

UNDERSTANDING LEVITICUS

IN LIGHT OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS INTERTEXTUAL APPEARANCES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Overview

Authorship

The book of Leviticus, as with the rest of the Pentateuch, has traditionally been ascribed to the great Israelite prophet-leader Moses. Although modern scholarship has questioned this long-held tradition and has attributed the book to various priestly writers in the several centuries following the Exodus, there can be no doubt that the material in Leviticus developed from the theophany at Sinai and should be closely associated with Moses and his revelations, even though its present form may not come directly or completely from his personal handwriting.

Genre

Leviticus 1–16 mainly contains priestly instructions relevant to the sacrifices made in the Court of the Altar. Leviticus 17–27 deals mainly with the subject of holiness and the two interior rooms in the tabernacle where the presence of the Lord was experienced. Coming at the middle of the five books of Moses, Leviticus begins right after the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness was completed in Exodus, chapter 40. With this new sanctuary all set up, Leviticus presents instructions for the performance of ordinances there, and thus very little narrative is found in Leviticus. The blessing of this lack of narrative is that Leviticus very clearly focuses on conveying the will and words of the Lord. But for many readers, the lack of stories makes Leviticus hard to read since it has little to say about people, places, events, and human-interest stories as do parts of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. The only two stories included in Leviticus are the account of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 and the case of the blasphemer in Leviticus 24.

Historical importance

Once the Israelites settled in the land between the Jordan River Valley and the Mediterranean Sea, the movable tabernacle became the floorplan for the temple built on the rock where God had made a covenant with Abraham. That temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem was destroyed, rebuilt, and remodeled over the next one thousand years until it was finally destroyed by the Romans. It was of central importance to biblical people. And Leviticus was the handbook of instructions telling them what to do and not do in the temple and in their lives with respect to the temple.

Composition

Leviticus moves step by step through various stages. Many sections in this book are written using chiasmus and parallelism. The outstanding and exhaustive three-volume commentary on Leviticus by Jacob Milgrom¹ especially presents and discusses numerous examples of these chiastic and other literary arrangements. Although these structures can make the text seem repetitious or redundant to modern readers, ancient minds delighted in the sense of balanced order, completeness, and finality provided by these literary forms. Because ancient texts did not use paragraphs or punctuation marks, various textual forms of composition helped to mark the ending of one section and the beginning of the next. And while the provisions in Leviticus often make use of repeated verbal patterns and forms, each segment addresses a particular part of the operation or influence of the temple.

Voice

Leviticus is mostly filled with either the Lord's declarations to Moses or His instructions for His covenant people. Even the two events narrated in Leviticus reinforce the importance of complying with the laws of the Lord since both stories are about noncompliance—namely the noncompliance of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 and of the blasphemer in Leviticus 24. These two woeful stories end with divine commands, and they ultimately serve as springboards for further instructions from the Lord.

Audiences

Leviticus speaks to several audiences. Originally, to Israelite priests, Leviticus was a vital handbook. To lay Israelite readers, it set forth the path of individual and collective obedience, purification, and communion with God.

Throughout the New Testament, early Christians were repeatedly taught words from Leviticus as the authoritative words of God. The second great commandment, to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” first appears in Leviticus 19:18 and is repeated often throughout the New Testament.² Other passages from Leviticus

¹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 3 vols., Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991–2001).

² See Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

are also quoted in the New Testament,³ including many allusions to the Day of Atonement (especially in Hebrews 8–10). Thus, although the old temple requirements and practices were fulfilled by Jesus, their underlying principles remained important in early apostolic Christianity.

As Jews today especially notice, Leviticus stands at the heart of the Torah—it is positioned exactly in the middle of the five books that make up the text (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Leviticus likewise is a favorite of readers interested in temples since it is the prime example of a temple text. It is all about the temple, the functions performed there, why they are done, and how to create enduring relationships with God there that are grounded in solemn and sacred covenantal promises.

For Latter-day Saints, the principles behind these Israelite temple requirements and practices remain important today, especially as we strive to approach the temple, the house of the Lord, with holiness. When Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses, He did not necessarily render its principles and precepts obsolete. In most cases, His teachings, conduct, and instructions filled the provisions, performances, and regulations of that preparatory law (4 Nephi 1:12), but the law had meaning, purpose, and ultimately fulfillment in Him.

Uses of Leviticus by Book of Mormon authors

Because the brass plates brought to the New World by Lehi’s party contained the five books of Moses (see 1 Nephi 5:11), it is no surprise that Leviticus is quoted by certain Nephite authors. These verbal connections—some stronger than others—will be discussed in more detail in the main body of these notes and comments. However, here is an overview:

A supercomputer programmed to identify significant word similarities found at least thirty-seven allusions to Leviticus in the Book of Mormon—many in priestly settings—as follows:

- 2 times by the premortal Lord and 3 times by the resurrected Jesus Christ (the giver of Leviticus)
- 4 times by Lehi and 5 times by Nephi (who knew the texts and liturgies of Leviticus in Jerusalem)
- 1 time by Jarom (Jacob’s grandson and part of his priestly line)
- 1 time by Zeniff (who returned to reclaim the temple-city of Nephi)
- 1 time by Alma the Elder (one of King Noah’s priests)
- 2 times by King Mosiah
- 10 times by Alma the Younger (after he focused all his time on his duties as high priest)
- 1 time by Amulek (Alma’s convert)
- 7 times by Mormon (the prophet and abridger of the holy Nephite records)

³ See Leviticus 11:44 in 1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 12:8 in Luke 2:24; Leviticus 16:27 in Hebrews 13:11–12; Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12; Leviticus 20:9 in Matthew 15:4; and Leviticus 24:20 in Matthew 5:38.

There are several good reasons why certain Nephite authors, in particular, made use of words and passages from Leviticus. Most of these references to Leviticus in the Book of Mormon can be attributed to three authors: Lehi, Alma the Younger, and Mormon.

While not a priest or Levite, Lehi was a resident of Jerusalem, and like most of the city's residents, he was probably quite familiar with the inner workings of the temple service. Leviticus was the guidebook for this ritual service. Upon leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Lehi assumed a priestly role, offering sacrifices, divining the Lord's will through the Liahona, and dwelling in a tent (or, a tabernacle). References to Leviticus decline after the deaths of Lehi and Nephi since the scriptural record was kept by people who had spent most or all of their lives far away from the Jerusalem temple and since the small temple in the city of Nephi that record keepers could have accessed seems to have become less serviceable.

Alma the Younger was the next prophet to substantially refer to Leviticus. He and his father are the only two named figures referred to in the Book of Mormon as "the high priest" (as opposed to the indefinite references to "a high priest" or "high priests," which can also refer to *the* high priest's associates, family, or party). As the high priest, Alma would have had liturgical responsibility over the entire church and the temple in Zarahemla. Such responsibilities were enumerated, to a great extent, in Leviticus, and so the book's terms were likely part of Alma's regular vocabulary. In addition, many of Alma's sermons were probably accompanied by his cultic functioning in the office of high priest, making them occasions ripe for allusions and quotations from Leviticus.

The final concentration of Leviticus references comes from Mormon. An avid historian and reader of Israel's scriptures, the prophet Mormon clearly had a particular interest in things related to the temple and to Leviticus. But his outsized share of Leviticus references is likely due to his large hand in authoring the Book of Mormon. Since Mormon is by far the author who contributed the most words to the text, he likewise contributed a considerable share of the Book of Mormon's allusions to Leviticus.

Particular words and phrases from Leviticus found in the Book of Mormon

The quotes from and allusions to Leviticus in the Book of Mormon mainly refer to principles found in Leviticus 5–8, 16–20, 22–23, and 25–27. None of these quotes relate to Leviticus 1–4, 9–15, 21 or 24, where more technical provisions tend to be found. For example:

Eight Book of Mormon references, pertaining to the rituals at the altar of sacrifice, come from Leviticus 5–8:

1. Leviticus 5:4 = Alma 12:31: "*to do evil or to do good*"
2. Leviticus 5:5 ~ Mosiah 26:35: "*confess that he hath sinned*" ~ "repented of their *sins* and did *confess* them"

3. Leviticus 5:8 ~ Helaman 12:8: “*divide it asunder*” ~ “*the dividing asunder*” (see also 1 Nephi 17:45; Mosiah 27:18; Helaman 5:33; and 3 Nephi 8:6)
4. Leviticus 6:10 ~ Alma 14:10: “*the fire [totally] consumed*” ~ “*consuming in the fire*” (Alma may be comparing the women and children who were put to death in Ammonihah to the burnt offering consumed in the Leviticus reference.)
5. Leviticus 6:27 ~ 3 Nephi 27:19: “*whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy; and when there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place*” ~ “*no unclean thing can enter into [the Father’s] kingdom . . . save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood*” (another inverted quotation)
6. Leviticus 7:24 = Alma 5:51: “*in no wise*”
7. Leviticus 7:26 = Jarom 1:6: both speak negatively about eating the *blood of beasts*
8. Leviticus 8:4 = 1 Nephi 2:3 and 3:7: “*doing as the Lord commanded*”

Four, regarding cleanliness, commandments, and being cut off, draw on Leviticus 16–20:

1. Leviticus 16:30 = Ether 4:6: being clean “before the Lord”
2. Leviticus 17:2 = 1 Nephi 3:15: doing “the thing which the Lord hath commanded”
3. Leviticus 18:29 = 3 Nephi 21:20: being “cut off from among . . . people”
4. Leviticus 20:2 ~ Alma 33:17: “he shall surely be put to death: the *people* of the land shall *stone him*” ~ “because the *people* would not understand his words they *stoned him to death*”

Four come from Leviticus 19, the heart of the book of Leviticus:

