

The Literary Structure of Leviticus Reexamined

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Introduction

Many others have sought to map out the literary structure of Leviticus and so far, there is no scholarly consensus on the topic.¹ Quite

¹ Among the different proposals for the literary structure of Leviticus we find the following ones: William H. Shea, "Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus," in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series Volume 3, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 131-168; Mary Douglas, "The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus," *JSOT* 59 (1993): 3-23; idem, "Poetic Structures in Leviticus," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. D. P. Wright, et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 239-256; Christopher R. Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus," *JSOT* 70 (1996): 17-32; Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); E. Zenger, "Das Buch Levitikus als Teiltext der Tora des Pentateuch: Eine synchrone Lektüre mit kanonischer Perspektive," in *Levitikus als Buch*, ed. H.-J. Fabry and H.-W. Jüngling, Bonner biblische Beiträge (Berlin: Philo, 1999), 49-83; Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff (Linden: Brill, 1999); John H. Walton, "Equilibrium and Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus," *BBR* 11.2 (2001): 293-304; Andeas Ruwe, "The Structure of the Book of Leviticus in the Narrative Outline of the Priestly Sinai Story (Exod 19:1-Num 10:10)," in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler, Supplements to Vetus Testamentus 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 55-78; Mary Douglas, "Response to Reviews of *Leviticus as Literature*," *JRS* 18.2 (2004): 186-191; Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 30-36; Didier Luciani, *Sainteté et pardon: structure littéraire de Lévitique*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 185A-185B, 2 vols. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005); James W. Watts, *Leviticus 1-10*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 12-20; Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 3 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2014); 77-

common is the view that Leviticus is structured in the form of a macro chiasm, but the challenge has been to identify the segments that in each section of the book correspond, in a reliable way, to the other. The methodological question is how to identify the organizational pattern of Leviticus while keeping under control the interpreter's creativity.² This is difficult to achieve and has led some to suggest that the safest way to identify a chiasm or inverted parallelism is through the use of the same language (repetition) in the parallel segments.³ But this seems to be too restrictive in light of the most recent understanding of parallelism. Often the impression is given that a chiasm is based on the traditional understanding of poetic parallelism as synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic. Before we initiate our analysis of the literary structure of Leviticus, we should briefly review some recent developments in the understanding of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible.

Parallelism in the Hebrew Bible

Parallelism is found throughout the Bible in narratives and legal texts but it predominates in Hebrew poetry. It is generally defined as "the repetition of similar or related thought and/or grammatical structure in adjacent lines or verses. The repetition is rarely identical."⁴ Hebrew

84; Moshe Kline, "Structure is Theology: Composition of Leviticus," in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond*, ed. Roy E. Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen, Society of Biblical Literature: Resources for Biblical Studies (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 225-264; Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Tora to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*, 2. Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr, 2007), 89-110. We do not have the space needed to evaluate the different macrostructures suggested for Leviticus. For such evaluations see, Warning, *Literary Artistry*, 14-19; Luciani, *Structure*, 1:209-241; Watts, *Leviticus 1-10*, 14-19; and Christophe Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 84-89. The different structures suggested have in many cases common elements, implying that the literary structure of Leviticus is little by little being unfolded. Our independent study has in a sense resulted in a refinement of the many suggestions made by other scholars.

² The point was correctly stated by Mary Douglas: "The safeguard is to have some principle of selection that makes the interpretation a work of discovery, not of creation" (*In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 158 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 94).

³ Warning, *Literary Artistry*, 30-35.

⁴ Adele Berlin, "Parallelism," *NIDB* 4:379. It has been also said that parallelism "refers to a correspondence established between two (or occasionally three) lines of prose or poetry. Such correspondence can involve semantic and syntactic elements (i.e., similar verbal or grammatical usages) or it can be established through repetition of certain sounds (assonance or rhyme)" (John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasm in the Scriptures and Beyond* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1994], 15).

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poetry commonly utilizes a short sentence formed by at least two clauses in some kind of parallel relationship. For instance,

A “Happy is the person who honors the LORD,
B who delights greatly in his commandments” (Ps 112:1).⁵

Different names have been given to the two clauses but we will refer to them as A and B. The significance of the two parallel clauses was defined long ago by Robert Lowth.⁶ He organized the different kinds of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible under three main types: synonymous (the second part of a poetic sentence [B] repeats in different words what was said in the first part [A]); antithetic (the second [B] contrast the first [A]); and synthetic (the second [B] enlarges in some way the first [A]). This understanding of parallelism prevailed for well over a century, until James L. Kugel⁷ and others⁸ subjected it to close scrutiny and found it unreliable. Kugel’s insights on the nature and function of parallelism appear to have found significant scholarly support.⁹ According to him, the connection between the two clauses that constitute a short sentence is much more complex and richer than what Lowth offered. The two clauses are separated by a slight pause after the first and a long one after

⁵ All translations are my own.

⁶ R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory, 4th ed. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1839 [1753]); idem, *Isaiah: A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes, Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*, 10th ed. (Boston: William Hilliard, 1834). For a discussion of Lowth’s views, see James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 274-286; and R. R. Marrs, “Lowth, Robert (1710-87),” *DBI* 2:89-90.

⁷ Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, 1-58. Obviously, he was not the first to point to the limitations of Lowth’s views.

⁸ Among the best-known evaluations of parallelism are those of Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev. and updated (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011); and Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). For a discussion of the history of biblical parallelism see Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, 96-292. For a useful summary of the discussion of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible in light of the recent studies, consult J. M. LeMon and B. A. Strawn, “Parallelism,” *DOT: WPW* 502-515.

⁹ Robert Alter refers to the first chapter of Kugel’s book as “a splendid first chapter full of incisive comments on what happens in semantic parallelism” (*Poetry*, 2). Breck, *Biblical Language*, 35, comments that Kugel’s thesis “has won wide acceptance among literary critics.” See also J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 29.

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the second.¹⁰ Kugel calls this the afterwardness of B;¹¹ in other words, B follows A for a variety of reasons, among them, to develop, specify, explain, expand, complete what A stated. B points back to A and goes beyond it. It is basically emphatic, strengthening and reinforcing A and bringing A to completion or closure.¹² Therefore, Kugel concludes that the connection between the two clauses could be expressed as “A, and what is more, B,”¹³ meaning that “biblical lines are parallelistic not because B is meant to be a parallel to A, but because B typically supports A, carries it further, backs it up, completes it, goes beyond it.”¹⁴ Consequently, the relationships between A and B are practically endless and cannot be circumscribed to the three patterns suggested by Lowth. There is a correspondence between A and B, but it is rarely synonymous

¹⁰ Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52. Alter’s views are similar: “What I should like to propose, and this is the one respect in which my own understanding of the phenomenon is close to James Kugel’s, is that a diametrically opposite description of the system—namely, an argument for the dynamic movement from one verset to the next [A to B]—would be much closer to the truth, much closer to the way the biblical poets expected audiences to attend to their words” (*Poetry*, 9; see also 17-18, where he attempts to refine Kugel’s views). Alter (2-3) also reacts against Kugel’s suggestion that there does not seem to be any poetry in the Bible (85). See also Berlin’s reaction to Kugel’s idea that there is no difference in the Bible between prose and poetry (*Dynamics*, 4-6). Adele Berlin has provided one of the most important analyses of the nature and expressions of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, approaching it from a linguistic perspective. Although she sympathizes with Kugel’s proposal that A, and what is more, B, she finds it too general or even vague to fully unpack the nature of parallelism. In a sense, she enriches and goes beyond Kugel’s arguments. Her goal “is to present an overarching, integrated, and linguistically based description of biblical parallelism” (Berlin, *Dynamics*, 29; see also, *idem*, “Parallelism,” *ABD* 5:155-162; *idem*, “Parallelism,” *NIDB* 4:379-381). She argues that “parallelism is more than grammar . . . Linguistics includes phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, and all of these play a role in parallelism” (*Dynamics*, 26). A useful summary of Berlin’s views is found in, Berlin, “Parallelism,” *ABD* 5:157-160. The new advances in the study of parallelism do not seem to have had a major impact among biblical scholars. Alter, speaking about his own proposal, comments that it “has not spoken to a good many biblical scholars because the overriding importance of poetic form and poetic achievement does not figure significantly in their perception of the Bible” (*Poetry*, x). Berlin herself, in her commentary on Psalms, did not apply to a full extent her own views of parallelism, perhaps because of the nature of the JPS Bible Commentary (Adele Berlin, *Psalms 120-150*, The JPS Bible Commentary, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer [Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2023]).

(B restating what A said).¹⁵ In other cases the correspondence is hardly present. He concludes that “the majorities of parallelisms in the Bible fall between such extremes.”¹⁶ In a sense, biblical parallelism is synthetic, not synonymous or antithetic.¹⁷ Kugel’s view of parallelism led him to discourage and apparently even to reject any attempt to identify all the different types of parallelisms in the Hebrew Bible, but this particular suggestion has not found much support.¹⁸

The ultimate goal of parallelism is rhetorical in that through it the intended message compressed in a short sentence, characterized to a large extent by terseness, is further clarified. Hidden in the beauty and complexity of parallelism is the conviction that although language conveys meaning through words, no one word or image is encompassing enough to embody the fullness of a concept. The unveiling of a concept or idea is perceived through the juxtaposition of words that in a dynamic way further develop, particularize, expand, reinforce, differentiate, contrast, etc., the compressed meaning contained in the words previously employed to introduce a concept. Parallelism does not simply aim at dazzling us with its literary beauty and poetic richness. It is an effort to state the complexity and significance of communicating meaning through language.¹⁹

Methodological Issues

Obviously, Leviticus is not a poetic book, but we will argue that it uses parallelism in the form of a chiasm to organize its content. From the

¹⁵ Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁸ See the list provided by Berlin, “Parallelism,” *ABD* 5:156-160; and LeMon and Strawn, “Parallelism,” *DOT: WPW*, 510-512. The fact that no one has been able to provide a final list of the types of parallelism found in Hebrew poetry—they only provide possible examples—would indicate that it is better to work on the basis of a general principle, as suggested by Kugel, allowing the interpreter to apply the principle.

¹⁹ Berlin comments, “The poetic function—the ‘focus on the message for its own sake’—is achieved through parallelism; and so, parallelism becomes our entrée into the message. Through the relationships which parallelism creates we are shown the poem’s meaning” (Berlin, *Dynamics*, 17). See also, *idem*, *Commentary*, xviii, where she writes that “poetry is the vehicle through which the message is expressed.” LeMon and Strawn, “Parallelism,” *DOT: WPW*, 512, argue that “the task of interpretation entails discerning how these parallelisms function, how they provide structure to the poem, and how that structure and those parallelisms contribute to the poem’s meaning, much of which is not contingent solely upon parallelism.”

