

# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 3

TOTC

## LEVITICUS



# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 3

SERIES EDITOR: DAVID G. FIRTH  
CONSULTING EDITOR: TREMPER LONGMAN III

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## LEVITICUS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

JAY SKLAR



Inter-Varsity Press

 IVP Academic  
An imprint of InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois

InterVarsity Press, USA  
P.O. Box 1400  
Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426, USA  
Website: [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)  
Email: [email@ivpress.com](mailto:email@ivpress.com)

Inter-Varsity Press, England  
Norton Street  
Nottingham NG7 3HR, England  
Website: [www.ivpbooks.com](http://www.ivpbooks.com)  
Email: [iup@ivpbooks.com](mailto:iup@ivpbooks.com)

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Inter-Varsity Press, England, is closely linked with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, a student movement connecting Christian Unions in universities and colleges throughout Great Britain, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Website: [www.uccf.org.uk](http://www.uccf.org.uk).

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First published 2014

Image: © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

USA ISBN 978-0-8308-4284-1 (print)  
USA ISBN 978-0-8308-9586-1 (digital)  
UK ISBN 978-1-84474-927-0

Set in Garamond MT 11/13pt

Typeset in Great Britain by CRB Associates, Potterhanworth, Lincolnshire  
Printed and bound in the UK by Ashford Colour Press Ltd, Gosport, Hampshire



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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sklar, Jay.

*Leviticus : an introduction and commentary* / Jay Sklar.  
pages cm.—(Tyndale Old Testament commentaries ; Volume 3)

Includes bibliographical references.  
ISBN 978-0-8308-4284-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Bible, Leviticus—Commentaries. I. Title.  
BS1255.53.S59 2014  
222'.1307—dc23

2014003546

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#### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

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P	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
Y	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	

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## GENERAL PREFACE

The decision completely to revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible, without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the Word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, whilst emphases in exegesis have changed markedly. Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study

of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor  
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

'I believe it is more important for you and me to read Leviticus than it is for us to read the best Christian book ever published, because Leviticus has a quality and produces an effect that no book in the Christian marketplace can compete with' (Platt, 2010: 192).

It seems safe to say that this perspective does not resonate with many people today. Even if we can agree intellectually that Leviticus, as part of God's inspired Word, must be very important, few of us feel that to be true. Indeed, when I tell people that I've spent years studying Leviticus, many respond with the type of smile that says, 'Oh well, at least he's not hurting anyone.'

I never take this personally. In fact, I think I understand why it happens. Both historically and culturally, Leviticus seems very disconnected from our world today. Most of us see no practical need to know about things like sacrifice (Lev. 1 – 7), ordaining priests (Lev. 8), or ritual purity and impurity (Lev. 12 – 15). These are simply not the realities we deal with on a daily basis.

And yet it would be a tragic mistake to overlook this book. In its pages, you will find answers to some of the most pressing questions we ask as human beings: Who are we? Why are we here? What is life about anyway? How can I find meaning and purpose? And you find these answers here, because Leviticus describes a point in human history when the God who gives us meaning came and dwelt in the midst of some of our fellow human beings (the Israelites) and taught them what their purpose in life really was. The goal of this commentary is to make clear what it is that the Lord said to the

ancient Israelites and, in so doing, to make clear what the Lord is saying to us today.

I owe sincere thanks to many who have helped me in numerous ways during the course of writing this commentary. At IVP, Philip Duce first invited me to participate in this series, has answered many questions along the way, and has been very patient in waiting for the results. David Firth has provided excellent editorial oversight, not only saving me from many errors and strengthening the work greatly, but doing so with a consistently encouraging spirit.

Several colleagues, students and friends have read and commented on this manuscript (or portions thereof). Special thanks are due to Cheryl Eaton, Aaron Goldstein, Arthur Keefer, Steven Edging, Adam Szabados, Bruce Clark, Ron Lutjens, Carol Kaminski, Christine Palmer and Greg Jewell.

My colleagues at Covenant Theological Seminary have taught me more than anyone else what it means to worship and love the Lord. I am especially indebted to C. John 'Jack' Collins, Michael D. Williams and David Chapman for the ways in which they have shaped my own thinking over the years.