1. Leviticus 19:14 = Alma 4:10: “stumblingblock[s]” to the blind / the church
2. Leviticus 19:15 ~ Alma 10:27: “do no *unrighteousness in judgment*” ~ “the foundation of the destruction of this people is . . . laid by the *unrighteousness* of your *lawyers and judges*”
3. Leviticus 19:16 ~ Alma 20:2: “*thou shalt not go up . . . as a talebearer*” ~ “*thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi*” (the direct word of the Lord is another possible allusion here)
4. Leviticus 19:18 = Mosiah 23:15 (Alma the Elder): “love [thy/his] neighbor as [thyself/himself]”

Three quote Leviticus 22 to warn about being cut off from God’s presence:

1. Leviticus 22:3 = 2 Nephi 4:4: “shall be cut off from my presence”
2. Leviticus 22:3 = Alma 36:30: “shall be cut off from [my/his] presence”
3. Leviticus 22:3 = Helaman 12:21: “[shall/shalt] be cut off from my presence”

Four are related to the land blessed by God:

1. Leviticus 23:43 = 1 Nephi 17:40: “[I/he] brought them out of the land of Egypt”
2. Leviticus 25:9 ~ Alma 49:1: “*tenth day of the seventh month*” ~ “*tenth day of the month*”

3. Leviticus 25:10 ~ Alma 46:17: “*liberty* throughout all the *land*” ~ “the *land of liberty*”
4. Leviticus 25:10 ~ Mosiah 29:32: “*liberty* throughout all the *land*” ~ “*land of liberty*”

Eight come from the concluding words of the Holy One:

1. Leviticus 26:3 = Alma 37:13: “keep my commandments”
2. Leviticus 26:6 = Words of Mormon 1:18: “[give/establish] peace in the land”
3. Leviticus 26:7 = Alma 44:18: “fall before . . . the sword” = “fall . . . before the swords”
4. Leviticus 26:14 = 2 Nephi 1:29: “but if ye will not hearken unto [me/him]”
5. Leviticus 26:39 = Mosiah 10:12: “the iniquities of their fathers”
6. Leviticus 26:45 = 3 Nephi 16:12: “but I will . . . remember the covenant” = “but I will remember my covenant”
7. Leviticus 26:46 = Alma 8:17: “these are the statutes and judgments” = “the statutes and judgments”
8. Leviticus 27:30 ~ 1 Nephi 8:24: “tithes of the land, . . . or *of the fruit of the tree*” ~ “partake of *the fruit of the tree*”

Each instance of these basic themes and foundational principles will be explained in the commentary for its respective chapter and verse sequence.

General religious themes

Many positive religious themes appear in each stage of progression through Leviticus. These themes track quite closely the order in which instructions are given and received still today in Latter-day Saint temples. Listed chapter by chapter, these elevating themes include:

- observing the law of *sacrifice* and *obedience* (chapters 1–7)
- wearing of *meaningful robes* and symbolic garments (8–9)
- requirements enabling strict adherence and reverence (10)
- maintaining holiness and cleanliness in daily life (11–15)
- expelling evil and atoning for sins (16)
- avoiding disallowed forms of worship (17)
- maintaining sexual purity and avoiding disallowed sexual relations (18, 20)
- loving God and neighbors and living a life of goodness (19)
- sanctifying people and praying in the Holy Place (21–22)
- dedicating time and holy days to the Lord (23)
- protecting holy things, sacred knowledge, and especially the divine name (24)
- proclaiming the release of debtors and redeeming holy land that had been lost (25)

- consecrating property to the Lord by vows in order to serve the Lord and relieve the poor (27)
- hearing the words of God as He reaffirms all the covenantal stipulations, warnings, and commensurate promises contained in His covenant with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (26)

Finding the Lord in Leviticus

In addition to instructing faithful readers in ways that point our minds, hearts, and souls toward the Lord, the book of Leviticus reveals many of the names and functions—such as types, shadows, and patterns—by which the Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself. According to the divine plan, He does not ask of us things that He Himself was not willing to do. He *sacrificed* and suffered. He made God’s *mercy* accessible to all. He learned by *obedience* to His Father. He served as our great *High Priest*. He did not take upon Himself authority, except as He was called of God. He was *pure* and holy and imparted holiness, finding refuge in prayer. He epitomized the *Atonement*, reconciliation with God through His blood. He properly honored the *Sabbath* and traveled several times to the *temple* in Jerusalem. He hallowed His Father’s *name*. He attended especially to the *poor*, the sick, and the lost. He *redeemed* those in bondage of sin and bought back their eternal inheritance. He forgave the *debts* we are unable to pay. He extended the *covenantal promises* of God to all who will come unto Him. All these elements, and many others, can be found in the book of Leviticus, a handbook whose principles remain vital today.

Seeing the Floorplan of the Tabernacle as the Underlying Structure of Leviticus

In many very interesting ways, the overall structure of Leviticus follows the steps of the high priest as he enters the Court of the Altar and then moves, step by step, into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, the final room in the temple. The text moves forward and upward through various rituals and levels of holiness. For example, in Leviticus 16, the reader finds the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement, prerequisites for reconciliation with God and access to the Holy of Holies. Only after reading through these prescriptions does one find the Holiness Code, a set of ethical and ritual commandments for the Lord’s covenant people, in Leviticus 17–26. A concluding chapter, Leviticus 27, prepares the reader to fulfill their temple vows and commitments.

In her book *Leviticus as Literature*, Mary Douglas helped people see the book of Leviticus itself as being structured to follow the floorplan of the tabernacle. In Leviticus, the presentation of numerous divine instructions and laws is interrupted only twice, at two points. Douglas called these points screen 1 (chapter 10) and screen 2 (chapter 24). See figure 1, which presents the floorplan of the tabernacle or temple in two ways: by first identifying the rooms and furnishings within the house of the Lord and then by indicating the Leviticus chapters relevant to each of those places and features.

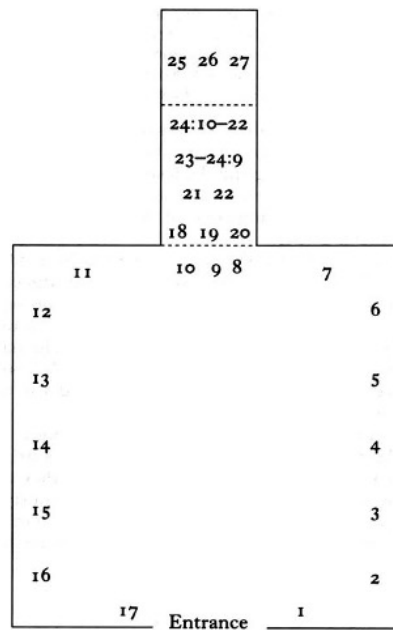
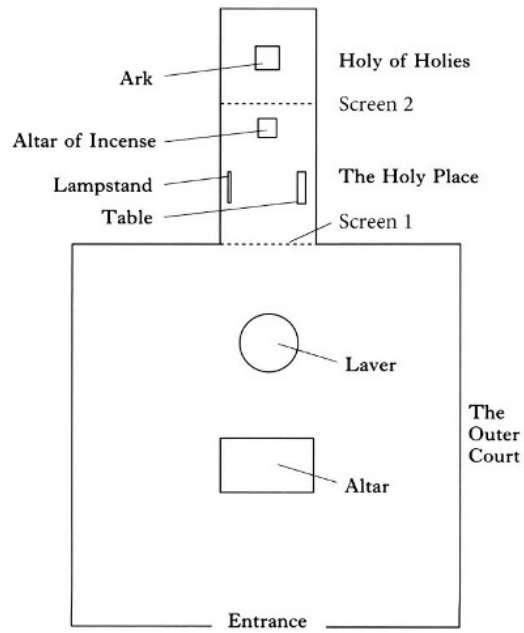


Figure 1. The floorplan of the tabernacle. Reproduced from Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000), fig. 1.

Thus, the book of Leviticus can be easily and effectively understood as a kind of a guidebook. No one needs to feel lost or disoriented in the temple. Leviticus not only gives helpful directions for the priests and Levites but also virtually allows all readers to experience the temple since the book gives them a kind of hypothetical visitor's guide through the ancient Israelite temple and its many functions. In that temple, reassuring words were spoken, and ultimately the presence of the Lord was encountered, felt, and experienced. Indeed, the order in which divine instructions are presented in Leviticus corresponds with the floorplan and the movement of the ordinances and sacred functions performed throughout the tabernacle and temple, as outlined below.

The front courtyard

The experience begins in the outer Court of the Altar. There the sacrifices and purifications mentioned in Leviticus 1–17 were conducted. This outer courtyard also represents the farthest that the ordinary Israelite could proceed in the temple toward God's presence in the Holy of Holies. (Access to the subsequent Holy Place and Holy of Holies was reserved for the priests and high priest, respectively.) The courtyard was often a crowded, noisy, and smelly place where worshippers were confronted by the clamor and odors of the priests, Levites, fellow worshippers, and sacrificial animals. To the modern Latter-day Saint, whose worship is steeped in the simple nature of American Protestantism, this sort of worship probably sounds foreign, but to the ancient devotee—as well as to those who have visited holy sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—this environment was part of the expected and venerated experience. The famous story of Hannah and her prayer in front of Eli occurred in the courtyard at the ancient tabernacle.

The entrance

The divine presence was manifested outside the sacred structure of the temple itself in the form of two pillars, which were named Boaz and Jachin—these names in Hebrew mean “strength in him” and “he will establish”—and which represented the cloud that led Israel by day and the pillar of fire that led them by night. Whether in daylight or darkness, the presence of Jehovah stood beside His faithful people on their right and on their left. The two pillars are represented structurally in Leviticus by the pair of chapters 18 and 20.

The long hall, or Holy Place

Passing out of the busy and often noisy outer courtyard, the relative quiet of the first room inside the temple must have sharpened the senses of the priestly worshippers. Here the table of bread was set for the Lord, the lights of the menorahs gave guidance, and the pleasing smells of the burning incense carried prayers of thanks and petitions up to the Lord. In this Holy Place (called the *Hekal* in Hebrew), the instructions found in Leviticus 21–24 were most relevant. This is the place where the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, heralding the birth of John the Baptist.