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literary point of view, chiasm itself is “one form of varied word order in parallelism.”²⁰ In our case, it could be said that chiasm could find expression in “macrostructural parallelism.”²¹ It is useful to remember that while parallelism develops and expands ideas, it continues to express a level of equivalence that guarantees cohesion.²²

Since chiasm (ABB'A') and introversion (ABC-D-C'B'A')²³ are characterized by parallelism, it would be proper to apply to it the new insights in the understanding of poetic parallelism.²⁴ Therefore in attempting to identify an introversion (e.g., ABC-D-C'B'A'), we should look not only for what is similar but also at what is different as we identify the functional parts of the parallel segments.²⁵ In other words, we need to explore similarities, differences, and the development of ideas.²⁶

As far as I can tell, there is not a particular methodology to be used to identify the literary macro structure of a biblical book, much less for Leviticus.²⁷ But there are some elements that we found to be methodologically useful and that hopefully provide some controls and objectivity to our task. Their employment in the analysis of Leviticus will reveal their value in the task before us.

First, the most basic component has to be thematic, that is to say, the two parallel sections, that I will refer to as A and B, should be grounded

²⁰ Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, 20.

²¹ LeMon and Strawn, “Parallelism,” *DOT: WPW*, 512.

²² Fokkelman, *Reading*, 34.

²³ There is a tendency to use the term “chiasm” to designate parallelism without a nexus or central line (ABB'A') and introversion as containing a central axis (ABC-D-C'B'A') that exhibits the key thematic component of the literary structure; see Deborah L. Ellens, “Fundamental Structure as Methodological Control for Evaluating Introverted Literary Structures in Leviticus,” in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature*, 266-272; also, with a slightly different focus, Breck, *Biblical Language*, 15-16, 38-49.

²⁴ Also suggested by Breck, *Biblical Language*, 52.

²⁵ Ellens, “Fundamental Structure,” 276.

²⁶ Mary Douglas writes, “The technique is to match everything that has been said in the first round by a second round which enriches, completes and explains what was left unexplained before. The ring is a comprehensive parallelism that incorporates the whole work” (“Forbidden,” 10).

²⁷ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), lists and discusses the steps to be followed to identify literary structures: “(1) identifying the composition’s constituent parts (‘units’), (2) analyzing the arrangements of those parts, and (3) considering the relationship of the composition’s structure to its meaning” (16; carefully developed in 17-41). See also, Luciani, *Structure*, 1:246-249.

on a common thematic or theological topic as they conceptually mirror each other. This suggestion is based on the fact that Leviticus is not a poetic book and that consequently we cannot narrowly apply to it the strict poetic parallelism that gives priority to or emphasizes linguistic links. After all, parallelism is interested in the meaning of the text. I consider this to be a basic postulate for the analysis of biblical narratives and legal materials that are often characterized by repetition. In the case of Leviticus, we find a substantial amount of legal material and a few narratives, all of them placed within a narrative framework. One of the stylistic characteristics of the book is precisely repetition that lends itself to the organization of small units in chiasmic structures and that, we are suggesting, shows that the book itself is a macro chiasm structured around a series of repeated themes that serve to identify the major concerns or emphases of the document.

Second, thematic parallels are never static, that is to say, they are not strictly synonymous. In some cases, B develops, modifies, contrasts or adds new material or insights to the discussion of the common theme in order to highlight the broadness of the parallel theme(s).²⁸ As long as the new material is embedded within the theme that gives cohesion to the two sections, it does not disrupt the literary structure but enhances it.

Third, the presence of common terminology in both parallel sections is indispensable in identifying the parallels. Thematic components are, to a significant extent, identified through the presence of common terminology and ritual activity, thus providing objective criteria to evaluate the validity of the claim of parallel structures. One of the challenges we find in Leviticus is the presence of basic technical terminology throughout the book that makes it difficult to use much of that terminology to isolate parallel segments. Methodologically, we need to set limits to the terminological argument to establish and validate parallels.

We are suggesting that the use of the same terminology in the parallel sections should be in a certain way unique. For instance, if the

²⁸ This particular characteristic of Leviticus supports Roy Gane's emphasis on the nature of the didactic strategies employed in the book ("Didactic Logic and the Authorship of Leviticus," in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature*, 197-221). Very useful is his statement to the effect that "linking units of information by having them share terminology or concepts can contribute to coherence of instructional material and development of themes . . . Such coherence facilitates comprehension by the learner, whose task is simplified by the ability to relate new information to familiar conceptual categories" (204).

term is employed for the first time in Leviticus in A and for the last time in B, then it is a valid indicator of parallelism because it may be conveying the concept of closure. If the terminology is found in the two parallel sections and nowhere else in Leviticus, we could use it to support parallelism.²⁹ When the same terminology is used in A and B but B develops it beyond A, the possibility of parallelism is to be explored because of the principle A, and what is more, B would seem to be present. When terms are used in a positive way in A and in a negative way in B we may be dealing with an important conceptual differentiation in the parallel section. If a particular term is found in significant numbers in sections A and B, it is possibly identifying a common topic and could be functioning as a marker of parallelism.

Fourth, the amount of text in each of the parallel sections should be determined by the thematic and linguistic arguments. For instance, we are suggesting that Lev 11-15 parallels 17-20 acknowledging that in this particular case we are analyzing a significant amount of textual material. This is a case in which the fallacy of quantity and scope could be raised: “the larger the passage, the greater the chance of finding coincidental pairs and supposed chiasmic structures.”³⁰ The risk is real. However, in this specific example, there is no doubt that in 11-15 the unifying theme is ritual impurity and that in 17-20 we are dealing with moral impurity

²⁹ Luciani lists similar criteria present in different divine discourses as of value in the search for literary structures in Leviticus (*Structure*, 1:249). His work is the best analysis on the topic of the literary structure of Leviticus. However, it seems to me that he overlooked some important thematic connections. A full evaluation of his views cannot be provided in this short article. He places the emphasis primarily on the linguistic elements without overlooking themes. I place the main emphasis on thematic links using the linguistic components as well as other elements to confirm the thematic parallels. In a sense our approaches are in some way quite different since I am also employing the new insights for the study of biblical parallelism.

³⁰ David P. Wright, “The Fallacies of Chiasm: A Critique of Structures Proposed for the Covenant Collection (Exodus 22:23-23:19),” *ZAR* 10 (2004):167. He commented, “Larger structures identified across a chapter or two such as CC [Covenant Collection] or the flood, . . . not to mention a whole book, are *a priori* suspicious. It is not difficult to find a number of thematic pairs in a large stretch of text” (165). In a later article, Wright commented that his study of the Covenant Code and the Law of Hammurabi “has led me now to temper my skepticism about chiasmus as a real, i.e., intended, feature in CC and in biblical texts in general” (“Chiasm in the Covenant Code Reconsidered: The Final Apodictic Law,” in *“Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu tiben” (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Reinhard von Achenbach und Martin Arndt [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009], 171).

and in some cases with ritual impurity. There is a common theme running through both sections supported by unquestionable linguistic connections.

Fifth, in some cases stylistic elements found in A and B could be useful in identifying or supporting the presence of parallel segments. However, we should not always expect to find stylistic components that are to some extent unique to both parallel sections.

Sixth, although Leviticus is formed by divine speeches, it does not follow that the literary structure of Leviticus as a macro chiasm is determined by them.³¹ In many cases there is a connection between the speeches and the literary structure, but we should be open to the possibility that this restriction may not always apply. We agree that “in order for parallelism to serve the poetic function—to focus on the message for its own sake—it must be perceptible.”³²

Parallelism in Leviticus: *Inclusio*

As we look at Leviticus as a whole, the first literary component we observe, and that makes the presence of parallelism perceptible, is that the book is framed by an *inclusio*. By this we mean that the two components contain similar terminology and ideas and that this is in some way a type of parallelism.³³

Although Leviticus is related to the content of Exodus and Numbers, it can also stand as a book by itself with a particular literary structure.³⁴ The geographical and theological statements found in the opening and closing of Leviticus, forming an *inclusio*, support this proposal and suggests that in its present form the book may be organized as an introverted chiasm:

³¹ For an evaluation of the attempt to structure Leviticus on the basis of the number of speeches see, Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 88-89.

³² Berlin, *Dynamics*, 130.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ On the question of Leviticus as a book, see Rolf Rendtorff, “Is it Possible to Read Leviticus as a Separate Book?” in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer, JSOT Supplement Series 227 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22-35; Graeme Auld, “Leviticus: After Exodus and Before Numbers,” in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, 41-54; Hendrik Jacob Koorevaar, “The Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and the Macro-structural Problem of the Pentateuch,” in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, BETL 215, ed. Thomas Römer (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 423-453; and Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 69-76.

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*wayyiqrā' 'el-mōšeh wayədabbēr Yahweh 'ēlāyw mē'ōhel mō'ēd lē'mōr
dabbēr 'el-benē yiśrā'ēl*

“Then the LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ‘Speak to the Israelites. . .’” (1:1-2a).

*'ēlleh hammišwôt 'āšer šiwwāh Yahweh 'et-mōšeh 'el-benē yiśrā'ēl bəhar
sînāy*

“These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the Israelites at Mount Sinai” (27:34).

When comparing the two texts we observe similarities and differences.³⁵ The similarities consist of the use of the same terminology and syntax: *Yahweh* is the subject, *mōšeh* (Moses) is the direct object, and the *benē yiśrā'ēl* (“sons of Israel/Israelites”) are the indirect object. Moses functions in both passages as an intermediary between Yahweh and the people and the information given is considered to be of divine origin. The differences are significant: The clause “The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him . . . saying,” is omitted in 27:34, but the text assumes that God addressed Moses before speaking to the people. What God said to the Israelites through Moses in 1:1-2 would constitute the content of Leviticus, while in 27:34 the clause “these [*'ēlleh*] are the commandments that the LORD commanded,” point back to what is now the content of the book.³⁶ While in 1:1 the Lord asks Moses to speak (*dābar*), in 27:34 the verb used is “to command” (*šiwwāh*), further specified as “the commandments [*hammišwôt*] which the LORD commanded [*šiwwāh*] Moses.” Thus, the implied legal nature of the divine speech in 1:1, and throughout the rest of Leviticus, is now

³⁵ The structural significance of both passages is also identified by Luciani, *Structure*, 1:289.