My greatest earthly support is my wife Ski, who has not only willingly engaged in hours of conversation on the topic of Leviticus over the years, but has also gone above and beyond the call of duty in reading through all of the chapter comments and providing tremendously helpful feedback. Her love and support mean more to me than words can express.

This commentary is dedicated with deep affection and esteem to Gordon P. Hugenberger and Gordon J. Wenham. Over fifteen years ago, Gordon Hugenberger suggested to me that the sacrificial system was a possible area for PhD research, setting me on the path that would eventually lead to the writing of this commentary. More importantly, as my pastor and professor during seminary, he modelled for me both godly living and scholarly excellence. Gordon Wenham, who served as my dissertation supervisor, has provided to me the same model of humble piety and scholarly learning. During my time working under him, I was impacted as much by his prayers as by his scholarship. It is a special honour for me that, at the time of writing, this commentary on Leviticus will stand beside

his own commentary on Numbers in this series. May the Lord grant it to be a worthy companion.

Jay Sklar  
Covenant Theological Seminary  
7 September 2013



## CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D. N. Freedman et al. (eds.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ANET	J. B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd edn with suppl. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EBC	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
FFB	<i>Fauna and Flora of the Bible</i> – prepared in cooperation with the Committee on Translations of the United Bible Societies, 2nd edn (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980)
GKC	E. Kautzsch (ed.), <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
HL	Hittite Laws
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>

JM	Joüon, P. and T. Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> , revd Eng. edn (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006)
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LH	Laws of Hammurabi
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	W. A. VanGemeren (gen. ed.), <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 5 vols.
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

### **Bible versions**

AV (KJV)	Authorized (King James) Version
ESV	English Standard Version
LXX	Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament)
NASV	New American Standard Version (1995)
NEB	New English Bible

NET	NET Bible, Version 1.0
NIV (2011)	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNK	JPS Tanakh (1985)



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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Context and title

In order to understand Leviticus well, it is important to consider it in the context of the story that precedes it. This can be done by reading it in light of its immediate literary and historical context and in light of the story of creation.

The story immediately before Leviticus is one in which the Lord redeems the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 1 – 15) and enters into covenant relationship with them (Exod. 20 – 24). They are to be his ‘treasured possession’ who are to fulfil a special role: being a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’, and in this way spreading the Lord’s kingdom of justice, mercy, goodness and love in all the earth (see Williams, 2005: 134–149). What is more, they are to do this with the Lord himself dwelling in their midst in the tent of meeting (Exod. 25 – 31, 35 – 40). If you were an Israelite, all of this would lead to some burning questions: How in the world can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people? How can he live here, in our very midst, without his holiness melting us in

our sin and impurity? And how can we live as his people in such a way that we really do extend his holy kingdom throughout the earth?

Leviticus answers these questions. It begins by explaining the sacrifices that address sin and enable the Israelites to worship this King rightly (Lev. 1 – 7). It provides the people with priests to intercede on their behalf and lead them in worship before the King (Lev. 8 – 10). It gives them laws to teach them how to deal properly with impurity (Lev. 11 – 15). It provides a yearly ceremony to remove every last ounce of sin and impurity from the kingdom (Lev. 16). It provides a whole series of laws in other areas to direct them in living as a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Lev. 17 – 27), that is, in setting up a society where God’s character and wishes for humanity can be seen in the corporate life of the nation. In short, while many Christians regard Leviticus as a burden, the Israelites looked on it as a blessing. For them, it was life-giving instruction that answered life’s most important questions: How do we live in relationship with the Lord, our covenant King, and how do we reflect his holy character to the watching world?

But Leviticus does more than answer questions raised by its immediate literary and historical context. It also casts a vision rooted in the Bible’s larger story and, in particular, in creation. Indeed, God’s purpose for his people in Leviticus is in many ways a return to his purpose for humanity in creation. This may be seen in terms of separation, blessing and calling. In the story of creation, the Lord separates (Heb. *hibdíl*) things into their proper place to bring order to the world (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). At the pinnacle of creation, he makes Adam and Eve, bringing them into this ordered world and blessing them in many ways, whether by shining his favour on them to make them fruitful (Gen. 1:28), placing them in a lush garden in Eden where all their physical needs are met (Gen. 2:8–25), giving them a Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:3), or, most of all, ‘walking’ (Heb. *hithalék*) with them as their God (Gen. 3:8a). Along with these blessings is a calling. He has created them in his image, and they are to reflect that image in the earth (Gen. 1:26–28). Practically speaking, this means they will represent him, ruling over the earth in a way that reflects how he rules over it: with justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love (Pss 86:15; 89:14; 96:10; 97:2; 103:8). Their mission is to fill the earth with this kingdom (Gen. 1:28).

