

# How the Dwelling Becomes a Tent of Meeting: A Theology of Leviticus

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## Abstract

This essay proposes that the theology of the book of Leviticus centers on the question of how the dwelling, God's *mishkan*, becomes a tent of meeting, the *'ohel mo'ed*. By the end of Leviticus, the tent of meeting has become the place where Israel's community can enjoy fellowship with Yahweh—a Sabbath goal symbolically portrayed in Leviticus 24:1–9. The cultic festivals of Leviticus 23–25, with 24:1–9 at their heart, demonstrate that the dwelling has become a “tent of meeting” indeed and that the purpose for the cosmos—namely, fellowship with God—can now be realized through Israel's cultus.

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**T**he theology of the book of Leviticus may be discerned in the movement of how God's dwelling becomes Israel's meeting place with God, the tent of meeting—that is, how the *mishkan* (מִשְׁכָּן) becomes the *'ohel mo'ed* (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד).<sup>1</sup> This goal, it will be argued, is portrayed symbolically in Leviticus 24:1–9. We will begin therefore by probing the cultic symbolism of the lampstand and bread of the presence in Leviticus 24:1–9, and then, positioning that

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<sup>1</sup> This essay represents a summary of three chapters of my book, L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 109–220.

account within the overall movement of Leviticus, we will endeavor to demonstrate that it functions as the heart of the book's resolution.

## **I. The Symbolism of the Lampstand and the Bread of the Presence**

In this section we argue that the lampstand shining upon the bread of the presence offers a symbolic picture of the Sabbath: Israel basking in the light of God's blessed presence, mediated by the cultus. A careful comparison of the priestly benediction of Numbers 6:23–27 with the lampstand ritual of 8:1–4 shows that both texts present the blessing of God upon the people of God, mediated by the priesthood of God.<sup>2</sup> The arrangement of the holy place in Numbers 8:1–4 thus portrays the ideal of Israel basking in the light of the divine presence, a symbolism which, as we will see, accords with Leviticus 24:1–9.

### **1. The Lampstand and Bread of the Presence in Leviticus 24:1–9**

Turning to Leviticus 24:1–9, we will consider the text's two subdivisions—vv. 1–4 pertaining to the lampstand and vv. 5–9 pertaining to the bread—together as one complete portrait. Both sections highlight Aaron's duties (vv. 3–4, vv. 8–9) and the people's contribution to the ritual (vv. 2, 8), and they contain requirements referred to as everlasting statutes (vv. 3, 9). Both sections, furthermore, emphasize the continual nature of these requirements through the use of *tamid* (תָּמִיד), “daily” or “continual.” While the tending of the lampstand is a daily *tamid*, evening and morning, yet the renewed arrangement of the fresh bread with the addition of incense is performed as a weekly *tamid*, specifically on the Sabbath, and is dubbed an everlasting covenant.<sup>3</sup>

Roy Gane, though treating the bread ritual alone, makes two observations useful to our purpose.<sup>4</sup> First, as the only offering designated “an eternal covenant,” the bread of the presence uniquely symbolizes the relationship between YHWH and his people.<sup>5</sup> He rightly associates the twelve loaves with the twelve tribes of Israel, suggesting that even the division into two piles of

<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 106–7.

<sup>3</sup> The bread, with the addition of pure frankincense as a memorial, is also said to constitute an *'ishah* (אִשָּׁה), a gift by fire to YHWH (v. 7). As their due, the priests receive the bread that was removed and are to eat it in a holy place (v. 9).

<sup>4</sup> Roy Gane, “‘Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42.2 (1992): 179–203.

<sup>5</sup> See also Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann, *Sefer Vayikra*, trans. Zvi Har Shefer and Aharon Leiberman (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 2:212.

six supports this understanding (cf. Exod 28:9–12; Deut 27:11–13). In addition, in order to symbolize the covenant relationship, the bread of the presence in vv. 5–9 should be read in the light—literally!—of the lampstand ritual (vv. 1–4). The original instructions for the lampstand in Exodus 25:37, quite similar to those found in Numbers 8:1–4, make the inclusion of the table of shewbread *normative* for the lampstand’s symbolism. The lampstand’s main purpose is to shine upon the table of showbread:

You shall make seven lamps for it, and then arrange its lamps so that they shine light in front of it.

Secondly, Gane affirms that the changing of the bread on the Sabbath defines its meaning in terms of Sabbath (and creation) theology, noting that the Sabbath itself is referred to as an “eternal covenant” and “a sign” between YHWH and Israel (Exod 31:16–17). Now given that the menorah is made up of seven lamps, which require the evening and morning *tamid*, it could be that a cosmological symbolism links this ritual with the bread *tamid*, focusing on the Sabbath in particular.<sup>6</sup> Along similar lines, Vern Poythress writes that the seven lamps correlate

with the general symbolism for time within Israel. The heavenly bodies were made in order to “serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years” (Genesis 1:14). The whole cycle of time marked by the sun and moon and stars is divided up into sevens: the seventh day in the week is the Sabbath day; the seventh month is the month of atonement (Leviticus 16:29); the seventh year is the year of release from debts and slavery (Deuteronomy 15); the seventh of the seven-year cycles is the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25). Fittingly, the lampstand contains the same sevenfold division, symbolizing the cycle of time provided by the heavenly lights.<sup>7</sup>