³⁶ The connection between the subscript in 27:34 and the similar one in 26:46 is not totally clear. One thing is clear, 26:46 points back to 25:1 indicating that the divine speech that constitutes both chapters has ended. However, 26:46 lists a number of legal terms that seem to refer to most of the content of Leviticus, without claiming that at this point the book ends. We can perhaps say that 26:46 anticipates the closure of the book and in that sense complements 27:34. The closure of the book is formally done in 27:34, where the whole content of Leviticus is summarized with the phrase, “These are the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses at Mount Sinai” (see in particular Luciani, *Structure*, 1:288-289; and Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 94).

explicitly called divine commandments. The movement is from the use of broad terminology to a more specific one. The geographical move is from the specific to the general: God spoke to Moses from “the tent of the congregation,” but now He spoke to the Israelites at “Mount Sinai.” The reference to the tent of meeting connects Leviticus to Exodus (40:34), while the reference to Mount Sinai connects it also to Numbers (1:1).

The parallelistic nature of the *inclusio* has one fundamental purpose, namely to bring closure not only to the opening statement of Leviticus but to the primarily legal material that now constitutes a long literary unit that could be properly referenced as a book. The parallel phrases “tent of meeting” and “Mount Sinai,” by pointing back to Exodus and forward to Numbers, imply that Leviticus is a discrete part of a larger narrative.

Leviticus as an Introverted Chiasm

We would suggest that the rest of the content of Leviticus, enclosed within the *inclusio*, is arranged in the form of an introverted chiasm. We will first provide the literary structure of Leviticus and then proceed to examine the different parallel segments to justify our conclusions.

“The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting . . .” 1:1

- A Voluntary offerings to the Lord 1:2-3:17
 - B Violation of the law and its remedy 4:1-6:7 [MT 4:1-5:26]
 - C Holiness and offerings 6:8-7:34 [MT 6:1-7:34]
 - D Priests and holiness 8:1-10:20
 - E Purity and impurity 11:1-15:33
 - F Day of Atonement 16:1-34
 - E’ Purity and impurity 17:1-20:27
 - D’ Priests and holiness 21:1-22:33
 - C’ Holiness in time and the Holy Name 23:1-25:55
 - B’ Violation of the law and its remedy 26:1-46
 - A’ Voluntary dedication of persons and things to the Lord 27:1-33

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“These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses . . . at Mount Sinai” 27:34

Leviticus was carefully structured to facilitate a better understanding of the different legislations and particularly the ideology it promotes. The inverted parallelism reinforces the significance of its content not only through the repetition and contrast of ideas but specifically by expanding them in increasing depth and by occasionally establishing their boundaries.

A A' Leviticus 1-3//27: Voluntary Offerings/Voluntary Dedication of Persons and Things

Each of these two sections of Leviticus—chapters 1-3 and 27—contain one divine speech.³⁷ In both cases God speaks to Moses and commands him to speak to the Israelites (1:1; 27:1). As already pointed out, Lev 27:34 looks back to 1:1-2a to specify that the divine intention for the book of Leviticus was achieved. Now, the chapters opening and closing the book connect with each other thematically and theologically and through terminological links.

Thematic Links

There are conceptual or theological correlations establishing a connection between Lev 1-3 and 27. The most basic one is that both deal with what is *voluntarily* brought to the Lord as an offering or sacrifice and what is *voluntarily* consecrated to the Lord. The burnt, grain, and communion offerings were brought voluntarily to express among other things gratitude to the Lord. The consecrated items listed in Lev 27 are the result of vows made or voluntary consecration of property and other

³⁷ Warning, *Literary Artistry*, 46, assigns to the two speeches “an important position in the overall structural outline of Leviticus.” We agree with him and consider them to be the first two elements in the chiasmic structure of Leviticus. Kline, “Structure,” 232-237, also argues for the complementarity of Leviticus 1-3 and 27. The same is done by Mary Douglas, “Forbidden,” 10, supported by Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3B (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 2409; Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 94. Most scholars consider Lev 1-7 to be one block of material on the sacrifices and so do I, but I also believe that within that block of material there are some theological emphases that should be taken into consideration when exploring the literary structure of the book.

items to the Lord (vv. 2-25). Most of them could be redeemed with an additional charge.³⁸

However, Lev 27 includes legislations that set a limit to what can be vowed or consecrated to God. The firstborn of animals belongs de facto to the Lord and cannot be consecrated or promised in a vow³⁹ or redeemed, except if it is an unclean animal (vv. 26-27). Anything a person voluntarily devotes to the Lord under the law of *herem* (“devoted object”), including proscribed persons,⁴⁰ cannot be redeemed (vv.28-20). Tithes “belong already to God, hence they cannot be offered a second time in fulfillment of a vow.”⁴¹ The additional legislations carry the theme of voluntary offerings beyond what we find in the parallel section (chapters 1-3), enriching the concept and completing it.

³⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., commenting on Leviticus 27, mentions among the motivations to offer a vow “the desire to thank God for some special favor God granted . . .” and “the urge to spontaneously express love to the Lord” (“Leviticus,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994], 1186). He adds that, “what preceded in chaps. 1-26 has all been by way of obligatory duties mandated by Israel’s Lord; what follow in chap. 27 is of an optional nature” (ibid.). He affirms the voluntary nature of the offerings discussed in chaps. 1-3 (ibid., 1005, 1009), but does not connect it to chap. 27. Samuel E. Balentine expresses well the thematic content of Leviticus 1-3 and 27: “It is instructive to notice that chapter 27 effectively returns the reader of the book of Leviticus to its beginnings. The sacrificial laws in chapters 1-7 begin with instructions concerning Israel’s voluntary offering, or ‘gifts’ to God, cereal offerings, and well-being offerings (1:1-3:17). Chapter 27 returns to the topic of voluntary gifts, now addressed in terms of the personal vows, the dedication of animals and real estate, and the tithes and offerings that signal Israel’s desire to consecrate everything at its disposal to the service of God” (*Leviticus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1999], 212-213). See also, Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. Alec Motyer (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 317-318. The voluntary nature of sacrifices and vows is also affirmed by Luciani, *Structure*, 1: 295. Unfortunately, he identifies the parallel sections as chaps. 1-7 and 25-27.

³⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 341; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 446.

⁴⁰ John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, *Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2003), 586, comments that Leviticus 27:28, “seems to envisage a voluntary form of proscription in which a person devotes a slave, some livestock, or some land irrevocably to God (cf. Num 18:14; Ezek 44:29). Like the Gibeonites in Josh 9:22–27, a proscribed person, most likely, belonged to the sanctuary as a slave.” See also Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2396; and Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 466-467.

⁴¹ Balentine, *Leviticus*, 211; also Walter Kornfeld, *Levitikus*, *Die neue Echter-Bibel*, eds. Josef G. Ploger et al. (Wurzburg: Echter Verlag, 1983), 113.

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The idea of gradation, based on the economic condition of the person, is common to the two parallel sections under consideration, restating and developing it. In Lev 1, a person could bring a male animal from the herd (1:3), or a sheep or a goat (v. 10), and even a turtledove or young pigeon (v. 14), based on the economic ability of the person. In Lev 27, when a person consecrated someone to the Lord the priest would establish the value, but if the person could not pay the assigned value the priest would adjust it based on the economic condition of the individual (27:8).⁴² The concept of valuation for voluntary offerings is applied to different situations, enlarging its usefulness within the cultus and facilitating the participation of the poor in bringing offerings to the Lord.

Linguistic Links

There are some terminological links pointing to the interconnection of Lev 1-3 and Lev 27. One of the most important phrases in the book of Leviticus is “most holy” (*qōdeš qodāšîm*),⁴³ used for the first time in 2:3 and for the last time in 27:28, flanking the book. It is found a total of 12x in Leviticus (2:3, 10; 6:10, 18, 22; 7:1, 6; 10:12, 17; 14:13; 24:9; 27:28), signaling its significance. In Lev 2:3 and 10 the portion of the grain offering assigned to the priests is designated “most holy.” In 27:28, something or someone dedicated to the Lord is most holy and cannot be redeemed for it belongs exclusively to the Lord. *Hērem* (“devoted object”) designates a unique type of consecration to God that could result in the destruction of the object (cf. v. 29). This is the only place in the Bible where what is voluntarily devoted as *hērem* is called “most holy.”⁴⁴ In 2:3, 10, “most holy” refers to what God assigned to the priests while in the 27:28 the concept is extended to include what exclusively belongs to God after it is dedicated to him. The meaning of the parallel phrase “most holy” is enlarged or expanded in almost unexpected ways. This is a clear case of “A, and what is more, B.”

In Lev 2:14, the Hebrew *bikkûrîm* designates the offering of “firstfruits,” a term derived “from the same verbal root as *bekhor*, ‘first-born,’ which refers to both animals and humans,”⁴⁵ and is used in Lev 27:26 to refer to firstborn animals. Among other terminological parallels

⁴² See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2374. Gradation is also allowed for required purification offerings (5:1-13; 12:6-8; 14:21-32).

⁴³ See Warning, *Literary Artistry*, 48.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Levine, *Leviticus*, 13.

we find *bəhēmāh* (“cattle”) in 1:2 and used for the last time in 27:28. In 27:9, *bəhēmāh* refers to a type of animal that can be brought (*qārab*, “bring near,” “offer”) to the Lord as an offering (*qorbān*). In fact, the term *qorbān* is found for the first time in Leviticus in 1:2 and the last time in 27:11. The phrase *qorbān laYahweh* (“an offering to Yahweh”) is only found four times in the in Leviticus (1:2; 17:4; 27:9, 11), opening and closing the book. Animals from the herd and flock (*bāqār* and *šō’n*) could be offered as well (1:2, 10) or given as a tithe to the Lord (27:32), expanding the legislation. Leviticus 1-3 describes the role of the priest (*kōhēn*) during the sacrificial process (e.g., 1:5, 7, 8) and Lev 27 expand his role to include the valuation of things and persons consecrated to the Lord (vv. 8, 11-12, 14, 18, 23). The nominal clause *‘im zākār* (“if [it is] a male”) appears only in Lev 3:1 to designate a male sacrificial animal and in 27:7 a male person. In fact, the binary “male-female” (*zākār, nekebāh*) is used for the first and last times in the book in those two passages, linking them together.

Stylistic Links

Stylistically, the content of Lev 1 and 27 is organized in a similar way, consisting of three main sections with three components each.⁴⁶

Leviticus 1:3-17

1. Sacrificial animal from the herd (vv. 3-9)
2. Sacrificial animal from the flock (vv. 10-13)
3. Sacrifice of birds (vv. 14-17)

Leviticus 2:1-16

1. Grain Offering of fine flour (vv. 1-3)
2. Grain offering baked (vv. 4-10)
3. Grain offering of firstfruits (vv. 14-16)

Leviticus 27:2-13

1. Voluntary vows of humans (vv. 2-8)
2. Voluntary vows of clean animals (vv. 9-10)
3. Voluntary vows of unclean animals (vv. 11-13)

Leviticus 27:14-25

1. Consecration of one’s house (vv. 14-15)
2. Consecration of one’s field (vv. 16-21)
3. Consecration of an acquired field (vv. 22-25)

⁴⁶ Similar organizational patterns to what we are suggesting have been identified by others. For a more detailed analysis see, Luciani, *Structure*, 1:17-22; 2:356-357; idem, “Structure et théologie,” in *Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense 2006: The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, BETL 215, ed. Thomas Römer (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 324-326; and Kline, “Structure,” 232-234, who finds a similar structure in chapter 27.

