MARK A. AWABDY

Green Eggs and Shawarma: Reinterpreting the Bible, Reforming Mission, with Leviticus’ ’ה as a Test Case

Abstract

This article encourages Christians to revisit and reinterpret the Bible in order to more faithfully align with God’s mission in the world. As a test case, the article reinterprets the socio-religious status of the “non-indigenous resident” (נער) in Leviticus and concludes with some possibilities for reforming mission theology and praxis. The first section of the article reviews the conventional interpretation of Leviticus’ ה in Leviticus and the socio-religious status of the נער in Leviticus was bound in covenant to Yahweh, yet free to practice some foreign customs and practices. To argue for this, the article reconsiders the intent of the Holiness Code’s ה injunctions; reinterprets three pertinent laws; and identifies an important contextual limiting factor in Lev 18-20. In the conclusion, the author offers three ways this fresh understanding of ה in Leviticus intersects with, and may serve to reform, present cross-cultural witness to the Gospel.

Keywords: Cross-cultural mission, Leviticus, “non-indigenous resident” (נער), reinterpretation, reformation, covenant, socio-religious status

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"The Church reformed, and always reforming according to the Word of God" (ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei). What might this Protestant Reformation mantra mean for the Church of Jesus Christ today? Here is one response among many. The Church is called to reread and reapply Scripture in light of God’s historic and present activity in the world, thereby jettisoning unfruitful readings while advancing and recontextualizing fruitful ones. That is to say, the Church, Majority World (Southern) and Minority (Western) constituents together, must subject its traditions to rigorous, prayerful reconsideration in order to expose deficiencies in theology and praxis. Every valid biblical reinterpretation must be done in the context of Christian community (with historic and contemporary interlocutors) and should result in a more faithful alignment with God’s mission expressed in the biblical narrative.

This means that both eminent missional texts and motifs must be reconsidered, and overlooked ones, restored. To illustrate the value of the latter – restoring overlooked expressions of mission in the Bible – I turn our attention to the book of Leviticus. Lawson G. Stone’s forthcoming article exposes one underappreciated aspect of mission in Leviticus, namely, that of stewarding Yahweh’s creation: “The presence of Yahweh in his sanctuary, in his land, among his people confers a sacred obligation for its care.”1

There is another missional impulse in Leviticus, oft-bypassed by readers, and it centers on the injunctions to protect and provide for the “non-indigenous resident” (singular: יֹודֵעַ; plural: יֹודֵעִים), often translated “(resident) alien.”2 “Israel did not just live in the midst of the nations; the people of the world were also right in her midst.”3 Arguably the יֹודֵעַ has always been allowed to enter covenant with Yahweh by being incorporated into Israel.4 Some would contest this understanding since “texts where captives, slaves, and strangers (יָדְעוֹן) [and to a lesser degree, ‘strangers’ (יָדְעִים) and ‘foreigners’ (יֹודֵעִים)] are integrated into Israel present us not with mission but with the normal process of assimilation. Mission implies a community’s conviction of responsibility toward the rest of humankind.”5 However, the biblical portrait of the יֹודֵעַ is unlike the rest of these identities.6 A strong case can be made for the Old Testament’s centrifetal (attracting others), not centrifugal (going to others),7 mission to the יֹודֵעַ in Exodus (i.e., 12:48-49), Numbers (i.e., 15:13-16), and Deuteronomy (i.e., 16:10-15). That is to say, Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy do not envision, much less exhort, Israelites to travel across national borders to spread Yahwism, but they do integrate non-indigenous residents into Yahweh worship within the cultic community. Can such a case be made for Leviticus, too?

Several indispensible monographs devoted to mission in the OT overlook the יֹודֵעַ altogether,8 or mention the יֹודֵעַ in a few cursory paragraphs,9 often without reference to Leviticus.10 Furthermore, conventional
scholarship has not provided an adequate conception of Leviticus’ נַע, and therefore biblical reinterpretation is needed before we may begin to construct a “הַמָּשֶׁדֶל” from Leviticus. In the scope of this article I offer a reinterpretation of the socio-religious status of the נַע in Leviticus and then conclude with some possibilities for reforming mission theology and praxis.

