

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Leviticus is often considered to be one of the most challenging books of the Bible because of its focus on blood sacrifice, infectious diseases, and complicated dietary restrictions. Moreover, scholarly approaches have focused primarily on divisions in the text without considering its overarching theological message. In this volume, Mark W. Scarlata analyzes Leviticus' theology, establishing the connection between God's divine presence and Israel's life. Exploring the symbols and rituals of ancient Israel, he traces how Leviticus develops a theology of holiness in space and time, one that weaves together the homes of the Israelites with the home of God. Seen through this theological lens, Leviticus' text demonstrates how to live in the fullness of God's holy presence and in harmony with one another and the land. Its theological vision also offers insights into how we might live today in a re-sacralized world that cherishes human dignity and cares for creation.

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“Mark Scarlata’s examination of the place of wine in Jewish and Christian scriptures is about so much more than wine. The significance of the land, the meaning of work and ritual, the call to care for creation and communities, the relationship between God and humanity – all these topics and more are on illuminating display in this finely conceived book. Prepare to have your drinking and thinking transformed.”

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OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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This series aims to remedy the deficiency of available published material on the theological concerns of the Old Testament books. Here, specialists explore the theological richness of a given book at greater length than is usually possible in the introductions to commentaries or as part of other Old Testament theologies. They are also able to investigate the theological themes and issues of their chosen books without being tied to a commentary format or to a thematic structure provided from elsewhere. When complete, the series will cover all the Old Testament writings and will thus provide an attractive, and timely, range of short texts around which courses can be developed.

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MARK W. SCARLATA

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Contents

<i>General Editors’ Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xviii
1 THE SACRED WORLD	1
The Setting of Leviticus Within the Pentateuch	1
A Theology of Holiness	8
Critical Scholarship and Leviticus	16
Leviticus, Decentralization, and the Israelite Home	22
Conclusion	29
2 SIN, SACRIFICE, AND ATONEMENT (LEVITICUS	
1–7, 16)	32
The Nature of Sacrifice	32
Who Can Sacrifice?	39
Types of Sacrifice	43
Performing the Divine Drama	49
The Life Is in the Blood	55
A Theology of Sin and Atonement	61

Yom Kippur	70
Anselm, Atonement, and Leviticus	75
3 PURITY AND IMPURITY (LEVITICUS 11–15)	83
Defining Boundaries	83
Eating Our Way to Holiness	87
Purification and Childbirth	102
Purification, Skin Disease, and Bodily Discharge	109
4 INHABITING SACRED SPACE (LEVITICUS 8–10, 24–27)	114
A Priestly Theology of Space: The Tabernacle	114
Inhabiting Sacred Space: The Ordination of Priests	121
The Consecration of the Altar	130
Defiling Sacred Space	133
Holiness and the Land	140
The Jubilee	149
5 LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR (LEVITICUS 17–22)	157
The Holiness Code	157
A Bridge from God’s Home to Israel’s Home	160
Sexual Ethics and the Health of the Family	169
The <i>Imitatio Dei</i>	179
From Lay Household to Priestly Household	195
6 LIVING IN SACRED TIME (LEVITICUS 23)	203
Holy Times and Seasons	203
A Priestly Theology of Time	209
Sabbath	212
The Festivals	217

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-84564-9 — The Theology of the Book of Leviticus
Mark W. Scarlata
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CONTENTS ix

7	LEVITICUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND BEYOND . .	234
	Leviticus and the Old Testament	234
	Leviticus in the Second Temple Period	242
	Leviticus in the New Testament and Beyond	247
	Conclusion	260
	<i>Further Reading</i>	263
	<i>Index</i>	270

General Editors' Preface

Some years ago, Cambridge University Press, under the editorship of James D. G. Dunn, initiated a series entitled *New Testament Theology*. The first volumes appeared in 1991 and the series was brought to completion in 2003. For whatever reason, a companion series that would focus on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible was never planned or executed. The present series, *Old Testament Theology*, is intended to rectify this need.

The reasons for publishing *Old Testament Theology* are not, however, confined solely to a desire to match *New Testament Theology*. Instead, the reasons delineated by Dunn that justified the publication of *New Testament Theology* continue to hold true for *Old Testament Theology*. These include, among other things, the facts that (1) given faculty and curricular structures in many schools, the theological study of individual Old Testament writings is often spotty at best; (2) most exegetical approaches (and commentaries) proceed verse by verse such that theological interests are in competition with, if not completely eclipsed by, other important issues, whether historical, grammatical, or literary; and (3) commentaries often confine their discussion of a book's theology to just a few pages in the introduction. The dearth of materials focused exclusively on a particular book's theology may be seen as a result of factors like these; or, perhaps, it is the

cause of such factors. Regardless, as Dunn concluded, without adequate theological resources, there is little incentive for teachers or students to engage the theology of specific books; they must be content with what are mostly general overviews. Perhaps the most serious problem resulting from all this is that students are at a disadvantage, even incapacitated, when it comes to the matter of integrating their study of the Bible with other courses in religion and theology. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a series to bridge the gap between the too-slim theological précis and the too-full commentary where theological concerns are lost among many others.