Just as the creation account establishes the evening and morning of days for the sake of the Sabbath, the daily *tamid* ritual of verses 1–4 of Leviticus 24 similarly establishes a rhythm of days for the sake of the Sabbath *tamid* ritual in verses 5–9. Already, then, one may discern the profound homology between cosmos and cult: just as the cosmos was created for humanity’s Sabbath communion and fellowship with God, so too the cult was established for Israel’s Sabbath communion and fellowship with God. “Sabbath

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Ruwe, for example, believes the menorah may be associated with the sevenfold structure of Genesis 1 (Andreas Ruwe, “Heiligkeitgesetz” und “Priesterschrift”: *Literaturgeschichtliche und rechtssystematische Untersuchungen zu Leviticus 17,1–26,2* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 324–25).

<sup>7</sup> Vern Sheridan Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (1991; repr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 18–19.

by Sabbath” (*beyom hashabbath beyom hashabbath*, בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת), as verse 8 has it, the twelve loaves of bread are renewed in the light of the lampstand. This cultic symbol, we propose, conveys the ideal Sabbath, the twelve tribes of Israel basking in the divine light, being renewed in God’s presence Sabbath by Sabbath.

## 2. *Leviticus 24:1–9 within the Context of Chapters 23 through 25*

We turn now to investigate the significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 within the context of chapters 23–25. Leigh Trevaskis has recently (and convincingly) argued that Leviticus 24:1–9 presents the ideal of Israel paused in worship before YHWH on the sabbatical occasions described in chapters 23 and 25, which frame it.<sup>8</sup> He notes that two common themes unite chapters 23 and 25. The first is a concern for calendric time. Israel’s annual feasts are delineated in chapter 23, emphasizing their dates in particular. This stress on calendric time is especially evident when compared with the enumeration of feasts in Numbers 28–29, which devotes more attention to the prescribed offerings than to their appointed times. Chapter 25, establishing the (seventh year) land Sabbath (vv. 1–7) and the (fiftieth year) Jubilee Sabbath (vv. 9–55), is also clearly concerned with calendrical time.

The second unifying theme is a sabbatical principle. The two Sabbaths detailed in chapter 25 are apparent enough, yet the same is also true for the appointed feasts of chapter 23: there are seven major festivals, seven days of rest, several festivals occurring on the seventh month, every seven years being a sabbatical year, and there is a grand sabbatical year after the seventh of the seven-year cycles. Since we have already noted how the *tamid* rituals of the lampstand and the bread of the presence both underscore the element of time in a way similar to the creation account—that is, the rituals focus upon the Sabbath—it seems Leviticus 24:1–9 fits well within the thematic context of chapters 23–25; as a cultic symbol, the lampstand’s shining upon the twelve loaves captures the ideal for Israel’s sacred convocations, which are themselves rooted in the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the introduction (Lev 23:1–4)

<sup>8</sup> Leigh M. Trevaskis, “The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59.2 (2009): 295–312; cf. John H. Walton, “Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11.2 (2001): 302–3.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Gorman also makes the observation that “Leviticus 23 divides the year into two parts by placing emphasis on the activities of the first month and the seventh month. The two-part division of the year reflects the two-part division of the day—day and night. Two seven-day observances are also required, one in the first month and one in the seventh month. In addition, seven holy convocations are identified in the calendar (vv. 7, 8, 21, 24, 27, 35, 36)” (Frank H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1997], 127). If valid, the two- and sevenfold nature of the annual feasts comports well with the lampstand and bread *tamids*, respectively.

to the festival legislation bookends the Sabbath (v. 3) with dual references to the appointed feasts of YHWH (*mo'ade yhwah*, מועדי יהוה) and the holy convocations (*miqra'e qodesh*, מקראי קדש; vv. 2, 4). What the insertion of the Sabbath accomplishes in Leviticus 23:1–4 is likewise accomplished by the insertion of Leviticus 24:1–9 between chapters 23 and 25. “Once we have recognized the notion of the ‘Sabbath’ to be an important thread running through Leviticus 23–26,” writes Wilfried Warning, “one must admit that this keyword—occurring twice in 24:5–9—may have prompted the ancient author to place this pericope here.”<sup>10</sup> The lampstand shining its light upon the twelve fragrant loaves is a symbol of the covenant, itself signified by the Sabbath—Leviticus 24:1–9 is a picture of the Sabbath. We may therefore conclude that Leviticus 24:1–9, as a cultic symbol, is the theological heart of chapters 23 through 25.

