar (vv. 14-19; cf. vv. 20, 33). The carcasses of the animals, which absorbed the defilements, were incinerated outside the camp (v. 27).

Leviticus 16:16 lists the evils that the high priest purged from (*kipper... min*) the inner sanctum, called here the “holy place,” and the outer sanctum, the (rest of) “the tent of meeting.” These were physical impurities, *peša’* sins, and *ḥaṭṭā’* sins. The high priest also applied blood to the outer altar to remove these impurities and moral faults (abbreviated by referring to the impurities, the first item in the list) from it and to reconsecrate it (verses 18-19).

Notice that although purification offerings throughout the year only involved application of blood to the outer altar in cases of physical impurity and mostly to that altar in cases of sins, the impurities and sins affected the inner sanctum and the outer sanctum. The altar was an integral part of the sanctuary, so what happened to it affected the entire sanctuary, “part for all.” The effects of human problems impacted all of YHWH’s residence, including the inner sanctum and the ark of the covenant, above which he was enthroned above and between the cherubim (cf. Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4).

The *ḥaṭṭā’* sins removed from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement were those that were expiated by purification offerings throughout the year (e.g., Lev 4:3, 14, 23, 26, 28), but the *peša’* sins are only mentioned in Leviticus 16:16, 21, in the context of the Day of Atonement, in all of pentateuchal ritual law. There were no sacrifices for such sins, so they could not have entered the sanctuary through purification offerings as impurities and *ḥaṭṭā’* sins did. Therefore, it appears that the *peša’* sins, which can be translated as “rebellious sins,” came to the sanctuary through automatic defilement caused by egregious sins, such as Molech worship (20:3) and willful failure to undergo purification from corpse impurity (Num 19:13, 20).

Such defilement of the sanctuary from a distance is only attested in these cases. While these sins had to be purged from the sanctuary, this did not benefit those who committed them, who were “cut off.” The penalty was terminal, so the sinners had no opportunity to gain expiation through animal sacrifices. Jacob Milgrom has argued that *ḥaṭṭā’* sins, which were expiable by purification offerings, also automatically defiled the sanctuary from a distance,<sup>54</sup> but there is no real evidence for this.<sup>55</sup>

### **Culpability Transferred to Priests**

If purification offering blood that splattered on a garment contaminated it and such blood that the priest applied to the outer altar or inside the outer sanctum transmitted defilement to the sanctuary, what happened to priests when they ate the meat of purification offerings (Lev 6:19, 22 [Eng. vv. 26, 29]? Vessels in which such meat was cooked became impure so that they had to be broken or cleansed (v. 21 [Eng. v. 28]). This indicates that the meat, like the blood, carried some defilement, which the priests who ate the meat would receive.

Moses made this explicit when he asked the priests in Leviticus 10:17 why they had not eaten the inaugural purification offering on behalf of the community (cf. 9:15) in the holy precincts. He reminded them that the sacrifice was most holy and had been assigned to them, that is, to eat, in order to bear the culpability (*'āwōn*) of the community by expiating for them before YHWH.<sup>56</sup>

Culpability was the consequential liability, i.e., punishability, that resulted from committing a sin. For example, in Leviticus 5:1, if a person sins in a certain way, he bears his culpability unless he confesses (v. 5) and offers a purification offering (v. 6). When a priest eats the purification offering, he receives the culpability. In this way, a priest who mediates for the people participates in bearing culpability as he does (Exod 34:7). Culpabilities must be borne by the priests, not by the physical sanctuary structure or space, because only persons can be liable for punishment. However, the priest does not actually end up suffering the punishment, whether because the culpability is weakened when it is transferred to another person, or because the priest is immune to the culpability, or because the culpability is removed from him on the Day of Atonement to the live goat for Azazel, which carries culpabilities into the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22).

### **Conclusion**

We have found that purification offerings to remedy minor *ḥattā'î* sins and physical impurities resulted in the transfer of weak defilement to the sanctuary, and purification offerings for minor sins, but not physical impurities, caused priests to bear the culpabilities that were transferred to them from the sinners. These dynamics were limited to purification offerings, which involved only weak defilement, probably in order to avoid desecrating the sanctuary so that its function as YHWH's residence would cease because he would leave (cf. Ezek 8-11).