**Conventional Interpretation of the נַע in Leviticus**

A person belonging to the נַע class in the OT has been defined as one “who (alone or with his family) leaves village and tribe because of war, famine, epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter and residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed” (e.g. 2 Sam 4:3; Is 16:4, Ruth 1:1). This definition may be generally true, but the identity of the נַע class in the OT varies and is contextually informed by each of its literary environments: the so-called Holiness Code (HC; Lev 17-26[27]), Covenant Code (CC; Exod 20-23), Deuteronomic Code (DC, Deut 12-26), and non-legal texts. Rather than interpreting the term etymologically, or constructing an all-inclusive definition (i.e., the above definition), over the last two centuries scholars have attempted to understand the נַע through syntactical and socio-historical analyses of its various OT corpora.

Even with these advances, the research to date has not adequately explained the socio-religious status of the נַע in the Holiness Code (HC) of Leviticus 17-26, a corpus that contains, together with the genetically related chapter 16, all of Leviticus’ injunctions concerning the נַע. The historical referent of the HC’s נַע is debatable because it is largely contingent on one’s dating schema. Most would concur that “the נַע stood as a listening member, that is, he was in a relationship with the entire religious community, but each one [נַע] in this relationship was marked by strangeness, that is, the נַע was of modest origin outside Judah” (translation mine). Similarly, the נַע in HC “designates a religious type of non-Israelite origin, i.e., a foreigner who seeks integration in the religious community of Israel.”

What is controversial is the extent to which the נַע of the HC was integrated into Israel’s religious community. Source critics in the nineteenth century who dated P (of which HC was believed to be a part) to the postexilic era equated HC’s נַע with “proselytes” to Judaism in the Second Temple period (cf. Septuagint: προσήλυτος). However, if we accept that the HC had a pre-exilic provenance, then “proselyte” is anachronism.

If נַע were not proselytes in the Second Temple sense, to what extent were they integrated into Israel’s social and cultic congregation? José Ramírez Kidd and Jan Joosten assert, respectively:

These laws attempted to prevent the defilement of the land in a time when concern for sanctity and cultic purity of the
congregation was particularly important, and their observance was a *condicio sine qua non* for the admission of the ה and his coexistence “in Israel.”

As a resident alien, he is a free agent and nobody’s charge. The law therefore seeks to protect him from oppression and recommends him to the goodwill of the Israelites. His freedom is real: the ה may retain his foreign culture and religion with its practices, though he would be welcome to participate in the Israelite religion with its practices. In any case, however, he should observe the apodictic prohibitions for fear of defiling the land and the sanctuary, the earthly dwelling of YHWH among his people.

Indeed the HC is concerned that Israelites and בֵּית הָאָדָמָה maintain the purity of the land. Yahweh’s people are to be holy (i.e., 19:2; cf. 22:32-33 where Yahweh will make them holy). Yahweh’s land is sacred (chs. 18, 20) since he owns the land (25:2, 23), will dwell in it (26:11) and will walk among his people if they keep covenant (26:12). Consequently, the ה injunctions must be understood pragmatically as a means of preventing community and land defilement.

Yet, against Joosten, how can the ה retain all facets of “his foreign culture and religion with its practices” without defiling the land? Joosten footnotes Gordon Wenham as support, but Wenham’s language is qualified and actually substantiates my thesis: “That the law finds it necessary to specify that certain rules did apply to sojourners seems to imply that in some matters resident aliens were allowed to preserve their traditional customs” (italics mine). Does the HC grant בֵּית הָאָדָמָה unmitigated religious liberty, or were they bound to Yahweh, yet free to practice some of their foreign customs and practices? I argue the latter by: reconsidering the intent of the HC’s ה injunctions; reinterpreting three pertinent laws; and identifying a contextual limiting factor in Lev 18-20.