### 3. *The Relationship of Leviticus 24:1–9 with the Blasphemer Tale*

Since understanding the unity of chapter 24 as a whole will be helpful toward considering the structure of Leviticus below, the relationship between 24:1–9 and 24:10–23 (the blasphemer tale) must be addressed briefly.<sup>11</sup> Building on the work of Bryan Bibb,<sup>12</sup> Trevaskis explains the function of the blasphemer story in verses 10–23 as serving as something of a foil to the cultic ideal expressed in verses 1–9, in effect extending the ideal holiness of the community represented in the ritual (vv. 1–9) to every aspect of life in the camp/land—even to the sojourner (vv. 10–23). His fine analysis may be buttressed by reflecting upon the tale’s emphasis on the sacred “name” of YHWH, noted three times (vv. 11, 16 [2x]). Recalling now that the Levitical blessing of Numbers 6:23–27, in which YHWH’s face is made to shine upon Israel, is formally characterized as “placing my Name upon them” (v. 27), we may see how Israel’s Sabbath by Sabbath basking in the divine presence sanctifies the community particularly by placing the sacred name upon them. Significantly, Leviticus 22 closes with legislation concerning the divine name in terms quite similar to that of the Sabbath: neither the “holy” name

<sup>10</sup> Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Typically, scholars explain Leviticus 24:10–23 as a rather obvious interpolation that, perhaps, maintains structural balance with the Nadab and Abihu narrative (10:1–7), yet without manifesting any coherence with its literary context. See, e.g., Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2082.

<sup>12</sup> Bryan D. Bibb, “This Is the Thing That the Lord Commanded You to Do: Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Books of Leviticus” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 210–15; now published as Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

nor the “holy” Sabbath is to be “profaned” because it is “YHWH who sanctifies you” (Lev 22:32–33; cf. Exod 31:13–14). The holiness section of Leviticus is itself laced with warnings against profaning the divine name (see 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32). Tamar Kamionkowski understands the name as expressing the holy bond that binds God and Israel together, serving as a “portal” or meeting place between the divine and human, and concludes that the sojourner’s blasphemy was a sort of penetration (*naqav*, נָקַב) into the divine sphere akin to an unwelcome entry into the holy of holies,<sup>13</sup> a relevant analogy, as we will see in the next section. Along with the sanctuary, the Sabbath and the divine name are the major sancta that can be desecrated by Israel.<sup>14</sup> Understanding God’s name as something of a sanctuary outside the sanctuary, related to the light of his countenance, then the literary placement of the blasphemer story obtains coherence. The shift from cult (vv. 1–9) to community (vv. 10–23) in Leviticus 24, moreover, offers in microcosm the general movement of the book of Leviticus from cult (chs. 1–16) to community (chs. 17–27)<sup>15</sup>—a movement to which we now turn our attention.

## II. The Movement of the Book of Leviticus

In this section, in order to demonstrate that Leviticus 24:1–9 functions to portray symbolically that the *mishkan* has now become an *’ohel mo’ed*, which is nothing less than the book’s goal and theological import, we will rehearse the threefold movement of Leviticus. Briefly, Leviticus may be divided into three subsections: chapters 1–10, 11–16, and 17–27.<sup>16</sup> While space precludes a defense of this outline, the division is a common one and without controversy. Furthermore, we understand the promises and threats of chapter 26 as the *application* of chapters 1 through 25, a sure signal that

<sup>13</sup> S. Tamar Kamionkowski, “Leviticus 24, 10–23 in Light of H’s Concept of Holiness,” in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions*, ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S Baden (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2009), 73–86.

<sup>14</sup> Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 99; see also John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 11–12.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Leigh M. Trevaskis, “The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59.2 (2009): 307–12.

<sup>16</sup> The first two movements build upon the work of Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*. For a similar reading of the Pentateuch (Leviticus) within the context of the lost and regained divine presence, see Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

the basic content has been covered.<sup>17</sup> We proceed, therefore, with the supposition that chapters 23–25 (with Lev 24 as their heart) form the climax to the theological movement of the book, a climax that is both festive and jubilant.

### 1. *The Terms Mishkan and 'Ohel Mo'ed*

A preliminary discussion on the terms “dwelling” (*mishkan*) and “tent of meeting” (*'ohel mo'ed*) is necessary at the outset. Is it legitimate to make much of terms that may otherwise appear to be used synonymously (as translated, e.g., by the Lxx and Vulgate)? No doubt, some scholars would not concede such a nuanced use of terms, even at the level of redaction. Historically source critical scholarship has maintained that, after incorporating the designation “tent of meeting” from earlier sources (E and J, possibly D), the Priestly writer used the terms *mishkan* and *'ohel mo'ed* indiscriminately, without any intended difference in meaning.<sup>18</sup> Several factors, however, suggest that the possibility is at least worth exploring. First, etymologically, of course, there is a clear difference of emphasis in both terms, even though they have the same referent. *Mishkan* highlights the tabernacle as God’s dwelling-place, the earthly copy of his heavenly abode, while *'ohel mo'ed* underscores the tabernacle as the place designated for Israel to meet with God at the appointed times.<sup>19</sup> Menahem Haran notes the fundamental distinction between these two terms (God’s “abode” versus the place to which he comes at “the appointed time”), but only at the source level (as a distinction between the P and E tents), asserting that P uses both terms indiscriminately.<sup>20</sup> This assessment has not gone unchallenged, however. Benjamin Sommer, for example, has affirmed P’s intended difference in these terms, suggesting they manifest a tension between two orientations toward divine presence within P itself.<sup>21</sup> On either approach, the point stands.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 27, linked with chapter 25 by the motif of redemption, should likely be regarded as something of an epilogue (though no mere afterthought) that keeps the book from ending with covenant threats/curses. See John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1992), 479; Christopher R. Smith, “The Literary Structure of Leviticus,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21.70 (1996): 30; and Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 272.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Richard E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 807–27.