Why would YHWH, who according to the pentateuchal narrative is the source of the ritual instructions, direct that purification offerings would defile his sanctuary as a necessary side-effect of intentional ritual processes?<sup>57</sup> The God of the Israelites provided them with ritual solutions to their problems of sin and of physical impurities, representing the disease of mortality resulting from sin,<sup>58</sup> by making himself vulnerable, due to the temporary defilement of his sanctuary residence and culpability carried by his servants, the priests. This shows his unique willingness to do all he could to help human beings (cf. Isa 5:4a), who could not remedy their problems on their own (cf. Ps 49:8 [Eng. v. 7]), even if it involved sacrifice on his part.

In cases of sin, purification offerings provided expiation, prerequisite to divine forgiveness (e.g., Lev 4:20, 26, 31). As the one who granted pardon, YHWH functioned as Israel's supreme judge. The role of a judge is to vindicate those who are innocent and to condemn those who are guilty (Deut 25:1; 1 Kgs 8:32). A judge is not supposed to forgive the guilty, which would extend mercy without adequate justice. But that is exactly what God does. So he bears judicial responsibility for forgiving sinners, just as King David as judge would bear such responsibility for pardoning a murderer if his mother, the woman of Tekoa, did not offer to bear it for him (2 Sam 14:9—in the context of a juridical parable).

God bears judicial responsibility, as represented by defilement of his sanctuary residence-headquarters and the bearing of culpability by his priests, until the Day of Atonement, Israel's judgment day, when purgation of his sanctuary shows that he is vindicated for having forgiven the right people, who remain repentant and loyal to him. He is also vindicated for condemning those who do not show loyalty to him on this day. Therefore, the two stages of treating *hattā'î* sins, first to remove them from the sinners and then to purge them from the sanctuary, both of which are carried out by purification offerings, constitute a ritual enactment of theodicy, justification of God's character, in dealing with sin. The fact that he forgives shows his mercy. The fact that an expiatory sacrifice is prerequisite to forgiveness and it defiles his sanctuary so that it must be cleansed, representing his vindication, shows his justice. He is fully just as he extends mercy, as expressed in Psalm 85:11: "Faithfulness and truth meet; justice and well-being kiss" (NJPS; verse 10 in other English versions). Justice and mercy are the two sides of God's love (Exod 34:6-7). Therefore, "God is love."<sup>59</sup>

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**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> T. M. Lemos shows that overall rationales for ANE impurity that scholars have proposed, such as symbolism of displaced matter (Mary Douglas), death (Jacob Milgrom), or uncontrollability (Eilberg-Schwartz) do not really cover all kinds of impurity (“Where There Is Dirt, Is There System? Revisiting Biblical Purity Constructions,” *JSOT* 37 [2013], 265-94).
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Alice Mouton, “The Sacred in Hittite Anatolia: A Tentative Definition,” *History of Religions* 55/1 (2015), 59—“any disruption of the established order brings about some form of impurity”; Manfred Hutter, “Concepts of Purity in Anatolian Religions,” in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, Dynamics in the History of Religions 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 159-60, 172.
- <sup>3</sup> Trans. Wolfgang Heimpel, “To Nanshe,” *COS* 1.162:526-31.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. Lev 19:35-36.
- <sup>5</sup> Heimpel, “To Nanshe,” 528.
- <sup>6</sup> Trans. Robert K. Ritner, “Book of the Dead 125 (‘The Negative Confession’),” *COS* 2.12:59-64.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>9</sup> Trans. Gary Beckman, “Plague Prayers of Muršili II,” *COS* 1.60:156-60.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>11</sup> Trans. Benjamin R. Foster, “The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer,” *COS* 1.153:486-92.
- <sup>12</sup> Mouton, “The Sacred,” 55-56.
- <sup>13</sup> For the texts with analysis, see Roy Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, Gorgias Dissertations 14, Religion 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 228-38.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Matt 12:43-45.
- <sup>15</sup> Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, 235.
- <sup>16</sup> David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*, SBLDS 101 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 261-71.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and Their World*, SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 7 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 178-9.
- <sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Mouton, “The Sacred,” 53-54.
- <sup>19</sup> James C. Moyer, “The Concept of Ritual Purity Among the Hittites” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1969), 50-79.
- <sup>20</sup> Various rituals involved “the use of water, in lustration (sprinkling) or complete immersion; the use of incense (fumigation); the use of metals or minerals supposed to be purifying, such as silver; or the use of wool whose color is perceived to have the power to absorb the impurity of some elements, and so on” (Mouton, “The Sacred,” 45).
- <sup>21</sup> Wright, *Disposal*, 45-49, 271; cf. trans. Billie Jean Collins, “Pulisa’s Ritual Against Plague,” *COS* 1.62:161.
- <sup>22</sup> For detailed analysis of this text, see Ada Taggar-Cohen, *Hittite Priesthood*, Texte der Hethiter 26 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), 33-139; cf. trans. Gregory McMahon, “Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials,” *COS* 1.83:217-21.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Taggar-Cohen, *Hittite Priesthood*, 123: “By washing the priests are regarded as clean *parkui-* or ritually clean.”
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 87.
- <sup>25</sup> Taggar-Cohen, *Hittite Priesthood*, 109, 123-4.