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Leviticus 3:1-17

1. Sacrificial animal from the herd (vv. 1-5)
2. Sacrificial animal from the flock (vv. 6-11)
3. Sacrificial animal a goat (vv. 12-17)

Leviticus 27:26-29

1. Firstborn of clean/unclean animals (vv. 26-27)
2. Devoted humans, animals, fields (vv. 28)
3. Tithe: land and herd and flock (vv. 29-33)

B B' Leviticus 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5]//26:1-46:⁴⁷ Violation of the Law and its Remedy

Leviticus 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5] consists of three divine speeches addressed to Moses (4:1; 5:14; 6:1 [MT 5:20]) whereas Lev 26 is part of the speech that began in chapter 25. We are suggesting that the content of Lev 26 is quite different from that of Lev 25 and that consequently Lev 26 lends itself to an independent analysis within the structure of the book, without claiming a radical separation between the two chapters.⁴⁸ The literary style of blessings and curses sets chapter 26 apart from chapter 25 and even from the rest of Leviticus, unless one view the curses as a call to repentance, in which case the closest parallel would be, as we are suggesting, Lev 4:1- 6:7 [MT 4-5].

Thematic/Theological Parallels

Thematically, the theology of obedience, disobedience, and reconciliation characterizes the two parallel segments under discussion without being a simple repetition of ideas. The fundamental difference is that the first section deals with individual guilt and the second addresses the problem of collective or national guilt.⁴⁹ The parallel moves from the one to the many. Among other parallels, Lev 4:1-6:1-7 [MT 4-5] expect from the worshiper obedience to God's covenant law; they are to do his commandments. This conviction lies at the very foundation of the chapters. In Lev 4, the unintentional violation of a commandment is

⁴⁷ Kline, "Structure," 244, correlates these two sections in his chiasmic literary structure of Leviticus.

⁴⁸ Milgrom has argued for the unity of both chaps. (*Leviticus* 23-27, 2274-2275), but the thematic connections, important as they are, do not exclude separating the two chapters in the study of the literary macro structure of Leviticus, particularly when there are fundamental thematic connections with chaps. 4:1-6:7.

⁴⁹ Kline also finds in Leviticus 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5] and 26 corresponding parallel sections in the literary structure of the book. He basically distinguishes between the two parallel segments on the ground that the first "speaks to individuals concerning personal guilt" and the second "addresses the whole nation concerning national guilt" ("Structure," 251).

something that “ought not to be done” (v. 2). The idea of obedience runs throughout Lev 26, expressed for the first time in v. 3: “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments. . .” (cf. vv. 14-15, 18, 21, 27). Leviticus 26 does not address the occasional violations of the commandments of the Lord by an Israelite but it seems to presuppose the regulations found in the parallel section, where such violations, although considered a breaking of the covenant law, are forgivable through repentance and atonement. Leviticus 26 builds on and enlarges the theology of 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5] to new horizons. In other words, Lev 26 assumes that perfect fidelity of the people to the covenant law is dependent on the priestly work of atonement. Otherwise, the people would hardly be able to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

Second, in Lev 26 the curses are the result of the people’s constant and stubborn disobedience to the Lord. This is not a case of occasional disobedience of the individual for which there was divine forgiveness through sacrificial atonement. Because disobedience is constant, to the point of almost open rebellion, the atoning significance of the sacrifices becomes ineffective—“I will not smell your pleasant aromas” (v. 31). God would attempt to solve the problem through disciplinary actions that would increase in intensity with the purpose of bringing the people back to obedience to avoid the exile. But there is a final possible solution.

Third, according to Lev 26, the ultimate solution to the problem of national disobedience would be based to some extent on what we find in Lev 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5]. All that is required from the people is to acknowledge their sin and repent: “if they confess their iniquity. . . in their unfaithfulness committed against me. . . ; and they then make amends for their iniquity. . .” (26:40, 41). Here, as well as in Lev 5, forgiveness is available for those who sin by being unfaithful (*mā’al*) to the Lord (5:15). Accepting one’s guilt and confessing the sin are prerequisites for atonement or restoration (4:23; 5:5). Once more, Lev 26 builds on and enlarges the information found in Lev 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5]. Leviticus 26 does not explicitly require from the people to accompany their repentance and confession with an atoning sacrifice, probably because during the exile they would not have been able to offer sacrifices.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2330; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 454.

Linguistic Parallels

Among the linguistic parallels we identify the use of the verb “to do” (*‘āśah*) in conjunction with the plural noun “commandments” (*mīšwôt*)—“to do/perform the commandments.” It is used for the first time in Lev 4:2 and its last occurrence is located in 26:15. The phrase is found ten times in Leviticus and all of them, with one exception (22:31), are found in 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:17 and 26:3, 14, and 15, strongly restating its significance. Notice also that in both sections the phrase is employed for the first time at the beginning of both chapters (4:3; 26:3). It is obvious that one of the concerns of both parallel sections is obedience or disobedience to God’s commandments and that by using a linguistic parallel the author is pointing to the interconnectedness of Lev 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5] and 26.

The phrase *rêah nîhôah* (“a pleasing odor”) is often employed in Leviticus in a positive sense, particularly in chapters 1-8—“a pleasant aroma to the LORD.” It appears only once in chapter 4:31 and once in 26:31. While in the other usages it expresses the idea of the acceptance of the sacrifice by the Lord, in 26:31 it expresses the rejection of the sacrifice—“I will not smell your pleasant aromas [*rêah nîhôah*],”⁵¹ and is connected to disobedience to the commandments (*mīšwôt*; cf. v. 14). This is an important conceptual differentiation even when the same terminology is being used.

In the two sections of Leviticus under discussion, disobedience to God is forgivable. The sin is specifically described as the “iniquity” (*‘āwôn*) of the people, further defined as “unfaithfulness” (*ma‘al*) to the Lord. The noun *‘āwôn* is found for the first time in Lev 5:1 and the last time in 26:43. *Ma‘al* is used 3x in Leviticus, only within the sections we are examining (5:15; 6:2 [MT 5:21]; and 26:40). In Lev 5:15 and 6:2 [MT 5:21], the serious sin of *ma‘al* is expiable through a guilt offering. In 26:40, God specifies that if the people “confess” (*hithpael* of the root *y-d-h*) their “unfaithfulness” (*ma‘al*), the Lord will restore them to the land, i.e., bring them back from exile. In this case, as already suggested, no atoning sacrifice is required probably because the people are described as being in exile, unable to offer sacrifices to God. The verb

⁵¹ The negative “implies that YHWH rejects not only the sacrifices but also the sacrificer, who now realizes that, having lost divine protection, he faces an ominous future” Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2320-2321).

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rendered “confess” is used three times in Leviticus, establishing a clear connection between our two sections (5:5; 16:21; and 26:40).⁵²

Stylistic Parallels

The content of the two sections (4:1-6:7 [MT 4:1-5:26] and 26:1-46) can be outlined in different ways, but they seem to be stylistically organized around two main topics containing two components each:

Leviticus 4:1-6:7 [MT 4-5]

Purification Offering

Atonement and Forgiveness 4:1-5:13

Guilt Offering

Atonement and Forgiveness 5:14-6:26 [5:14-26]

Leviticus 26

Covenant Blessings and

God’s Work of Redemption 26:1-13

Covenant Curses and

Restoration 26:14-45

C C’ Leviticus 6:8-7:34 [MT 6:1-7:38]//23:1-25:55: Holiness and Offerings/Holiness in Time and the Holy Name

The number of divine speeches in these two major sections of Leviticus is significant, consisting of five in 6:8-7:38 [MT 6:1-7:38] (6:8-18 [MT 1-11]; 6:19-23 [MT 12-16]; 6:24 [MT 17]-7:21; 7:22-27; 7:28-34) and eight in 23:1-25:55, some of which are short (23:1-8; 23:9-22; 23:23-25; 23:26-32; 23:33-43; 24:1-12; 24:13-22; 25:1-55).

Thematic Parallels

We will first look at the role of the two parallel sections in order to ascertain whether they are thematically related. Leviticus 6 and 7 are mainly addressed to the priests with a section clearly addressing the people (7:11-36).⁵³ The two chapters deal with different ritual elements,⁵⁴

⁵² The best parallels are 5:5 and 26:40 because in these two cases the sinners confess their sin, while in 16:21 the priest confesses the people’s sin.

⁵³ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3A (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 382.

⁵⁴ Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 79, comments, “Although the central focus is on the priestly portions, attention is also given to correct priestly clothing, the maintenance of the altar fire, and the holiness of sacrificial flesh and of the temple.” It has also been said that Leviticus 6-7 “focuses more specifically on the proper handling of the offering

but their main focus is on the priesthood and the preservation of the holiness of the sacrifices, beginning with the most holy sacrifices (6:8-7:10 [MT 6:1-7:10]) and followed by the holy (7:11-36).⁵⁵ More specifically, the chapters identify the portions of the meat that go to the priests, in some cases to the offerer, and the proper procedure to be followed in order to preserve the holiness of the sacrifice.⁵⁶ The *minḥāh* is most holy and is to be eaten in a holy place (6:16-17 [6:9-10]). The priestly *minḥāh* belongs exclusively to the Lord and it is to be totally burned (vv. 22-23 [MT 15-16]). The purification offering is most holy and the priest is to eat its flesh in a holy place (vv. 25, 26 [MT 18, 19]). It is required that anything that comes into contact with its flesh be holy (v. 27 [MT 20]). The guilt offering is also most holy, to be eaten by the priest in a holy place (7:1, 6). Some of the flesh of the peace offering went to the priests and to the offerer (7:11-21, 28-36). The suet and the blood were exclusive property of the Lord and were to be burned on the altar (vv. 22-27). The holiness of the offerings was at major risk if portions of it were eaten by humans who might wrongly utilize it without following proper ritual protocol. This would suggest that the primary interest of the legislation was the preservation of the holiness of the offerings, particularly while consuming some of it.

