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TOWARD A HOLISTIC BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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Few topics have held the interest of scholars and pastors alike more than worship. The interest seems justified given the centrality of the topic in Scripture and history. While a monolithic definition for worship remains elusive,¹ contemporary church voices confuse the matter further by conflating ideas like “praise and worship,” and reducing worship to music as a synonym. However, compartmentalizing Spirit-shaped living from the corporate and individual experiences of “worship” may eventually appear as the most damaging aspect of modern approaches to the topic. Here, I survey themes in Leviticus and Amos to extract core elements for Christian worship and to demonstrate the viable relationship between covenant worship and covenant ethics.²

Of the available definitions of worship, Miroslav Volf and D. A. Carson are closest to what I propose. Volf writes, “The sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of good works are two fundamental aspects of the Christian way of being-in-the-world. They are at the same time the two constitutive elements of Christian worship: authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.”³

¹See Ron Mann’s informative article that compiles a dizzying array of both scholarly and popular definitions of worship for the reader. Ron Mann, “Defining Our Terms,” *Worship Notes*, Vol. 3, no. 7 (2008). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwaanPllB9oEMDZXRXhxWUZ1V1U/edit>.

²Several scholars contend for the centrality of Leviticus in the Pentateuch, and, thus, the central theological element of the Pentateuch. For a helpful discussion on the structure of Leviticus, see L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23–37. Biblical scholars have further examined the macro-structural elements of Leviticus and come up with more than one arrangement. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (Anchor Bible Commentaries; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 27. For the purpose of this study, I will simply examine the book as to its two most obvious sections: chapters 1–16 and 17–26.

³Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic,

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Carson correctly orients Christian worship to the gospel of Jesus Christ, “which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and action.”⁴ Similarly, I suggest that Christian worship is a God-initiated composite of holistic attitudes and activities given to fallen but redeemed people that they may respond to the triune God for all that he is and does, continue to enjoy his presence, and be conformed in the world to his reality.⁵ Together, prophetic and cultic texts provide point-counterpoint material that richly informs our perception of what could be termed “holistic worship.”⁶ Such worship assumes the reality of the triune God as the center of all Scripture, who reveals himself, redeems and sustains his people, and reshapes their perception of the world to conform to his presence in it.

I. LEVITICUS: WORSHIP IS A RESPONSE TO GOD’S SELF REVELATION

“And He called to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him from the

1993), 207.

⁴D.A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 26.

⁵This thesis is similar to Beale’s “what people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration” in Greg Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 16.

⁶Divorcing the impulses of the cultic and prophetic literature has been a practice since Wellhausen but is unnecessary and harmful to the overall canonical reading of the Scriptures. Horst D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. II (The Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 210, helpfully contends that “[t]he prophetic contention with Israel’s religion “has nothing to do with the rejection of the cultus in principle ... but rather with a concrete criticism of a false cultus against which the prophets spoke and which they opposed because of its especially wrongly formed attitude toward its operations.” That Amos’s message is contiguous with Torah traditions appear in John Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos* (Old Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68, in which Barton states: “Amos takes it for granted that the people are familiar with the moral principles he accuses them of breaching. He also assumes that they recognize these principles to be divinely given.” Further, the book begins and ends with references to Exodus traditions (3:2; 9:7). Thus, Amos seems to be responding to Israel’s failure to observe a rich tradition and its legislation. See also the importance of Amos in this discussion in the history of biblical interpretation in M. Daniel Carroll R, *Amos—The Prophet and His Oracles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 4–11. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, first century Christians read these two texts together. In Acts 15:11–21, Luke combines the eschatological restoration promise of Amos 9:11-12 to describe the rebuilt booth of David as the multiethnic covenant community saved and united in the Spirit by the finished work of Jesus. He then follows up with practical instructions to facilitate fellowship between Jew and Gentile believers pervasively from the priestly tradition, if not from Leviticus in particular. John Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary; Nashville: B&H, 1992), 332, notes that all four of the “apostolic decrees” are found in Lev 17 and 18 as requirements expected of resident aliens: abstinence from pagan sacrifices (17:8), blood (17:10-14), strangled meat (17:13), and illicit sexual relationships (18:6-23).

tent of meeting” (Lev 1:1).

The opening line of Leviticus simultaneously connects it to the narrative of Exodus and contextualizes the entire book as divine revelation to Israel.⁷ Thus, both worship actions and attitudes in Leviticus apply to the covenant people alone. As the book develops, Moses unites the concepts of worship and ethics, suggesting that God intends proper worship to conform Israel to his reality in both liturgy and principle. That ethics and worship flow from theology is fundamental. Christopher Wright notes that “ethical issues are at every point related to God – to his character, his will, his actions and his purpose.”⁸ The same logic applies to worship. Therefore, reflecting on God in Leviticus precedes consideration of either worship acts or sacred ethics. While a full discussion on God in Leviticus exceeds the scope of this project, three characteristics of God integral to the book help clarify Christian worship: God is intentionally present with his people; he is creator King; and he is radically holy.

1. *God as Present in Israel's Midst.* A number of scholars assert the presence of God as key to the priestly theological enterprise.⁹ Morales demonstrated that Leviticus 9–10 and 16 both provided a portrait of the cultic creation and re-creation, and specifically “track[ed] the gradual abolishment of Israel’s distance from God in his *mishkan*” (9:23; 16:2).¹⁰ God’s presence in Leviticus was both daunting and liberating; it provided both threat to and purgation of sacred people and precincts alike. From Israel’s midst, God annually exiled sin through the work of his chosen mediator. Sacrifices and offerings

⁷For a clear discussion of the narrative context of Leviticus, see Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, chapters 1–2.

⁸Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 154 notes that this “angle” of Israelite culture is fundamental to all others.

⁹Michael Fishbane, “The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible,” in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum M. Glatzer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. M. Fishbane and P.R. Flohr; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 18, argued that the tabernacle, like Sinai, “concretizes sacred space as social space and gives expression to the cohesion and blessing of Israel around God’s presence.” See also J. Roth, “La tradition sacerdotale dans le Pentateuque,” *NRT* 80 (1967): 696–721; M. Saebo, “Priestertheologie und Priestereschrift: Zur Eigenart der priesterlichen Schicht im Pentateuch,” in *Congress Volume* (ed. J. A. Emerton; *VTSup* 32; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 357–74. Gerhard von Rad “The Tent and the Ark,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch* (trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken; London: SCM Press, 1931), insisted that the idea of YHWH’s indwelling presence is reminiscent of earlier traditions. However, the difficulty in determining which tradition was first and which became dominant is nearly impossible. Most recently is the very helpful work, cited in this project already, Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*

¹⁰Michael Morales, “A Theology of Leviticus,” *International Journal of Reformed Theology and Life*, vol 5.1 (April 2019), 113.

subjugated sin throughout the year at the Ark of the Covenant, mitigating covenant death and exile. Then, once a year on the Day of Atonement, God exiled their sin rather than them from the camp and into the wilderness (Lev 16). He did this to remain among them.

