

## Patterns of Presence and Cleansing in the Old and New Testaments

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וְהִזְרַתֶּם אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִטְּמֵאתָם

וְלֹא יָמָתוּ בְּטְמֵאתָם בְּטְמֵאִים אֶת־מִשְׁכְּנִי אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness,  
so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.  
(BHS and NRSV, Leviticus 15:31)

This paper constitutes an attempt to communicate the results of ongoing research on the purity principles and regulations in the Hebrew Bible and apply that research, in particular, to some of their trajectories into the Greek New Testament. For those readers who are concerned about the terminology, when I use the terms Old and New Testament there is no intention to offend those for whom the latter is not even scripture. For me both “Testaments” are scripture, and equally so. One does not override the other. My concern is to understand specific elements of the relationship between them. Similarly, when I capitalize the “s” on the word “spirit” it is because it is the divine “Spirit” that is being referred to, no matter how that is understood. I have no interest here in debating the issues that surround that rendering in various communities of faith and tradition. I am also aware of the extensive, longstanding, and ongoing research and publication history in this field, both Old Testament and New, but it is not my purpose here, and it would not be feasible in any case, to engage with that scholarly literature in every detail. Instead, this paper will lay groundwork and isolate certain patterns and specific points in the text that are especially important; some of which deserve more attention than they normally receive in the current scholarly discussion, as I see it.

Divine presence and guidance in and through the tabernacle and the importance of maintaining human purity amid that divine presence constitutes one of the central concerns of the tabernacle system in the Torah. It was all about the Lord’s tabernacle presence in their midst (Exod 40:34-38). The goal of this paper is to follow the pattern of development of these closely related themes (i.e., presence and purity) from the Hebrew Bible, especially the Book of Leviticus, into the Greek New Testament. In all their Jewish-ness, the New (or Second) Testament writings stand in various patterns of continuity, discontinuity, and transformation in relation to this Old (or First) Testament dual pattern of divine presence and human purification.

The pattern extends from the Old Testament itself to the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:21-24, blood) and the baptisms of John and Jesus (Luke 3:1-9, water; cf. John 1:19-34, 3:5-6; 3:22-4:2; Acts 1:5; 19:1-7), to the sacrificial death of Jesus (Luke 23; cf. Acts 21:26 with Heb 9:13-14), and on into the church as the Holy Spirit indwelt (John 1:14 with 17:22 and Eph 2:19-22; 3:14-21, etc.) and purified people of God (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 1:22ff, etc.). Of course, it will not be possible to develop all the details of the many texts involved.<sup>1</sup> That would be too

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<sup>1</sup>The present author’s basic analysis of these two closely related themes and the exegetical analysis of many of the most important passages in both the Old and New

much for a paper of this type. A surface survey, however, would be inappropriate for this occasion as well. So I will limit myself to certain pivotal passages in the Old and New Testaments, treat the most pertinent details of those texts for the topic at hand, and show the pattern of presence and cleansing that emerges.

### Purity and Purification in Leviticus 11-16

The passage cited above from Leviticus 15:31 is a good place to start. The concern was to “keep the Israelites separate (*nzr*; or ‘caution’ them, *zhr*, SP, LXX) from their uncleanness so they do not die . . . by defiling my tabernacle which is in their midst.” This clarifies the main purpose of the regulations in chapter 15 (note vv. 32-33), specifically, and provides a natural explanatory transition from the purity regulations in Leviticus 11-15 into the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

#### The Day of Atonement

Jacob Milgrom has shown convincingly that the purpose of the slain sin (or perhaps better “purification”) offerings and blood manipulation on the Day of Atonement was to decontaminate the tabernacle.<sup>2</sup> The summary at the end of the chapter is especially pertinent. On the Day of Atonement, according to Leviticus 16:32-33:

וְכֹפֵר הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר-יִמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ וְאֲשֶׁר יִמְלֵא אֶת-יָדוֹ<sup>32</sup>  
 לְכַהֵן תַּחַת אָבִיו וְלִבְשׁ אֶת-בְּגָדֵי הַבַּד בְּגָדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ:  
 וְכֹפֵר אֶת-מִקְדָּשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד<sup>33</sup>  
 הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יְכַפֵּר וְעַל הַכֹּהֲנִים וְעַל-כָּל-עַם הַקָּהָל יְכַפֵּר:  
 וְאֵת

<sup>32</sup> The priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as (high) priest after his father shall *make atonement*.