Concerning Lev 23-25, the concept of holiness runs throughout these chapters, applied to holiness in time (chapter 23), in the sanctuary (chapter 24), and holiness in time as it relates to the land (chapter 25; Sabbatical and Jubilee Years). The chapters have been cautiously considered to be “a textual block that might carry the superscription ‘sacred times.’ In any event, such a designation is commensurate with Leviticus 23 and 25, both of which deal with regularly recurring intervals

pieces, such as the ritual state necessary for touching or eating the offerings (6:18, 20, 22[25, 27, 29]; 7:6, 19–21), how to distribute offering portions among the priests (6:9, 11, 19[16, 18, 26]; 7:6–10) and how to dispose of any remainders (6:3–4, 15–16 [10–11, 22–23]). Such laws were crucial because these offerings were the LORD’s holy property and had to be treated with due reverence” (Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: The Lord’s Holy People Living out His Holy Character*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Daniel I. Block [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023], 183).

⁵⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 382. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 139, writes, “The offerings are therefore also listed according to the holiness of the sacrifices. Thus, the most holy sacrifices are listed before the holy sacrifices.”

⁵⁶ Cf. Watts, *Leviticus 1-10*, 380. Levine indicates that, “Chapters 6–7, on the other hand, focus on the role of the priesthood as officiants in the sanctuary and detail the special care that must attend the sacrificial offerings in order to prevent impurity” (*Leviticus*, 34).

in which something quite special happens.”⁵⁷ It has been suggested that, “from ch. 23 onwards holy time . . . becomes the major theme. The theme of holy time will be developed more fully in ch. 25.”⁵⁸ Concerning Lev 24, it has been correctly stated that “it deals with three most holy things: the holy oil for the lamps; the holy bread for the Lord; and the holy name of the Lord.”⁵⁹

While Lev 6 and 7 discusses the personal offerings of the priests and the people, chapter 23 places the emphasis on the calendric offerings the Israelites were to bring during the festivals. However, the daily burnt offering, mentioned in 6:2-13, appear to have been placed on the altar on behalf of the people. The text specifically states that the festivals are “the appointed times of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to bring offerings . . . to the LORD” (23:37). All the different offerings mentioned in Lev 6-7 are also mentioned in Lev 23, with the exception of the guilt offering.

In both Lev 6-7 and 24, the legislation is partially interested in the responsibilities of the people and particularly that of the priest to protect the holy and most holy. In Lev 24 clear instructions are given describing the role of the people and Aaron concerning the lamps in the tabernacle (vv. 2-4) and the bread of the presence (vv. 5-9), to ensure that the holiness of the tabernacle was preserved. There is also a discussion about the role of Moses and the people in enforcing the death penalty on the blasphemer (vv. 14-23) to remove profanation from the camp.

There are also fundamental thematic and theological connections between Lev 6-7 and chapter 25. First, both major sections of Leviticus discuss what belongs to the Lord. All the offerings and sacrifices given by the Israelites to the Lord are his property—they brought “their offerings to the LORD” (7:38). Concerning the land, the regulations found in Lev 25 are based on the theological conviction that “the land is mine [Yahweh’s]” (25:23).

Second, from that which belongs to the Lord, he gives to his people. From the most holy offerings and sacrifices the Lord gives a portion to Aaron and his sons. Concerning a particular portion of the grain offering, God said, “I have given [*nātan*] it as their [Aaron’s and his sons] portion from my offerings” (6:17 [MT 10]; cf. 7:9-10). He also gave to the

⁵⁷ Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 334.

⁵⁸ Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 3, eds. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 417.

⁵⁹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 514.

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priests some of the flesh of the purification offering (6:26 [MT 6:19]; cf. 10:17; *nātan*). The same applies to the guilt offering (7:7). Even in the case of the burnt offering, that was totally burned, the Lord assigned the hide to the priest (7:8). In Lev 25, the subject is not the priests but the whole nation, indicating that God does not only provide from what is his for the priests but also for all of his people, enlarging the concept of God as provider. Although the land is the Lord's, he has given it to them: "When you enter the land which I shall give [*nātan*] you" (25:2; cf. v. 38). In Lev 6-7, the instructions address God's gifts to the individual and in Lev 25 to the nation.⁶⁰

Third, what the Lord gives to Aaron and to the Israelites contributes to their subsistence. Aaron and his sons were to eat (*'ākal*) the portion of the offerings that the Lord gave them (6:18, 26, 29 [MT 11, 19, 22]; 7:6). A portion of the communion offering was also given to the offerer, who was to eat it in the presence of the Lord (7:15). Those sacred portions were not enough to cover the people's need. Now, in the parallel section, the Lord explicitly tells the Israelites that the gift of the land includes its produce: "You shall eat [*'ākal*] its crops out of the field" (25:12). Every person living on the land, particularly the poor (25:35-38), should be taken care of. This new legislation goes beyond and completes what is found in chapters 6-7, based on the principle A, and what is more, B.

Fourth, specific instructions were given to the priests related to their responsibilities in properly following ritual procedures when handling the Israelites' holy offerings (e.g., 6:8-13 [MT 1-6]). In Lev 25 the same concern is expressed with respect to the care of the land, expressed in legislations dealing with the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee that assured the well-being of the land and of the nation. The laws related to redemption of property (25:23-34) and slaves (vv. 39-55) were all connected to the fact that the land the Lord gave to His people should not be taken permanently from anyone, particularly from the poor (vv. 35-38). The primary concepts are applied to new situations within a common thematic parallel.

Linguistic Parallels

There are a number of other linguistic connections between 6:8-7:34 [MT 6:1-7:34] and 23:1-34 that need our attention. The "unleavened

⁶⁰ Kline points to this thematic connection and uses it to correlate chapters 6-7 with only chapter 25 as parallel sections ("Structure," 250). The insight is valid and useful, but chapters 6-7 contain too many elements that cannot be accounted for in chapter 25.

bread” (*maṣṣāh*), that was part of an offering, was to be eaten (*’ākal*) only by Aaron and his sons (7:12), but during the feast of Unleavened Bread (*maṣṣāh*) all the Israelites would eat (*’ākal*) unleavened bread (23:6), carrying the practice further and popularizing it. In both sections “an offering made by fire [*’iššeh*] to the LORD” is mentioned (7:5, 25; 23:8). The phrase is used seven times in Lev 23 (vv. 8, 13, 25, 27, 26 [2x], and 37), restating its significance. The infinitive *lehaqrīb*, “to present,” is used for the first time in 7:38, in connection with offerings for the Lord, (*lehaqrīb ’et-korbānêhem laYHWH*, “to bring/present their offerings to the Lord”) and the last time in 23:37 (*lehaqrīb ’iššeh laYHWH*, “to bring/present offerings by fire to the LORD”). Some of the regulations are specifically described as their “due forever [*huqqat ’ôlām*]” (7:36; 23:14, 21, 31, 41). The noun *qōdeš* in the singular is used 6x in chapters 6 and 7 (6:17, 25, 29 [MT 10, 18, 22]; 7:1, 6) and 12x in chapter 23 (vv. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 20, 21, 24, 27, 35, 36, 37). References to the grain offering (*mīnḥāh*) are found 9x in chapters 6 and 7 (6:14, 15 [2x], 20, 21, 23 [MT 7, 8, 13, 14, 30]; 7:9, 10, 37) and 4x in chapter 23 (vv. 13, 16, 18, and 37, the last time found in the book).

When we examine Lev 24, we also find clear linguistic connections with 6:8 [MT 6:1]-7:38. Probably one of the most important ones is the use of the term *tāmīd* (“continuity, continuance”), used 6x in Lev 6 (vv. 13, 20 [MT 6, 13]) and 24 (vv. 2, 3, 4, 8). In both chapters, it designates priestly activities related to holy objects performed on a regular basis—mainly every day or once a week—that were indispensable within the sacrificial system. The priest was to place the wood on the altar every day to keep the fire continually burning (*tāmīd*; 6:13 [MT 6]) and to lay (*’āraq*, “set in order, arrange”) on it the burnt offering. During the anointing of Aaron, he and his son were to bring a daily (*tāmīd*) grain offering (v. 20 [MT 13]). The priest was to perform these cultic activities in the courtyard of the tabernacle.

In Lev 24, one more ritual activity is added to the responsibilities of the priest vis-à-vis the tabernacle, but this time it was to be performed inside of it, in the holy place. He was responsible to “tend/keep in order” (*’āraq*; v. 3) the lamps to assure that they were “continually [*tāmīd*]” burning (v. 2) before the Lord (vv. 3, 4). The parallel term (*tāmīd*) is imbued with new contextual value. The “bread of the Presence” (24:5-9), a type of grain offering, was to be continually (*tāmīd*) placed before the Lord every Sabbath. Like the common grain offering, the bread of the

Presence was made of fine flour (*sōlet*; 6:15 [MT 6:8]; 24:5)⁶¹ and accompanied by “frankincense” (*lābōnāh*; 6:15 [MT 8]; 24:7). *Lābōnāh* is used in Leviticus seven times and its last two occurrences are precisely 6:15 [MT 8] and 24:7. The frankincense was burned as a “memorial” (*’azkārāh*; 24:7), but in the case of the common grain offering, a portion of the flour with its oil and frankincense was burned as a “memorial” (*’azkārāh*; 6:15 [MT 8]). The two passages are the last two places in Leviticus where *’azkārāh* is used. In all the previous cases the parallel terms embrace new contextual significance supporting the idea that A, and what is more, B, is operative.

The phrase “a statute forever/perpetual” (*hoq-’ōlām*) is utilized in Leviticus three times (6:18, 22 [MT 11, 15]; 24:9). In one case, it refers to the legislation requiring the priests to eat (*’ākal*) the portion of the grain offering that God assigned to them (6:18 [MT 11]). Concerning the bread of the Presence, it was “a perpetual statute” that Aaron and his sons should eat it (*’ākal*; 24:9). Both were to be eaten “in a holy place” (*bāmāqôm qādōš*; 6:16 [MT 6:9]; 24:9). These two passages are the last two places where the phrase “in a holy place” is employed in Leviticus.⁶²

The last part of Lev 24 is a narrative (vv. 10-23), used to formulate a law against anyone who violates the holiness of God by cursing His name.⁶³ The fundamental concern is showing proper respect to God’s holy name. There are some terminological connections between this story and Lev 6 and 7. An important one is the verb *yāša’* (“to go out”) employed in conjunction with the phrase “to outside [*’el-mihûš*] the camp [*lammaḥāneh*],” referring to the responsibility of the priest to go outside the camp, to a holy place, to dispose of the ashes of the burnt offering (6:11 [MT 4]). Leviticus 24:14, 23 uses the same grammatical construction and applies it to one who curses the Lord—the people

⁶¹ The Hebrew term *sōlet* (“semolina;” *DCH* 6:166) is used fourteen times in Leviticus (2:1, 2, 4, 5, 7; 5:11; 6:15, 20 [8, 13]; 7:12; 14:10, 21; 23:13, 17; 24:5). Notice that 6:8 [15] occupies the seventh position on the list and that 24:5 is number fourteen on the list; it is also the last time that *sōlet* is mentioned in Leviticus.