The presence of God also guaranteed covenant life to Israel, for whom the threat of death was a real and present danger. Milgrom maintained that issues of life and death informed Israel's ritual purity and impurity system and argued that ritual impurity was equivalent to death.¹¹ The chief causes of ritual impurity in Israel were genital discharges, corpses, skin disease, and menstrual blood. For Milgrom, these categories reflected the reality of death.¹² The loss of vaginal blood and semen represents the loss of life. Skin disease reflects a dead body still walking.¹³ The significance of a corpse needs no explanation. These common instances of impurity served as constant reminders of death. The rituals of Leviticus maintained the presence of God in Israel's midst in the face of death. God dwelt "in the midst of their uncleanness". To acknowledge, purge, and expel covenant-hostile pollution maintained God's presence, and animated covenant life for Israel. Thus, God's presence with his people, sustained by a God appointed-mediator executing a God-initiated purgation of sin that provides death-shattering life is a central tenant of Christian worship. The mundane frailties of life recall that death is always there. Yet, the presence of the living God likewise reminds the Christian that death never has the final word. This reality derives from the fact that the God present in Israel's midst is also the sovereign God of all creation.

2. *God as King of All Creation.* Scholars, convinced of the association between creation and cult, have appealed to the Sabbath as a clear connecting point between the two traditions. The Sabbath is the sign of God's power and provision on Israel's behalf. Blenkinsopp and Kearney both observed the heptadic structural parallels between Genesis 1:1–2:4 and Exodus 25–40.¹⁴ The heptadic, or Sabbatical

¹¹Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16, 46–48*, argued that the common experience of death informed all purity/impurity systems.

¹²For Milgrom's arguments, see *Leviticus 1–16*, 1000–4.

¹³In Num 12:12, Aaron prays for his sister that she "not be as a corpse." See also Num 19:14 for the similar contagious effects of scale disease and corpses.

¹⁴J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 375–86. Others, like Levinson and Geller, have contended that the Sabbath is the key to interpreting creation. See J. Levinson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*; S. A. Geller, "Blood Cult: Toward a

structure, appears in Leviticus as well. Gane noted the menorah contains seven lamps inherent with the evening and morning (Exod 25:37). Morales observed the relationship between the lampstand ritual and bread in the daily ritual, which focuses on the Sabbath in particular.¹⁵ He noticed that “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 and communion with God.”¹⁶ He further emphasized that the bread ritual in conjunction with the lampstand ritual provided the “ideal Sabbath.” The twelve loaves of bread, renewed in the light of the lampstands, represented “the twelve tribes of Israel basking in the divine light, being renewed in God's presence ... Sabbath by Sabbath” (Lev 24:8).¹⁷ He also asserted the “Sabbatical principle” united Leviticus 23 and 25. There are two Sabbaths detailed in chapter 25 (Lev 25:1–7; 8–22). In chapter 23, there are seven days of festivals, seven days of rest, and several festivals occurring in the seventh month. Every seven years was a sabbatical year, and the ultimate Sabbath occurred at the end of the seventh of the seven-year cycles.¹⁸ The Day of Atonement is called a “Sabbath of rest for you,” merging atonement for sin with divine repose for his people. The use of Sabbath links the Creation and Exodus traditions to the cult, exemplifying God's power and provision for his people (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 16:27–36; 20:8–11).

Scholars have also long noted the clear connection between the tabernacle/temple and the Garden of Eden.¹⁹ Wenham convincingly

Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch,” *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 97–124.

¹⁵Morales, “A Theology of Leviticus,” 105.

¹⁶Morales, “A Theology of Leviticus,” 105.

¹⁷Morales, “A Theology of Leviticus,” 105–6.

¹⁸See the reference to Vern Poythress in Morales, “A Theology of Leviticus,” 105–6.

¹⁹A standard mantra that characterizes the ancient Near East on this point is “a garden is a mountain is a tabernacle is a temple.” This discussion is indebted to the helpful article by Gordon Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (eds. Richard Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 34, also states that when man forfeited his priestly role, the guardianship of Eden transferred to the Cherubim. They were guardians of the heavenly temple (i.e., the upper register) and thus their transfer highlights the identity of Eden as an earthly reproduction of the heavenly temple. Greg Beale in multiple works, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place for God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004); *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), similarly asserts the connection between temple and creation. See also Daniel Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis* (eds. Daniel Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd;

contends that the Garden of Eden is an archetypal sanctuary, of which the tabernacle is a copy.²⁰ He offers several pieces of evidence to substantiate the plausibility of identifying Eden as a sanctuary. First, one likely entered the Garden of Eden from the east, as later sanctuaries, such as the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple.²¹ Second, the verb “to walk to and fro,” in Genesis 3:8, also occurs in Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 23:15, and 2 Samuel 7:6-7 to describe the activity of the priests. Third, Adam’s job in Eden was “to serve and guard”.²² The only other places these two verbs appear together are in the cultic passages concerning the Levites’ duty at the temple (Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6), leading Wenham to suggest that Adam was an archetypal Levite. Fourth, Wenham posits that clothing Adam and Eve with “tunics” paralleled Moses’ actions with the priesthood (Exod 28:41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev 8:13).²³ Fifth, the presence of trees in general and the tree of life in particular is significant.²⁴ Following Meyers, Wenham commends the menorah as an idealized tree of life in the core of the tabernacle. Sixth, significant is the mention of the “cherubim”, who stand guard at the east side of the Garden and prohibit access to the tree of life.²⁵ Cherubim appeared both on top of the Ark cover and embroidered on the screens of the tabernacle. Seventh, the appearance of precious jewels Genesis 1–2 bears cultic qualities.²⁶ Wenham contends that if Eden is a “super-sanctuary,” the

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013).

²⁰This description corresponds to the general phenomenological definitions applied to shrines. They function as the center, around which all the community was oriented. See the arrangements of the twelve tribes in Num 1:51–2:31; 9:15–23; Ezek 48:8-10. They acted as a meeting point between the heavenly and earthly registers. Pertinent to this idea is Lev 16:2 and 1 Kgs 8:30. The shrines mirrored the heavenly register on the earthly register (cf. Exod 25:40; Heb 9:24). Finally, the temple/tabernacle was the place of “immanent-transcendent presence.” See R. Averbeck, “vdqm,” in *NIDOTTE* (ed., William VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1080–81. All these images are useful in providing definition for the shrine in Leviticus.

²¹Gen 3:24 states that the path out of the garden was east.

²²Gen 2:15.

²³The need for covering also may have been a polemical idea in light of the Sumerian priesthood, who practiced their priestly duties naked.

²⁴Wenham references Carol Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976).

²⁵2 Kgs 6:23–28 records two cherubim guarding the inner sanctuary of Solomon’s temple. Pictures of the angelic host decorated the walls of the tabernacle and the temple (Exod 25:28–22; 26:31; 1 Kgs 6:29). In addition, in Akkadian, the *kuribu* also served as the guardians of holy places. Most significant for our discussion is the fact that two cherubim formed the throne of YHWH atop the ark in Exod 25:18–22.

²⁶See also D. Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1958), 29, who draws connections between the jewels and gold of Eden and the décor of the tabernacle and the high priestly vestments. See also Ezek 28:11-13 for garden references. For comment, see Daniel I.

mention of gold (2:12) is hardly surprising. Practically, everything was made of gold or covered with gold in the sanctuary (Exod 25:11, 17, 24, 29, 36). The precious stones bdellium and onyx are equally important (Gen 2:12). The other occurrence in the Torah of bdellium appears in Numbers 11:7, where the writer compared manna to it. Onyx is even more conspicuous. Its identity is relatively unknown. However, Israel used it extensively to decorate the tabernacle, temple, and the high priestly vestments (Exod 25:7; 28:9, 20; 1 Chr 29:2). The two stones that fit inside the ephod were also this type of stone (Exod 28:9–14).

Creation motifs portrayed the object of Israel's worship as the architect of the universe, and absolutely sovereign over all things temporal, material, and functional. Israel understood God to be sovereign over all that He created, sin as the vehicle by which the order of creation elevated itself over God and brought disorder, and sacrificial worship as the task of acknowledging and re-ordering creation *via* ritual.²⁷ It reiterates the reality that God created humans to enjoy his unique presence as God in all of creation. This characteristic provides a clear lens through which to view God as holy.