The Intent of the ה Injunctions in the HC

In the OT the verbal form ה “to sojourn” often expresses residence outside of Israel (e.g., Gen 12:10; Ruth 1:1, Ps 120:5; Ezra 1:4; Lam 4:15), whereas the nominal cognate ה predominantly indicates a non-indigenous, usually non-Israelite, resident in Israel. In the HC בֵּית הָאָדָמָה are regularly paired with native Israelites, namely, the: ה- “native” (16:29; 17:15; 18:26; 19:34; 23:42; 24:16; 24:22); ה הָאָדָמָה “Israelites” (17:13; 20:2); or ה הָאָדָמָה “[from] the house of Israel” (17:8, 10; 22:18). Two verses provide rationale for this egalitarian coupling of the ה with the native; Lev 19:34 and 24:22, respectively:
The non-indigenous resident [הmaids] who resides [הmaids] with you shall be as the native [הmaids] among you, and you shall love him [לה微量元素] as yourself for you were non-indigenous residents [טפרים] in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

There shall be one standard for you all [לשב], whether for the non-indigenous resident [הmaids] or the native [בידיה], for I am Yahweh your God.

Both close with the null-copular clause “I am Yahweh your God” which is one form of the first member of the so-called covenant formula, featured in the HC with both members in 26:12: “And I will be your God, and you will be my people.”[26] Even if the 2mp enclitic pronoun “your God” (אליהם) refers only to native Israelites in 19:34, the same cannot be said for 24:22 since here the proximate statement “there shall be one standard for you all” expressly refers to native Israelite and יהו constituents, and therefore both are implied in Yahweh’s pronouncement: “I am Yahweh your God.” In Leviticus יהו were, as far as Yahweh was concerned, integrated members of his covenant people.

Like the CC and the DC, the HC contains יהו legislation concerned with protecting the יהו (i.e., Lev 19:10, 34; 23:22). The HC is unique in that it also couples the native with the יהו to sanction “matters of holiness”: [27]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HC יהו law</th>
<th>Prescription</th>
<th>Sanction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:8</td>
<td>The bringing of a sacrifice</td>
<td>יהו form (&quot;he shall be cut off from his people&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:10</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>יהו form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:12</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>יהו form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:13</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>יהו form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:15</td>
<td>Eating “carcass” (בבלות)</td>
<td>יהו נפשו form (&quot;he shall bear his guilt&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:26</td>
<td>Sexual relations</td>
<td>יהו form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 20:2</td>
<td>Molech worship</td>
<td>יהו מת form (&quot;he shall surely be put to death&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 24:16</td>
<td>Blasphemy</td>
<td>יהו מת form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 24:22</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>יהו מת form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the יהו had the potential to be “cut off from his people” (italics mine; 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26) - “his people” referring most plausibly to the Israelite people - he must have been meaningfully integrated into the covenant community (contra the יהו “foreigner” who is not subject to
these laws). Furthermore, these prescriptions are not merely mechanisms for preserving the land’s holiness, but covenant markers, distinguishing Yahweh’s people socio-religiously from the customs and rituals of other Near Eastern societies. That the הָאָמָה was included in these prescriptions (notably 17:15; cf. Deut 14:21), and held accountable to these sanctions without impunity, indicates the הָאָמָה participated with native Israelites in imitating Yahweh’s holiness (19:2). This calling was reserved for only those in covenant relationship to Yahweh.

Three Laws of Particular Interest
Joosten presents three laws as evidence that the הָאָמָה did not enter into covenant with Yahweh: Lev 17:3; 23:42-43; and 24:15-16. We first reconsider Lev 24:15-16:

You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “If anyone curses his G/god [יְהֹוָה] then he will bear his sin. So the one who blasphemes Yahweh’s name shall surely be put to death; all the assembly, whether the resident non-Israelite or the native, when he blasphemes the name, shall be put to death” (translation mine).

Joosten claims that “...the legal casuistics stated in v. 15-16 are carefully nuanced: if someone — presumably a non-Israelite — curses his (own) god(s), he will merely ‘bear his sin,’ but if anybody, resident alien or Israelite, curses the name of YHWH, he will be put to death. ”29 This is a fascinating, but unsupported, reading of “his god” (יהוה).