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- <sup>26</sup> Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, 245-86, 358-60.
- <sup>27</sup> Trans. Billie Jean Collins, "Establishing a New Temple for the Goddess of the Night," *COS* 1.70:176.
- <sup>28</sup> On relationships between the Decalogue and the other laws, see Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 239-80.
- <sup>29</sup> On this punishment see Donald Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978), 251-5; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 457-60; Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," 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 N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 13.
- <sup>30</sup> On "divine passive" expressions, see Christian Macholz, "Das 'Passivum divinum,' seine Anfänge im Alten Testament und der 'Hofstil,'" *ZNW* 81 (1990): 247-53, esp. 248.
- <sup>31</sup> On the nature and purpose of pentateuchal law, see Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 17-57.
- <sup>32</sup> See, e.g., the Prologue to the Laws of Hammurabi (trans. Martha Roth, "The Laws of Hammurabi," *COS* 2.131:336-7).
- <sup>33</sup> On the experience of guilt in terms of suffering misfortune, see Bruce Wells, *The Law of Testimony in the Pentateuchal Codes*, BZABR 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 67-69.
- <sup>34</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 60; cf. 31-2, 48-50, 207-8.
- <sup>35</sup> Cf. the curse that David pronounced on Joab in 2 Sam 3:29: "may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous..." (ESV).
- <sup>36</sup> Cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 731-2, 1002-3.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.
- <sup>38</sup> Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 106-43; *idem*, "Privative Preposition *min* in Purification Offering Pericopes and the Changing Face of 'Dorian Gray,'" *JBL* 127 (2008): 209-22. Against Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, who argued that purification offerings throughout the year removed sins and impurities from the sanctuary (254-58).
- <sup>39</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 254, 256.
- <sup>40</sup> James A. Greenberg, *A New Look at Atonement in Leviticus: The Meaning and Purpose of Kipper Revisited*, BBRSupp 23 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 105-7.
- <sup>41</sup> For purification in stages, see also the elaborate procedure prescribed in Leviticus 14 for purification of a person who has been healed from scaly-skin disease. Such an individual has been banished from the Israelite camp (13:46; cf. Num 5:1-4), so the first stage of purification—a ritual with two birds, followed by ablutions and shaving—must take place outside the camp. When that has been completed, the person is pure, i.e., enough for that stage, and is permitted to enter the camp, but not his/her tent (Lev 14:1-8). After more shaving and ablutions on the seventh day, the one undergoing purification is again said to be pure (v. 9). On the eighth day, the person is to come to the sanctuary in order to offer sacrifices (vv. 10-20), as a result of which the residual impurity is removed from the individual (v. 19) and he will be pure (v. 20).
- <sup>42</sup> Presumably the blood from the same animal would have the same effect, so that whatever would touch it would become holy.