Leviticus casts this same vision for God's people. In Leviticus, the Lord once again brings order to the world by 'separating' (Heb. *bibd'il*) things into their proper place and calling his people to do the same (Lev. 10:10; 11:46–47; 20:25). Indeed, he separates his people from the rest of the world (Lev. 20:24, 26) and promises to bless them as he did Adam and Eve, whether by shining his favour on them to make them fruitful (Lev. 26:9; cf. Gen. 1:28), placing them in a lush land where all their physical needs will be met (Lev. 26:4–5, 10; cf. Gen. 2:8–25), giving them Sabbath rest (Lev. 23:3; 25:1–7; cf. Gen. 2:3), or, most of all, 'walking' (Heb. *bithalek*) with them as their God (Lev. 26:11–12; cf. Gen. 3:8). And, as in creation, the blessings are again accompanied by a calling. He has separated them from the peoples of the earth in order to reflect his image in the world: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy' (19:2; see also 11:44–45; 20:7, 26). The Israelites are the ones who are to represent the Lord in this earth, thus fulfilling the purpose the Lord had for humanity in creation, as well as showing the rest of the world what that purpose is, how to live in keeping with it, and therefore how to experience the abundant life God intended for his creation (cf. at Lev. 26, *Meaning*). Simply put, the Israelites are not only to be a signpost back to Eden; they are to become a manifestation of it and a people who extend Eden's borders to every corner of the earth.

### Leviticus: a return to God's purposes in creation

	Creation	Leviticus
Separating things into their proper place and bringing order to the world	Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18	Lev. 10:10; 11:46–47; 20:24–26
Blessing humanity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruitfulness</li> <li>• A lush land where physical needs are met</li> <li>• Sabbath rest</li> <li>• Walking with them as their God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen. 1:28</li> <li>• Gen. 2:8–25</li> <li>• Gen. 2:3</li> <li>• Gen. 3:8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lev. 26:9</li> <li>• Lev. 26:4–5, 10</li> <li>• Lev. 23:3; 25:1–7</li> <li>• Lev. 26:11–12</li> </ul>
A calling: to reflect God's image in the world	Gen. 1:26–28	Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26

In short, the book of Leviticus not only answers questions raised by its immediate context, it also casts a vision that takes the Israelites back to the Lord's intent for humanity from the beginning of the world: to walk in rich fellowship with their covenant King, enjoying his care and blessing, and extending throughout all the earth his kingdom of justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love. In this way, the vision of Leviticus should actually feel very familiar to the people of God today, since it is the very same vision for which Jesus teaches us to pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10). Old Testament or New, the Lord always calls his people to pray for, embody and extend his kingdom in this earth, both for his glory and for their blessing.

The above helps to make clear that 'Leviticus' is an unfortunate title for this book. It derives ultimately from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which entitled it *Leuitikon* ('pertaining to the Levites'), undoubtedly because it addresses many issues involving priests, a group that came from the tribe of Levi. But as the above shows, Leviticus is about far more than priestly matters. It belongs to a grand story in which the holy King of the universe has come to live among his sinful and impure people. In his love for them, he tells them in this book how to address their sin and impurity, and live out their calling and mission in this world as the holy people of his kingdom. A longer, more fitting title would be: 'How to live as the holy priestly kingdom of the holy and heavenly King'.

## 2. Authorship and date

### *a. Traditional approach*

Traditionally, Moses is understood to be the primary source of Leviticus. This is because Leviticus introduces almost all of its content with some variation of the phrase: 'And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying . . .' (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, etc.; thirty-six occurrences in total). Furthermore, he is understood to be the primary author because several passages indicate that Moses recorded at least parts of the Pentateuch at the Lord's command (Exod. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27–28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9, 22–26). Because some of these

texts make clear that the words Moses recorded are the same words he spoke to the Israelites (cf. Exod. 24:4 with 24:7; 34:27–28 with 34:32), it seems natural to assume he followed this same pattern in Leviticus, namely, writing down the words that he was constantly commanded to speak to the Israelites (e.g. 1:2; 4:2; 6:25; 7:23, 28; 11:2; 12:2). This would imply that Moses is the substantial author of much of the book.