Most significantly, 24:15-16 cannot be divorced from its context. The prescription and sanction of 24:15-16 is Yahweh’s response to the incident in 24:9-12 of the man (a הָאָמָה cf. 24:11) who “blasphemed the Name and cursed” (24:11). The verbs in 24:11 are synthetically parallel, that is, “and cursed” (לְבָטָלָה) provides a related, but distinct nuance to “blasphemed the Name” (רָשָׁא לְבָטָלָה). The implication is that in both v. 11 and vv. 15-16 the God of Israel, whose name is Yahweh, was the object of verbal abuse (or verbal stoning; thus, death by stoning fulfills lex talionis30). Contextually, then, Joosten is not justified in reading לְבָטָלָה as the foreign deity of the הָאָמָה. Rather, Yahweh “uses the pronominal suffix to indicate that it is the person’s personal God.”31 Accordingly, “he will bear his sin” (נשא יְהֹוָה) in v. 15 is not a lesser punishment for a separate violation, but is elucidated by the parallel sanction in v. 16 “shall surely be put to death.” In this reading, the הָאָמָה is not portrayed as retaining foreign (local or national) deities, but is defined, with the Israelite community, in relation to “his God,” namely, Yahweh.32
The next text germane to our discussion is Lev 17:3-4, which reads:

Any man from the house of Israel [יהוה ישראל] who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat inside the camp or who slaughters outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to Yahweh, before Yahweh’s Tabernacle, bloodguilt shall be [imputed] to that man (translation mine).

Since the pattern in chapter 17 (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15) has been to include the ה in the sacrificial prescriptions, the Septuagint converted “of the house of Israel” (יוֹ raided הָיוֹ צְיָסָלָה) to “of the sons of Israel” in order to add: “or of resident non-Israelites who resides among you.” If the MT is original, does Lev 17:3 omit the ה by accident? This is possible. More likely a distinction is being made, as Joosten correctly observes:

The MT rules that, to the Israelites, all slaughter of domestic animals is forbidden except as ה [a peace offering] at the tent of meeting (17:3, 4). However, this rule does not apply to the resident alien, which implies that to them profane slaughter is permitted (though it is not encouraged).34

He interprets this omission of the ה as evidence that the ה was religiously free,35 but there is an alternative. Lev 17:3-4 in no way indicates ה were prohibited from presenting their domestic animal sacrifices to Yahweh (note: 17:8-11 and 22:18). Since ה are not mentioned in 17:3-4, the implication is that they were granted the prerogative to perform profane slaughter of domestic animals. The very ה protected by Lev 19 from the poverty and disenfranchisement to which they were predisposed, are once again protected, this time by their prerogative to immediate slaughter and consumption of their domestic livestock. As covenant members, ה were permitted to sacrifice their animals to Yahweh (17:8-11, 22:18; cf. Num 15:13-16); but as those susceptible to food paucity, ה were not required to complete this time-consuming sacrificial process before eating their meat.

The final law of concern to our study is Lev 23:42-43, which reads:

You shall live in booths for seven days. All the native Israelites [הַנַּחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל] shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the sons of Israel [יִשְׂרָאֵל] live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God (translation mine).

Joosten’s observation and rationale here are both accurate:

One could say the non-mention of the ה is emphatic: he is not obliged to dwell in booths. .. The dwelling in booths makes sense only for the Israelites, whose forefathers took
part in the Exodus; the resident alien is not required to participate in the celebration of Israel’s past.36

Milgrom notes, “Everywhere else in H, the הָלָה ‘the Israelite’ is equated with the הָל ‘the resident alien’ (16:29; 17:15; 18:26; 19:34; 24:16, 22; Exod 12:19, 48, 49; Num 9:14; 15:13, 29, 30) as well as elsewhere (Josh 8:33; Ezek 47:22). Rather than allow for this sole exception, many critics insert the הָל.”37 Why, then, would the הָל be excluded in Lev 23:42-43 from celebrating the Festival of Booths? Joosten answers perceptively: “The dwelling in booths makes sense only for the Israelites, whose forefathers took part in the Exodus.” Although the הָל was not obliged to dwell in booths, as one in covenant with Yahweh the הָל might choose to dwell in booths, to celebrate Yahweh’s redemption of the native Israelites. Similarly, in Exod 12:48-49 Yahweh insists the הָל “shall be like the native of the land” (יוֹהָנָהָנָה הָלָה הָלָהָנָהָנָה) insofar as the הָל and all his male children were circumcised and privileged to celebrate Passover, another festival that commemorated the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.38