⁶² Another passage establishes as “a permanent ordinance” that a priest should not eat any portion of his own grain offering (6:22 [MT 15]).

⁶³ The tendency has been to parallel this narrative to that of the death of the sons of Aaron in chap. 10. The correlation is made primarily in terms of genre—they are both narratives, although there are some interesting thematic and linguistic parallels (see Didier Luciani, “Une autre intention pour Lv 24: Réponse à Leigh M. Trevaskis,” *VT* 60 [2010]: 591-600). We kept Lev 10 together with the section dealing with the holiness of the priests because Nadab and Abihu were priests while the son of the Israelite women was not; it also fits better under the theme of holiness and its most flagrant violation.

would take him and go outside the camp to stone him. Their final destination is outside the camp, in this case for an execution and in Lev 6 to properly dispose of the ashes. We also find two similar phrases used to describe the condition of the person who violates the sanctity of the communion offering and that of the blasphemer who violated the sanctity of the name of the Lord, namely to bear culpability (*nāšā* 'awôn; 7:18; *nāšā* 'heṭā'; 24:15).

The linguistic parallels peculiar to Lev 6-7 and 25 are very limited, probably because Lev 25 deals with the unique topics of sabbatical years and Jubilee, not discussed anywhere else in the book. We have already mentioned some linguistic parallels, but here we would add the concept of holiness. The Jubilee is, like some of the offerings, specifically described as holy (*qōdeš*; 25:12, 10), indicating that the Israelites would benefit from both the Jubilee and the flesh of the holy peace offerings. A topographical reference to Sinai closes the instructions in 7:38, and in 25:1 such a reference serves to introduce what follows.

Stylistic Features

The numeral six plays an important role in our two parallel sections. Leviticus 6-7 discusses six specific offerings—burnt offering, grain offering, priestly grain offering, purification offering, guilt offering, and peace offering. Leviticus 23 mentions offerings to be brought to the Lord during six specific festivals—Passover, Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Trumpets, Atonement, and Booths. As already indicated, in both cases the holiness of the ritual acts is emphasized. Leviticus 24 discusses three specific activities—the holy lamps, the holy bread, and the holy name—and three more are found in chapter 25 for a total of six—sabbatical year, Jubilee, and redemption of the land. At the end of 7:37 there is a summary of the legislation listing the specific offerings discussed in chapters 6-7 and the same is done in 23:37 with respects to the sacrifices offered during the Israelite festivals.

D D' Leviticus 8:1-10:20//21:1-22:33: Priests and Holiness⁶⁴

There are only two divine speeches in Lev 8-10, flanking five speeches of Moses, implying that Moses' speeches are deeply grounded on God's instructions to him, while in chapters 21-22 there are five divine speeches. Chapters 8-10 are essentially a narrative detailing what

⁶⁴ Zenger has also correlated these two sections in his structure of Leviticus ("Buch Levitikus," 62-76); and also, Shea, "Literary Form," 149.

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took place during the anointing of Aaron, his sons, and the tabernacle, the initiation of the sacrificial system, and the tragic aftermath of the profanation of the holiness of the tabernacle by two of the priests. We hope to demonstrate that all of this is presupposed and developed in chapters 21-22.

Thematic Parallels

Leviticus 8:1-10:20 and 21:1-22:33 have a fundamental thematic cohesion focusing on the personal holiness of the priests and their holy work. This has also been noticed by other scholars.⁶⁵ While Leviticus 8-10 is primarily a narrative describing the anointing and consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, the parallel section (chapters 21-22) builds on that, develops it, and states the implications of the holy life and work of the priests, expanding it to include, among other things, the proper qualifications for priesthood (21:16-24) and the proper administration of the food God provided for them from the sacred offerings of the Israelites (22:1-16). The priests had to make certain that the people followed the proper procedure when selecting and bringing the offerings (22:17-32) and they were required not to profane the sacred gifts brought by the Israelites (v. 15).⁶⁶ The inauguration of the sacrificial system, narrated in chapter 9, provides the ground for the specific instructions given to the priests concerning the proper use of the flesh of the sacrifices (22:1-16).

Linguistic Parallels

The presence of common terminology and phrases strongly suggests that the two sections are being intentionally linked together. This is particularly the case with respect to the sentence, "Then he [Moses]

⁶⁵ For instance, Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary 3A, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), writes, "These two chapters [Leviticus 21-22] differ from the other chapters in this section [17-24] in that the regulations given are primarily directed toward the priests. This section thus supplements Leviticus 8-10" (271). Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, adds, "Leviticus 21-22 now seem to concentrate completely on the priests, similar to Leviticus 8-10" (305).

⁶⁶ Samuel E. Balentine comments that Leviticus 21-22 is formed by six sections: "The instructions may be grouped into six sections: instructions to all priests concerning mourning and marriage (21:1-9); instructions to the high priest concerning mourning and marriage (21:10-15); instructions concerning disqualifying blemishes (21:16-24); instructions to the priests concerning eating sacred food (22:1-9); instructions concerning who may and may not eat sacred food (22:2-16); and instructions concerning blemished sacrificial animals, followed by a summary exhortation (22:17-33)" (*Leviticus*, 167-168).

poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and he anointed him, to consecrate him" (8:12). In Leviticus 21:10 this ritual is assumed to have taken place: "On whose head [Aaron's] the anointing oil had been poured." We are taken back to the moment when Aaron was anointed in order to develop the significance of that event. The phrase "anointing oil" (*šemen hammīšhāh*) is used in Leviticus only in 8:2; 10:7; 21:10, 12 to designate the oil used to anoint Aaron (and in 8:10, it is the same oil employed in the consecration of the tabernacle). Furthermore, the phrase "on his head" (*'al-rō'šô*) appears five times in Leviticus to designate the head of a sacrificial victim (3:13; 4:11), the head of the blasphemer (24:14), and only in Leviticus 8:9 and 21:10 the head of Aaron. Another phrase common to both sections is "fill the hand" (*millē' yād*) in the sense of "consecrate/ordain" (8:33; 21:10), designating in both passages the moment of Aaron's anointing. The term *beḡed* ("garment") refers to the garments of Aaron and his sons (8:2, 30) and in 21:10 to those of Aaron.

The language of holiness occurs often in our two sections in the context of the priests and their work. The use of the verb *qādaš* ("be/become holy"), having as its object Aaron and/or his sons, occurs in the book of Leviticus only in 8:12, 30 and in 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, and 16. The passive form of the verb (*niphal*) expresses the divine requirement that the Lord is to be treated as or shown to be holy by both the priests (10:3) and the people (22:32). These are the only two places in Leviticus where this particular verbal form is employed. Nadab and Abihu did not treat God as holy and "they died [*môt*] before the Lord" (10:2). The priests who profane God's specific cultic legislation will also die (*môt*) (22:9; cf. v. 3).⁶⁷ Finally, the noun *leḥem* ("food") identifies the food that belongs to the priests from the offerings of the Israelites (8:26, 31, 32; 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22; 22:7, 11, 13).

Another important parallel phrase found in both sections, showing their interconnectedness, prohibits the priests to mourn for the death of a relative. After the death of Nadab and Abihu, Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Do not shave [*pāra*] your heads nor tear [*pāram*, "tear to pieces"] your clothes" (10:6). Neither were they to "go out [*yāša*'] from

⁶⁷ Commenting on 22:9, Milgrom writes, "The magnified risk of priests who work inside the sacred sphere is best illustrated by the tragedy of Nadab and Abihu (10:1-3)" (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, Anchor Bible 3A [New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000], 1859).

the doorway of the tent of meeting” to attend the burial (v. 7). The same ideas are found only in Lev 21: “The high priest . . . shall not shave [*pāra*] his head nor tear [*pāram*] his clothes” (v. 10); “nor shall he go out [*yāša*] of the sanctuary” (v. 12). What was said in 10:6 is now constituted into a priestly law regulating how the priests and the high priest are to mourn for the death of a relative (21:1-6, 10-12). This is a case in which a specific command for a particular situation within a narrative is developed and becomes an important piece of priestly legislation, the purpose of which is to protect the holiness of the priesthood. This concern is extended to include the women whom the priests are permitted to marry (21:4, 13-15).

E E’ Leviticus 11:1-15:33//17:1-20:27: Purity and Impurity⁶⁸

Leviticus 11-15 consists of six divine speeches addressing matters related to impurity, suggesting that these chapters constitute a thematic unity and that they should be analyzed as such. It is indeed a significant amount of textual material. The suggested parallel textual block is also long, consisting of four divine speeches (chapters 17-20), although they actually amount to about half the length of Lev 11-15. At first sight, it may appear to be difficult to establish a correlation between these two sections as parallel structures, but our analysis will show clear and significant linguistic and conceptual parallels. Before proceeding we should discuss the role of chapter 17 in the structure of the book.

Role of Leviticus 17

It is generally recognized that Lev 17 introduces the second part of the book, with its emphasis on holiness. The chapter is indeed a transitional speech with connections to what precedes and follows it, although its primary function is related to what follows. Its retrospective and prospective perspective is ingenious in that it smooths out the transition to avoid introducing into the book a radical break with the preceding chapters. For instance, the prohibition of blood consumption (17:10) links it to 3:17; 7:26-27, and could be considered an extension of the dietary laws in 11:2-47, referred to also in 19:26 and 20:25. Eating

⁶⁸ Shea also considers these two sections to be parallel in his chiasmic structure of Leviticus (“Literary Form,” 149). Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 99, has grouped the contents of chaps. 17-25 the same way I did but for a different purpose (Lev 18-20; 21-22; 23-25). Zenger also suggests a similar structure: 11-15//10-20; 8-10//21-22 (“Buch Leviticus,” 71-74).

the flesh of a dead animal is forbidden in 17:15 and also in 11:39-40 and 22:8. The phrase *qorbān laYHWH* (“an offering to Yahweh”) is only found in 1:2; 17:4; and 29:9, 11. One of the most important elements in the transitional nature of Lev 17 is the significance of the verb *kipper* (2x in v. 11). It is found in Leviticus a total of 49x (45x before Leviticus 17 and 2x after it; 19:22; 23:28), connecting what precedes it with what follows. It is at this point that the correlation between the verb and blood is explored, shedding light on its use and meaning throughout Leviticus. The mention of demon goats in 17:7 connects with the figure of Azazel in 16:10⁶⁹ and with offering human sacrifices to Molech in 20:2-5 and perhaps to the laws concerning those who consult the spirits of the dead in 19:31 and 20:6-8, 27.