All of these factors commend the publication of *Old Testament Theology* now, just as they did for *New Testament Theology* more than two decades ago. Like its sister series, *Old Testament Theology* is a place where Old Testament scholars can write at greater length on the theology of individual biblical books and may do so without being tied to the linear, verse-by-verse format of the commentary genre or a thematic structure of some sort imposed on the text from outside. Each volume in the series seeks to describe the biblical book's theology as well as to engage the book theologically – that is, each volume intends to *do* theology through and with the biblical book under discussion, as well as delineate the theology contained within it. Among other things, theological engagement with the composition includes paying attention to its contribution to the canon and appraising its influence on and reception by later communities of faith. In these ways, *Old Testament Theology* seeks to emulate its New Testament counterpart.

In the intervening years since *New Testament Theology* was first conceived, however, developments have taken place in the field that provide still further reasons for the existence of *Old*

Testament Theology; these have impact on how the series is envisioned and implemented and also serve to distinguish it, however slightly, from its companion series. Three developments in particular are noteworthy:

1. *The present hermeneutical climate*, often identified (rightly or wrongly) as “postmodern,” is rife with possibility and potential for new ways of theologizing about scripture and its constituent parts. Theologizing in this new climate will of necessity look (and be) different from how it has ever looked (or been) before.
2. *The ethos change in the study of religion, broadly, and in biblical studies in particular*. No longer are the leading scholars in the field only Christian clergy, whether Catholic priests or mainline Protestant ministers. Jewish scholars and scholars of other Christian traditions are every bit as prominent, as are scholars of non- or even anti-confessional stripe. In short, now is a time when “Old Testament Theology” must be conducted without the benefits of many of the old consensuses and certainties, even the most basic ones relating to epistemological framework and agreed-upon interpretative communities along with their respective traditions.
3. Finally, recent years have witnessed *a long-overdue rapprochement among biblical scholars, ethicists, and systematic theologians*. Interdisciplinary studies between these groups are now regularly published, thus furthering and facilitating the need for books that make the theology of scripture widely available for diverse publics.

In brief, the time is ripe for a series of books that will engage the theology of specific books of the Old Testament in a new climate

for a new day. The result will not be programmatic, settled, or altogether certain. Despite that – or, in some ways, *because* of that – it is hoped that *Old Testament Theology* will contain highly useful volumes that are ideally poised to make significant contributions on a number of fronts including (a) the ongoing discussion of biblical theology in confessional and nonconfessional mode as well as in postmodern and canonical contexts, (b) the theological exchange between Old Testament scholars and those working in cognate and disparate disciplines, and (c) the always-pressing task of introducing students to the theology of the discrete canonical unit: the biblical books themselves.

Brent A. Strawn

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Professor of Law, Duke University*

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Preface

Studying the Book of Leviticus can be a challenge for even the most patient of readers. How many chapters can one plow through on the finer details of how to slaughter an animal or how to detect if there is a fungal infection in a wall? Leviticus is unlike any other book of the Old Testament and yet it sits firmly in the center of the Pentateuch as one of the critical articulations of God's law and the calling of his people Israel. Nowhere else do we find such an emphasis on holiness, purity, and ethical obedience as it relates to God's covenant people and their relationship to his tabernacle.

The world of Leviticus is filled with the rituals and symbols of an ancient society that often feel impenetrable to today's reader. Yet with a little perseverance, one can begin to discover how things like the drama of ritual, the use of sound and smell, and the symbolism of blood help contribute to a theology of what it means to dwell in the presence of a holy God.

Israel's call to holiness is also shaped by their ethical treatment of the land and their relationships with family members and the aliens among them. Leviticus is not only concerned with ritual purity, but it offers moral and ethical commands that are critical to the life of a holy people. Israel is to care for the poor and the

vulnerable, to create a society based in justice and mercy, and to love their neighbor.

For all its peculiar commands around eating, sex, or farming, Leviticus has a very simple message – the calling of God’s people to be holy as he is holy (Lev 19:2) (Following the text of Leviticus, this study will maintain the use of the masculine pronouns for God throughout). Holiness, however, does not cease with God’s people but it is meant to lead to the consecration of all creation. The holiness of the tabernacle extends to the holiness of Israel’s home and to the land, but the vision of Leviticus is for the consecration of all things.

Part of this book was composed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns we experienced here in the UK. It was fascinating to study ancient laws on purity, contamination, and contagious disease while the world was trying to find scientific answers to the global spread of a virus. What became quickly apparent was that governments around the world were wrestling with issues of contagion that are similar to those found in Leviticus. I’m grateful for those scholars who were part of the St. Edward’s scriptorium during that time. Although they were subjected to my constant ramblings on Leviticus, their presence and support was welcomed during such difficult periods of isolation. I’m also thankful for the study leave I was granted by St. Mellitus College to finish this work and for my students who always stimulate creative ideas for new interpretations. This book would not have been possible without the gracious support and feedback given by the editors, Brent Strawn and Stephen Chapman. I’m grateful for the opportunity to participate in this series on the theology of the Old Testament. These books offer a critical theological voice in Old Testament scholarship that can often be overlooked in favor of other approaches to the text. Finally,

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Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

PREFACE

xvii

I am always most thankful for the support of my family and their willingness to consider what it means to walk together in holiness.

Mark W. Scarlata
St. Edward, King and Martyr, Cambridge
Michaelmas 2025

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABS	<i>Archaeology and Biblical Studies</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

xix

DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995. 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
ESV	English Standard Version
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
H	Holiness legislation
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IVP	Intervarsity Press
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint

NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTT	<i>Old Testament Theology</i> , 2 vols. Gerhard von Rad, trans. D. M. G. Stalker. Old Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967.
P	Priestly source
PAAJR	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
StBoT	Studien Zu Den Boğazköy-Texten
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>