The word ‘substantial’ is used above, because conservative scholars generally agree that Moses did not write his own death notice (Deut. 34:5–9). Other passages also provide descriptions that seem to come from after Moses’ time, such as the mention of Dan (Gen. 14:14) and the reference to Israel having already conquered the land (Deut. 2:12b; see further Grisanti, 2001: 582–588).<sup>1</sup> Such editorial work is therefore possible for Leviticus as well, although it is difficult to identify its extent<sup>2</sup> and date.<sup>3</sup> In any case, the presence of editorial work need not detract from the implication of the text that Moses was the primary source through whom the content of Leviticus was given to Israel. This also means that much of Leviticus comes from the time of Moses, that is, between 1440 and 1260 BC (depending on the date of the exodus from Egypt), and that initially it would have been spoken to the first and second generation of Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai.

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1. While affirming the presence of editorial work sometimes makes conservative scholars nervous, it need not. The Lord can inspire those who edit material as he does those who first write it, as the Gospel of Luke so well attests (Luke 1:1–4). See further Grisanti (2001: 577–598).
  2. Questions include: If editorial work is present, is it limited to phrases that introduce the Lord’s speeches to Moses (‘And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying . . .’)? Does it also include the order in which the speeches are grouped and reported in Leviticus (cf. the way in which the Gospel writers were responsible for the order in which they reported and grouped the speeches of Jesus)?
  3. Did they come from a much later time or was the editor someone like Joshua, writing down Moses’ words, as did Baruch for Jeremiah (Jer. 36; the possibility is raised by Averbeck, 2012: 158)?

***b. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the historical-critical approach***

Different from the traditional approach is the historical-critical (or ‘higher-critical’) approach. Unlike the traditional approach, it does not view the Pentateuch as a cohesive whole, but as a mix of different sources and traditions that are often in conflict with one another and have come together over a long period of time to give us the final text. The goal of historical criticism is to determine what that process looked like.

While there are various historical-critical approaches to the Pentateuch (see overview in Alexander, 2012: 3–6), the one that has had the greatest impact is source criticism, which seeks to determine the sources from which the current text was formed. As applied to the Pentateuch, the classic expression of this approach was given by Julius Wellhausen (1885).<sup>4</sup> He argued that the Pentateuch consists of four main sources that were edited together: the ‘J’ source, characterized by reference to God as Yahweh (in German, ‘Jahve’); the ‘E’ source, characterized by reference to God as Elohim; the ‘D’ source, which consists of most of Deuteronomy; and the ‘P’ source, which concerns priestly matters (Leviticus was attributed to the P source). He also followed others in arguing that the P source included an earlier source, found mostly in Leviticus 17–26. Scholars labelled this the ‘H’ source (‘holiness’ source), due to the frequent mention of holiness in these chapters (19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6–8, etc.). He further argued that these sources were combined in a certain order: JEDP (P incorporated H). And while Wellhausen himself did not have a firm position on the dates of J and E, those using his approach soon assigned the following dates to the sources: J – c. 840 BC; E – c. 700 BC; D – c. 623 BC; P – c. 500–450 BC (with H coming after D, but before P).<sup>5</sup>

4. For the following, see Alexander, 2012: 7–31, esp. 16–18.

5. Increasingly, critical scholars now argue that H is later than P and should be dated to pre-exilic times (Lyons, 2010: 29, n. 57). Many also argue that it is better to view H as an original composition by the author of Leviticus, or as a redactional (edited) layer, but not as a pre-existing source that was added to P (see overview in Lyons, 2010: 19–29).

This approach came to be known as the ‘documentary hypothesis’ (hereafter ‘DH’). As the discussion above shows, the DH is in direct conflict with the claims of the text itself, since it places the material of the Pentateuch long after the time of Moses. Nevertheless, it was very quickly accepted among historical-critical scholars – at least in much of Europe and America – as *the* model that explained how the Pentateuch was formed.