<sup>20</sup> Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 269.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, “Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9.1 (2001): 56.



Secondly, at least *some* of the time, the Pentateuch does appear to use each of these terms in a manner that is sensitive to their etymological nuance. While our suggestion for the movement of Leviticus will present a test-case (in relation to Exod 40:34–35), yet just such a careful and deliberate use of these terms also appears in Exodus 25:9–33:7. Within this section, Exodus 25:9–27:19, which for the most part contains instructions for making the various furnishings and curtains of the tabernacle (and courtyard), utilizes *mishkan* exclusively (19 times). Exodus 27:20–33:7, however, which includes instructions regarding Aaron’s garments and the cultic functions within the tabernacle, utilizes *’ohel mo’ed* exclusively (17 times). Here it is perhaps not insignificant that Exodus 27:20–21—constituting the first use of the term *’ohel mo’ed* in the Pentateuch—relates the daily *tamid* of the lampstand. Indeed, the transition from the former section to the latter is marked by the only occurrence of the term *’avodah* (עֲבֹדָה), “service,” within Exodus 25–27 (27:19), manifesting the shift in focus from the tabernacle’s construction/equipment to its cultic function.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, since Exodus 25–31 is widely attributed to P,<sup>23</sup> a literary approach to the material seems likely to have more potential for explaining word choice than a simple source critical one. In a three-part study of the usage of these two terms in Exodus 25–40, Ralph Hendrix concludes that the expressions *mishkan* and *’ohel mo’ed* are discrete and specific rather than interchangeable and that most analyses of this text have lacked sensitivity to the distinction between these two terms, which he explains as follows: in Exodus 25–40 *mishkan* is used within the context of constructing the tabernacle as a transient dwelling place, whereas *’ohel mo’ed* is used when the context is the tabernacle’s cultic function.<sup>24</sup> A few decades earlier, Peter Kearney had already observed as much, in relation to the first (Exod 25:1–30:10) of the seven speeches that comprise chapters 25–31:

Most of it separates readily under two general headings: the Dwelling and its furnishings (25:8–27:19) and the priesthood of Aaron (27:20–29:42). One clear distinction between these two parts is in the name of the sanctuary: *mishkan* (“Dwelling”) in the first and *’ohel mo’ed* (“Tent of Meeting”) in the second. “Tent of Meeting” is

<sup>22</sup> Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 810.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 2004), 529–37.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph E. Hendrix, “The Use of Miskan and ‘Ohel Mo’ed in Exodus 25–40,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30.1 (1992): 3–13. Cf. his two other studies, “Miskan and ‘Ohel Mo’ed: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extra-Biblical Usage,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29.3 (1991): 213–24; and “A Literary Structural Overview of Exod 25–40,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30.2 (1992): 123–38.



an apt name in this second section, where the redactor builds climactically towards a continuous sequence of cultic “meetings” with God (cf. 29:38–43).<sup>25</sup>

Our suggested significance for Leviticus 24:1–9 corresponds well with Kearney’s insight, making sense of the use of *’ohel mo’ed* in 27:20–29:42 and explaining why the inclusion of Aaron’s care of the lamps (27:20–21; 30:7–8) was of such importance, since it portrays the goal of the covenant symbolically, as it is expressed and experienced through the tabernacle cultus. Although this topic merits separate address, the case for an undifferentiated use of *mishkan* and *’ohel mo’ed* is inconclusive and contested, while that for a logical use of these terms according to their etymology appears strong, at least in some sections of the Pentateuch. This point leaves open the possibility we are pursuing, namely, that the difference in these terms is key to the movement of Leviticus.

## 2. The Movement of Leviticus 1–10: Approaching the House of God

Broadly, the first ten chapters of Leviticus detail the legislation for sacrifice (chs. 1–7) and the consecration of the priesthood (ch. 8), both as prerequisites for the inauguration of the cult (chs. 9–10). This rather straightforward sequence, however, takes on new significance when read in light of the crisis introduced at the end of the book of Exodus. In Exodus 40:35 we read that Moses “was not able to enter the tent of meeting” as a result of verse 34, the substance of which is repeated in verse 35 (to envelop Moses’s inability to enter):

<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the dwelling.

<sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because (*ki*, כִּי) the cloud rested (*shakhan*, שָׁכַן) above it, and the glory of YHWH filled the dwelling.