He shall put on the holy linen garments<sup>33</sup> and **atone (purge)** the most holy place

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Testaments has been published in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 4 vols., ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, abbreviated NIDOTTE), “sin, sin offering” (*ḥaṭṭā’t*, 2.93-103); “to be clean” (*ṭhr*, 2.338-353); “to be unclean” (*ṭm’*, 2.365-376); to make atonement (*kpr*, 2.689-710); “Tent of Meeting” (*’ōhel mō’ēd*, 2.873-877); “sanctuary” (*miqdāš*, 2.1078-1087); “tabernacle” (*miškān*, 2.1130-1134); “Clean and Unclean” (4.477-486); “Offerings and Sacrifices” (4.996-1022).

See also the more recent articles on “Sacrifices and Offerings” and “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (InterVarsity Press, 2003, abbreviated DOTP), 706-733 and 807-827.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Anchor Bible, pp. 255-56.

and the tent of meeting, and the altar he shall **atone (purge)**.  
On behalf of the priests and all the people of the congregation he shall **make atonement**.

Consider also v. 20 earlier in the chapter, just before the introduction of the “scapegoat”:

וְכִלָּה מִכִּפֹּר אֶת־הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ  
וְהִקְרִיב אֶת־הַשְּׂעִיר הַחַי:

When he has finished atoning/purging the (most) holy place, the tent of meeting,  
and the altar,  
then he shall present the live goat.

The first part of this verse summarizes what had been accomplished by the offering of the slain sin offerings in the previous ritual procedures. Only after this does the high priest present the live goat over which all the sins and impurities would be confessed so that they could be sent as far away as possible from both the tabernacle on the head of the goat. It appears that this is what is v. 30 is referring to:

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהַר אֶתְכֶם  
מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ:

For on this day he (the high priest) shall make atonement on your behalf to  
purify you –  
you shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD.

In this chapter, therefore, the verb “atone/purge” (כִּפֹּר) takes as its *direct* object the tabernacle and as its *indirect* object the people. That is, the tabernacle – the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar – is purged *on behalf of* the priests and the people on the Day of Atonement. The English versions are generally misleading on this point. For example, the NRSV translates Leviticus 16:32-33 as follows, making no distinction between כִּפֹּר with the direct object as opposed to the indirect object:

<sup>32</sup> The priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement, wearing the linen vestments, the holy vestments. <sup>33</sup> He shall make atonement **for** the sanctuary, and he shall make atonement **for** the tent of meeting and **for** the altar, and he shall make atonement **for** the priests and **for** all the people of the assembly.

The point here is that Leviticus 15:31 isolates this concern about the contamination of the tabernacle in the immediate context leading into the Day of Atonement regulations in Leviticus 16. The Day of Atonement regulations, in turn, declare the need and describe the procedures for

a yearly decontamination of the tabernacle – a fall tabernacle cleaning day, so to speak. This is the sole purpose of the slain sin offering procedures on that particular day.