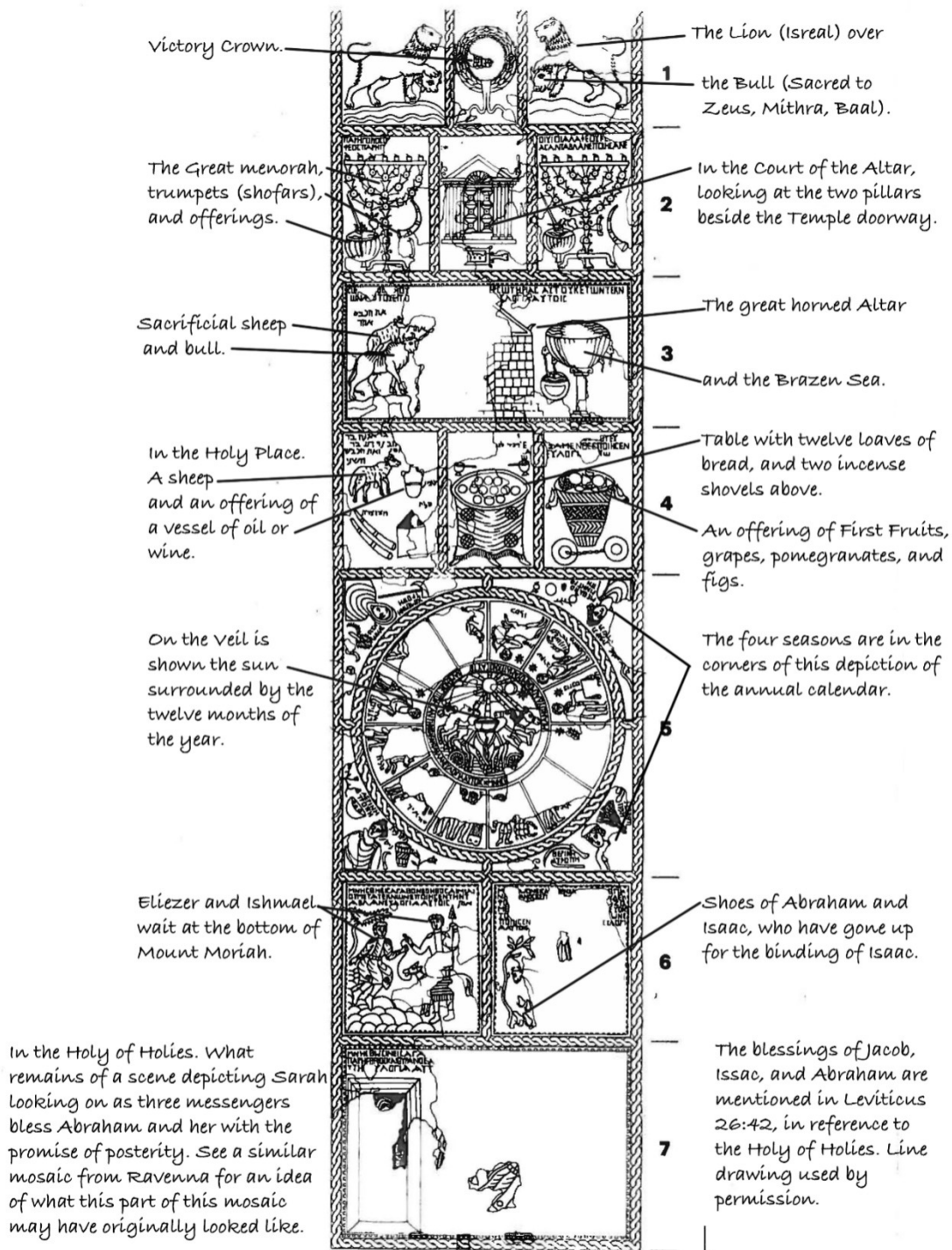


Figure 2. Line drawing of the mosaic at Sepphoris. Reproduced from Ehud Netzer and Ze'ev Weiss, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem, Israel: Israel Museum, 1996).

The veil of the temple

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest progressed on through a second entrance, the veil of the temple, to which Leviticus 24 is pertinent.

The Holy of Holies

Finally, in the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 26), the presence of the Lord is experienced, and His personal voice is repeatedly heard in no less than twenty-nine first-person statements. The innermost Holy of Holies was the epicenter of the Lord's merciful presence in the temple. There, God lovingly revealed Himself to the high priest and to some of His prophets, such as Isaiah (see Isaiah 6). With the ark (or the carrying chest) of the covenant—the ark's mercy seat representing the Lord's throne on earth—and the tablets of the Ten Commandments there, this place was exceptionally sanctified and revered. But by more than those observable objects, God's divine presence was felt and heard in the Holy of Holies as the Lord spoke.

Many biblical scholars who have studied Mary Douglas's approach accept her insightful explanation. The many correspondences between the book of Leviticus and the temple floorplan can hardly be coincidental. In addition, the ancient significance of the floorplan of the temple can be seen in a recently excavated mosaic floor of a synagogue at Sepphoris (Zippori) that was built in Galilee by a congregation of surviving Levites about 400 years after Jesus. The accompanying line drawing, photographs, and captions help readers everywhere to experience the mosaic.



Rows 2–4 of the Sepphoris mosaic show the menorah, altar, brazen sea, sacrificial animals, first fruits, and table of the shewbread. Photo by author.



Row 5 shows the veil of the calendar with the daily sun and lunar months and seasons. Photo by author.



Row 6 and the corner of row 7 show parts of three scenes in the account of the binding of Isaac. Photo by author.



In this AD fifth-century mosaic from Ravenna, Italy, Abraham feeds three blessed messengers while Sarah looks on. Then, with the substitutionary ram below and God's right hand coming through the heavenly veil above, we see the binding of Isaac, which Christians identified as a type and shadow of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Photo by Jonathan Johnson, 2019. Used by permission.

The Court of the Altar

Overview of Leviticus chapters 1–7

The seven opening chapters of Leviticus set forth the rules regarding the sacrifices offered in the Court of the Altar, the first area encountered in the tabernacle. Requirements are given for burnt offerings, cereal offerings, well-being offerings, purification offerings, graduated purification offerings, and reparation offerings. These chapters make it clear that a variety of sacrifices are important and acceptable to the Lord.

The law of sacrifice is intended to be a broad entry point, blessing all parts of life and inviting worshippers to voluntarily bring all kinds of sacrifices into the storehouse of the Lord. Sacrifices are to be offered under all sorts of conditions, whether in sickness or in health, well-being or in impurity, in good standing with the Lord or in need of forgiveness and drawing close to God. In return for the abundance with which the Lord has blessed them, His people gratefully make various kinds of sacrifices for a range of purposes. These sacrifices are to be performed with precision.

Chapter 1

Some sacrifices are burnt offerings of animals from the Israelites' cattle, herds, and flocks (verses 2–17), made as freewill offerings brought to the door of the sanctuary. The individuals making the offering place their own hand on the head of the animal being offered, which is then accepted as a gift or as an offering of atonement in the person's behalf (verse 4). Upon the altar, the blood of the animal is sprinkled, and its parts are burnt. Its entrails and legs are washed in water (verses 5–9). Even sheep and goats without blemish are to be washed before being presented as an offering worthy to be sacrificed. Poultry also may be offered.

Chapter 2

An evening offering made of flour or cereal may also be brought to the temple, and oil poured upon it (verses 1–7), but it was not to be leavened or made with honey (verse 11). A sacrifice of first fruits may also be made but should not be burnt on the altar except when oil is poured upon the fruit and it is offered with salt (verses 13–14) and burnt together with incense (verses 15–16).

Chapter 3

The well-being offering, or the peace offering of gratitude, can be made of either a male or female animal without blemish from the herd. It likewise should be burned with fire and its blood sprinkled upon all the altar (verses 1–17) after the priest has placed his hand upon the head of the animal (verses 8, 13).

Chapter 4

The seriousness of and procedures involved with the various sin offerings depend on the status of the sinner and whether it was a sin of ignorance or negligence (verse 2). The higher the person's level of

responsibility, the more serious the infraction and therefore the larger the necessary reparation. Thus, if an anointed priest has committed or is responsible for a sin of the people against God, he must offer a bull and sprinkle its blood seven times before the veil of the temple (verses 3–12).

If the whole collective congregation of Israel sinned through ignorance, then the elders of the people should offer a young bull as a sacrifice after laying their hands upon its head and then sprinkle its blood seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the temple (verses 13–21).

If a ruler or chieftain of the people has sinned through ignorance, when his transgression has come to his knowledge, he sacrifices a kid of the goats, a male without blemish (verses 2–26).

If any of the common people similarly sin, they should offer only a female kid without blemish or a lamb instead (verses 27–35).

The problem of sinful actions committed ignorantly, mistakenly, unintentionally, or against one's own will seems odd to modern people, but indeed people have a duty to be diligent, attentive, and careful. Claiming ignorance is not a valid excuse for sinning, especially if being more attentive could have prevented the wrongdoing. Inasmuch as actual damage can be caused by negligence or by accident, those wrongs still need to be rectified. Interestingly, in Mosiah 3:11 King Benjamin says—apparently with this problem in mind—that the blood of Jesus Christ atones for unintended transgressions and for all those, whether high and mighty or weak and lowly, “who have ignorantly sinned.”