Moses’s barred entry is a shocking statement, as throughout the narrative of Exodus Moses alone *is able* to ascend into God’s presence within the clouded summit of Sinai.<sup>26</sup> If Moses is not able to enter the tabernacle, then nobody is able—and yet, it is with this dire reality that Exodus closes. YHWH God has taken up his dwelling on earth, but no human being—no Israelite, not even Moses the mediator—is able to approach his abode. Christophe Nihan rightly understands this crisis as generating the dramatic movement

<sup>25</sup> Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89.3 (1977): 375.

<sup>26</sup> See L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, BTS 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 219–30.

of Leviticus 1–10, although he does not probe for any significance in relation to the different terms used for the tabernacle in these verses.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Moses's barred entry is given specifically in relation to the "tent of meeting," the *'ohel mo'ed*, which is covered by the cloud that is "resting" (*shakhan*) upon it; while the glory's in-filling of the tabernacle is given in relation to the term "dwelling." When the glory of YHWH fills it, the tabernacle becomes a dwelling—a *mishkan*—indeed. The cloud, however, now covers the "tent of meeting," apparently serving as a barrier so that it, along with the indwelling glory, is given as the reason (*ki*) for Moses's inability to enter. The tent, in other words, has become a *mishkan* but as yet it cannot function as an *'ohel mo'ed*, a "tent of meeting." The terminology used appears quite precise. The book of Exodus ends, therefore, with the climactic in-filling of the tabernacle so that it has become, in accord with the promises given in Exodus 25:8 and 29:45, a *mishkan* without question. What the book's end does question, however, is how this tabernacle will come to function as an *'ohel mo'ed*. Accordingly, within the narrative of the Pentateuch, the remarkable statement of the mediator's inability to enter serves a particular function, namely, it serves to introduce the book of Leviticus, to underscore the necessity of its revelation of the cultic legislation and personnel ordained by God as the way by which Israel may approach YHWH. How may Israel approach YHWH's abode? Through divinely revealed sacrifices and a divinely chosen and ordained priesthood to offer those sacrifices on behalf of Israel. In this manner, Leviticus recounts and theologizes how the *mishkan* steadily becomes the *'ohel mo'ed*, a resolution that is not complete until chapters 23–25.

Part of the narrative strategy evident already is that the movement contextualizes the legislation (chs. 1–8) between the crisis and the resolution. Leviticus 9 recounts the inaugural worship of the tabernacle cultus, wherein Moses and Aaron are allowed for the first time to enter the tent of meeting and the people behold the glory of YHWH (v. 23)—the sacrificial cult has established a new form of relationship between YHWH and Israel.<sup>28</sup> The gap between Moses's inability to enter in Exodus 40:34–35 has been abolished in Leviticus 9, *through the sacrificial cult revealed by God* (Lev 1–8).

In Leviticus 10 a new crisis is introduced that will require for its full resolution the developments that take place in the final two sections of the book, the first ending in chapter 16 and the second with chapters 23–25. Since its tension propels the second movement of Leviticus, we will consider Leviticus 10 in the next section.

<sup>27</sup> Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 89–95.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

### 3. The Movement of Leviticus 11–16: Cleansing the House of God

Leviticus 10:1–3 recounts Nadab and Abihu’s fatal approach to YHWH with “strange fire.” God then responds in Leviticus 10:10—highlighted as the only divine speech addressed exclusively to the high priest—by instructing Aaron to teach Israel how to distinguish “between holy and profane” (the subject matter of the third section of Leviticus, chs. 17–25) and between “unclean and clean” (the subject matter of the second section of Leviticus, chs. 11–16). The second narrative movement, the death of Aaron’s sons, Nihan observes, creates a twofold problem: firstly, the sanctuary needs to be cleansed from corpse pollution, the most dangerous and contagious form of uncleanness;<sup>29</sup> secondly, and assuming Aaron’s sons had attempted to enter the inner sanctum with their censers, the question of how near God’s people may approach him has been raised.<sup>30</sup> The legislation for the Day of Atonement, though removed by five chapters, is revealed on the same day as Nadab and Abihu’s tragedy in Leviticus 16 and offers the remedy for both problems. The Day of Atonement ceremony provides for the annual cleansing of the tabernacle so that it may be called a ritual of restoration or “re-founding,”<sup>31</sup> and this day also provides for the nearest approach into the divine presence—within the holy of holies.

As with the previous section, we find here a narrative strategy whereby the laws of clean/unclean (chs. 11–15) have been inserted within the narrative movement from Leviticus 10 to 16, creating a theological context for those laws so as to underscore their consequence within the cultic system. As the capstones of their sections, chapters 9–10 and 16 recount the creation of the cultus and the regular re-creation of it by way of cleansing—institution and restitution.<sup>32</sup> They are also both marked by references to the divine presence (9:23; 16:2), which track the gradual abolishment of Israel’s distance from God in his *mishkan*.

### 4. The Movement of Leviticus 17–27: Meeting with God at the House of God

When we consider chapter 26 as the *application* of the covenantal gift of the tabernacle cultus (i.e., of the *whole* book of Leviticus), then we are led to

<sup>29</sup> See Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, JSOTSup 56 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 66–85.

<sup>30</sup> Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 92–105.