### Categories of Impurity

Not all physical ritual impurities, however, required blood atonement. The regulations in Leviticus 11-15 are concerned with what seem to be three levels of impurity and their related purification procedures: regular, irregular, and severe impurities. All three forbid the impure person from entering the tabernacle presence of God until their impurity has been cleansed.<sup>3</sup>

First, some of the regulations refer to what we might categorize as “regular impurities.” For example, the person who picks up or even touches the carcass of an unclean animal (Lev 11:28) or touches, picks up, or eats from the carcass of a clean animal that dies on its own, was required to wash his clothes and be unclean until evening (vv. 39-40). Similarly, a man or woman who had sexual intercourse was unclean for the day because of the seminal ejection. He or she was required to bathe his or her body in water and was unclean until the next evening (Lev 15:16-18). A woman was unclean for seven days during her menstrual period after which she would bathe and become clean (v. 19), and anyone to whom her impurity was transferred by touch during those seven days would need to wash his or her clothes, bathe in water, and be unclean until evening (vv. 20-23). If a man would lay with her sexually during her period he would be unclean for seven days and only after the seven days could he do the washing procedures and become clean (v. 24). These categories of impurity required no sacrificial atonement.

Second, there was a category of what we could call “irregular impurities.” Unlike the regular impurities, these required sacrificial blood atonement for the cleansing procedure, specifically a “sin offering” ( **תִּזְבֹּחַ חַטָּאת**). For example, the man who had flow from his sexual organ other than the normal seminal ejection was unclean, and his impurity extended through seven days after the flow ceased. During that time, anyone who came into contact with his body, his bed, his clothes, etc. needed to wash their clothes, bathe their body, and be unclean until evening. After the seven days the man would wash his clothes, bathe in water, and make sacrificial blood atonement on the eighth day in order to become clean (Lev 15:1-15). The same was true for a woman who had an irregular blood flow, not during her menstrual period (vv. 25-30).

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<sup>3</sup>I am limiting this examination of the categories of uncleanness to Leviticus 11-15. This is the main unit of impurity laws in the Pentateuch, and the three categories I am referring to here do not change with the addition of other units. Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 18-23 comes up with seven sources of uncleanness, which correspond roughly to my three categories except for the addition of sexual misdeeds (Lev 18:24) and priestly corpse contamination (Lev 21). The material in Numbers does not change the basic picture, according to Neusner. Ian C. Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Studies in the Texts of the Desert of Judah 72 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 8-9 objects to Neusner’s analysis and especially its application to the purity procedures at Qumran and in Rabbinic literature.

The cleansing of a woman from her blood flow after childbirth falls into the same basic category according to Leviticus 12.<sup>4</sup> After her time of impurity the woman would bring a burnt offering and a sin offering to make blood atonement for her purification (vv. 6-8). The differences between the purification periods for the male versus the female child in this chapter have been a subject of considerable debate among scholars. The initial period of impurity extends for seven days for giving birth to a male baby and fourteen days for a female baby, as in her regular menstrual period. The length of time for the blood purification is doubled as well, from thirty-three days to sixty-six days, so the entire length of time for the male baby is forty days while for the female baby it is eighty days. Scholars have offered several different explanations for this, from the relative status of the sexes in that culture, to the supposedly longer postnatal discharge for the birth of the female, and many other proposals. My own view is that the key to understanding this seeming disparity is in the circumcision of the male child on the eighth day, referred to in v. 3. We need to come at it backwards. The issue is not so much the longer duration of the impurity for the birth of the female baby but, instead, the shorter period for the male. The blood flow in childbirth is more extensive and dangerous than that of menstruation, so one would expect that the impurity would endure longer than the seven days of menstruation, which would explain the fourteen days for bearing a female baby. The impurity for bearing the male was shortened to the seven days of the menstrual regulation because the male baby was to be baptized on the eight day. Proportionately, the additional thirty-three days for the purification of the blood flow of the woman after bearing the male baby was likewise a reduction from the sixty-six for the female and similarly, the whole period was forty days for the male baby and eighty days for the female.

Moving on then, there was also a third category of impurity that I have dubbed “severe impurities.” The diseases that manifest themselves in certain kinds of lesions visible on the skin as described in Leviticus 13 fall into this category. In this case, both washings and blood atonement were called for in the purification procedures (Lev 14:1-20), but in addition to these the impure person was expelled from the community as a matter of quarantine until the physical disease or infection had healed (Lev 13:45-16), as determined by the priest (Lev 14:1-3).<sup>5</sup> Specifically because the skin diseased person needed to be reincorporated back into the community and regain access to the tabernacle presence of God, the “guilt offering” ( אֲשָׁמָה ) was offered before a sin and then a burnt offering. The guilt offering was designed to make atonement for committing a sacrilege – desecration of sancta (things “holy”).<sup>6</sup> It was required in this particular case because the Israelite was a member of the “holy nation” (see, e.g., Exod

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<sup>4</sup>For a more extensive discussion of the details of Leviticus 12 see NIDOTTE 2.368-370.

