

Structure, Rhetoric, and Application: Modern Approaches to the Book of Leviticus

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The ancient, priestly texts of Leviticus have not always been among the most popular of the books of the Bible. At times, however, these texts attracted renewed attention, scholarly as well as spiritually. This volume offers three peer-reviewed papers, each of which sheds new light on important matters in Leviticus. Together, the authors of this volume demonstrate how an arsenal of modern exegetical and hermeneutical tools help to analyze and appreciate the old priestly texts, even as we enter the 2020s.

The first paper, written by Paul Hocking, explores the neat structure of the festival calendar of Leviticus 23. In the paper, he sets out to demonstrate how repetitions are not dull but are rhetorical devices intentionally deployed by the author to structure the text. In fact, it is argued that the repetitions suggest a two-dimensional reading of the text, and that the message of the text is rightly appreciated by taking heed of this textual “weave”.

In the second paper, Geoffrey Harper ponders the question on how to read and apply the food laws of Leviticus 11. As a background, historical Christian appropriations of the text are presented to demonstrate how Christian traditions often ended in a so-called separation hermeneutics, where the ritual texts were effectively seen as obsolete for Christian life. In his attempt to reading Leviticus 11 as genuine Christian Scripture, Harper employs modern tools of speech act theory and intertextuality to explore the illocutions performed by the food laws by means of their allusions to creation and fall in Genesis 1–3. It is argued that some of these illocutions persist even in the New Testament, while other illocutions are supervened.

David Instone-Brower, in the last paper of this volume, explores the law of Leviticus 20:13 which has traditionally been interpreted as a general condemnation of any kind of homoerotic activity. The challenge offered by the Hebrew of this verse is that two different words for “man” or “male” are used, namely *'ish* and *zakar*. In his paper, Instone-Brower inquires whether these two terms are synonymous or refer to two different types of men. Moreover, in order to track the historical development of the text and the general Biblical use of these lexemes, diachronic and synchronic approaches are employed. Finally, the vast body of Akkadian literature is explored in order to interpret the verse in its ancient Near Eastern context.