A Contextual Limiting Factor in Lev 18-20

The so-called Holiness Code (HC) of Leviticus 17-26 extends holiness to the land and daily life of Yahweh’s people, not least because Yahweh’s presence was not confined to his sanctum (as in Lev 9-10; 16:2). If the Israelites obeyed the terms of the covenant, Yahweh promised them, “I will walk among you” (26:12).39 In Lev 18:24-28 the inhabitants of Canaan were said to have defiled themselves and the land, and as a result, the personified land vomited them out. The Israelite community must itself be careful to observe Yahweh’s commandments “lest the land vomit you out when you defile it” (18:28; cf. 26:33, 38, 45). By way of inclusio with ch.18, framing chapter 19, Lev 20:23 states, “You shall not follow the customs of the nation which I am about to drive out before you, for they did all these things. Thus, I abhorred them” (translation mine). In contrast to this prohibition, throughout Lev 18-20 are favorable injunctions related to another subclass of non-indigenous persons, namely, בָּלָה. A literary case can be made for reading the הָל “non-indigenous resident” dialectically with the בָּל “nation(s).” Consider this brief survey.

In 18:26 the הָל is expressly included with the “native” (יהוּדָה) as those who are to avoid the sexual perversities that characterize the “nations” (יִבְרָה; 18:24-25). The aforementioned inclusio of 18-20 reflects this structure.40

Lev 18  Sexual relationships and the pollution of the land
Lev 19  A tōrā for the holy community (see 19:2)
Lev 20  Sexual relationships and pollution of the land
Chapter 19 contains four injunctions to protect the vulnerable בָּנָי (vv. 10, 33, 34 [2x]), and these injunctions are antithetical to the manner in which Israel was to regard Canaan’s defiled land and inhabitants. In Lev 20:2 both the “Israelites” (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the are prohibited from sacrificing offspring to Molech, and in 20:23 Molech infanticide is in view (along with predominantly sexual sins) when Yahweh commands “you shall not follow the customs of the nation [הָאֲנָשָׁה].”

Therefore, two subsets of the “foreign” class, גֹּרים (non-indigenous residents) and גּוֹרים (nations), are diametrically opposed in Lev 18-20. The בָּנָי is one who remains in the land, whereas the nations are vomited out. Certain customs of the בָּנָי, we may infer, were permitted, but the customs of the nations abhorred. The בָּנָי was to be cultically and ethnically holy, representing, with native Israelites, Yahweh’s holiness, but the nations were emblematic of ethical profanity.

Conclusions: Reinterpretation for Reformation

You have probably been wondering what the main title of this article, “Green Eggs and Shawarma,” has anything to do with the article itself! For many readers, myself included, Dr. Seuss’ classic story has preconditioned us to expect Green Eggs and Ham. When we read Shawarma instead of Ham, our expectations are unmet, and we mentally search for the meaning of the new phrase. Before understanding new phrase as a whole, some may first need to learn that Shawarma is rotisserie broiled or grilled lamb, goat, chicken, turkey, beef, or a mixture of these. Yet, for many Middle Eastern readers – with some Europeans and North Africans – their cuisine, not Dr. Seuss’ tale, has preconditioned them to expect Red Eggs and Shawarma (not Green Eggs and Ham). They may not know about Sam-I-Am, but they certainly know about Shawarma, and they love hard-boiled eggs soaked in pickled beet juice.31 Here is the analogy. Just as we have been predisposed toward a particular reading of “Green Eggs and Shawarma,” so also conventional biblical interpretations and our own cultural lenses have predisposed us toward certain readings of Scripture. While many historic interpretations of Scripture must be embraced and guarded, some must be reexamined and reinterpreted.

With a number of indispensable, missiology monographs available today, many of which are firmly grounded biblically and theologically (see footnote 3), is there really any need to revisit the Bible to reform our mission theology and praxis? The answer is a resounding yes! We are indebted, for example, to OT exegetes, missiologists and cross-cultural Christians who have revisited the Bible and have cogently shown God’s mission to the world is a thoroughly Old Testament vision (not conceived by Jesus and the early Church). In this article I hope I have raised awareness, at least minimally, that further biblical
reinterpretation is needed. To show this, I provided a test case: a reinterpretation of Leviticus’ יָוָהוֹ “non-indigenous resident” to function as a rubric for reforming our missiology.