Chapter 5

A person who becomes aware of a transgression has a duty to report or confess the problem and to bring a female lamb or kid. Specifically, if a person hears someone secretly swearing an oath or sees someone in private touch any unclean thing, a duty arises to make known this potential public defilement. Bringing it to awareness involves the person who sinned in the atonement process (verses 1–6). If the witnesses are unable to bring a lamb, they may bring two doves or pigeons; if unable to bring any of those, they can bring one tenth of an *ephah* of fine flour without oil (verses 7–13). If the reported transgression involves some holy things of the Lord (verse 15), then a ram without blemish must be brought (verses 15–16); the same rule applies if the transgression involves something normally forbidden yet done by commandment of the Lord (verse 17). If the transgression involves taking the name of the Lord in vain by lying about something that was entrusted to a neighbor for safe-keeping or which was lost, then also a ram without blemish must be offered and the property fraudulently taken away must be restored (6:1–7).

Leviticus 5:4. In the Book of Mormon, the duty to report and to be involved in the process of obtaining a confession and making atonement for sins mentioned in Leviticus 5 appears to stand behind Alma’s efforts in Ammonihah. He could not simply ignore the well-known apostasy and wickedness in that town. Thus, in Alma 12:31, Alma makes it clear that God had given all humankind the power to know good from evil and to “act according to their wills and pleasures, whether *to do evil or to do good.*” That encompassing phrase is found in Leviticus 5:4 regarding the swearing of any and all oaths whatsoever, whether “*to do evil, or to do good.*” As the high priest in the land of Zarahemla, Alma the Younger needed to speak out against the resolutions of the people in Ammonihah or he himself would become guilty of their iniquities.

Leviticus 5:5. The requirement found in Leviticus 5:5 that people must “*confess that [they] had sinned [in the detected way]*” is also found in Mosiah 26, where the high priest, Alma the Elder, was given a charge by King Mosiah and by the Lord to judge those “who had been taken [heard or seen] in iniquity” (Mosiah 26:34). The ruling then continued that only if the sinners “repented of their *sins* and did *confess* them” could they remain numbered among the people of the church (Mosiah 26:35), consistent with the priestly duty articulated in Leviticus 5:5.

Leviticus 5:8. The atoning sacrifice required in the case of an observer’s becoming impure was to bring two small doves or pigeons to the priest, who would wring off their head but not “*divide it asunder*” (Leviticus 5:8) and then chop it completely into pieces. The expression “divide asunder” appears in the Book of Mormon when Mormon speaks of the earth obeying the commandments of God unto “the *dividing asunder*, at the command of our great and everlasting God” (Helaman 12:8). Only God—not even the priests—had the power to divide so utterly.⁴

Chapter 6

Sacrifices are to be carried out with precision, and so the administrative order of how to perform these sacrifices is stated in considerable detail. Rules regarding the perpetual burning of the fire on the altar all night (verse 9) and all day (verse 12) are given, together with rules about Aaron and his sons eating the offerings (verses 14–30). The laws regarding restitution for trespasses are enumerated. After the wrong has been repaid with interest (verses 1–5), the offender is instructed to bring a sacrifice to the priest (verses 6–7). The burnt offerings are to be burned for the entire night on a perpetual fire. Grain offerings are burnt in part, and the remaining portion is allotted to the priests. Upon its sacrifice, the sin offering is to be given to the priest who performed the sacrifice.

⁴ See the swallowing up of the households of the men of Korah in Numbers 16:31–33. See, likewise, the trembling of the earth as if it would *divide asunder* in 1 Nephi 17:45; Mosiah 27:18; Helaman 5:33; and 3 Nephi 8:6.

Leviticus 6:10. The language about “*the fire* [which totally] *consumed*” the burnt offering during the night may stand behind Alma’s description of the women and children in Ammonihah “*consuming in the fire*” (Alma 14:10). Likewise, the fact that city was obliterated “in one day” (Alma 16:10) might signal the presence of God behind the talionic punishment (a punishment that demands a penalty corresponding to the crime—for example, “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth”) of that city, reducing it in one day to desolation just as they had horrifically killed, or sacrificed, those women and children and reduced them to ashes.

Leviticus 6:27. Another instance of inverted quotation is found in 3 Nephi 27:19, where Jesus says that “no unclean thing can enter into [the Father’s] kingdom . . . save it be those who have *washed* their *garments* in my *blood*.” This appears to be a fulfilling allusion to Leviticus 6:27, which reads: “Whatever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be *holy*: and when there is sprinkled of the *blood* thereof upon any *garment*, thou shalt *wash* that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place.”

Chapter 7

The laws regarding the most holy trespass offering are given special attention (verses 1–10), along with the handling of peace offerings, thanksgiving offerings, and voluntary offerings connected with voluntary vows (verses 11–19). While people are always welcome to make voluntary offerings by the process of vows and freewill donations to the poor, especially in making acceptable sacrifices to the Lord as the Lord has required, this calls for a higher sense of obedience and a strict compliance (see also Numbers 30). This is not because the letter of the law is an end in and of itself but because these sacrifices are a part of a covenant relationship; in order to attain holiness (*kodesh*), compliance with the covenantal terms allows the complete fulfillment of the promises and spirit of that covenant relationship, as Joshua Berman observed.⁵ If people who are unclean eat any of these sacrifices, they will be “cut off from [their] people” (verses 20–21, 25, 27). Obedience to all these rules is crucial; the manner of burning the fat and giving the breast and the right shoulder to Aaron and his sons must be followed scrupulously (verses 28–34).

Leviticus 7:24. Although it is a very faint verbal connection, the absolute prohibition in Leviticus 7:24 against eating the flesh of any already-dead animal is stated by using the words “*in no wise*.” No Nephite would have thought of eating such flesh. Thus, Alma can use this small linguistic marker to stress the absolute fact that unrepentant people shall “*in nowise* inherit kingdom of heaven” (Alma 5:51).

Leviticus 7:26. This provision strongly prohibits eating the *blood* of birds or *beasts*. This is the basis of one of the main parts of the Jewish kosher law. With that clear and everyday restriction solidly in place in the plates of brass, it would have been difficult for the Nephites to not recoil at how quickly the Lamanites began to “drink the *blood* of *beasts*” (Jarom 1:6).

⁵ See Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Lanham, MD: J. Aronson, 1995), 1–12.

The Priestly Order

Overview of chapters 8–10

Here the text deals with the inauguration of the priestly administration. Once the people in general and the priests particularly have complied with the laws of sacrifice and obedience, the temple priests are then consecrated and empowered to carry out the operations of the temple. The book of Leviticus establishes an archetypal general pattern, which is evident at this point in the book because the sacrifices and the priestly administrative order set forth in chapters 1–7 already assume that priests have been consecrated and are fully operational.

Chapter 8

Having given the anointing and presentation of Aaron and his sons that authorizes them to minister unto the Lord in the office of a priest (7:35–38), Leviticus now details the manner of ordaining Aaron; robing him in garments; anointing him with oil; washing the priests with water; and placing upon them the coat, the girdle, the robe, the ephod, the curious girdle of the ephod, the breastplate, the miter, the golden plate, and the holy crown (8:1–9). Sacrifices of bulls and rams then follow to consummate the consecration of Aaron and his sons. Blood is put on the tip of their right ears (verse 24), the thumbs of their right hands, and the big toes of their right feet (verse 24). Their heads are then anointed with oil and their garments sanctified (verse 30). For seven days and seven nights, they are consecrated (verses 31–33). All of this was done strictly as the Lord had commanded (verses 34–36).

Leviticus 8:4. Here the text reports that “Moses *did as the Lord commanded him*” in robing Aaron and his sons and in gathering all the *congregation* together at the door of the *tabernacle*. It is significant that 1 Nephi 2:3 uses the same words to describe Lehi’s faithful gathering of his *family* and provisions and *tents*, being “obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore *he did as the Lord commanded him.*” Nephi’s subsequent pledge of strict obedience in 1 Nephi 3:7 likewise carries the overtones of being obedient to God’s commands as Moses had been in Leviticus 8.

Chapter 9

This chapter authorizes priests to stand in the service of God. The priesthood powers given to these priests (verses 1–24) come with a strict expectation that they will render righteous and proper service only to the Lord. Once installed as a priest, Aaron made sacrifices on behalf of the people, promising them that “the Lord will appear unto you” (verse 4), and the entire congregation “drew near and stood before the Lord” (verse 5). Aaron sacrificed a calf for himself and then a goat for the people, after which he “lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them” (verse 22). Then “the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces” (verses 23–24).

Chapter 10

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

Personal Purity

Overview of chapters 11–17

These chapters give guidance for maintaining personal purity in daily life (chapters 11–16) and for removing any remaining impurities on the annual Day of Atonement (chapter 16), also stating several problems to avoid (chapter 17).

Chapter 11

This chapter begins a long section that sets forth requirements for maintaining purity, holiness, and often simple cleanliness in virtually every aspect of everyday life. Those who connected with the temple are to maintain holiness in the family home. Thus, dietary laws regulate what can be eaten on the daily table.

Chapter 12

Rules regarding childbirth (verses 1–8) celebrate and sanctify the most holy and exquisite purpose of family life—bringing human beings into this world.

Chapter 13

All other forces that arise from unholy and impure practices are discussed, including washing, discolorations, boils, burns, and baldness, and which fabrics can be worn on the skin. Nothing is more ordinary in the daily routine of life than washing and caring for the skin, which is the body's front-line defense against disease, injury, and infection. In ways such as these, the book of Leviticus calls all its adherents to a daily life of holy observance of the covenant relationship instituted by God through Moses on Mount Sinai.

Chapter 14

The rites for purifying individuals who have recovered from leprosy are set forth. After the disease's disappearance, various sacrifices and cleansing rituals are required before the former leper can rejoin society.

If leprosy or another disease is discovered in a house, all individuals and items inside the house are considered unclean. A priest is to perform an inspection of the house and supervise its cleansing.

Chapter 15

This chapter contains a discussion of bodily discharges and their resulting impurities. Discharges by both men and women render them and those who come into contact with them unclean until they have ritually immersed. Irregular discharges render one unclean for an extended period. Those with an irregular seminal or menstrual discharge must wait seven days from the return to normal bodily function and offer a sacrifice before returning to ritual cleanliness.