Thematic Parallel

Thematically, Leviticus 11-15 deal primarily with *physical ritual impurity* while Leviticus 17-20 emphasize *moral impurity* with laws concerning sexual immorality within the family, the extended family, and other sexual deviations (chapter 18), a collection of primarily moral laws (chapter 19),⁷⁰ and penalties for violating mainly moral purity (chapter 20).⁷¹ In chapter 17 we find both moral violation (v. 4; a case of bloodguilt) and ritual impurity (vv. 15-16). Leviticus 17-20, as a whole, relates to religious, cultic, and moral defilement, although moral defilement predominates. The overall category of impurity not only includes a physical undesirable condition that in most cases could be removed through certain ritual acts; it also encompasses a more

⁶⁹ The chiasmic structure suggested by Brian Britt and Patrick Creehan, “Chiasmus in Lev 16, 30 and 17, 11,” *ZAW* 112 (2000): 398-499, would certainly strengthen the connection between chapters 16-17.

⁷⁰ See, David Tabb Stewart, “Leviticus 19 as Mini-Torah,” in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature*, 299-323. It should be noted that some scholars consider Leviticus 18-20 to be a discrete unit of text within the book of Leviticus (e.g., Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 246, who refers to these chapters as “a self-enclosed unit;” Rooker, *Leviticus*, 239; Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 373; see particularly Mary Douglas, “Justice as the Cornerstone: An Interpretation of Leviticus 18-30,” *Interpretation* 53 [1999]: 341-350). Unquestionably, the content of chapter 18 is very similar to that of chapter 20, while chapter 19 looks like a summary of the Torah. It could be argued that the three chapters constitute a chiasm (see, Douglas, “Justice,” 343-344).

⁷¹ For a careful discussion of ritual and moral impurity see, Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-42. James W. Watts has questioned the validity of such distinctions (*Leviticus 11-20*, Historical Commentary of the Old Testament [Leuven: Peeters, 2023], 27-30). For now, I will use “ritual” and “moral” impurity for a lack of better terminology.

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damaging moral violation that in some cases could result in the death penalty (e.g., 20:10, 13) or the terminal divinely administered penalty of “cutting off” (verbs from the root *k-r-t*; e.g., 20:18). The two sections appear to be connected in that the concepts found in one are further developed and expanded in the other, as signaled by the use of some common terminology. Paralleling ritual and moral impurities demonstrate that in the life of the individual, the cultic, ethical, and moral components are inseparable.

Linguistic Parallels

The suggestion that the discussions of ritual and moral impurity in Lev 11-15 and 17-20 constitute two parallel sections within the macro chiasm of the book is supported by the presence of terminology related to impurity in both sections. The verb *tāme*’ (“to be/become unclean”) is a fundamental one. The preponderance of its use in Leviticus is located in chapters 11-15, employed there 64x plus 12x in 17-20, for a total of 76x, as compared to 9x in the rest of the book. To this we should add the adjective *tāmē*’, found 32x in chapters 11-15 and 2x in chapter 20, for a total of 34, as compared to 13x in the rest of the book.

In Leviticus 11-15, there are a number of things that make a person or a thing unclean (*tāmē*’): touching the carcass of an animal (11:24, 26, 28) or dead swarming things (v. 31), childbirth (12:2), leprosy (13:3, 8), leprous garment (v. 19), a house with leprosy (14:36), and bodily flows (15:1-30). When we examine Lev 17-20, the primary sources of defilement are adultery (18:20), improper sexual relations with relatives (6-19, 24), sex with an animal and other improper sexual activities (vv. 23, 24) that defile a person and also the land (vv. 25-28). Furthermore, defilement results from consulting mediums and wizards (19:31), sacrificing children to Molech (20:3), and eating unclean animals or touching their carcasses (20:25; 17:13).

Of particular relevance is the use of the *hithpael* of *tām*’ē found only in Lev 11:24, 43, 44, referring to unclean animals, and in 18:24, 30, referring to moral violations. According to 11:26, eating an unclean *bāhēmāh* results in defilement, while in 18:23 (cf. 20:15, 16) having sex with a *bāhēmāh* defiles the person. The latter defilement is permanent and requires the death of the person and the animal. Interestingly, the person who eats of the carcass of a clean animal that died of itself is required to wash his/her clothes and remains ritually unclean until the evening (11:40; cf. 15:11; 17:15). In fact, the sentence, he “shall wash [*kābas*] his clothes and bathe [*rāḥaṣ*] in water, and be unclean until

evening [*‘ad-hā‘āreb*]” is recorded for the first time in the first part of Leviticus (15:5; also vv. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27) and for the last time at the beginning of the second part of Leviticus (17:15).⁷²

Notice that the term “house” (*bayīt*), which designates a residence contaminated by leprosy (14:33-47), is employed in 18:9 to designate a “household/home” (*bayīt*) that is defiled through improper sexual activity within the family. Leviticus 12 takes us inside the residence of a family where the wife has given birth to a child to legislate how to deal with the impurity that accompanied the birth. After the cleansing ritual is finished, the woman is declared to be clean from “the flow of her blood” (v. 7). The same phrase is applied in 20:18 to the woman who has sexual relations with a man during her menstruation. The topic of menstruation is also of interest in 12:2 and 15:19-24. The last 12x that the guilt offering is mentioned in Leviticus are found in chapters 14 and 19. In 14:12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 24, 25 (2x), and 28, the guilt offering is offered as part of a cleansing ritual while in 19:21, 22 (2x), it is brought for moral impurity (v. 22).

One of the almost obvious linguistic parallels is found in the discussion of clean/unclean animals that starts the section of Leviticus 11:1-14:57 and that is resumed in 20:25-26 at the conclusion of 18:1-20:27.⁷³ “You are to make distinction [*bādal*; 11:47] between the clean [*tahôr*; 11:47] beast and the unclean [*tāmē*; 11:4, 5, 47], and between the unclean birds and the clean [11:46], and you shall not make yourselves detestable [*šiqqas*] by animal or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground [11:20, 29, 31], which I have separated from you as unclean.” This is another case in which Leviticus intentionally brings two separate sections together, bringing closure to the topic and alerting the reader that one section (chapters 11-15) is somehow paralleling the other (chapters 17-20).

Notice that the *piel* verb *šiqqēs* is used in Leviticus only 4x, all of them in the two sections under discussion (11:11, 13, 43; 20:25). The verb *bādal* (“to separate”)⁷⁴ is utilized both in 11:47 and 20:25 to exhort Israel to distinguish between clean and unclean animals (cf. 10:10). But there are at least two new theological developments in the employment

⁷² Similar concepts are expressed in 14:8; 15:16; and 16:4, but not the exact same sentence.

⁷³ Also identified by Zenger, “Buch Levitikus,” 71-72.

⁷⁴ *Badal* is employed in Lev 1:17; 5:8 and 10:10, and the other usages are found 11:47; 20:24, 25 (2x), 26 in the context of the law of clean/unclean animals.

of the verb in Lev 20. First, it is now explicitly stated that the Lord separated or set apart some animals and birds as unclean for the Israelites (20:25b). The origin of the legislation is clearly from the Lord. Second, it is also explicitly indicated that the divine intention of the law of clean and unclean animals is to show that the Lord “separated you from the peoples [*wa’abdil ’etkem min-hā’ammîm*] to be mine,” that is to say, to be holy (20:26). In Lev 11:44-45, the legislation about clean/unclean animals is a call for Israel to be holy. The idea of separation was implicit in 11:45 in the use of the phrase, “I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God.” This is also the ultimate purpose of the laws related to moral purity recorded in Leviticus 18-20. Toward the close of that section the Lord addresses the people: “You shall carefully keep all my statutes and all my ordinances. . . I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples [*hibdaltî ’etkem min-hā’ammîm*]” (20:22, 24). The concept of separation is reaffirmed, supporting the suggestion of parallelism, and further developed. The ritual and moral laws have the same ultimate goal.

The exhortation “you shall be holy” (*hitqadištem*; *hithpael* stem) is located only in Leviticus 11:44 and 20:7, and is accompanied by the motive clause, “for I am holy” (11:44, 45) or “for I am the LORD your God” (20:7). The phrase, “You shall be holy” (*wihəyîtem qədōšîm*), accompanied by a slightly different motivational phrase, is found four times in Leviticus, all of them within our section (11:44, 45 [“for I am holy” *kî qadōš ’ānî*]; 20:7 [“for I am Yahweh your God” *kî ’ānî Yahweh ’ēlōhēkem*], 26 [“for I Yahweh am holy” *kî qadōš ’ānî YHWH*]).⁷⁵ The use of the formula “I am Yahweh your God” is common in Leviticus, but it first appears in 11:44 and predominates in Leviticus 18-20 (13x: 18:2, 4, 30; 19:2, 3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 34, 36; 20:7, 24; compared to 8x in the rest of the book: 23:22, 43; 24:22; 25:17, 38, 55; 26:1, 13).

The noun *niddāh* (“menstruation”) is utilized for the first time in Leviticus 12:2 (also in v. 5, and nine times in chap. 15 [vv. 19, 20, 24, 25 [3x] 26 [2x], and 33]) and in 18:19 and 20:21, the last time in Leviticus. Interestingly, while in 12:2 the *niddāh* is that of a woman, in 20:21 the *niddāh* is that of a man in the sense of “moral impurity.” In 12:2 the phrase “her menstruation” (*nīddat dəwōtāh*) finds its closest syntactical

⁷⁵ Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, perceptively suggested that Leviticus 11:43-45 “represents rather a kind of proleptic announcement of Lev 18-20, connecting the observance of the law of ch. 11 with the—forthcoming!—sanctification of the community in Lev 18-20” (108).

parallel in 18:19—“menstrual impurity” (*nīddat ʔum’ātāh*). By introducing the noun *niddāh* in 12:2 and employing it one last time in 20:21, the discussion of this particular topic has been brought to closure. The noun *ʔārlāh* (“foreskin”), found two times in Leviticus, is literally the foreskin of a new born baby (12:3) and figuratively the foreskin of a recently planted tree that is giving its first fruits (19:23).

Two of the three usages of the phrase “the land of Canaan” (*ʔereṣ kənaʔan*) are located in our two parallel sections (14:34; 18:3; the third one is 25:38). We also find in both sections laws restricting what to eat (*ʔākal*, “to eat, consume”). The most obvious restrictions are found in Lev 11 and 17:10, but there is also the prohibition not to eat the flesh of the communion offering on the third day, otherwise the holy would be profaned (19:6-8). Once the people entered the land of Canaan, they were temporarily forbidden to eat the fruits of the trees they planted (vv. 23-25). Neither were they to eat anything with blood (v. 26).