<sup>31</sup> Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOTSup 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 61–102.

<sup>32</sup> Benedikt Jürgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Levitikus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext*, Herders Biblische Studien 28 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001), 302; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 101.

look for the third section's resolution *before* the blessings and curses stipulated in Leviticus 26.<sup>33</sup> Here, our particular angle on the theme of Leviticus—how the *mishkan* becomes the *'ohel mo'ed*—reveals its usefulness. The first two sections of Leviticus as we have presented them, approaching God's house (chs. 1–10) and cleansing God's house (chs. 11–16), do not convey the significance of the term *'ohel mo'ed*. These sections do, however, serve as necessary preliminaries before the tabernacle can function as a “tent of meeting.” And, indeed, as we will see, Leviticus 23–25 (symbolized by 24:1–9 as their center) have this precise function as their subject. For this final section of Leviticus, we will present four lines of reasoning that support understanding Leviticus 24:1–9 as symbolizing the goal of the *mishkan*'s becoming an *'ohel mo'ed*. We will consider the theme of sacred time with which this third section closes, how that theme relates to *'ohel mo'ed* terminology, how our proposal fits the overall narrative strategy discerned in the previous two sections, and how our proposal corresponds with the literary structure and theme of Leviticus.

#### a. The Theme of Sacred Time

Keeping in mind the cult and cosmos homology, Walter Vogels makes two relevant points regarding the fourth-day creation of the heavenly lights in Genesis 1:14–18.<sup>34</sup> First, the word for light or luminary, *ma'or* (מָאֹר), is rare; elsewhere in the Pentateuch it always refers to the lamps of the tabernacle lampstand. Secondly, the chief function of the heavenly “lamps” is for the sake of the *mo'adim* (מוֹעֲדִים), a word which is better translated as “cultic festivals” rather than “seasons (of nature)” (Gen 1:14). Significantly, Vogels notes that the singular *mo'ed* (מוֹעֵד) refers 135 out of the 160 times it appears in the Pentateuch to the “tent of *meeting*,” with the vast majority of the other cases referring either to the “fixed time” of a cultic festival or simply as a synonym for the “festival” itself. The creation account, let us recall, is structured by a sabbatical principle, opening with a seven-word sentence, containing seven paragraphs with seven days, and climaxing on the seventh day of divine rest. The first, middle, and last days all deal with time: the period of a day (Day 1), the heavenly lamps for marking annual cultic

<sup>33</sup> Nihan himself refers to chapter 26 as a “concluding exhortation” (Ibid., 99) and notes that Leviticus 25 may “legitimately be viewed as the conclusion to the entire legislation on holiness in Lev. 17–25” (534).

<sup>34</sup> Walter Vogels, “The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen. 1:14b),” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11.2 (1997): 163–80; see also David J. Rudolph, “Festivals in Genesis 1:14,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 542 (2003): 23–40.

festivals (Day 4), and the weekly Sabbath (Day 7).<sup>35</sup> The message of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is clear: the cosmos was created to be the meeting place between God and humanity, specifically on the appointed days of meeting—built upon the Sabbath.

Understanding the tabernacle as a mini-cosmos, one would expect a similar purpose for its construction, and such is indeed the case (cf. Exod 31:12–17).<sup>36</sup> The goal is for the tabernacle to become an *'ohel mo'ed*, the place where Israel meets with God Sabbath by Sabbath. If we understand this as the end toward which the narrative has been leading, then we can discern the significance of chapters 23–25 of Leviticus. Although generally a foreign concept in the present era, sacred time was a standard category in the ancient world; not until YHWH has revealed the sacred calendar to Israel, setting up the appointed times of meeting, can the dwelling finally function as a tent of meeting.

### b. Terminology

Just here it is critical to consider the *'ohel mo'ed* terminology. The word *mo'ed* is built from the root *y'd* (דע), meaning “to appoint, meet.” That this function of the tabernacle, far from incidental, is essential to its purpose may be seen from the programmatic statement in Exodus 29:42–43 (cf. 25:22; 30:6, 36), which contains a threefold use of the root *y'd*:

The daily burnt offering shall be throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting (*mo'ed*, מועד) before YHWH, where I will meet (*'ivva'ed*, וָאֵנִי) with you [pl.] to speak with you there. And I will meet (*weno'adeti*, וְנִפְגַּעְתִּי) with the sons of Israel and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

Ralph Klein observes that the term “meet” is at the heart of this “summary paragraph, which articulates the central significance of the whole institution of the tabernacle.”<sup>37</sup> This usage, moreover, is not an isolated instance.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Weimar, “Struktur und Komposition der priesterschriftlichen Schöpfungserzählung (Gen 1,1–2,4a),” in *Ex Mesopotamia et Syria lux: Festschrift für Manfred Dietrich zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Manfred Dietrich et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 836; Vogels, “The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen. 1:14b),” 164, n. 4; 176–79; Frank H. Gorman, “Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status,” in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 52–53.