Chapter 16

If any of these rules are broken, whether intentionally or unintentionally, atonement must be made to repair damaged relationships and expurgate impurities between God and His people. The scapegoat offering, to be performed on the Day of Atonement to carry away all the sins of the people so that the mercy of the Lord may reach out to all of His people, is spelled out in Leviticus 16 (verses 2–4). This vicarious cleansing begins with killing a goat “for the Lord” as a sin offering to make atonement for the sanctuary and to reconfirm the sanctity of the temple (verses 15–17). Then Aaron places both his hands on the head of a second goat, confesses over him all the sins of the children of Israel, and sends the goat away “for Azazel” by the hand of a strong man into the wilderness (verses 21). As Jacob Milgrom observed, “the most plausible explanation is that Azazel is the name of a demon . . . who has been eviscerated of his erstwhile demonic powers by the Priestly legislators.”⁶ Aaron then again washes himself and offers an atonement sacrifice for himself and for the people with the offering of a bull, and the high priest’s assistants are also purified (verses 26–28). On this day, all the people are required to humble themselves and do no work (verse 29).

Leviticus 16:30. Worshippers are promised that the priest’s service will be efficacious, rendering them “*clean* from all [their] sins *before the Lord*.” This is accomplished by means of the priest’s “mak[ing] an atonement.” This language is echoed in Moroni’s prophecy that upon their repentance, the latter-day Gentiles will “become *clean before the Lord*” (Ether 4:6).

Chapter 17

Four final provisions turn attention to the broader interests in holiness and thereby form a transition into the next stage of the book of Leviticus and the holiness code.

⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 168.

- The killing of any ox, lamb, or goat must be performed at the temple; any offending person will be cut off from the people (verses 3–4).
- In an effort to drive out the influence of satanic forces, all sacrifices to devils or evil spirits are particularly prohibited, and this shall be a perpetual regulation (verse 7).
- Any non-Israelites who would not be worthy to go beyond the Court of the Gentiles and approach the altar are prohibited from making sacrifices on pain of being expelled from the community (verses 8–9).
- Eating blood is not allowed (verse 14).

This completes the provisions in the book of Leviticus involving the altar and sacrifices. These guidelines provide information regarding the priests' preparations and duties that were performed in preparation for entering into the sanctuary.

Leviticus 17:2. The phrase “*the thing which the Lord hath commanded*” makes an appearance in both Leviticus 17:2 and 1 Nephi 3:15. In both cases, it refers to a prior commandment delivered by the Lord. In Leviticus, it contains instructions regarding the location of sacrifices; in 1 Nephi, it is in reference to the Lord’s commandment that Lehi’s sons obtain the brass plates from Laban.

The Holy Place

Overview of chapters 18–23

Here the reader is guided into the Holy Place and told a few things about the higher order of law and righteousness that is taught and ceremoniously revered there.

Chapters 18 and 20

The long lists of provisions presented here function as worthiness recommend requirements to be met by anyone wishing to enter the next level of holiness. The two lists in chapters 18 and 20 also stand like twin pillars supporting chapter 19, which can be thought of as the crossbeam or pediment over the portal leading from the Court of the Altar into the Holy Place (the *Hekal*).

Mary Douglas called these three chapters, together with the three narrative chapters 8–10, the “first screen.”⁷ At this placement, the reader is fully warned of the heightened responsibilities and risks assumed by those moving closer to the presence of the Lord. The person entering “is faced by a trilogy of chapters, 18 and 20 repeating [mirroring] each other [in the opposite order], and between them chapter 19, which must be considered to be of central importance if only because of the way it is framed by the other

⁷ Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 234.

two.”⁸ Just as “the pedimental style puts the climax in the middle,”⁹ so the two pillars of strikingly similar content frame and emphasize the all-important chapter 19. Chapters 21–23 will then deal with matters of conducting sacred honors given to the Lord and prayers offered by the priests inside the Holy Place.

The two lists of serious prohibitions in chapters 18 and 20 deal with all kinds of incest, illicit sexual practices, and adultery, along with laws against abusing children by devoting (sacrificing) them to the Canaanite god Molech and prohibitions against cursing one’s father or mother. These two textual pillars, through which one must pass in order to enter the next level of holiness, comprise the broad principles behind the law of chastity. This order of the priesthood takes seriously any illicit sexual acts outside of sanctioned marriage. In essence, one advances from the outer area of sacrifice into a higher priesthood domain by observing rigorous injunctions regarding sexual relations and procreation.

The almost complete duplication in the text of Leviticus 18 in Leviticus 20—the two matched pillars—is not a mere repetition. While the relationship between the two lists of prohibited sexual relations in Hittite Laws 187–200 and Leviticus 18 happens to be one of *direct* correspondence, the relationship between the two lists within Leviticus 18 and 20 is one of chiasmic *inversion* (this ABA structure was noticed but not developed by Douglas).¹⁰ The overall tendency here is for the items at the top of the list in Leviticus 18 to move to the bottom of the list in Leviticus 20 and for those on the bottom of the list in Leviticus 18 to move to the top of the list in Leviticus 20. For example, the mention of foreigners, which comes at the bottom of the list in Leviticus 18, appears as the first item in the sequence in Leviticus 20.

Leviticus 18:29. The punishment for those who fail to adhere to the book’s moral standards is being “*cut off from among their people,*” removed from Israelite society and from favor with the Lord. Jesus foretells the same consequence for those in the latter days who fail to repent and accept Him as their Savior, delivering the words of the Father as “them will I cut *off from among my people,* O house of Israel.”

Chapter 19

The two columns in this portal sustain the essence of the Holiness Code, found in Leviticus 19, which culminates with its central pinnacle: “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (verse 18). As Rabbi Hillel once remarked, paraphrasing Leviticus 19:18, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor, that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it” (b. Shabbat 31a).

8 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 234.

9 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 59.

10 See Mary Douglas, “Poetic Structure in Leviticus,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi M. Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 93–102.

Famously, Leviticus 19 begins with the injunction to become holy or perfect, saying, “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (verse 2). The chapter details rules regarding honoring one’s mother and father, keeping the Sabbath day holy, not turning to idols, consuming peace offerings within the first two days, leaving the corners of fields for gleaners, not stealing, not dealing falsely, not lying, not swearing by God’s name falsely, not profaning the name of God, dealing honestly with one’s neighbor, not withholding wages, not cursing the deaf or tripping the blind, not judging falsely, not spreading rumors, and not hating one’s brother in one’s heart or rebuking or ridiculing or speaking evil against one’s neighbor, but loving thy neighbor as thyself (verses 3–18). The second half of the chapter similarly concludes that a holy or covenant person should not crossbreed animals or mix seeds or fabrics, have sexual relations with slaves, eat fruit that grows for the first three years after planting a tree (verse 23), eat blood or use magic (verse 26), trim hair (verse 27), cut flesh in mourning for the dead (verse 28), sell a daughter into prostitution (verse 29), practice divination (verse 31), oppress the foreigner (verse 33–34), or use dishonest weights and measures (verses 35–36). Likewise, covenant people should reverence the temple (verse 30) and honor the elderly (verse 32).

Particularly relevant at this point in the text of Leviticus is that the reader (or listener) quite stunningly begins to hear, over and over, the words of the Lord expressed in the divine first person: “I am YHWH your God” (18:2), the land “to which I am bringing you” (18:3), “my rules alone” (18:4), “I YHWH (have spoken)” (18:5). In heightened density here, first-person statements appear some nine times in chapter 18, fifteen times in chapter 19, and thirteen times in chapter 20. Thus, the screen that leads from the Court of the Altar into the *Hekal* is the unmediated reception of the Lord’s concentrated and repeated first-person communications—above all, the personal invitation to hear and receive the divine call, “You shall be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy” (19:2). These introductory first-person statements will resume and be greatly expanded in Leviticus 26.

Leviticus 19:14. A short verbal connection, Leviticus 19:14 warns that the covenant people should not make life more difficult for those who are already disadvantaged by such actions as “put[ting] a *stumbling-block* before the blind.” The church in Alma’s day, growing so wicked that Alma resigned the chief judgeship to focus exclusively on preaching, sets up a similar context. In Alma, the church’s wickedness itself became a “*stumbling-block* to those who did not belong to the church,” similarly harming a group—those who were not counted among the church—that already suffered from some disadvantages.

Leviticus 19:15. Amulek, in Alma 10:27, recognizes that *unrighteousness* in legal matters is likely to prove catastrophic for the Nephite nation since corruption among their lawyers and judges could perhaps spell the “destruction of [the] people.” This observation echoes a commandment in Leviticus: “ye shall do no *unrighteousness* in judgment,” a commandment that is seemingly directed particularly at Israel’s

lawyers and judges (Leviticus 19:15). Leviticus also ensures the fate of utter destruction for those of Israel who do not live up to the commandments given in the book (see chapter 26).

Leviticus 19:16. Another loose connection is found in Alma 20:2, which reproduces the phrase “*thou shalt not go up*” from Leviticus 19:16. In the record of Ammon, it is the voice of the Lord directing Ammon to avoid going to the land of Nephi, whereas in Leviticus it describes habitual action regarding moral behavior—one should “*not go up and down as a talebearer*”—not the itinerary of a journey. This connection is further weakened by the fact that the word “up” is not present in the Hebrew of Leviticus 19:16 (“up and down” was inserted by the King James Version translators in an effort to show the verb’s iterative aspect), making it likely that these two phrases are related only in translation.

Leviticus 19:18. One of the strongest verbal connections to Leviticus in the Book of Mormon comes in Mosiah 23:15, where Alma the Elder directs his people to “*love his neighbor as himself.*” This commandment should sound familiar to any Christian since toward the end of His mortal life, Jesus taught that this injunction is the second great commandment (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). Both Jesus and Alma are quoting Leviticus 19:18 where, at the center of the Holiness Code, the Lord enjoins, “Thou shalt *love thy neighbor as thyself.*” There is little ambiguity here. Alma seems to be directly quoting Leviticus.