*c. Twentieth and twenty-first centuries*

Today, however, there is a diversity of views about the formation of the Pentateuch. These views may be grouped into three large categories by geographical region (Dozeman, Schmid, Schwartz, 2011: XI–XII). North American scholars tend to accept the broad outlines of the DH, although many argue for much more redactional (editorial) activity than the traditional DH allowed. They are also much more likely to focus on the final form of the text, and analyse it in light of Ancient Near Eastern evidence or its place in the canon.

Israeli scholars also accept the broad outlines of the traditional DH in terms of the sources, but have not argued for as much redactional activity as American scholars have. (For example, some argue that one redactor brought together all four sources to form the Pentateuch.) Many Israeli scholars have also argued that P dates not only from before the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, but also from before D. This changes the order from JEDP to JEPD.

Finally, among European scholars, the DH is no longer a majority view. While the existence of P is often accepted, it is doubted whether J and E are distinct sources in Genesis–Numbers, and it is argued instead that there is a much higher degree of supplemental and redactional activity.

Given the wide diversity of views concerning the DH, it seems fair to conclude that there is no ‘mainstream’ view among critical scholars today about the formation of the Pentateuch. This does not mean that arriving at a consensus is impossible, and further research could, over time, begin to favour one of the above approaches over the others (or come up with another approach entirely). But it is also possible that scholars will see the lack of consensus as evidence that a comprehensive and accurate description of the Pentateuch’s formation requires information that has

been lost to history. Consequently, they may turn increasingly to questions other than how the text was formed.

As for the traditional approach to the DH, those who critique it often argue that its methods of identifying sources are unreliable (see Alexander [2012: 19–25], and esp. Whybray [1987: 17–131], who cannot be dismissed as a theological conservative). But even if it were assumed that the sources have been properly identified, there is the entirely different question of their dating. With regard to P (which includes most of Lev. 1 – 16), there are indicators that at least portions of it can be plausibly dated to the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 BC), the period during which Moses lived according to the biblical account. Most relevant are those indicators that provide some measure of external control in dating a text. For example:

1. ‘The details of the form and manufacture of the Tabernacle lampstand [Exod. 25:31–40] do not correspond to those of the lampstands in Solomon’s Temple or in later periods. They most closely resemble the design of lampstands of the late Bronze Age’ (Milgrom, 1991: 10).
2. ‘Israel’s camp in the wilderness is square-shaped; in later Israel the war camp was round. The wilderness camp most resembles the war camp of Rameses II [c. 1303–1213 BC], possibly the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Not only is the latter camp square in shape, but its tent sanctuary is in its center’ (Milgrom, 1991: 11; see also Kitchen, 2003: 275–283).
3. ‘The boundaries of the promised land (Num. 34) do not conform to any historical situation in Israel’s national existence, but are congruent with Egypt’s Asiatic province during the period of the New Empire (fifteenth through thirteenth centuries)’ (Milgrom, 1991: 11).

Hess (2008: 810) cites a similar indicator for material assigned to H (Lev. 17 – 26) in his comments on the blessings and curses found in Leviticus 26:

Only documents from the second millennium BC (and earlier) show clear evidence of both blessings and curses. First millennium legal collections, such as the Neo-Babylonian laws (Roth, 143–149), as well as first

millennium treaties, such as the Neo-Assyrian ones (Parpola and Watanabe, xxxv, xli–xlii), do not possess these two elements.<sup>6</sup>

If these examples hold, they do not prove that the entirety of Leviticus 1 – 16 or 17 – 27 came from that time, and debates over the extent and date of later editorial work will no doubt continue. But these examples at least allow for the possibility that an early date extends to other portions of these chapters as well.<sup>7</sup>

#### *d. Conclusion*

As the discussion above shows, the Pentateuch itself suggests Moses was the source and author of much of the book of Leviticus, although it may include later editorial work. While the extent and date of editorial work will doubtless remain an area of debate, it is the final form of the text that is canonical, and thus our focus, as we seek to discern what the Lord is saying through this remarkable book to his people today.