3. *God as Radically Holy.* God's holiness orients the book of Leviticus. It appears as an inherent characteristic, contrasting him to the gods of Egypt and Canaan (Lev 18:1–3). Covenant attachment to God demands that Israel also reflect this type of holiness (Lev 18–20). Rudolph Otto produced a provocative discussion on holiness.²⁸ He argued for five essential aspects of holiness, which he labels *numinous*: *tremendum*,²⁹ *majestas*,³⁰ *energicum*,³¹ *mysterium*,³² and *fascinans*.³³ A full discussion of Otto's categories surpasses the

Block, *Ezekiel 23–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²⁷See Frank Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

²⁸Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 9th ed. (trans. John W. Harvey; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928). Otto's thesis was antagonistic to his historical setting. He examined holiness as it applied to ancient Israel, early Christianity, Luther, primitive religion, and oriental religions. The reductionist notion that all religion was created by societies in order to cope with both social and psychological needs had carried the day before his work.

²⁹*Tremendum* is the awful element of divine power and wrath.

³⁰*Majestas* is the absolute unapproachability of the deity.

³¹*Energicum* is the deity's freedom, mobility, and vitality of movement. D. J. Hanél, *Die Religion der Heiligkeit* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931), 7, provided this nuance for Otto's categories.

³²*Mysterium* conveyed that the deity was wholly other, incommensurable, and beyond the transcendent.

³³*Fascinans* is the element of rapturous exaltation.

scope of this article. However, his *majestas* and *tremendum* provide an illustrative glimpse at the nature of God's holiness.³⁴ Intertwined in the *majestas* and *tremendum* of God is Leviticus' portrayal of God as radically autonomous from Israel. Block has illustrated the normal ancient Near Eastern triadic relationship among deity, land, and people.³⁵

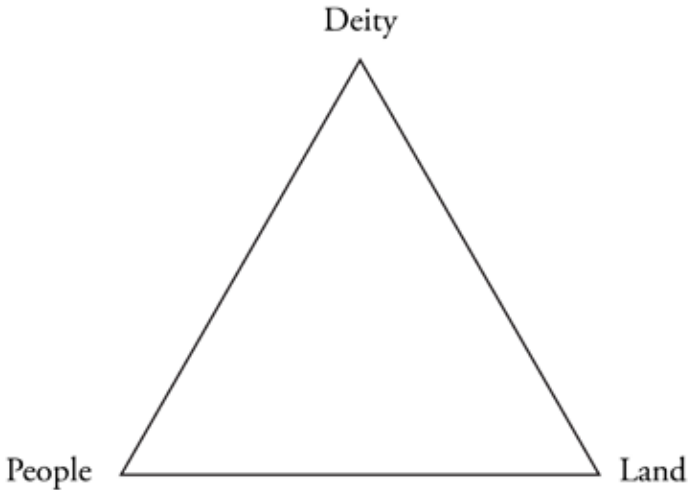


Figure 1. The Interrelationship among Deity, Land, and People

In the environment out of which the priestly vision of Leviticus grew, the notion of *interdependence* between deity, land, and worshipper was central. However, Leviticus conveys a deity that is untamable and without accountability – an idea that abandons the religious paradigm that controlled the ancient world.³⁶ The Nadab and Abihu

³⁴The concept of holiness does not parse off cleanly into Otto's groupings. There is some level of crossover between the categories.

³⁵Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), notes that the defining element of the ancient Near Eastern god-worshipper relationship was interdependence. The god defined its land and people; in turn, the people, their land and god; and the land its god and people. For an analysis of ancient Near Eastern national theology, see C. J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

³⁶W. G. Lambert, "Morals in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Ex Orient lux* 5 (1955–58): 184–196. Lambert contends that "the impression is gained that everyday religion [in Mesopotamia] was dominated by fear of evil powers and black magic rather than a positive worship of the gods ... the world was conceived to be full of evil demons ... if they had attacked, the right ritual should effect the cure" (194).

narrative illustrate this point well: “Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev 10:1–2). An Egyptian ritual provides some context for the brothers’ fatal cultic *faux pas*. Every morning in the ritual of Amun, the Egyptian priest approached his “holy of holies”³⁷ (*naos*) by burning incense. Blackman details the ritual:

His first act after entering the temple was to kindle a fire, a bow-drill being used for that purpose, or perhaps only a spindle and “hearth.” The priest then picked up the principle part of the censer, which was of metal, usually bronze, and in the form of an outstretched arm with the hand open palm upwards. Taking hold of the rest of the censer, the little brazier in which the incense was burned, he fixed it in its place, namely in the open hand, at the end of the arm. Having filled the brazier with burning charcoal from the fire that he had previously kindled, he set incense thereon, and, holding the smoking censer in one hand, proceeded to the sanctuary.³⁸

This common ritual in ancient Egypt assumed that the priest both awakened and revived the god. The activities of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 and the daily work of the Egyptian priest are comparable. Both bring censers, fill them with fire, place incense on the fire in their censers, and approach the sancta.³⁹ If Nadab and Abihu had the same intent as the Egyptian priest, it would provide a possible explanation for Moses’ initial remarks made to Aaron in Leviticus 10:3 that those who “drew near” to God, namely the priests, had to portray God as holy before Israel. In the context of Leviticus

³⁷A. Erman, *Handbook on Egyptian Religion* (Boston: Longwood, 1977), 46. Erman called this area the holy of holies, for this is where the god actually dwells.

³⁸Aylward M. Blackman, “Episodes in the Egyptian Daily Temple,” in *Gods, Priests, and Men* (Toronto: Kegan Paul, 1998), 235–36.

³⁹While there is no specific evidence that Nadab and Abihu were inside the holy of holies, it is certain they were not wandering away from the holy place.

10, holiness seems to refer primarily to the autonomy that is God's alone.⁴⁰ God was incomparable, and neither incense offerings nor the priesthood who offered them controlled or manipulated him. To treat God as a common deity interdependent upon his priesthood was an affront to his holiness. In Moses' mind, this scene in Lev 10:2 contextualizes the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). YHWH was not a common deity with whom one could trifle but was the holy God Israel could trust. The punctuation of the threat of Aaron's death coupled with his approach to the heart of the adytum demonstrated the necessary caution exercised by the high priest in the face of overwhelming power and possible wrath. Other elements of the Day of Atonement conveyed an awareness of God's holiness. The cloud functioned as the instrument that both housed God and shielded the high priest.⁴¹ The submission portrayed in the seven-fold sprinkling act assumed the vast inequity between the parties involved with this procedure. Israel stood as vassal and God as an undisputed Suzerain.⁴²

⁴⁰Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 605. Milgrom was correct in noting that the text set forth a polemic against foreign incense offerings. Whether they were already rampant throughout Israel is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the priests were not to perform any public or private rite that failed to distinguish YHWH as the one who brought Israel out of bondage and into covenant with himself. This tradition is not unique to Leviticus. See Exod 3:14; Isa 43:7; 62:3-5; Job 41:11; Ps 50:7-12; 90:2.

⁴¹The same divinely ordained protection shielded Moses in Exodus 34. Cf. also Exod 33:22-23 and Exod 34:5-7. for the relationship to YHWH appearing in a cloud form and setting forth perhaps the Torah's most essential definition of YHWH.