Chapter 20

Leviticus’s temple-like structure opens ways to understand the reasons behind the second list in Leviticus 20, which intensifies Leviticus 18 in several ways. Leviticus 20 adds punishments throughout this text. No punishments are mentioned in Leviticus 18, and that omission was probably not an oversight. The matter of punishments was simply reserved as intensification for the second iteration of the list in Leviticus 20.¹¹ More than that, incidents that may be punished by humans have been moved to the first half of the list, and those that are left to be dealt with by God appear in the second half. In addition, the framing passages of Leviticus 20 uniquely add an intensified double prohibition and double warning against idolatrous whoring after ghosts and sorcery or divination (verses 6, 27). Still, this overall double warning enhances the message behind this matched set of texts. Being told again, the hearer or reader is invited twice to think hard about what fidelity requires. The need for people to stop and think hard about their choices was not lost on the biblical writers: “For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not” (Job 33:14).

Idolatry belongs on this list of unpermitted sexual relations because the unfaithfulness of idolatry was to the Hebrew mind a close cousin of adultery, especially since the covenant with the Lord was often represented as a marriage contract; likewise, sexual misconduct was seen as both a social offense and a

¹¹ See Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 357, which identifies the chiasmic arrangement among the punishment clauses in Leviticus 20 themselves.

sign of apostasy against Israel's God and religion (see Hosea 3:1, for example). And whereas the motivation behind Leviticus 18 was to ensure that the Israelites would not be cast out of the land as its former inhabitants had been, the more elevated priestly motivation behind Leviticus 20 was to ensure that the Israelites would not defile the sanctuary or God's name (20:3). Instead, they would be a pure and holy people, separated from unclean people and beasts in order to belong to God and be worthy of His presence (verses 25–26).

Thus, Leviticus 20 twice adds to this structure the ultimate demand to “be holy” (verses 7, 26), obey the statutes (verses 8, 22), and maintain the statutory boundaries between the clean and the unclean (verse 25). A comparison can be made between the standards of conduct in these chapters and the language in Psalm 15, Psalm 24, and other scriptures, which scholars have even expressly designated as temple entrance liturgies.¹² For Latter-day Saints, temple recommend questions function as a similar important self-assessment process before entering the temple proper.

In this text, one's passage into the Holy Place runs between the twin pillars of the two matched laws of sexual purity in chapters 18 and 20, as well as through chapter 19, the epitome of the Holiness Code. As Mary Douglas observed, “there could not be a stronger framing of the central chapter at the apex of the pediment. Leviticus's scheme very deliberately puts the laws of righteous and honest dealings at the centre.”¹³ Positioned between the “hair-raising anathemas” of chapters 18 and 20, chapter 19 is “bound to seem tame. It can easily be overlooked because it surveys and enlarges upon some of the laws that Leviticus has given already.” Douglas concluded, “As the elaborate rhetorical framing suggests, it is in fact the most important chapter of the whole book, the chapter on the meaning of righteousness.”¹⁴ While this is true enough, what Douglas said about chapter 19 may prove even more descriptive of chapter 26, as we shall see later.

Leviticus 20:2. Alma 33:17 records the fate of the otherwise unknown Hebrew prophet Zenock: being rejected and “stoned . . . to death.” This sort of death was the common lot for those who had been accused of blasphemy or disloyalty to the Lord. Since Alma mentions that “*the people* would not understand his words,” it is likely that they construed Zenock's preaching about the Son of God as blasphemy and perhaps even as polytheism. Leviticus 20:2 is one of the verses that prescribes death by stoning as a punishment for worshipping false gods: “Whosoever . . . giveth any of his seed unto Molech [a god of Israel's neighbors who required infant sacrifice]; he shall surely be put to death: *the people* of the land shall stone him with stones.”

¹² See, for example, Craig C. Broyles, “Psalms Concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 248–287.

¹³ Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 236.

¹⁴ Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 239.

Chapters 21–22

These two chapters deal with rules and regulations regarding the conduct of priestly activities in the *Hekal*, the Holy Place of Habitation for the Lord. As a type of His dwelling place, the *Hekal* offers comfortable accommodations, pleasant odors and lighting, and no surprises. This house of the Lord includes both His exalted throne and footstool in the Holy of Holies as well as a table set with bread, a sumptuous lampstand, and a fragrant incense burner. When the high priest walks solemnly toward the presence of the Lord, he carries seal-stamped stones and a jewel, and the bells on his robe jingle. These details all enhance one’s remembrance of God’s goodness and merciful gifts. The idea that the temple is the dwelling place of the Lord is not hidden; it is apparent.

The house of the Lord also has house rules. People must behave properly in the *Hekal* and show reverence and love toward God. Silence was to be maintained (see Habakkuk 2:20). The commandments in Leviticus 21 and 22 ensure the holiness of priests who officiate in setting out the twelve daily loaves of bread, of those who serve the bread of God, and of those who are worthy to partake of it (21:8, 17, 21). For an echo of these priestly functions, see the instructions Jesus gave at the temple in Bountiful regarding the disciples’ roles in bringing the sacramental emblems, passing the sacrament to the people, and ensuring the worthiness of those who partook of it (3 Nephi 18:1, 4, 28).

To be worthy to serve in this sacred place and in these sacred roles, priests must avoid any improper contact with dead bodies (21:1–4). They must not take the name of God in vain—that is, swear falsely in that name or speak disrespectfully about God using that name (21:6). They are not to marry a woman who is not a virgin (21:7, 13)—at least, as this provision was applied, until it was made sure that she had repented or had been exonerated and was pure again. If the priests have any skin blemishes, including leprosy, that can transmit diseases (21:17–23) or if they touch unclean animals or carrion (22:5, 8), they cannot officiate, presumably until they appropriately wash themselves and wait during a period of quarantine. They also cannot permit any impure members of their families to eat the sacrificial meat that the priests are allowed to take home and eat (22:11). Rules here also prescribe when such offerings are to be eaten (22:30). God’s house was to be a house of order.

Leviticus 22:3. Here we learn the punishment for those who allow their personal ritual impurity to defile the Lord’s “holy things” (in Leviticus, this usually means the implements and places set apart for ritual function): “that soul *shall be cut off from my [the Lord’s] presence.*” This is more than a barring from participation in organized worship; since the Lord’s presence symbolically covered the entire nation of Israel, this punishment could even mean estrangement from the larger covenant society. This phrase is easily recognizable to readers of the Book of Mormon. It is the consequence that falls upon Laman, Lemuel, and their descendants as a result of their rebellion against Lehi and Nephi. One chapter before

Laman and Lemuel's separation was complete, Lehi warned Laman's children in the book's familiar couplet: "The Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye *shall be cut off from my presence*" (2 Nephi 4:4). In the next chapter, Nephi recorded this prophecy's fulfillment: "Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they *shall be cut off from the presence* of the Lord. And behold, they were *cut off from his presence*" (5:20). The couplet that Lehi quoted (which appears first in 1 Nephi 2:20–21), if alluding to Leviticus 22:3, takes the Leviticus original and applies it by moralizing and generalizing it. Originally concerned with the defilement of tangible "holy things" by a ritually impure member of Israelite society, the phrase has much broader application in the Book of Mormon. Laman and Lemuel may not have been ritually impure, but their moral impurity was enough of a danger to the "holy things"—perhaps Nephi's prophecies or a righteous society—that they, too, suffered estrangement from the Lord's presence. This couplet, with its attached blessing and curse, appears elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, reproduced in full in seven places.¹⁵ It also appears in part (without the curse) in four instances.¹⁶ Other passages in the Book of Mormon mention a similar cutting off from the Lord's presence as a punishment for sins, although they do not fit the exact pattern of the Nephite couplet.¹⁷

Leviticus 22:43. In a common phrase used to remind Israel of their obligation to God following the Exodus, the Lord declares, "I *brought them out of the land of Egypt*" (Leviticus 23:43). In this case, it is used as a justification for His commandment to keep the festival of booths (*Sukkot*), but biblical authors often hark back to the Exodus as a reminder of the Lord's hand in Israel's history. The Exodus was an event that became an undeniable element of Israel's cultural memory, and so when ancient prophets appealed to it, they knew that they were likely to find a receptive audience. The Nephite prophets likewise used Exodus motifs extensively, both in their original context and applied to Lehi's journey from Jerusalem, which the Nephites seemed to understand as an Exodus of its own. This can be seen in Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 16:35: "He [Lehi] had *brought them out of the land of Jerusalem*." Nine other places in the Book of Mormon use the language "brought . . . out of the land of Jerusalem," usually with the Lord as agent.¹⁸

Chapter 23

This chapter sets out laws regarding the timing of the weekly Sabbath observance, the holy convocation days of Passover, and the festivals of first fruits and Pentecost, of Rosh Hashanah, of the Day of Atonement,

15 2 Nephi 1:20; Alma 9:13, 14; 36:30; 37:13; 38:1; 50:20.

16 1 Nephi 4:14; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Alma 36:1.

17 2 Nephi 9:6; Alma 42:9, 11, 14; Helaman 12:21; 14:16; Ether 2:15; 10:11.

18 2 Nephi 1:30; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; Alma 3:11; 22:9; 36:29; 3 Nephi 5:20; Ether 13:7.

and of the Feast of Tabernacles. This calendric material connects the temporal terrestrial times of temple performances with the eternal celestial cycles, that all may be done on earth as it is in the heavens.

Chapter 24

Building on all of Leviticus before it, chapter 24 completes the discussion of the activities and implements in the Holy Place and the strict preparations allowing the high priest—the one for all, the representative of the worthy people—to move into the Holy of Holies. The first part of chapter 24 gives final instructions regarding the pure oil to be used in the lamps that are to burn continually in the Holy Place. Except for certain exceptional times in Israelite history, the menorah was not taken out of the temple. The menorah is to stand in the Holy Place in front of the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (verse 3). The recipe for the making of the twelve cakes of showbread to be set before the Lord is described (verses 5–9).