Recent scholarship has helpfully defined the יָוָהוֹ as a non-indigenous resident among the Israelites (perhaps including Northern Kingdom immigrants to Judah after 722 BC). However, against conventional interpretation, Leviticus does not portray the יָוָהוֹ as religiously neutral, but as one governed by covenant with Yahweh, and by implication as one required to relinquish allegiances to other deities. The יָוָהוֹ was a cultic participant and was accountable to preserve the purity of Yahweh’s land, temple, and people as a holy dwelling for Yahweh’s presence. On the one hand, the יָוָהוֹ bound himself to Yahweh and experienced coextensive membership in Israel’s religious community. On the other hand, the יָוָהוֹ was unbound with respect to his ethnicity: he was not, and would never be, considered indigenous to the region or to the Israelite community. This means the יָוָהוֹ called Yahweh “his God” (יהוהי), and was therefore obliged to uphold the sanctity of his God’s reputation. It also appears to mean the יָוָהוֹ was free to celebrate Israel’s redemptive history, but not required to. It is plausible, if not probable, that the יָוָהוֹ was free to retain his custom of non-sacred slaughter of domestic animals as a means of circumventing hunger. That the יָוָהוֹ had bound himself in covenant relationship to Yahweh is enforced by chs. 18-20 where compassion toward non-indigenous residents (יַהַגִּירָה) is contrasted with abhorrence for the customs of the nations (יהודה).

Finally, and most importantly, can this reinterpretation of the יָוָהוֹ in Leviticus aid us in reforming our missiology? With prayer and sensitivity, we may appropriate Leviticus’ יָוָהוֹ laws because there are contemporary “יָוָהוֹ” counterparts and because the God of Israel is the God of the Church of Jesus Christ. Christopher Wright reminds us:

we ourselves, like every generation of Christians, standing as we do between Pentecost and the Parousia, are a part of the story-line. We stand in organic spiritual continuity with the biblical people of God in both Testaments, a continuity which transcends the varying degrees of cultural discontinuity. Our story is part of their story. This was the principle by which New Testament writers could apply the ethics of the Old Testament to their Christian readers, even before the formation of the New Testament canon.42

Consider these three ways our fresh understanding of the יָוָהוֹ in Leviticus intersects with present cross-cultural witness:

1) Cross-cultural believers who, among indigenous believers, witness to the glory of God in Jesus Christ are tantamount to non-indigenous residents, יָוָהוֹ, who testified to Yahweh as their God.
For many who read this article it should not be hard to imagine
yourself as a believer in a host country among indigenous believers. 
Imagine you are a non-indigenous resident in their land, their 
country, their Church. You share, with the indigenous Christians, 
the weighty calling of preserving the holiness of the community 
as a fitting locale for God to reside in sovereign power. Rather 
than standing in awe that the indigenous believers worship your 
God, stand in awe that you worship the God of the indigenous 
believers! Such was the disposition of the מ in Leviticus.

2) Non-indigenous believers who are not supported financially by 
their country of origin and who do not have a lucrative occupation 
are tantamount to non-indigenous residents, הובא, who were 
predisposed to poverty, real estate disenfranchisement, identity 
crisis, injustice, and preclusion from certain prerogatives related 
to worshiping God. Perhaps you leap up to help those who are 
suffering; I thank God for your response to the מ who resides 
in your community. Now imagine yourself conversely as a minority, 
without a reliable income, residing among a majority ethnic 
population. You are vulnerable to certain social, economic, and 
religious disadvantages. Your calling is to testify to the sufficiency 
of God while living in a place that does not feel like home. The 
calling of your sisters and brothers in Christ is to be the sufficiency 
of God on your behalf. Humble yourself to receive, to benefit, to 
be fed, to be protected. In so doing, you will experience how the 
מ in Leviticus felt: underprivileged, yet regarded and satisfied. In 
so doing, you will fulfill one part of your “reason for existence” 
(raison d’être).