⁴²J. B. Pritchard, "EA, No.137" in *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 483. References to seven-fold acts of prostration in ancient Near Eastern literature tend to appear in political or biographical documents. The Amarna letters reveal an obvious seven-fold act of submission. In EA 137, the writer begins his request for troops as follows: "Rib-Ad[di spoke] to the king, [his Lord, the Sun-god of the lands.] Beneath the feet [of the king my lord,] seven times, and seven times [I fall]." See also *ANET*, 484, EA 147 is also demonstrative of the vassal/suzerain relationship. "To the king, my lord, my pantheon, my Sun-god say: thus, Abimilki, thy servant. Seven and seven times I fall at the feet of the king, my lord. I am the dirt under the feet of the king, my lord." The remainder of the introduction extols the majesty and dominion of Akhenaton. This type introduction appears throughout the letters, EA, 234, 244, 250, 254, 270, 271, 280, 286-290, 292, 297, 298, 320; RA, xix, .97; 106. All of the introductions emphasize the activity of prostration at the feet of the great king. Many include a desperate appeal of some type. Some appeal for troops, and others appeal for a fair hearing against an unjust accusation. Of the former No.137 states, "I have written repeatedly for [garrison troops] but they were not given." No. 287 states, "Let my king know that all the lands are at peace (but that) there is war against me. So let my king take care of his land." This letter, in particular, sets forth a number of difficulties for the king. See *ANET*, 488 n.18. This expression of submission and homage occurs at the heart of the internal blood rites of Leviticus 16. Aaron sprinkles blood from both purification offerings seven times before the *kapporet* and the Tent of Meeting. Each seven-fold act follows a single sprinkling act that serves as the principle purgative act. The seven-fold sprinkling of the purification offering may correspond to the seven-fold act of prostration and submission represented in the Amarna letters.

The vestments of the high priest emphasized not threat but covenant mercy. He was to appear on this day without any of the sacred paraphernalia that would cause God to remember Israel in covenant fidelity. He was both every Israelite and yet high priest, who was still in need of the alleviation of his own guilt. This day, while displaying threat, emphasized God's abundant mercy toward his people. It provided a landscape for Israel to demonstrate its confidence in God's unflinching covenant goodness, equally inherent within God's holiness.⁴³

Thus, Israel understood God to be holy, that is, entirely different from all of creation, including the gods of the nations, and available to them in mighty acts of redemption and offers of ongoing reconciliation. The God of Israel did not need a priest to vivify, feed, or care for him. He was the one who called everything, both visible and invisible, into existence by divine fiat and resided on the throne of the cosmos, yet graciously among his covenant people. His merciful deliverance of Israel from Egypt and his self-revelation in their midst undergirded every sacrifice, ritual, and offering. To approach him with any other intention was to deny his autonomy and holiness, and to forfeit the gracious benefits of his presence. The fact that God granted Aaron entrance into the holiest place at all was sheer mercy. God shared no obligation to any priest or people concerning his holy presence. That said, his presence in Israel realistically demanded a response. This response necessitated both acts and attitudes of worship from Israel. This God is the God to whom all Christian acts and attitudes of worship respond.

4. *Covenant Worship Necessitates Sacrifice.* The chasm between God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness necessitated the management of the latter by a sacrificial system that entailed both actions and attitudes.⁴⁴ The severity of the sacrifice, namely the destruction of life, conveyed the danger of the distance between God and Israel. The typical result of spilling sacrificial blood was "atonement." Von Rad believed the meaning of this Hebrew term to be elusive even if

⁴³It is possible but less convincing that Leviticus 16 sets forth God's *energicum* as well. The LORD chose to appear in a cloud of incense above the "atonement lid" or, more famously translated, "mercy seat" during the ritual. By moving into the tabernacle at the end of Leviticus 9, God's presence sanctified the tabernacle, altar, and priesthood, but more importantly, provided a tacit offer for Israel to reconcile themselves to him. Moses connected Leviticus 16 with what has gone before, namely Leviticus 10, Exodus 25–31, 35–40, and Exodus 32–34.

⁴⁴For fuller discussions on theology of sacrifice, see Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 122–27.

there was scholarly consensus on its translation.⁴⁵ However, there is a sense that the overall intent of each use, regardless of the individual results (ransom, purification, forgiveness), is reconciliation. Morales extends the idea, referencing atonement as a means to an end, namely, to dwell in the presence of God.⁴⁶

There are at least three pertinent points concerning Israel's constant need and use of sacrifice. First, Israel is sinful and, thus, in need of continual atonement. Leviticus provides weekly rituals such as the shewbread and lampstand that present Israel with eschatological hope for God's presence and their Sabbatical rest, as well as multiple feasts and festivals throughout the year, where Israel appeared before God to worship him for his goodness and power on their behalf. However, the hallmark of Leviticus' worship paradigm is the consistent offerings for sin, reparation, and atonement. According to McKenzie, "the cultus was the most normal and most frequent form of the Israelites' experience of God."⁴⁷ Rather than "save" anyone, sacrifices maintained a state of reconciliation and community between this unprecedented deity and his people. The sinfulness of Israel demanded both acknowledgment and exile of Israel's sin. If nothing occurred to remedy sin, then God would not remain in their midst. The sinner or the impure (whether ritually or morally) must be void of covenant community either temporarily or permanently (11–15, 18–20). Even the land responds to unrepentant sin (Lev 18, 26).

Second, genuine repentance was integral to sacrificial atonement in Leviticus. Repentance appeared in the vital act of imposing one's hand onto the sacrificial animal. The "hand imposition" rite concretized repentance and transferred the pollution of one's sin and guilt to the sacrificial animal. The slaughter of the animal and subsequent manipulation of its blood transferred the pollution to the sancta, where God subjugated it throughout the year.⁴⁸ The Day of

⁴⁵For a thorough discussion on the concept and history of interpretation of sacrifice and atonement, see James Greenberg, *A New Look at Atonement in Leviticus: The Meaning and Purpose of kippur Revisited* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement; State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020).

⁴⁶Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 124, examines Leviticus 9, where the specific order of the ritual, purification offering, "ascension" offering, and peace offering provides the paradigm through which he understands the theology of sacrifice in general.

⁴⁷McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, 32.

⁴⁸See Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *RB* 83 (1976): 390–99.

Atonement in Leviticus 16 provided the necessary ritual relief by inverting the normal ritual acts of hand imposition and sacrificial death. In a standard purification offering, the priest placed his hand on the sacrificial animal before its slaughter. However, in Leviticus 16, the high priest reverses the slaughter of the animal and the imposition of the hands, necessitating two animals instead of one.⁴⁹ This ritual requires the high priest slaughter the first goat as a regular purification offering, without the performance of the “hand imposition” rite, and take its untainted blood into sacred space for the only time during the year. The untainted blood absorbs the accumulated sin-pollution in the sancta as it does throughout the year at the altar. Then the high priest, bearing the sin, transgressions, and iniquity of Israel that he absorbed with the blood of the first goat imposes both of his hands on the living goat, vicariously repenting and confessing all of Israel’s sin-pollution, over the goat’s head, then exiles the goat.⁵⁰ Thus, integral to sacrifice in Israel is the worshipper’s repentance, concretely demonstrated by imposing the hand onto the animal’s head. This scenario provided the worshipper a vicarious substitute that would bear his/ her sin and guilt into the adytum and become the impetus for the resultant forgiveness or purification.⁵¹ Sinners who refused to repent, sinning with a “high hand” (cf. Num 15:30–31), which conveyed obstinacy, had no sacrifice to offer.

Third, sacrifice yielded forgiveness at times (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5). On other occasions, the ritual resulted in a purification that reconciled one to the community, God, or both (Lev 12:7, 8; 14:1–32). As mentioned above, the purifying work of sacrifice was central to the priestly work done in Leviticus 16, where sacrificial blood purified by absorbing accumulated sin-pollution. The high priest took

This brief discussion relies upon Noham Zohar, “Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of *Ḥaṭṭa’at* in the Pentateuch.” *JBL* 107 (1988): 609–18.

⁴⁹It is not unreasonable to understand two male goats as the ritual equivalent to one bull. In Lev 4, the male goat is one degree less valuable than the bull.

⁵⁰Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 258, 981; Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 75–84. Milgrom brilliantly conceptualized the priestly theology of sacrifice using the premise of the Oscar Wilde novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. The individual or worshipping community did not retain sin’s stain, but rather it was moved to the sanctuary, where annually it would be exiled. If they failed to view themselves as sinners, then the stain of their sin would settle back on them. My conclusions follow his.

⁵¹Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 128. See also Edmund Leach, ‘The Logic of Sacrifice,’ in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, IRT 8 (ed. B. Lang; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 145; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 77–80.

uncontaminated (without hand imposition) blood into the holy of holies and worked his way outward, sprinkling all the major cultic furniture on the way. This compilation of ritual acts purged the whole tabernacle area of Israel's accumulated sin-pollution that has resided there throughout the year. In this way, the annual ritual achieves its claim in Leviticus 16:30: "On this day atonement will be made for you." The purgation of sacred space resulted in the purgation of sacred people. The whole purpose of the sacrificial system was to maintain the presence of God in the midst of Israel by realistically assessing and reconciling with God. Thus, Israel's worship necessitated an inherent honesty and vulnerability before God and one another. Forgiveness and restoration rested on the humble worshippers who acknowledged their sin's severity and openly abandoned it. However, authentic worship also had another sanctifying element to it. Consistent confrontation with and worship of the living God of Israel and all creation should change them into a community congruent with the reality of such a God.

5. *Holiness as the Necessary Ethic in Israel.*⁵² Milgrom noted that both halves of Leviticus form a continuum.⁵³ The sacrificial system (Lev 1–16), coupled with instructions on holiness (17–26), provided a beautiful picture of redemption from sin and a perpetual dependence on God. The latter part of the continuum necessitates serious consideration.

The King of creation who is holy and present among Israel both logically demands and engineers an appropriate God-directed response from his people, whether in war, worship, economics, or the judicial system.⁵⁴ Because God is holy and Israel is his elect, they likewise should be holy (Lev 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7–8, 26; 21:6, 15, 23; 22:9). God's presence in Israel's midst resulted in a personal and systemic ethical structure, providing the means by which Israel continues to relate to Him uniquely (Lev 10:3; 18:2, 6; 19:4, 25; 20:24; 22:2; 23:43; 26:1). Israel ideally imaged the holiness of their

⁵²This section relies in terms of organization on Mooney, "Leviticus," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Some of the material also appears in Mooney, "Leviticus," in *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About* (ed. Jason S. DeRouchie; Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013), 102–121.

⁵³Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 27.

⁵⁴Morales, "A Theology of Leviticus," 117. God's presence in the tabernacle is the source of sanctification, while Israel's sacred calendar prescribes the occasions for entering his sanctifying presence.

God holistically and systemically. The concept of holiness here has both breadth and depth. It concerns almost every part of the personal and communal life of Israel. They refrained from eating the blood of sacrifice, positioning themselves as sovereign over life and death (Lev 17:10ff). They held a high standard concerning sexual ethics (Lev 18:6–23; 19:20–21; 20:10–21), reverence for parents and the elderly (Lev 19:3, 32), and proper treatment of the poor (Lev 19:9–10; 25:25–28, 29–34, 35–55). Israel also observed the correct protocol for peace offerings (Lev 19:5–8) and Sabbath-keeping (Lev 19:3; 26:2). Israel could neither oppress the vulnerable (Lev 19:13–14, 35–36) nor the sojourner (Lev 19:10, 33–34). Equally prohibited were cult prostitution (Lev 19:29–30), child sacrifice (Lev 20:1–5), and sorcery (Lev 19:31; 20:6–9, 27). Sexual violation of the powerless (Lev 19:20–21) and bowing before a powerless idol were proscribed (Lev 19:4; 26:1).

Thus far in our consideration, genuine worship orients the worshiper to God, who subverts the prevailing cultural theo-narratives. All other deities are adaptations to our reality and simply embody an exalted sense of humanness that expresses itself in conventional ways. Worship before the God who is both independent of his people yet condescends to them has no parallel in the ancient Near East. Thus, worshiping him precludes the worshiper's tendency toward enculturating God – “communizing” him into just another deity. Further, worship reengineers horizontal relationships within the covenant. When Israel loses its grip on these realities and presumes upon or redefines the God of all creation, who is inherently holy, it becomes evident in how they both worship and live.

The common compartmentalization that separates worship and ethics today does not appear in the book of Leviticus. Neither did later prophetic writers understand the idea of a covenant worshiper void of covenant ethics (Isa 1:11–14; 40:16; 66:3; Jer 6:20; 7:21–23; 14:12; Hos 6:6; 8:13; Amos 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8). Due to injustice, marginalization of the poor, and spilled innocent blood throughout the latter prophets, God refused to receive worship from his people. No book more concisely and clearly demonstrates this reality than Amos.

II. AMOS: LOSS OF HOLISTIC WORSHIP

The OT historian portrays religion in the Northern Kingdom as a state-sponsored entity rooted in Jeroboam's self-serving cult and continuing as the *status quo* throughout the history of the northern monarchy.⁵⁵ Initially, Israel was a tribal federation formed in covenant with God based upon his promises to the Patriarchs and its unprecedented liberation of the nation from Egypt. John Bright notes that Israel's early life was not ideal, but "her social structure had been a unified one without class distinctions, in which the basis of all social obligation was Yahweh's Covenant and in which all controversies were adjudicated by Covenant law."⁵⁶ According to 1 Kings 12:25-33, Jeroboam oriented all of Israel's life around the goal of securing his administration over against a possible mass exodus back to Jerusalem. Every king thereafter furthered this sin and continued the state policy of governing without the instituted prophetic voice resulting in sole obligation to the monarch. Bright argues that singular obligation to the state, clear economic growth patterns, and the absorption of numerous Canaanites whose background was feudal, yielded the current privileged class oriented around the monarch, which weakened, if not altogether destroyed, tribal solidarity and covenant orientation. Thus, those holding to historic covenantal values, ambitions, hopes, and legal tenants would indeed have experienced marginalization. While covenant law and commitments all significantly diminished, Yahwism remained the national religion in the eighth century and Israel's worship appeared divided along socioeconomic lines that were often predatory. This reality, so distant from the holistic vision of Leviticus, emerged from a composite of actions and attitudes in worship that often portrayed no knowledge of the holy Creator King who sat enthroned above the cherubim in Israel's midst.

1. *God in Amos.* God appears in two ways in Amos: Israel's perception and God's perception mediated through the prophet. Israel's state-sponsored religion reduced God – untamable and free Creator of all things, both transcendent yet profoundly immanent – to a common deity that corresponded with state values, ambitions, and ethics. Thus, the composite of attitudes and actions that comprised

⁵⁵The historian describes subsequent kings walking in the way of Jeroboam," or the "sin/s of Jeroboam". See 1 Kings 15:30, 34; 16:2, 19, 26, 31; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28.