<sup>5</sup>The preparations of the water containing the ashes of the red heifer used in purification from corpse contamination (Num 19:6, 17-18) has close similarities to the preparations for the purification of the skin diseased person (Lev 14:4-7), including the sprinkling of the water on the defiled person. Corpse contamination, however, did not require blood atonement.

<sup>6</sup>See the extensive discussion in Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Anchor Bible, 320-326 and 339-378.

19:6b). In his expulsion from the community he became desecrated. So his reincorporation back into the community required that atonement be made for his desecration; thus, a guilt offering (Lev 14:12-18).<sup>7</sup> The similarity to the procedures for consecrating the priests in Leviticus 8 is uncanny; in particular, the daubing of the blood on his right earlobe, right thumb, and right big toe. The healed person was thus restored as a full member of the holy nation.

In addition to these three categories of physical ritual impurity and purification procedures there is another whole level of defilement on the “moral” or covenantal level.<sup>8</sup> Such moral defilements included sexual sins (e.g., Lev 18:24-30), idolatry (e.g., Lev 19:31; 20:1-3), and bloodshed (Num 35:33-34). The physical defilements and purification procedures combine with moral defilements and their purification in a very interesting way in Ezekiel 36. It appears that it is on this element of the Old Testament pattern that John Baptist finds his baptismal practices in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> This will be treated in some detail below. Before dealing with that, however, it is necessary to understand the shift from the nature of God’s presence in the Old Testament to the presence of God in the New Testament specifically as it relates to the church and the life of the Christian. This shift underlies the principles and practices of John the Baptist.

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<sup>7</sup>This is discussed in detail in Richard E. Averbeck, “The Kingdom of Priests and the Priests of the Kingdom,” Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, Biblical Law Section, November 2006 (not yet published).

<sup>8</sup>See esp. the helpful analysis in Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53-56 and 71-72. It is of special interest that that “moral” defilements are found in what is commonly referred to in critical circles as H (the Holiness Code) as opposed to the “ritual” defilements in P (the Priestly Code). One wonders if a diachronic explanation of P versus H is the correct way to come at the differences between them. Perhaps it is better to think in terms of P dealing with the tabernacle or temple concerns in particular while H deals with the concerns of the community round about the tabernacle or temple – the people and the land. This would correspond nicely to the distinction between “ritual” and “moral” defilement, respectively, and the concerns would be mutually exclusive in neither a diachronic nor a synchronic manner.

<sup>9</sup>Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 55 argues that, on the one hand, “ritual impurity can be ameliorated by rites of purification,” but on the other hand, “that is not the case for moral impurity. . . . moral impurity does not produce ritual defilement.” Strictly speaking, he is correct I suppose, but the argument of Ezekiel 36 combines the two kinds of defilement in a creative manner for the message of the day. See the rather extensive discussion of Ezekiel 36 later in this essay. For a critical analysis and summary of the relationship between “ritual” and “moral” impurity and purification procedures in the Dead Sea Scrolls see the careful analysis in Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 293-305.