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6. The above examples are described as plausible indicators of the Late Bronze Age, and are not definite proof, for two reasons. First, an alternate explanation of some of the data is possible. For example, it could be argued that H has both blessings and curses, because it is modelled on the D source (cf. Deut. 27 – 28; this of course leads to another question: How is it that the D source, traditionally held to come from the seventh century BC, has these second-millennium BC characteristics?). Second, it is entirely possible that further archaeological discoveries will demonstrate that certain realities – such as the shape of the tabernacle and Israel’s camp – are not unique to the Late Bronze Age. At present, however, the above indicators seem best explained as evidence that these texts come from the Late Bronze Age.
  7. Those advocating the DH often date the sources by finding a historical time period that would fit with the social or cultural ideas or realities of the source. This is not wrong in and of itself, but, in practice, it frequently fails to take into account the simple fact that there are often many different points in history that would fit well with the data. Unless controls are used (see above indicators for P and H), the choice of one date over another becomes very subjective (see Sommer, 2011: 85–108, esp. 94–101).

### 3. The Hebrew text of Leviticus and the English version used here

Current editions of the Hebrew Bible are based on the Masoretic Text, the form of the Hebrew Bible that has been ‘accepted as authoritative by all Jewish communities from the second century CE onwards’ (Tov, 1992: 23). The oldest complete copy of the Masoretic Text is known as the Leningrad Codex B 19<sup>A</sup>. It dates to AD 1009 and serves as the basis for the standard Hebrew Bible used in academic circles today (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). Although this codex is relatively late, there are numerous examples of partial texts of the Hebrew Bible written in the Masoretic tradition that date from much earlier times. When these are compared with the codex, they show that the Masoretic Text ‘did not change much in the course of more than one thousand years’ (Tov, 1992: 30).

This does not mean that the Masoretic Text always has the best reading, and, as with any document copied from antiquity, it must be compared with other textual witnesses. The relevant witnesses for Leviticus are noted in the table below. Of these, the most important are the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. These witnesses overlap greatly with the Masoretic Text. Where they do contain alternate readings, these readings are often inferior to the Masoretic Text from a text-critical perspective, or, where possibly superior, are so minor that they do not affect the overall meaning. Where an apparent superior reading does affect the overall meaning, it will be noted in the commentary (as at 21:7–8).

#### Textual witnesses to Leviticus

Copies of Leviticus in Hebrew	Portions of Leviticus in Hebrew	Translations of Leviticus
Masoretic Text Samaritan Pentateuch	Various Dead Sea Scrolls	Septuagint (Greek) Vulgate (Latin) Peshitta (Syriac) Targums (Aramaic)

While the research for this commentary is based on the Masoretic Text, the comments will generally quote from the excellent translation found in the New International Version (2011, not 1984).

When the comments assume a different translation, this will be made clear in the text (as at 21:23).

#### 4. The theology of Leviticus

##### *a. The Lord is their covenant King who dwells among them*

In Leviticus, the central image describing the relationship between the Lord and Israel is that of a covenant King (the Lord), dwelling among his covenant people (Israel). This image is rooted in two of the book's central themes: the tabernacle and the covenant.

Leviticus begins with the Lord summoning Moses to the tabernacle (1:1), much as a king would summon a servant to his palace (cf. 1 Kgs 1:28, 32). Indeed, many factors indicate that the tabernacle is not simply a tent, but the palace-tent of the heavenly King, dwelling in the midst of his people:

1. The Israelites bring their tribute here (Exod. 25:1–9), just as a people would bring tribute to a king's palace.
2. They come and 'stand before' the Lord, just as one 'stands before' a ruler or person in authority (1 Kgs 1:28; 3:16; Esth. 8:4; see at Lev. 9:5).
3. The tabernacle's furniture and tapestries are incredibly ornate and unlike those of any other tent in Israel (Exod. 25:10–26:37; 30:1–10). This is clearly a tent fit for a king.
4. Just as kings had servants in their palaces who wore special uniforms and ministered before him (1 Kgs 10:5), so too the Lord has servants (the priests) in his palace-tent who wear special uniforms (Exod. 28) and minister before him (Exod. 28:43).
5. The tent has a throne room – the Most Holy Place – in which the Ark of the Covenant is the Lord's royal 'footstool' (1 Chr. 28:2), and the carved cherubim on top of it, his royal 'throne' (2 Sam. 6:2).

In sum, the King (the Lord) dwelt in his earthly palace (the tabernacle) in the midst of his people (Israel).

But this was not just any king and any people; these were a King and people who were in covenant relationship. As noted above