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

The reader now stands before the second screen: the trial and execution of a man (the son of an Israelite woman) who blasphemed the name of God, found in Leviticus 24:10–23. Douglas identified this text as the second screen of the tabernacle. Indeed, an explicit reference to the veil of the temple is found in Leviticus 24:3 right before this narrative account, using the unique expression *pārōket hā'ēdut*, “the curtain of the pact” or “veil of the covenant.”¹⁹

This crucial legal case of the trial of the blasphemer establishes, above all, that the name of the Lord must be kept most holy. Even blurting out the holy name, cursing, and blaspheming in the heat of a fight was held to be worthy of death. By divine judgment, the blasphemer was taken out of the camp by all who had heard and actually witnessed the transgression and was then stoned by the people. Obviously, holiness was a serious matter, always to be carefully preserved. Thus the final step that leads into the Holy of Holies and into the intimate presence of the Lord is obedience to the law of supreme reverence for the sacred name of God.

At the precise chiasmic center of this text in Leviticus 24:14–23, the law of *talionic* justice is emphatically embedded. Punishments should match and mirror the crime: bruise for bruise, beast for beast, eye for eye, and not more than a tooth for a tooth, either. In Douglas’s view, the writer of Leviticus used the law of *talion* here “to make a statement about exact restitution. The doctrine is in line with the precision of the rules of sacrifice. Crime and penalty are part of a pattern of reciprocity in which good things are repaid by good things and figure even more largely than violent crimes repaid in violence. Perfect reciprocity is the

¹⁹ See Gary Rendsburg, “The Two Screens: On Mary Douglas’s Proposal for a Literary Structure to the Book of Leviticus,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15 (2008): 181.

intellectual grounding for the covenant.”²⁰ To read this text out of context “does imply a harsh, unmerciful God, . . . [but] the full context of talion in Leviticus puts the negative reciprocity into balance with positive reciprocity, gift with gift, as well as crime with punishment. The other half of the comparison, the positive reciprocity, is the central theme in Leviticus. God’s compassion and God’s justice would be revealed to anyone allowed to pass through the [two] screens and able to read the testament of the covenant hidden in the most holy place. Only the high priest can do that [literally], but anyone [and everyone] can know what is there from reading the book.”²¹

The Presence of the Lord

Overview of chapters 25-26-27

Just as the tabernacle is the center of the camp of Israel and the temple is the center of Jerusalem, which will come to be seen as the center of the world, so at the center of the tabernacle/temple is the ark of the covenant. Here, “the virtual pilgrim, with book in hand, knows that he [or she] has arrived at this hidden place because in chapter 26 the Lord God proclaims his covenant no fewer than eight times (26:9, 15, 25, 42 [three times], 44, 66). Another elaborate literary construction makes chapters 25 and 27 into a massive frame for honouring chapter 26.”²²

It is here (as Jacob Milgrom translated it²³) that God declared, “I will establish my presence in your midst” (26:11). This masterful climactic chapter, with all its many blessings and promises, is like the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant at the heart of the Holy of Holies. It stands at the center of the triad (chapters 25-26-27). The overriding idea in these three chapters “is essentially to achieve justice and righteousness in the land. . . . To be able to promise this, Leviticus has to insist that the land belongs to God, he is the owner, and the people are his tenants using it by right of a divine grant or contract.”²⁴ Again, an ABA pattern is evident here, as it was before with chapters 18-19-20, now with chapter 26 in the middle and chapters 25 and 27 on the flanks, almost like the two cherubim on the sides of the ark of the covenant, the throne of God.

Chapters 25 and 27 detail ways in which all life and land already belong to the Lord or are further consecrated to Him by sacred vows.

20 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 216. For a display of this famous chiasmic structure, see <https://byustudies.byu.edu/further-study-chart/128-chiasmus-in-leviticus-2413-23/> or <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/chiasmus-leviticus-2413%E2%80%9323>.

21 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 216–217.

22 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 241.

23 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 3:2272.

24 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 243.

Chapter 25

In this chapter the reader is welcomed into the presence of the Lord. In the Holy of Holies,

Leviticus 25:1 begins: “And YHWH spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying . . .” The reference here to Sinai here has puzzled scholars and readers, but the solution may be to realize that at this very point, the text enters the Holy of Holies, which corresponds to the summit of Mount Sinai, as Rendsburg suggested.²⁵ In other words, as Douglas explained, “when the second screen has been passed the reader is standing, as it were, inside the Holy of Holies,”²⁶ representing the place where Moses stood in the presence of God and God spoke to him.

Chapter 25 famously deals with the laws of the sabbatical years and the Jubilee, with the promise of life and liberty, and the prolonged celebration as the land itself rests (verse 4), as if to say that everything and everyone is inextricably linked with the pervasive presence of God. The themes of this sabbatical chapter include atonement (verse 9), holiness (verse 10), family (verse 10), God’s ownership of the land (“for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me”; verse 23), redeeming the land for poor family members (verse 25), perpetual or eternal inheritance (verse 26), and redemption of slaves and hired servants (verses 47–55).

Leviticus 25:9. In the Jubilee year, the trumpet was to be blown “*on the tenth day of the seventh month.*” Every year, the Day of Atonement was observed also “in the seventh month, on the tenth day” (16:29). In Alma 49:1, the Lamanite armies are seen to approach the city of Ammonihah “*on the tenth day of the eleventh month.*” While this way of dating was a common form of expression, and thus the mention of this date may be nothing more than a coincidence, a subtle irony may be found in the fact that the defeat of Ammonihah came on that day that was the date of the Day of Atonement (the holiest day of the year) as well as on the date when trumpets of jubilee were to be blown to proclaim liberty and victory. Otherwise, why was this specific day mentioned here, especially when specific dates are a rare occurrence in the Book of Mormon?

Leviticus 25:10. Another better-known prescription for the Jubilee year comes from Leviticus 25:10: “Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim *liberty* throughout *all the land* unto all the inhabitants thereof.” It’s unclear from the biblical record and outside sources how and if this biblical commandment was observed. Since the Old Testament never explicitly mentions the observance of a Jubilee year, it is difficult to imagine what it would have looked like in practice. Yet it seems that the central ideal of the Jubilee—liberation from bondage—was very important to ancient Israelites, including several Book of Mormon figures. In fact, the Jubilee is the likely source for the Book of Mormon’s liberty language seen in Mosiah 29:32 (“I desire that this *land* be a *land of liberty*”) and Alma 46:17 (he gave *all the land* . . . a chosen land, a *land of*

25 Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 181.

26 See the explanation given by Mary Douglas, cited in the caption to figure 1, on page 8 above.

liberty”). Whether or not all the provisions of the Jubilee year were in fact carried out in Israel or the New World exactly as prescribed in the law of Moses, it is evident that the Nephites cared deeply about the values for which it stood,²⁷ much as Isaiah did when he drew on Jubilee themes in Isaiah 61:1–3.

Chapter 26

This very powerful chapter reaffirms the blessings and curses that are the essence of the covenant between God and Abraham. Symbolically, by instantiating the holy mountain of Sinai, the Temple Mount reverberated the reality of the presence of the Lord as He had appeared on Mount Sinai not only to Moses but also to the seventy: “In fact, the theophany [in the Holy of Holies] . . . reproduces, in miniature of course, the basic features of the divine revelation on Mount Sinai,” where “seventy elders were vouchsafed a glimpse of the God of Israel upon Mount Sinai.” “When the glory of the Lord appears, [Moses] huddles in the cleft and sees only Yahweh’s back”; likewise, “the prophet usually hides himself, so to speak, as long as the cloud of glory stands at the entrance to the tent (unless Yahweh explicitly summons him).”²⁸ In other instances, the presence of Jehovah and His glory is symbolized by the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12), with the cave functionally being for Elijah (1 Kings 19:13) what the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, was for Moses.

Thus, this culminating chapter at the heart of the concluding ABA (26-27-28) triad declares numerous blessings of rain, peace, military success, fertility, posterity, prosperity, and the presence of God (26:2–13)—themes connected to the ancient temple. Correlatively, it also invokes numerous curses of disease, military failure, plagues, invasions of wild beasts that will kill children and domestic animals, pestilences, poverty, destruction, scattering, and desolation (verses 14–39). Treaties and covenants in the ancient Near East almost universally set forth stipulations, laws, and requirements (as found in Leviticus 1–24), followed by blessings and benefactions for compliance on the one hand and curses for violations or infringements on the other hand.²⁹

If Israel will confess its iniquity, God promises that He will remember the covenant that He made “with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham” (26:42), as He will remember the land and His people (verses 40–46). Ending in the Holy of Holies with this central and culminating reaffirmation of the Abrahamic covenant is apropos here as one stands in the presence of the ark of the covenant, a solid symbol of the Lord’s covenant relationship with Israel.

27 See King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah and its similarity to the Jubilee. See also, fifty years later, Alma’s wishing that he could speak with the “trump” (the *jubel*) of God (Alma 29:1).

28 Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Ann Arbor, MI: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 276–278; see Exodus 24:9.