⁵⁶John Bright, *History of Israel* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2000), 260.

worship derived not from a self-revealing God but from a state-sponsored social abstraction without virtue or independence. This new source crafted a community that clung to and institutionalized its sin rather than exiled it. Their continued activity coupled with a lack of covenant ethics betrayed the assumption of God's presence; a theme that appears throughout prophetic texts (Isa 1:10–18; Jer 7:4; Ezek 10:1–22). The assumption seems to derive from a misplaced emphasis concerning Israel's election coupled with a misunderstanding of God's ethnocentric commitments to Israel. By Amos's day, "YHWH may thus be called the national god, just as Chemosh was the god of Moab or Qaus the god of Edom."⁵⁷

Contributing to this atrophied view of God is the clear sense of ethno-nationalism in their anticipation of the "Day of the Lord." Barton surveys the two main classical interpretations of the Day of the Lord: Mowinckel's cultic explanation and von Rad's military explanation.⁵⁸ He summarizes that regardless of the dissimilarities of these explanations both indicate God would urgently act on world affairs in the surrounding nations and that this action would be to the benefit and glory of Israel.⁵⁹ Amos presents a day that includes Israel as an object of divine derision along with the nations. Israel's current form of nationalism generated presumptions about God that provided a clear context for indictment concerning motifs from prophetic, exodus, and creation traditions. As mentioned above, one's view of God creates a consistent approach to worship. The eighth century northern kingdom reduced the idea of the holy creator king in Israel's midst down to a cultural abstraction, void of any significance independent of the state.

In the face of such a withered perception of God, Amos introduces a renewed vision of something very old. Israel is familiar with significant themes central to our above discussion on Leviticus. They are cognizant of the historical reality of the liberation from Egypt and the literary context of worship in Leviticus:

- "it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the

⁵⁷Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos*, 54.

⁵⁸See Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos*, 62–64.

⁵⁹Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos*, 64–65.

land of the Amorite” (Amos 2:10)

- “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2)
- “Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?” (Amos 9:7)

These references assume a certain amount of knowledge of the Exodus tradition, which the prophet used to correct the understanding of God that his audience held. The Exodus tradition texts combined with the international scope of the oracles against the nations provide a clear indication that Israel still perceived God to operate outside of the boundaries of the land. It was normal for deities in the ancient world to pass judgment on surrounding nations. However, Amos reports God’s judgement on nations in proximity to Israel that are not in conflict with Israel (1:1–2:5).⁶⁰ Amos also points to creation themes. God is the creator and sovereign over all things (4:13). This statement contextualizes the covenant curses towards Israel. God created Pleiades and Orion, governs time, and nurtures the earth (5:8–9). He can cause the sun to prematurely darken, turn feasts into times of mourning, and engineer a famine for the word of God throughout the land (8:9–11).⁶¹ Amos portrayed God as sovereign over life and death and omnipresent in Sheol, heaven, Mt. Carmel, and the bottom of the ocean (9:24). Earlier in the same chapter, God’s sovereignty over all the earth appears in the allusions to both exodus and creation themes. God is sovereign over the Nile, touches the earth and causes it to melt, and controls chaos, exemplified in the waters of the earth (9:5–6). Unless Israel has some idea of God as international monarch, the use of these comments as foundational for reproach would have been nonsensical. While Amos’s audience retained these traditions in their cultural memory, they understood them in a diminished form. This unfortunate reality appeared most notably in Israel’s worship. The loss of the unique and powerful reality of the one true God in the hearts of worshipping Israel lies at the heart of all worship gone wrong.

2. *Worship in Amos’s Context.* Amos exposed Israel's religious

⁶⁰The bulk of judgment applies to military crimes perpetuated against one another.

⁶¹See Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 45, for the connection between feasts and creation.

life as a thinly veiled amplification of the state. The focal point of the prophet's indictment is the people's ethics rather than their worship methods. However, that Israel was both familiar with and callous to the priestly tradition appears obvious. They make Nazirites drink wine, for instance (2:12). Divine condemnation applies to the worshippers' approach to categories in Leviticus, namely feasts, assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings (5:21–22).⁶² Given the clear organization of these sacrifices, the writer denounces the entire usage of the Levitical sacrificial system due to the lack of its necessary variable of systemic holiness.

Opposite of the ideal in Leviticus, Amos depicted their sacred space as barren social wildernesses; "the mountains of Samaria," have "tumults within her" and "the oppressed in her midst." Instead of places of equanimity, forgiveness, and atonement, these spaces embody hypocritical indulgence. Those affiliated with the "altars of Bethel," who own both "winter house and summer house and houses of ivory and great houses" (3:14–15), engage in "feasts," "solemn assemblies," and "offer songs," and "sacrifices," all of which God denounced through Amos (5:21–23).⁶³ Concerning the "altars at Bethel," Paul observes that the altar had a dual function. It served as asylum for whomever grasped the horns, protecting them from punishment (Exod 21:13–14; 1 Kings 1:50; 2:8). It was also the place of blood atonement for the people. The destruction of the altar and its horns symbolizes the end of the sanctuary, the end of immunity, and the end of atonement for the people.⁶⁴ Paul comments:

Ritual per say, with all its paraphernalia and panoply, simply cannot substitute for the basic moral and ethical actions of humans. When these are lacking, religious

⁶²That this list is referencing Leviticus seems obvious since it follows the order of sacrifices in Leviticus: burnt offerings (1:1–17), grain offerings (2:1–16), and peace offerings (3:1–17).

⁶³Bethel was one of the two religious shrines set up to insulate Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12:28–33; 33:1–2. It functions also as a cultic center in Hosea (4:15; 10:5, 8, 15; 12:5), and appears throughout Amos (4:4; 5: 5, 6; 7:10, 13). Shalom M. Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 124, suggests that it also seems to function as a royal sanctuary without Amos telling us what he believes that to be (7:13). Paul further observes the extreme similarities and expressions in Hebrew between Exodus 32:34 and Amos 3:14. He also makes the connection between the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 and the threat level against Bethel. This connection could further extend to Leviticus 16, which has a distinct terminological connection to Exodus 32.

⁶⁴Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, 124.

life, with all its ritual accoutrements, becomes a sham. What is required above all else is justice and righteousness. The proper human relationship is based upon the correct human to human relationship.⁶⁵

I would argue that this both represents the limitations of ritual and misdiagnoses the core problem. The point in all the prophets is not to elevate human-to-human relationships but to see them as directed byproducts of confronting and being confronted by God, who demands a new type of human-to-human relationship, a new vision of society.

The most unambiguous expression of the conflation of Israel's cultic and sociopolitical identities is the confrontation between Amos and the high priest Amaziah (7:10–17).⁶⁶ Amaziah consults with Jeroboam II concerning the possible political fallout from Amos's preaching (Amos 7:10). "Amos has conspired against you," and "The land is unable to bear his words," contributes to a clear covenantal focus for both Amos's preaching and Amaziah's concerns. Amaziah publicly admonishes Amos to "flee away to the land of Judah (7:12) ... and never again prophesy at Bethel for it is the *king's sanctuary*, and it is a *temple of the kingdom*." Mosaic legislation demands that the king write his own copy of the Torah specifically to avoid lifting his heart above his brothers (Deut 17:14–20). The opposite impulse is now a reality. The Torah does not rule and shape the king, but the king rules and shapes the Torah.⁶⁷ The religion of Israel, initially an authentically original and living idea, now merely functions as a baptized puppet of the state. This reality appears obvious as the high priest even forgets to mention God's name, the deity who resides enthroned at the temple. Given the holistic nature of Israelite reality,

⁶⁵Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, 193.