- <sup>43</sup> E.g., Christophe Nihan, “The Templization of Israel in Leviticus: Some Remarks on Blood Disposal and *Kipper* in Leviticus 4,” in *Text, Time, and Temple: Literary, Historical and Ritual Studies in Leviticus*, ed. Francis Landy, Leigh M. Trevaskis, and Byan D. Bibb (Hebrew Bible Monographs 64; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 118—“Presumably the most obvious reading of this passage is that it refers to the washing of the priestly vestments when the latter have been sanctified by contact with the blood of the *hattā’l*, as is usually assumed by commentators.” Cf. Christian Eberhart, “Review of Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*,” *RBL* [[https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5068\\_5341.pdf](https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5068_5341.pdf)] (2006): 5.
- <sup>44</sup> Grain offerings were also most holy (2:3, 10; 6:10 [Eng. v. 17]) and made things holy by direct contact like the purification and reparation offerings. See the summary in 6:11 (Eng. v. 18): “Whatever touches them shall become holy” (ESV), with the plural “them” referring to the grain, purification, and reparation offerings mentioned in the previous verse (cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 444). However, grain offerings had no blood or flesh, so the rules in verses 20-21 (Eng. vv. 27-28) would not apply to them. The burnt offering is not explicitly called “most holy,” but undoubtedly it was because it could not be eaten by non-priests or even by priests; the flesh was entirely consumed by the altar fire (Lev 1). However, the rule in 6:20 (Eng. v. 27) did not apply to it.
- <sup>45</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 405; Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 96 n. 8; 130-31, although they maintained that the sins were removed from the sanctuary, not from the offerer, throughout the year.
- <sup>46</sup> Gane, *Cult and Character*, 167-76.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-91.
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 403.
- <sup>49</sup> “Only impure earthenware needs to be broken (see 11:33, 35; 15:12) because its porous nature so totally absorbs the impurity that it can never again be purified” (*ibid.*, 405). Compare the Hittite “Instructions for Temple Officials,” according to which temple vessels contaminated by pigs or dogs could not be purified and had to be discarded (§14). However, in Lev 15:12, a wooden vessel that has become impure can be kept if it is rinsed with water.
- <sup>50</sup> Roy E. Gane, Paradoxical Pollution, “Purification Offerings and Paradoxical Pollution of the Holy,” in *Writing a Commentary on Leviticus: Hermeneutics – Methodology – Themes*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart and Thomas Hieke, *FRLANT 276* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 122.
- <sup>51</sup> Against Milgrom’s argument that lack of application of purification offering blood to the offerers indicates that this sacrifice never purified its offerer (*Leviticus 1-16*, 254-6).
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Christian Eberhart, “Review of Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character*,” 5; Jay Sklar, “Review of Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*,” *RBL* [[https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5068\\_6109.pdf](https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5068_6109.pdf)] (2007): 5.
- <sup>53</sup> “The offerer does not directly defile the sanctuary; there is only a residual effect from the action of the priest. Therefore, the offerer does not violate the regulation exemplified in Lev 7:20-21 (cf. 22:1-7 regarding priests) that he/she must never bring impurity into direct contact with something holy, such as by eating well-being offering meat while in a state of physical impurity” (Gane, “Purification Offerings,” 118).
- <sup>54</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 257-8.
- <sup>55</sup> Gane, *Cult and Character*, 151-7.
- <sup>56</sup> This was the normal rule, although Aaron, the high priest, explained to Moses that he and his sons had not eaten the purification offering on this occasion because of what had just happened (10:19): God had struck dead his other sons, Nadab and Abihu, because they had offered incense with unauthorized fire (vv. 1-2). So apparently Aaron and his surviving sons had not felt worthy to eat the

most holy sacrifice.

<sup>57</sup> *Peša'* sins also defiled the sanctuary, but they did so directly, without sacrifice, and against God's will.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ps 103:3, praising God "who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases."

<sup>59</sup> Cf. 1 John 4:8, 16.