29 For a vast amount of important new information on this topic, see Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

Moreover, the unusual order of the names of the three patriarchs found in Leviticus 26:42—namely Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham—oddly reverses the normal sequence, perhaps to emphasize the overall progression of the text of Leviticus, which runs step by step, deeper and deeper, further into the Holy Place, moving back in time as well as in space, into the presence of God and unto the source of the oath and covenant made by God to His people. As Mary Douglas concluded, “At the end we see how Leviticus is in a large sense all about the things that have been consecrated and the things that belong to the Lord: blood, the priests, the land, and dedicated animals. . . . Even going as far as we can go into the interior of the Tabernacle, expecting to unveil its secrets, what we find is not secret: still, only and always, the justice of God and his fidelity to the covenants he made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.”³⁰

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

Leviticus 26:3. A litany of God’s blessings rest upon one condition: “If ye walk in my statutes, and *keep my commandments*, and do them . . .” (verse 3). This language is common in the Book of Mormon. While it is likely that the Book of Mormon’s commandment-keeping language derives rather from Deuteronomy, it is nonetheless striking to note the thematic similarities between Leviticus 26:3–12 and the Nephite couplet discussed in the commentary for Leviticus 22:3. The majority of the passages in the Book of Mormon that use the phrase “*keep my commandments*”—the list is quite long³¹—are part of the formulation “Inasmuch as ye *keep my commandments* . . . inasmuch as ye will not *keep my commandments* . . .” with their corresponding blessing (prosperity in the land) and curse (estrangement from the Lord’s presence). Similarly, Leviticus 26 has both a blessing and cursing clause, stated in that order. The blessings are listed from 26:3–12, but the curses are described in far greater detail in 26:14–39.

³⁰ Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 244.

³¹ 1 Nephi 2:20, 22; 4:14; 17:13; 2 Nephi 1:20; 4:4; 31:14; Jacob 2:29; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 13:14; Alma 37:13; 45:6; 50:20; Helaman 10:4; 3 Nephi 12:20; 15:10; 18:14.

Leviticus 26:6. King Benjamin was impressively able to “establish *peace in the land*” (Words of Mormon 1:18) despite a number of internal and external conflicts that arose during his reign. The preceding period of trouble was marked by a Lamanite invasion; the propagation of false prophets, preachers, teachers, and even false Christs; and a general stubbornness by the Nephite population. The peace Benjamin achieved only came after “laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul,” supplemented by prophetic aid (Words of Mormon 1:18). Therefore, although the phrase alludes to the Lord’s promised blessing for obedience (“I will give *peace in the land*”), Benjamin’s reign demonstrates that even divine blessings must sometimes be tirelessly worked for if they are to be realized (Leviticus 26:6).

Leviticus 26:7. Another blessing promised to obedient Israel concerns success in battle: “Ye shall chase your enemies and they shall *fall by the sword*” (Leviticus 26:7). In this sense, the hand of the Lord can even be seen in the death and destruction of the Nephite-Lamanite wars: “Behold, they [the Lamanites] were pierced and smitten, yea, and did *fall* exceedingly fast before *the swords* of the Nephites.” The Nephites, an obedient remnant of Israel, found their promised success on the battlefield against their enemies.

Leviticus 26:14. Here is chapter 26’s turn from the blessing to cursing. Whereas the blessings came on the condition “if ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them” (verse 3), the curse clause begins, “*But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments*” (verse 14). Following this are twenty-five verses of curses and consequences described in graphic detail. Lehi used similar language in a similar context. Blessing his sons before his death, he counseled them to listen to their brother Nephi. Failure to do this, as in Leviticus, leads to the blessing being revoked: “*But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing*” (2 Nephi 1:28). Both begin with the disjunctive “*but*,” signaling a shift from promised blessings to assured negative consequences. Alma the Younger, too, employed this sort of language. Preaching at Zarahemla, he warned, “*If ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd . . . ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd*” (Alma 5:38). While the context is not as focused on blessing and cursing as the language of Leviticus and Lehi, Alma’s sermon is still grounded in covenantal terms, which form the backbone of Leviticus’s blessings and curses.

Leviticus 26:39. In one of the more intriguing connections between Leviticus and the Book of Mormon, Zeniff spent part of his account explaining the Lamanite worldview and cultural memory (Mosiah 10:12–17). The Lamanites, Zeniff related, believed that “they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because *of the iniquities of their fathers*” (Mosiah 10:12). As we recall, Laman and Lemuel were reluctant to leave Jerusalem. They claimed that “the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people” (1 Nephi 17:22), which by implication would put their father, who decried the Jerusalemites’ behavior, on the side of the wicked. It is therefore not surprising that they would credit their removal from Jerusalem to their father’s “iniquities” rather than to the city’s. This position of Laman and Lemuel becomes even

more interesting if we do not consider Lehi's elder sons as wicked simpletons but rather as members of an opposition party within Judaism. As Brant Gardner and Neal Rappleye observed, Laman and Lemuel seem to have been good, orthodox Israelites—just not of the same type that Lehi and Nephi were.³² Laman and Lemuel's priorities seem to align more closely with those of the Deuteronomists—the dominant school in Jerusalem during Lehi's day. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find that Laman and Lemuel use the scriptures to defend their positions; we should just expect them to use and interpret the scriptures by a different method than their more prophetically inclined father and younger brother. With all this in mind, one can come to see how Leviticus may have come to shape the Lamanites' worldview. Describing the curses prescribed for Israel's wickedness, Leviticus 26:39 reads, "They that are left of you [that is, those Israelites who remain after famine, war, and deportation] shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in *the iniquities of their fathers* shall they pine away with them." Indeed, Leviticus 26:39 explicitly connects expulsion from the land of Israel with the fathers' iniquity, and the Lehiites' removal from Jerusalem would have given Laman and Lemuel plausible evidence with which to accuse their father of *iniquity*.

Leviticus 26:40–42. Fortunately, the curses prescribed in Leviticus 26 are not to be never-ending. The Lord promises an end, conditioned upon repentance, for those who are suffering in sin and exile: "If they shall confess their iniquity . . . if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then *will I remember my covenant* with Jacob and . . . with Isaac and . . . with Abraham" (verses 40–42). In the Book of Mormon, the Lord promises to "*remember*" His "*covenant*" in a future sense (with the auxiliary verbs "*will*" or "*may*") on several occasions.³³ This promise is cited often toward the end of the Book of Mormon, including five times by Mormon and Moroni as the Nephite nation collapsed. Since the promise of covenant remembrance comes in response to Israel's suffering under wars, famines, and destruction as a nation, the promise that the Lord would remember His covenant and restore Israel must have been especially poignant to Mormon and Moroni, who witnessed firsthand the fulfillment of many of Leviticus's curses.

Leviticus 26:46. In 1 Nephi 17:22 and Alma 8:17, the law of Moses is referred to in the legal terms "*statutes and judgments*." This formulation is also used in Leviticus 26:46, albeit with the insertion of "and laws," and it serves as a summary statement for the book as a whole: "These are *the statutes and judgments and laws*, which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses." The closest Book of Mormon parallel to this statement is actually found in 3 Nephi 25:4: "Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with

³² See Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter* 16 (2015): 87–99.

³³ 1 Nephi 19:15; 2 Nephi 29:1; 3 Nephi 16:11, 12; 20:29; 29:3; Mormon 5:20; 8:21, 23; 9:37.

the statutes and judgments.” Here, only “*statutes and judgments*” are mentioned, and they appear alongside a reference to the theophany at Sinai, although here the alternate name “Horeb” is used. However, this is not a Nephite writing—rather, it comes from the book of Malachi, quoted to the Nephites by the risen Jesus. While Leviticus may be the source for the Book of Mormon’s use of the phrase “*statutes and judgments,*” Deuteronomy is a far more likely candidate since the phrase is used once in Leviticus and seven times in Deuteronomy.

Chapter 27

This concluding chapter similarly articulates such themes as redeeming people from obligations created by their personal vows to God (verses 2–8) and of redeeming animals (verses 9–13). Without being redeemed or the obligation being satisfied, these devoted persons or animals otherwise belong to God. The chapter goes on to regulate the sanctifying or consecrating of personal homes “to be holy unto the Lord” (verse 14), the sanctifying of fields (verses 16–25), the dedicating of animals to the Lord (verses 26–29), and the bringing of tithing to the temple while affirming that “all the tithe of the land” is holy unto the Lord and may neither be substituted nor redeemed (verses 30–33). All these ritual or legal actions proceed on the premises that everyone and everything belongs to the Lord and that He and His people are bound together by covenant (see Jeremiah 34:13–15). These elements point in the direction of concluding with Douglas and Rendsburg that chapters 25 and 27 are the flanks of the Holy of Holies, “the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle, and the summit of Mount Sinai.”³⁴

Leviticus 27:30. To ensure that nothing owed to the Lord is left out, Leviticus 27:30 lists some of the items that are to be tithed: “Whether of the seed of the land, or *of the fruit of the tree*, is the Lord’s.” Although it is a weak verbal connection, this phrase does exactly recall the Book of Mormon’s phrase “*of the fruit of the tree,*” which is *always* in reference to the tree of life.³⁵ Not once in the Book of Mormon does this phrase refer to any sort of natural tree, nor even to Eden’s tree of knowledge of good and evil. The authors only have the tree of life in mind. Perhaps in this we can see a connection—that the tithes of land, including some “*of the fruit of the tree,*” belong to God just as the tree of life is His.

In the end, the book of Leviticus closes with the punctuating words that mark the end of this scroll, or volume: “These are the commandments *which the Lord commanded Moses* for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai” (verse 34). That declaration of divine authorship closes the revelation with a statement similar to the words with which the book began: “And *the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him* out of the tabernacle of the congregation” (1:1). These two statements form an *inclusio*, bookending the text with a double seal of divine approval.

³⁴ Rendsburg, “Two Screens,” 188.

³⁵ 1 Nephi 8:24, 25, 30; Alma 5:34, 62; 12:21, 23; 32:40.

Although the Israelites lived and worshipped in a very different cultural and religious context from our own, the principles of holiness that guided their most sacred practices can give insight and enrichment to our own temple worship. Because the law of Moses was fulfilled and filled to the brim by the Lawgiver Himself, the eternal roles and requirements of sacrifice, obedience, purity, repentance, fidelity, consecration, and covenantal adherence are vital to our own progress to and through the temple and to our ultimate reunion back in the celestial presence of the everlasting Holy of Holies.

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