<sup>36</sup> See the parallels between the cosmos and tabernacle in relation to the Sabbath in Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy”; Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. André Caquot and Mathias Delcor, AOAT 212 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501–12.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph K. Klein, “Back to the Future: The Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus,” *Interpretation* 50.3 (1996): 268.

“There I will *meet* (*weno‘adeti*, וְנִוְעַדְתִּי) with you,” YHWH says with reference to the atonement lid in the instructions for the ark in Exodus 25:22; “where I will meet (*‘iwwa‘ed*, וְאִנִּי) with you” in Exodus 30:6; and “in the *‘ohel mo‘ed* where I will meet (*‘iwwa‘ed*, וְאִנִּי) with you” in Exodus 30:36. All passages have the making of the tabernacle and the establishment of the cult in view. In Exodus, moreover, the people of God become the *‘edah* (עֵדָה), built from the same root, the cultic community appointed to meet with him. Finally, the root *y’d* not only designates the place to meet with God and the people who will meet with God, but as we have already noticed, it designates the times appointed to meet with God, the *mo‘adim*. Leviticus 23, being a chapter concerned with cultic festivals, is itself defined by its sixfold use of *mo‘adim* (vv. 2 [2x], 4 [2x], 37, 44). The *‘edah* meets with God at the *‘ohel mo‘ed* for the *mo‘adim*. Just as the Sabbath marks the time for the bread to be renewed under the light of the lampstand, so, too, the Sabbath marks the time for Israel to convene, a *miqra’-qodesh* (מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ) (Lev 23:3), as a sacred assembly for fellowship and communion with YHWH.<sup>38</sup>

Returning now to the movement of Leviticus, what greater affirmation can be given to demonstrate that the sanctuary has finally become the tent of *mo‘ed* than these chapters calling Israel to gather about the sanctuary specifically for the *mo‘adim*? Once more, we suggest that the goal of the tabernacle, in harmony with that of the cosmos, is portrayed symbolically in Leviticus 24:1–9. We have already noted the correspondences between the lamps of the menorah and those of the cosmos, along with the seventh day and the Sabbath *tamid*. In short, all the necessary elements of Genesis 1:1–2:3 are found in Leviticus 24:1–9 for the sake of presenting a cultic picture of Israel basking in the renewing light of God’s Sabbath day presence—a beautiful, theological symbol for the significance of the tabernacle cultus as it has unfolded in Leviticus. Just as the creation account narrates the founding of both cosmos and the Sabbath/sacred time, so Leviticus narrates the founding of the tabernacle and the Sabbath/sacred time. More importantly, the message of Leviticus is that the Sabbath/*mo‘adim* convocations with God for which the cosmos-as-temple had been created (but which had been frustrated through the latter’s defilement), may finally take place through Israel’s cult. The unfulfilled purpose for which the cosmos was created may now be realized through the tabernacle cultus of Israel. Inasmuch as Leviticus 23–25 describe festive pilgrimages to God’s house, along with the redemption and rest entailed in the jubilee legislation, these

<sup>38</sup> Timothy K. Hui, “The Purpose of Israel’s Annual Feasts,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 148, 151–54.

chapters form a fitting celebratory resolution, signaling what the tabernacle has become for Israel, a tent of meeting-with-God.

### c. Narrative Strategy

Our suggestion for the true resolution to the third section of Leviticus yields a narrative strategy similar to the one for the previous two sections. As already mentioned, these chapters are to be understood as a further answer to the original Nadab and Abihu crisis, in relation to the priestly duty of distinguishing between holy and profane (10:10). The arc from Leviticus 16 to chapters 23–25 contains the insertion of holiness legislation, which is appropriately contextualized by chapters 23–25 and their emphasis upon the Sabbath (and sanctuary). Bracketing the bulk of the book's third section, we find the following words repeated verbatim (Lev 19:30; 26:2), which link the Sabbath with the sanctuary:<sup>39</sup>

You will keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am YHWH.

The narrative logic of the inserted legislation becomes plain upon considering that Sabbath engagement with God in his sanctuary is not only the *goal* of holiness but also the regular *means* for Israel to become holy, as evident from Exodus 31:13:

Surely, my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am YHWH who sanctifies you.

God's presence in the tabernacle is the source of sanctification, while Israel's sacred calendar prescribes the occasions for entering his sanctifying presence. It is the light of YHWH's countenance that sanctifies, and this is experienced particularly on the Sabbath, the "sanctuary in time" and "the beachhead of holiness in the world."<sup>40</sup> Time was the first object of sanctification in Scripture and, indeed, marks the only use of the term "holy" (*qdash*, קדש) in Genesis (2:3),<sup>41</sup> because it is the time set apart for setting

<sup>39</sup> For more on this link, cf. Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1995), 10–19. Ruwe sees these bookends as establishing the basic two topics for this section of Leviticus: for chapters 17–22 it is the sanctuary; and for chapters 23–25 the Sabbath (Ruwe, "Heiligkeitsetz" und "Priesterschrift," 103–120). Nihan refers to the two coordinates of holiness, space and time (Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 478).