Stylistic Features

When we examine Leviticus 11-15 and 17-20, we can detect some stylistic features that they have in common and that contribute to strengthen the suggestion that they are interconnected within the structure of the book. The first common characteristic is their emphasis on the careful and detailed categorization of items, laws, and procedures that list prohibited or permitted human activities. This is also found in other sections of Leviticus (e.g., sacrifices, Lev 1-7), but in these two particular sections they are extremely detailed.⁷⁶ This phenomenon is to some extent comprehensible in that the emphasis on ritual and moral purity found in both blocks of material is complex and requires as much specificity as possible.

The second common stylistic feature has to do with the absence of purification rituals in Lev 11 and 18. It is clearly stated that eating unclean animals pollutes the person, but we do not find in Lev 11 a ritual procedure to remove the pollution. Leviticus 18 lists forbidden sexual offenses that result in pollution, but again no purification ritual is provided to remove it.

A third feature has to do with the absence of penalties. Leviticus 11 forbids eating unclean animals, but does not stipulate the penalty applicable to the violator of the law. It is only toward the end of the chapter that we find ways to redress only the impurity contracted by

⁷⁶ This was noticed by Watts, *Leviticus 11-20*, 392.

touching the carcass of a clean or unclean animal (vv. 24-28, 31-35, and 39-40). In Lev 18, it is only at the end of the chapter that a punishment is mentioned for the violation of the laws listed in the chapter (vv. 24-29). This particular penalty is further developed and clarified in Lev 20. Leviticus 11 and 18 give the impression that the impurities mentioned are not removable, and the same applies to blood consumption (17:10).⁷⁷

A fourth stylistic feature is related to the organization of the materials. In Lev 18 we find a detailed list of permanent moral impurities, followed in chapter 20 by a detailed list of legal penalties. We seem to have a similar compositional structure in chapters 13 and 14. Leviticus 13 discusses in detail the case of a person who is unclean because of leprosy, but it is in Lev 14 that we find a detailed discussion concerning cleansing the person from ritual impurity.⁷⁸

F Leviticus 16: Day of Atonement⁷⁹

The central place of Leviticus 16 is initially evident by the use of a phrase found throughout the book and that contributes to make the chapter the apex toward which the content of the book moves like a spiral.⁸⁰ The argument is based on the frequent use of the phrase “the

⁷⁷ Watts has suggested that “Lev. 11:24 can be understood [*sic*, “understood”] as including eating as a form of ‘touching,’ for which waiting until evening provides purification. That interpretation is confirmed by Lev. 17:15-16 which adds bathing and laundering clothes to the purification procedures after eating blood in carcasses. Otherwise, the lack of purification procedures makes the diet rules resemble the regulations about sex in chaps. 18-20, which also lack purification procedures” (*Leviticus 11-20*, 73).

⁷⁸ Noticed by Watts, *Leviticus 11-20*, 515.

⁷⁹ Among scholars who consider Leviticus 16 to be the center of the book, see, Shea, “Literary Form,” 138; Hartley, *Leviticus*, 217; Balentine, *Leviticus*, 125; Rooker, *Leviticus*, 213; Tidball, *Leviticus*, 187; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 35; Warning, *Artistry*, 38-41; Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335; Luciani, *Structure*, 1:288-297; L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend to the Mountain of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2015), 32-34; Thomas Hieke, “Participation and Abstraction in the Yom Kippur Ritual According to Leviticus 16,” in *Writing a Commentary on Leviticus: Hermeneutics—Methodology—Themes*, eds. Christian A. Eberhart and Thomas Hieke, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, eds. Ismo Dunderberg, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 151-152; E. Zenger, “Buch Levitikus,” 76-80, who considers chaps. 16-17 to be the center of the book. Zenger’s ideas have been developed much more by Benedikt Jürgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Leviticus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext*, Herder Biblical Studies 28 (Freiburg: Herder, 2001), 126-186; cf. Watts, *Leviticus 11-20*, 257.

⁸⁰ Terminology used by Breck, *Biblical Language*, 38.

LORD spoke [*dābar*] to Moses/Aaron,” found in Leviticus 37x times, 18x before (1:1; 4:1; 5:14, 20; 6:1, 12, 17; 7:22, 28; 8:1; 10:8; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1, 33; 15:1; 16:1) and 18x after the phrase “the LORD said [*’āmar*] to Moses” in 16:2 (17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1, 16; 22:1, 17, 26; 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33; 24:1, 13; 25:1; 27:1), dividing the book into two main sections.⁸¹ In a sense, the phrase “the LORD spoke to Moses” is not needed in 16:1 because it does not introduce a divine speech. In 16:2, the statement “the LORD said to Moses” is the one employed to introduce the divine speech about the day of atonement. The unexpected use of the phrase in v. 1 may have been intentionally placed there to show that the reader reached the thematic center of Leviticus. The phrase “the LORD said [*’āmar*] to Moses” (v. 2) is used for the first time here to introduce a divine speech and in 21:1 to introduce another speech. It is a variation of the more common “the LORD spoke [*dabar*] to Moses.”

The central theme in Leviticus 16 is expressed by the use of the verb *kipper*, found 16x in it. It is the conceptual center or axis of the concentric chiasmic structure of Leviticus and serves to identify the fundamental goal of the book: the moment when the Israelite camp was totally cleansed from all sins and impurities (ritual and moral impurities).⁸² The problem of sins and impurities runs throughout the book, finding their final resolution in chapter 16. The ritual of the day of atonement is the climax of the cleansing process when sins and impurities were removed from the camp and placed on the source and instigator of all of them, Azazel.⁸³ Interestingly, Leviticus 16 is also structured in the form of a chiasm:⁸⁴

⁸¹ See, Warning, *Artistry*, 37-46. On the structural importance of 16:1 see Luciani, *Structure*, 1:280.

⁸² For a discussion of the all-inclusive nature of cleansing during the day of atonement, see Hieke, “Participation and Abstraction,” 153-156.

⁸³ For an introduction to the theology of the day of atonement see Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Leviticus,” in *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light. Depth. Truth*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), 264-267. See in much more detail Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005). For an overview of the theology of the Israelite sacrifices, including those of the Day of Atonement, see in Roy E. Gane, “Sacrifice and the Old Testament,” in *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/SacrificeandtheOldTestament>, 2022.

⁸⁴ See, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure,” *AUSS* 34.2 (1996): 69-86. I have modified some of the language used in the article.

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“And the LORD said to Moses”

- A Aaron should not go into the adytum any time he pleases 16:2
 - B Aaron’s sacrificial victims and special vestment 16:3-4
 - C Role of the people: provide sacrificial victims 16:5
 - D Aaron’s bull, goat for Yahweh, goat for Azazel 16:6-10
 - E Aaron initiates ritual activity: offers his purification-offering 16:11-14
 - F People’s goat sacrificed as a purification-offering 16:15
 - G Make Atonement 16:16-19
 - G’ Atonement finished 16:20a
 - F’ People’s goat for Azazel sent to the wilderness 16:20b-22
 - E’ Aaron’s closing activities 16:23-25
 - D’ Goat for Azazel, Aaron’s bull, goat for the Lord 16:26-28
 - C’ Role of the people: rest and humble themselves 16:29-31
 - B’ Anointed priest makes atonement wearing special garments 16:32-33
 - A’ Anointed priest makes atonement once a year 16:34
- “As the LORD commanded Moses”

The chiasm is framed by an introduction—“Yahweh said to Moses”—and at the end we find a compliance report—“As the LORD commanded Moses.” These serve as an *inclusio* for the chiasm. Lines A and A’ have in common the element of time by first forbidding the high priest to access the adytum anytime he wishes (v. 2) and then by more specifically limiting it to once a year during the day of atonement (v. 34). The movement in the parallel is from the general to the specific. Line B instructs Aaron concerning what he would need to access the sanctuary area (vv. 3-4). He will bring with him a bull for a purification offering, a ram for a burnt offering, and should wear a special vestment. The parallel line B’ (vv. 32-33), establishes that the special vestments are to be worn by any high priest who in the future will officiate during the day of atonement. Although no particular offering is mentioned in B’, the ritual purpose is stated, namely to make an all-inclusive atonement. Notice that in B the order is offerings and then vestments, and in B’ the order is vestments and then atonement.

Line C mentions the first role of the people during the day of atonement, consisting in providing two male goats for a purification offering and a ram for a burnt offering (v. 5). Line C’ (vv. 29-31), stipulates that during the cleansing of the sanctuary, the people are to rest and humble themselves before the Lord. One instance (C) is mentioned

at the beginning of Lev 16 and the other (C') towards its end, bringing closure to their involvement. The parallel between lines D (vv. 6-10) and D' (vv. 26-28) consists of the activities of Aaron with respect to the bull for his own purification offering and the selection of one goat for Yahweh and another for Azazel. This is paralleled by the activities of the person who took the goat for Azazel to the wilderness and who needed cleansing before returning to the camp (v. 26). Azazel is mentioned for the first time in v. 6 and for the last in v. 26, thus bringing closure to references to Azazel. The flesh of the bull and the goat is to be burned outside the camp and the person who burned it should go through a cleansing rite before returning to the camp (vv. 27-28). Thus, closure is brought to the rituals associated with those offerings. The linguistic parallels signal that the ritual activities for the day have come to an end.

The sacrificial ritual activity for the day of atonement in line E (vv. 11-14) begins when Aaron offers his own purification offering. His last activities performed for the day consist of a change of vestments and the offering of a burnt offering (line E'; vv. 23-25). The idea of closure is implicit through the parallelism. In line F, one of the goats from the community is offered to Yahweh as a purification offering (v. 15), while in F' the other goat is sent to the wilderness to Azazel (vv. 20b-22). Lines G (vv. 16-19) and G' (v. 20a) constitute the center of the chiasm, emphasizing the all-inclusive atoning work of the high priest (vv. 16-19), followed by a statement affirming that the work of atonement has definitely ended (v. 20a). For a short period of time, the people and the sanctuary stand before the Lord free from the sins and impurities of the Israelites.

Conclusion

Using some of the advancements in the study of biblical poetic parallelism, we have sought to map out the literary structure of Leviticus. The constant repetitions, contrasts, and developments of a variety of themes, as well as the constant employment of common terminology, suggests to the reader the possibility that the book is using parallelism in the organization of its content. It is from that theoretical intuition that we launched out in a search for the literary structure of Leviticus. We found it to be a macrostructural chiasmic inversion, or perhaps better an inverted chiasm, at whose center is Lev 16, with an impressive emphasis on an all-inclusive *kipper* that for a short period of time freed Israel and the tabernacle from the damaging presence of ritual and moral impurity. We

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are suggesting that the literary structure of the book offers us a frame of reference for the exploration of its theology.

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