⁶⁶Göran Eidervall, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 389, states that the main theological point made by Amos 7:10–17 in conjunction with the vision reports could be formulated as follows: rejection of the prophetic word makes forgiveness unthinkable.

⁶⁷For my purposes, it is obvious that the prophetic writer provides ample indictment for the North by highlighting the prostitutionary nature of Israel's current religious state. More importantly, this is a common ANE religious hierarchy. Due to the lifeless nature of the gods of the nations, religious truth embedded itself into conventional institutions like family, military, and political structures. This scenario portrays the Northern Kingdom as distant from its heritage, which was a tribal federation organized around the covenant of promise and the worship of YHWH. They are now an entity oriented around a monarch and everything attached to that monarch.

this type of worship had deleterious effects upon the worshipper. Carroll contends that holiness and impurity embodies “wholeness and meaning in a cosmic order,” and thus provides perspective on Amos’s possible interaction with Leviticus. Anthropologically, as Carroll argues, God is creator King of the cosmos, the point of orientation around which everything finds its order, systematizing Israelite reality. Thus, properly exercised ritual restores and rejuvenates life but ritual immorally executed in Amos’s day produces disorder and death.⁶⁸ Practically speaking, one’s perception of God would direct one toward ways in which to interact and adore him, which would construct a culture characterized by life or death in both ritual and social spheres. This truth provides the landscape on which Amos portrays the worshipping community in eighth century Israel.

3. *The Worshipper in Amos’s Context.* Amos portrays a divided society, which included a property-owning, economically self-sufficient upper class who lived at the expense of the marginalized. They lived functionally opposed to holiness as illustrated in Leviticus. The coexistence of covenant injustice and religious formalities exposed an idolatrous tendency toward the state that robbed worship of its meaning and provided a startling and contrasting vision of life for his audience. God will now treat Israel as it functions, namely as a common ancient Near Eastern people. This impulse appears immediately in the book. After lulling his listeners with clear punitive adjudications on the surrounding nations (1:2–2:5),⁶⁹ Amos concluded these oracles with Israel’s inclusion.⁷⁰ Barton helpfully explains

⁶⁸See Carroll, *Amos in Context*, 122–125. For the roots of Carroll’s thoughts, see also Mary Douglas, “The Abomination in Leviticus,” in *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966).

⁶⁹Barton states that the oracles against the nations function to “startle his hearers by suddenly turning on them. After lulling them into a false sense of their own security by denouncing their neighbors.” See Barton *Amos’s Oracles Against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1:3–2:5* (SOTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 38. The oracles against the nations are written from the perspective of the Israelite strophe as their intensification, 20. The purpose according to Fritz was possibly to warn Judah of impending divine judgement by explaining and justifying the demise of its rival to the north. See Fritz, “Die Fremdvolkersprüche des Amos,” *VT* 37; 26–38, 1987: 37–38. However, it seems that the oracles against the nations formula applied to Israel justifies the destruction of the north in a similar tone as Hosea, which exposes Israel’s infidelity and thus its similarity to the nations.

⁷⁰This rhetorical device intensified the message to the north by startling them into the reality that they had become to God as the nations they deplored. Jeremiah, *Amos*, 15–20, provides three formal devices within the framework, which demonstrate this point. (18–22) 1. The numerical formula, which only finds its completion in the Israelite strophe, where there are four actual sins, enumerated. All the other nations are content with less. 2. The negative formula of irrevocability

the scene: “The audience has to be imagined applauding after each oracle against a foreign nation, beginning with Aram, which the Israelite army had only recently defeated in order to win back two towns in Transjordan (Amos 6:13). This is the kind of thing an audience would expect from a prophet.”⁷¹ Israel’s subsequent insertion with Aram and company must have been shocking. Paul notes that Israel is not indicted for crimes committed as a consequence of military belligerency as were the four nations or for idolatry as was Judah, but “for transgressions committed within the social sphere. Israel’s guilt lies within the domain of the every day oppressive behavior of its citizens toward one another.”⁷² The message seems clear: Israel had institutionalized common cultural impulses including subordination of the deity to the state, which resulted in a classist imperialism that dissolved the very heart of the covenant relationship.

Amos describes the ruling class in the eighth-century Northern Kingdom as powerful and oppressive. He calls them the “swift,” the “strong,” the “mighty,” the “one who handles the bow,” who is “swift of foot,” “who rides the horse,” and the “stout of heart among the mighty.” These epithets may indicate a possible attempt at a military aristocracy included in the ruling element in Israel. He refers to the wealthy women of the social class as “cows of Bashan” who, from the vantage point of the temple (mountain of Samaria), “oppress the poor, crush the needy, rule their husbands” (4:1–2), and refuse to return to God regardless of his goodness and discipline toward them (4:6–11).

Like their perception of God, Israel expressed a diminished perception of covenant institutions like justice (holiness) and worship. Blatant discrepancies abounded in the administration of justice since only full citizens could sit and speak in their cases; slaves, foreigners, orphans, and widows had no one to uphold their just claims.⁷³ Rather than embody holiness and establish justice at the gate, Israel sought to thwart it (5:14–15). The “strong” in 5:9 “hate those who reprove at

excludes even prophetic intercession, which would have been an option prior to exile according to Jeremiah. 3. The concept of “guilt” Hebrew *pesba* is frequently a political category referring to revolts against or apostasy from a superior entity. The term appears in a metaphorical sense and is designed primarily for Israel (4:4; 5:12).

⁷¹Barton, *Amos’s Oracles Against the Nations*, 56.

⁷²Paul, *Amos*, 76.

⁷³Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II, 135.

the gate” and “abhor him who speaks the truth” (5:10). They trample and exact taxes of grain from the poor. They have built houses indicating they have taken land and planted pleasant vineyards for themselves, directly violating the egalitarian land tenure central to the life and covenant community between Israel and God. Owning and operating the judiciary, they afflict the righteous, take bribes, and “[run] aside the needy at the gate.”⁷⁴ They trample on the needy and “bring the poor of the land to an end” (8:4).

While civic in its expression, the social situation in Amos exposed a covenantal consciousness, exemplified by the ruling class’s disdain for faithful adjudicators at the gate and systemic efforts to impoverish a collection of marginalized peoples.⁷⁵ These situations contribute to a proper understanding of the marginalized in Amos: “poor,” “needy,” and “righteous.” Simply put, the poor are not righteous because they are poor, but the righteous are poor because they are righteous. Amos described the oppressed class in the inaugural indictment consistent with this covenantal paradigm (2:6–8). Eidevall argues that unlike other traditions that were ambivalent to economic infrastructure, “... prophetic writers give attention to the anomalous situations *in which the wicked were wealthy, and the righteous were poor.*”⁷⁶ He translates “the righteous poor” in Amos 2:6–8, as a select group that had become the objects of debt slavery (Exod 21:2; Lev 25:39; Deut 15:11).⁷⁷ Jeremias asserts that the sale here has little to nothing to do with any real-life situation that may engineer independence and domestic security, but seems to be a third-party acquisition for profit

⁷⁴Paul, *Amos*, 170–171. The “gate” was the place where legal hearings took place and where justice was administered. He also notes that the gate seems to be a cultural idea as well with examples appearing in both Ugaritic and Mesopotamian cultures. Amos’s crowd hated the arbiter at the gate for the same reason in Isaiah 29:21. M. Seidel notes a collocation of terms in Isaiah and Amos on this matter (M. Seidel, “Four Prophets who Prophesied at the Same Time,” in *Higre Mikra* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1978), 195–238 (Hebrew). For the central role of the *shaar* “gate” in legal proceedings, see L. Koehler, *Hebrew Man* (trans. P. Ackroyd; London: Akademie Verlag, 1956), 149–151. See Deut 21:19–20; 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1–3; Lam 5:14; for corruption of justice at the gate, see Prov 22:22.

⁷⁵The situation described here by Amos seems contrary to the understandable but indemonstrable assumptions of the Social Justice Movement, namely that the poor are righteous because they are poor. This project understands that the poor are not righteous because they are poor, but the righteous are poor because they are righteous.

⁷⁶Eidevall, *Amos*, 310.

⁷⁷Jeremias, *Amos*, 308. Earlier the institution itself was designed to keep body and soul together for a hopelessly impoverished person and to provide a manner in which a person might create an independent existence.

alone.⁷⁸ While there would always be poor among the Israelites (Deut 15:11), originally inter-covenantal servitude was intended to alleviate the pain of poverty within Israel and elevate the possibility of dignity.⁷⁹ Amos's hearers denied any impulses toward the dignity of those within the covenant who were outside of the existent advantageous feudal parameters.

That Amos's hearers have a certain impoverished capacity for covenant religion appears often. They wait for the end of religious holidays, for which they presumably stall their social hypocrisy only to re-engage with corrupt business and legal practices leveled at enriching the king's class and draining the poor classes (8:4–6). They are those who swear by the guilt of Samaria via “Dan” and “Beersheba” (8:14). They have successfully profaned Israel's religious life, compartmentalizing its expression and sanctifying affects from socioeconomic ethics.⁸⁰ The process of recrafting the covenant to sustain political identity engineered another god altogether. This deity was common, not holy, and therefore had no compelling power to engineer holiness to the covenant people. Amos 5:23–24 exposes the religion of Israel's inextricable relationship with covenantal justice.⁸¹ The prophet indicts those who “turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the Earth” (5:7). Further, he follows his condemnation of those who unfaithfully practice orthodox worship activities with the refrain, “Let justice roll down like waters; righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:23–24). This demand calls Israel back to their national identity (Gen 18:19). Read in conjunction with Leviticus, one sees a decisive departure from holiness

⁷⁸Jeremias, *Amos*, 309.

⁷⁹Impoverishment was no doubt the most common route to total loss of property - first land, then clothing from one's back, then one's own body. Torah legislation precluded all three acts and redress through the courts were available to citizens. See Eidevall, *Amos*, 308.

⁸⁰See a similar divine disposition toward Judah in Isa 1, 58; Jer 7, 22; Micah 6.

⁸¹All the prophetic texts applied by social justice proponents in a civic way are specifically covenantal in the Old Testament (Isa 1, 58; Jer 22; Amos 5; Micah 6). Unless one adapts a hermeneutical angle similar to Christopher Wright's *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, who applies his “social angle” directly to societies outside of Israel, the decision to use these texts civically seems arbitrary. Concerning the ubiquitous nature of justice throughout the Old Testament, Knierim states in *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 54, “The concern for justice pervades the entire Old Testament. It is found in the historical, legal, prophetic, and wisdom literature, and in the Psalms as well. It is found throughout the entire history of the Old Testament literature...The evidence shows that the concern for justice was one, if not the central, factor by which ancient Israel's multifaceted societal life was united throughout its historical changes...No sphere of Israel's life was exempt from concern for justice, and the LORD was known to be at work in all its spheres.”

given the attention to marginalized people concerning agricultural, business, and judiciary ethics.⁸² We would contend that holiness and justice correlate easily with one another. Justice is a primary aspect of holiness. Aside from the textual description of holiness from Leviticus 19, which entailed both individual and systemic justice categories, Wright describes holiness in a manner that allows justice to cohere to holiness:

Holiness is thus a very comprehensive concept indeed. It is, really, not so much a religious aspiration, or even just a moral code. Holiness is rather a way of being: a way of being with God in covenant relationship, a way of being like God in clean and wholesome living, a way of being God's people in the midst of an unholy and unclean world. Preserving that holy cleanness among God's people – ritually, morally, physically, socially, symbolically – is the primary thrust of the laws in the book of Leviticus.⁸³

While Amos lacks appropriate cultic vocabulary, his directives concerning justice certainly fall under the auspices of the social vision of holiness found in Leviticus. Injustice expressed in the context of covenant violates the very heart of holiness, which, at a systemic level, deconstructed many of the common realities of ancient Near Eastern religion and culture and produced a vibrant community living in the reality of an unprecedented deity.

There are two clear points of interest concerning worship for the prophet. First, Amos labors to distinguish God from the sacred precincts of Israel. He indicts the entirety of the cultic system early on: “come to Bethel and sin” (4:4–5). He further adjures Israel to seek him [“Me”] and live. The only place the prophet accuses Israel of worshipping other deities takes place after his most prominent call to covenant ethics over against the seemingly orthodox practice of Israelite religion (5:23–24). Amos admonishes the northern kingdom to take up Sikkuth and Kiyyun, their king and star god respectively, and go into exile with them (5:26–27). God will render the songs of

⁸²See the above discussion on holiness as an ethic in Leviticus.

⁸³Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 128.

the temple into wailing, which is how they more than likely sound to him. Death will occupy the sacred precincts (8:3).

III. TOWARD A HOLISTIC BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Leviticus and Amos provide the Christian material to contemplate worship. Christian worship demands responding to God as he has revealed himself to fallen but redeemed humanity. Leviticus presented the triune God as Creator in residence among his people. He is holy; he is radically autonomous, dangerous but liberating, on an entirely different order than his people, yet close to them. Through mediation and atonement, he provides forgiveness, restoration, and a way that his people can know that he is present and will remain present with them. His holiness portrays him as profoundly subversive among the gods, whether priestly or political. The triune God shares no parity with his people; yet loves and changes them. Understanding God as an expression of political or ethnocentric identity tends to have a starting point, where the reality of God eventually becomes a liability rather than an asset. That decision, while framed in covenantal categories betrays itself in acts of worship and the absence of the sanctifying power of worship.

Christian worship demands both attitudes and actions toward God that tend toward sanctifying the worshipper. To worship the living God engineers a tangible counter narrative – holiness applied – to all common cultural narratives. The holiness of Israel is due to attachment. Outside of attachment, there is no inclination toward holiness, but there is a collective response to manufacture something like it. By the time Amos arrives, there had been hundreds of years of state-sponsored religion in the Northern Kingdom. The object of worship is not recognizable and thus neither is the attachment-induced ethic of holiness. They attempt in vain to veil themselves with a deliberate but useless religiosity. Yet, pervading Israel are the marginalized righteous-poor, who are functionally void of covenant status. They are crushed, trampled upon in court, turned aside at the gate, and objectified by the same people who offer the offerings and attend the feasts prescribed for them in Leviticus. There is no evidence that an idea of holiness remains. However, the hope of Amos is why we worship. God would and did rebuild the tent of David,

and the nations and Israel experience it together (Amos 9:11–12; cf. Acts 15:14–20).⁸⁴ This restoration allows us to examine, amidst canonical tensions, Scripture's testimony to the holy God who forgives, restores, and calls his rebellious people to know and worship him. It further reiterates the sanctifying reality that those who cling to God as he has revealed himself at creation, the temple, the cross, the tomb, and resurrected in the church as the holy creator King in the midst of his people, are patiently being changed by God's spirit, sanctifying them according to God's divine purpose for their lives.



⁸⁴Luke seems to marry Amos and Leviticus in this passage, where he references that the nations who are now in the covenant should follow Mosaic legislation reminiscent of Leviticus 17–20.