<sup>40</sup> Edwin Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24.82 (1999): 110.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), xvi–xvii.



humanity apart unto God. Understanding holiness from the angle of Israel's cult, "holy" means "belonging to God." Entering into the Sabbath regularly, Israel was steadily to grow in its calling of belonging to God. It is not incidental, then, that the third section of Leviticus parallels the emphasis upon time found in Genesis 1:1–2:3, as we have noted already.<sup>42</sup> Remarkably, the Day of Atonement, which opens with Aaron's being forbidden to enter the inner sanctum "at just any time" (v. 2), concludes with the book's first mention of the Sabbath (v. 31). After the holiness legislation (chs. 17–22), chapters 23–25 then mark a significant spike in the use of *shbth* (שבת, which occurs twenty-six times in these chapters). Since the Sabbath is the sign of Israel's covenant with God, and since like the cosmos the tabernacle cultus was established for Sabbath day engagement with God, it comes as no surprise that Leviticus 26 applies the covenant in terms of the Sabbath (*shbth* occurring nine times in this chapter).

#### d. Literary Structure and Theme of Leviticus

Our focus upon Leviticus 24:1–9 finds confirmation in the literary structure of the book.<sup>43</sup> Various scholars have noted that chapters 8–10, 16, and 24 of Leviticus relate and allude to one another self-consciously, a significant phenomenon for the book's structure. Christopher Smith points out, for example, that Leviticus 16 begins by alluding to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (10:1–3), and it also ends by indicating that the Sabbath legislation applies equally to both the native and the sojourner (16:29), which then forms part of the resolution to the blasphemer story (24:22).<sup>44</sup> Bibb notes the remarkable parallels between the blasphemer's execution and the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16, including the laying of hands on their heads and their bearing away iniquity.<sup>45</sup> Our approach, once more, requires a

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<sup>42</sup> Volker Wagner has also argued that chapters 23–25 deal with "sacred times"; Volker Wagner, "Zur Existenz des sogenannten 'Heiligkeitsetzes,'" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86.3 (2009): 314–15.

<sup>43</sup> For some of the issues involved with Leviticus 24 in relation to the book's structure, see John R. Master, "The Place of Chapter 24 in the Structure of the Book of Leviticus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 414–24.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus." Even if one disagrees with Smith's understanding that all three pericopes are "narratives" (i.e., including the Day of Atonement legislation), the point that there is intertextuality among chapters 8–10, 16, and 24:10–23 stands nevertheless.

<sup>45</sup> Bibb, "This Is the Thing That the Lord Commanded You to Do," 213–14; see also Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," 310. Taking Kamionkowski's previous analogy, we may posit that the blasphemer story entails an elimination rite for the community with respect to the name, whereas the Day of Atonement is an elimination rite for the community with respect to the sanctuary.

holistic reading of Leviticus 24 (vv. 10–23 read as an extension of vv. 1–9), as well as understanding Leviticus 24 as central to the concern of chapters 23 through 25. In fact, the connections with Leviticus 16 include prominent references in these chapters that frame Leviticus 24 (cf. Lev 23:26–32; 25:9).<sup>46</sup> Understanding Leviticus 24 as the climactic resolution to the book's third section (and, indeed, to the book itself), therefore, corresponds well with the structural significance of the narrative in 24:10–23, as noted by various scholars.<sup>47</sup>

In retrospect, we can see that each of the three movements of Leviticus culminates with a theophany that takes place within the context of worship, mapped on Israel's calendar, and within one of the three areas of sacred space so that the *entire* tabernacle complex is encompassed:<sup>48</sup> (1) on the tabernacle's inauguration upon the eighth day (of Nisan, New Year) in the courtyard, (2) on the Day of Atonement (the "Sabbath of Sabbaths") in the holy of holies, and (3) on the Sabbath regularly in the holy place. With this scheme in mind, the full significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 becomes apparent: it constitutes a *cultic* theophany within the holy place.

## Conclusion

The symbolic significance of Leviticus 24:1–9 for which we have argued, that it portrays the ideal of Israel basking in the light of YHWH's Sabbath presence, forms a fitting and climactic resolution to the book's thematic movement and literary strategy, also validating the chapter's structural significance. Whereas the book of Exodus ends with Israel's mediator being unable to enter the *'ohel mo'ed*, the book of Leviticus ends with a lengthy and festal portrayal of Israel's sacred assemblies at the sanctuary to commune and fellowship with God—it ends, in other words, with a fully functioning *'ohel mo'ed* in the life of Israel. While the book's first half establishes the regular cleansing and maintenance of God's house, the second half focuses upon how God's house will function as a meeting place with Israel—and this as the goal and means of Israel's holiness. One might therefore describe the movement of Leviticus justly as "from cult to community," or from the *mishkan* to the *'ohel mo'ed*.

<sup>46</sup> Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within Its Literary Context," 310.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195–217; Smith, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus"; Didier Luciani, *Sainteté et pardon*, vol. 1, *Structure littéraire du Lévitique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 98–305.

<sup>48</sup> Here, we are adjusting the proposal of Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, who suggests that Leviticus 26:12 recounts the third and final theophany.