## The Presence of God in the Tabernacle/Temple

The brief summary of the categories of physical impurity above, and the regulations for their purification, need to be understood from the perspective of God's presence in the tabernacle. This is the point of not only Leviticus 15:31 (cited and discussed above) but also the narrative framework upon which the regulations are suspended. On the front end, Leviticus 9-10 recounts the catastrophic death of Nadab and Abihu on the tabernacle inauguration day, the first day Aaron and his sons functioned as fully consecrated priests (cf. their consecration in Lev 8). At the end of Leviticus 9,

וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם:

“... the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people” (v. 23b)

and then we read:

וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת-הָעֹלָה  
וְאֶת-הַחֲלָבִים

“Then fire went out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar.” (v. 24a)

At this point the people shouted and fell on their faces (v. 24b). Our main concern here is the expression for “presence,” Hebrew לִפְנֵי. This corresponds to Exodus 33:14, where the Lord said to Moses, “My Presence (פָּנַי) will go with you, and I will give you rest.” In that context the golden calf rebellion had made it dangerous for the Lord to go with them from Sinai to the promised land (Exod 33:1-6). Leviticus 10:1-2 tells us that, on that same inauguration day, Nadab and Abihu offered “strange fire” before the Lord, so in like manner,

וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם

“fire went out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them” (v. 2a)

All this reinforces the same essential concern mentioned in Leviticus 15:31, “. . . keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle . . .” Purity is a major issue specifically because of the Lord's presence in the tabernacle. This presence was physically visible in the form of the “glory (cloud) of the LORD” (כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה) and was shown to be an active presence by the sending forth of fire that consumed both the offerings and the two sons of Aaron. The former emphasizes the divine presence while the latter emphasizes the danger associated with that presence. This combination of presence and danger becomes the narrative point of departure for

the Day of Atonement regulations in Leviticus 16:1-2, following immediately after the purity regulations in Leviticus 11-15,

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן ( . . . )  
וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בִּעֲנֹן אֶרְאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

“The LORD spoke to Moses after the *death of the two sons of Aaron* ( . . . ‘tell Aaron your brother that he should not enter at any time into the holy place inside the curtain in front of the atonement cover that is over the ark)  
so that he does not die, for *in the cloud I will appear* over the atonement cover”

The point is that the narrative frame is about the physically visible divine presence and the physical purity regulations correspond to that presence. The manifest presence underlies the rationale for physical purity and purification. Leviticus 10:3 makes the point that, as the Lord himself had put it:

בְּקִרְבִי אֶקְדָּשׁ וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָעָם אֶכְבֹּד

“Among the ones who approach me I will be show myself [or ‘be treated as’] *holy*, before all the people I will be honored”

Then in Leviticus 10:10 we have a statement of the core principles of the levitical system:

וְלִהְבְדִּיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֹל וּבֵין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטְהוֹר:

“to divide between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean”

The first principle is the holy status of the Lord and the people, places, times, and other things devoted to him, as opposed to those that are common. The Lord’s presence in the tabernacle is the first of the first things. That is the point of the narrative context out of which this statement of core principles arises. In the context of this concern for that which is holy there is the second principle of maintaining the distinction between the condition of unclean versus clean people, places, and things. We see this connection, for example, in Leviticus 11:44,

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי

וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בְּכָל־הַשָּׂרָץ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

“For I am the LORD your God, so you shall *consecrate* yourselves and *be holy because I am holy*. And you shall not make yourselves *unclean* with any creeping creature that moves about on the earth.”

The holy presence of the Lord in the tabernacle, therefore, establishes the need for maintaining both holiness and purity in the tabernacle and in the community that surrounds it.

The larger context actually encases the levitical legislation as whole within the framework of God's presence and guidance in and through the tabernacle. The glory of God that appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:1-6) became the cloud with the pillar of fire in it by night that led them through the wilderness to Sinai (Exod 13:21-22). That same cloud occupied the tabernacle when it was erected in Exodus 40:

וַיִּכַס הָעֲנַן אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּכְבֹּד יְהוָה מֵלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן

. . .

כִּי עָנַן יְהוָה עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל-בְּיַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל-מַסְעֵיהֶם:

“(34) Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle . . . (38) For the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day and there was fire in it by night in the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys.”

Then at the end of the Sinai narrative, just before they leave on their journey toward the promised land in Numbers 10, this glory cloud presence of the Lord gains special emphasis at the end of chapter 9. It begins this way:

וּבַיּוