

## Dissertation Summary

# THE PERSUASIVE INTENT OF THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS<sup>1</sup>

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Although Pentateuchal scholarship has tended to approach Leviticus as two corpora in order to explore the historical situation behind each source, recent studies have explored the literary artistry and rhetoric of Leviticus. However, very little argument has been articulated about how Leviticus is rhetoric. To address this lacuna, this thesis demonstrates how a rhetorical strategy shapes Leviticus's arrangement to achieve a particular effect. To this end, this study adopts a four-step rhetorical-critical framework for the overarching argument.

The first step is to identify the nature of the exigency within the Pentateuch's literary setting that motivated YHWH to communicate with Moses from the tent of meeting in Leviticus 1:1-2, which this study terms the 'persuasive situation'. A heightened tension can be observed in Exodus 40 as YHWH's glory fills the tabernacle; how will YHWH live in the midst of his covenant people who have displayed a propensity to break faith with him and for YHWH not to consume them? The separation between Moses and YHWH, as Moses is left standing outside of the tabernacle, unable to enter, escalates this tension. As YHWH calls to Moses from the tent of meeting at the beginning of the book of Leviticus, the following communication events address the problem of this exigency. Thus the book of Leviticus functions between Exodus and Numbers to enable YHWH to

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine M. Smith, 'The Persuasive Intent of the Book of Leviticus' (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity College Bristol/University of Bristol, 2018). Supervisors Professor Gordon Wenham and Professor Gordon McConville.

dwell among his covenant people whilst not abhorring them (Lev. 26:11-12).

To demonstrate how Leviticus addresses this exigency within its persuasive situation, the third step of the rhetorical-critical framework analyses how Leviticus as the sum of P and H is arranged to achieve a particular effect that modifies the exigency. Before this can occur, though, a second step is necessary to delimit Leviticus as a rhetorical unit. Using insights from information structures and cognitive linguistics, I argue that it is feasible to approach Leviticus as a coherent and discrete unit within the context of the Pentateuch and, furthermore, that the global scheme of Leviticus's macrostructure has fifteen episodes (Lev. 1-7; 8-10; 11; 12; 13-14; 15; 16; 17-21; 22:1-16; 22:17-33; 23:1-44; 24:1-9; 24:10-23; 25-26; 27).

Having established the macrostructure of Leviticus's arrangement, the third step of the rhetorical-critical framework examines its rhetorical strategy. In summary, this study argues that Leviticus 1-7 establishes how the Israelite community, both people and priesthood, is to approach YHWH in relational order and, when that order is threatened by offence, to restore relationship (Lev. 1-5; 7:22-36). Leviticus 8-10 then inaugurates YHWH's cultic provision for his presence to reside amongst his people. In doing so, Leviticus 8-10 juxtaposes YHWH being sanctified by the priesthood by their obedience, with YHWH ensuring that he is both sanctified and glorified when there is priestly failure. The consequence when YHWH is sanctified by the priesthood is that the people's lives are preserved with a visible display of YHWH's glory; the gifts are consumed and the people live. The consequence, though, when YHWH sanctifies himself is death. The articulation of the principle in 10:3 – 'By those who approach me I will be sanctified and before all the people I will be glorified' – functions as an explanation of Leviticus 8-10 and also encompasses the instructions in Leviticus 1-7.

Following Leviticus 8-10, Leviticus 11, 12, 13-14, and 15 teach the distinction between the pure and the impure and motivate Israel to separate themselves from contagion, since the consequence of being in an impure condition is exclusion from the holy. Yet this exclusion is not permanent. However, Leviticus 15 warns about the consequence of failing to separate Israel from the nation's impurity, which is permanent exclusion from YHWH's presence. The reason for this consequence is established in the conceptual basis of Leviticus 1-16,

which is that Israel's covenant God is present in his sanctuary in their midst. If the priesthood allows Israel to persist in their impurities, then YHWH will act to sanctify himself – the nation will die. Leviticus 16 resolves this problem for the first generation at Sinai (vv. 1-28) and then for future generations when there is national obedience (vv. 29-34). By future generations undertaking the Day of Atonement instructions in obedience to command, as per the example of Aaron, both the tabernacle and nation are restored to a condition of order and purity and so act to sanctify YHWH in their midst.

So far, the episodes within Leviticus 1–16 have focused upon how YHWH is to be sanctified and glorified by priests and people within the ritual domain of YHWH's tabernacle in the midst of the camp. Leviticus 17–21 extends this concern to the ethical and ritual domains within the land. While the priesthood is not precluded from the instructions addressed to the sons of Israel in Leviticus 18–20, 21:1-15 and 21:16-23 address the priesthood directly to motivate them to embody their holy status and so dissuade them from profaning YHWH's sanctuary. Relating to this topic, 22:1-16 continues to address the priesthood and seeks to dissuade them from profaning the food gifts set apart to YHWH. This is the intent, too, of the following episode in 22:17-33, but this time directed to the Israelite community who are to offer gifts that are acceptable before YHWH and so not profane his name. In this context, the paraenesis in 22:32 extends the principle of 10:3 to the people: YHWH is to be sanctified in the midst of the sons of Israel. This then forms the basis of Leviticus 23, where the Israelites are instructed to declare YHWH's holy festal days.

Leviticus 24:1-9 makes explicit what has been implied since Leviticus 17: Israel is to acknowledge YHWH's permanent presence amongst his people. The juxtaposition between narrative and instruction that follows in 24:10-23 then exemplifies how Israel is to ensure that YHWH is sanctified when offence profanes YHWH's name (10:3; 22:32b). Israel is to ensure that the cause of impurity, irrespective of whether the offender is Israelite or resident foreigner, is removed from the nation. Through Israel's obedience, Israel ensures that YHWH is sanctified and glorified. If 24:1-9 explicates the permanent presence of YHWH amongst his covenant nation, then Leviticus 25–26 evinces the conceptual basis of how the paradigm of the camp extends to Israel in the land. Both land and people belong to YHWH their covenant God and thus the consequence is that if YHWH

is to dwell in the midst of his people and not abhor them then Israel is to walk in his statutes in obedience. The warning if they do not act to sanctify YHWH in their midst is that YHWH will act to sanctify himself by enacting the covenant curses. Leviticus 27 brings the arrangement to a fitting conclusion: Israel is to give to YHWH all that belongs to him and an implied consequence after Leviticus 25–26 is that this includes the whole nation as YHWH’s servants who belong to him.

Therefore, through the sequential connectedness of Leviticus’s global schema, YHWH instructs both priesthood and nation about how he is to be sanctified by those who approach him and glorified in Israel’s midst (10:3; 22:32b). Thus, the fourth and final step in this study’s rhetorical–critical framework is assessing how Leviticus addresses the persuasive situation’s exigency. Each episode in Leviticus’s arrangement instructs about a particular dimension for how the Israelite community – people and priesthood – are to ensure YHWH is both sanctified and glorified. This meets the exigency of the persuasive situation since it is by these means that Israel’s life will be preserved with YHWH dwelling in their midst both in their camp and in the future as they reside in the land as YHWH’s servants.