3) New believers who have left, or have been expelled, from their 
families and first cultures (i.e., MBBs), to reside in an environment 
more amiable to their faith are tantamount to non-indigenous 
residents, הובא, who upon covenanted to Yahweh renounced 
allegiances to other deities, likely also to their families, to live as 
new members of Yahweh’s people. The מ in Leviticus, however, 
was not asked to surrender his ethnic identity. He was permitted, 
by implication, to retain certain customs (e.g., immediate non-
sacred slaughter and consumption of domestic animals) and to 
observe, or refrain from observing, one part of Israel’s ethnic 
history (Festival of Booths). Just as Yahweh accommodated his 
stipulations for the מ in Leviticus, so Christian communities must 
accommodate their prescriptions for new, non-indigenous, 
believers (cf. Acts 15:28-31). Perhaps by revisiting the מ in 
Leviticus, and in the rest of the Bible, we may be able to further 
u nuance our biblical rubric for discerning which of a new believer’s
cultural customs are to be abandoned and which are to be celebrated.

Do these three examples reflect a reformation in missiology, as I have suggested should be the goal of biblical reinterpretation? No, if by reformation we mean unprecedented improvement. I am sure practical theologians have derived similar examples from other biblical texts. Yes, if by reformation these three examples, among many others unvoiced, compel us to align or realign ourselves, our families, our communities with the mission of God. Every faithful reinterpretation of Scripture, especially when performed collaboratively between believers from variegated cultures, should engender a reformation, that is, an innovative missional vision invigorated by a resolve to witness cross-culturally to the all-satisfying beauty of Jesus Christ.

End Notes

1 Lawson G. Stone’s article, “Worship as Cherishing Yahweh’s World in Leviticus,” has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal that I will keep anonymous.

2 “Non-indigenous resident” is my preferred translation for התי. The translation “(resident) alien” (NASB; JPS [1985]; NIV) may conjure images of an extraterrestrial, and the cognate verb “to alienate” and nominal form “alienation” have a negative charge, and for these reasons “(resident) alien” is an unhelpful translation. The translation “foreigner” (TNIV; NET; NLT) is better reserved for a separate Hebrew term (“וֹאֵל,” HALOT 2:700); also to call a התי a “foreigner” would be a misnomer in some biblical texts where the התי may be an immigrant from the Northern Kingdom, not ethnically non-Israelite. Others translate התי “stranger” (RSV; KJV; JPS [1917]; ESV), but a separate Hebrew noun is employed for “stranger” (“חַל,” HALOT 1:279) and also for the noun “sojourner” (“עֵדֶת” HALOT 4:1712). Immigrant is another possible translation, but modern associations with immigration issues must be distinguished (cf. James K. Hoffmeier, The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible [Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books], 2009).


6 The התי class of persons in Leviticus is distinct from the התי “unauthorized” (10:1) or “lay person” (22:10; that is, one unauthorized as a priest) and the התי “foreigner” (22:25), but contrasted to (בֹּא) התי “the nation(s)” (chs. 18-20). HC also frequently pairs the התי with its counterpart, התי “native” Israelite. Lastly, Jan Joosten (People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26 [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 74) observes the term התי “sojourner” in HC is not synonymous with the התי since the former “does not define rights, but objectively describes a social condition.”
On this important distinction, see Christopher J. H. Wright’s argumentation in *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006), 501-05.


“מ” HALOT 1:201.

James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], 116) has taught HB readers to interpret words synchronically, unless one can demonstrate that a given biblical passage intends for its readers to appreciate the etymological sense of a given word.


The typical source-critical division between Lev 16 and 17 is unjustifiable. Erich Zenger (“Das Buch Leviticus als Teiltext der Tora/des Pentateuch. Eine synchronre Lektüre mit kannonischer Perspektive,” in *Leviticus als Buch* [eds. H.-J. Fabry and H.-W. Jüngling; BBB 119; Berlin/Bodenheim b. Mainz, 1999], 47-83) and Benedikt Jürgens (*Heiligkeit und Vernunft: Leviticus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext* [HBSt 28; Freiburg i.Br., 2001], 180-86) have convincingly argued that these
chapters together are central to Leviticus and portray the restoration of the divine-human relationship by means of purification rites.

15 The noun דּוּר in Leviticus refers to Israel in Yahweh’s land once (plural דּוּר: 25:23), and to the “non-indigenous resident” 20 times: 16:29; 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26; 19:10, 33, 34(2x); 20:2; 22:18; 23:22; 24:16, 22, 25:23, 35, 47(3x).

16 Scholars have identified the HC’s דּוּר as: Samaritan hierarchs (Vink, “Priestly Code,” Priestly Code, 48); Northern kingdom Israelites who yielded to Judean control after Samaria fell (Cohen, “Ger’ Biblique,” 131); Israelite exiles who returned to Palestine (Cazelles, “Mission d’Esdras,” 131); Israelites who stayed in Palestine and joined the exiles who returned (Van Houten, Alien in Israelite Law, 156); and Diaspora Jews traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals (Grelet, “Rédaction Sacerdotale,” 178).

17 “steht der ger als das zugehörige Glied, das er ist, in einer Relation zur Religionsgemeinschaft als ganzer, ohne daß sich in dieser Relation eine herkunftsmäßige Fremdheit des ger von außerhalb Judas ausdrückt”: Bultmann, Der Fremde, 216.

18 Kidd, Alterity and Identity, 6-7
19 Bertholet, Die Stellung der Israel, 152.
20 Kaufmann, Religion of Israel, 206.
21 Kidd, Alterity and Identity, 68.
22 Joosten, People and Land, 72.
24 Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 244.
26 Ironically, Joosten (People and Land, 101) himself affirms this component of H’s covenant formula.
27 Here I augment the chart from Kidd, Alterity and Identity, 57
28 A persuasive argument can be established for viewing the דּוּר in Deuteronomy as a covenant member. Curiously, Deut 14:21 ostensibly exempts the דּוּר from this food law, whereas this parallel law in Lev 17:15 explicitly holds the דּוּר responsible.
29 Joosten, People and Land, 69.
31 Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, Leviticus in Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007), 440.
32 Along with most scholars, Martin Noth (Leviticus: A Commentary [OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965], 180) supports my reading דּוּר as Israel’s God, “At the head of v. 15b is the general sentence that ‘anyone’ (including the foreigner) must bear the consequences of ‘cursing God.’”
33 A phrase which Baruch A. Levine (Leviticus [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 112) says “expresses the close relationship and common descent of Israelites, even in exile.”
34 Joosten, People and Land, 65-6.
35 Joosten (People and Land, 65-6) contends, “The דּוּר is an exceptional situation:
not an Israelite, yet entitled to live as a free man among the people. Taking account of this, the sacral law does not oblige him to behave like an Israelite: he is not required to bring sacrifices to YHWH. Yet he must observe certain prohibitions, such as those prohibiting sacrifices to other gods or the eating of blood. A transgression against those prohibitions would bring guilt on the whole people; it must not be tolerated.” Jacob Milgrom (Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [Anchor Bible, Vol. 3; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 1453) relegates the rationale of 17:3-4 to holiness: “The ה is bound by the Noahide law to drain the blood (Gen 9:4), but since he is required to worship Israel’s God, he need not bring the blood to his altar...it is incumbent on the ה to obey only YHWH’s prohibitive commandments, since their violation generates impurity that pollutes the land and ultimately results in Israel’s exile. The violation of performative commandments, however, is characterized not by action, but by neglect. No pollution is generated by inaction, and the ecology is not upset... Thus in H’s view, the ה does not belong in this law.”

36 Joosten, People and Land, 36.

37 Milgrom (Leviticus 23-27, 2052).

38 This verse reads: “But if a ה resides with you and celebrates Passover to Yahweh, all his males must be circumcised, and then let him approach to celebrate it. He shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it” (translation mine).

39 Christophe Nihan (From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus [FAT 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 108) argues HC’s concern for Israel’s holiness in the sector outside the sacrificial cult (chs. 17-26) culminates Leviticus’ threefold structure by which Israel is gradually initiated into Yahweh’s presence: Lev 1-10 highlights a public theophany before the “tent of meeting” (see chs. 9-10); Lev 11-16 features a theophany inside the inner-sanctum on the (Lev 16:2; cf. Exod 25:22); and Lev 26 pronounces Yahweh will walk in the midst of the Israelites if they keep the terms of the covenant (26:12), language reflective of the primeval divine-human relationship in Genesis 3.

40 Nihan, Priestly Torah, 99

41 Pickled beet eggs are also commonplace to the Amish, Upper Peninsula Michiganders, Pennsylvanian Dutch, among others. People from these regions, however, would be knowledgeable of Dr. Seuss, but probably less familiar with Shawarma.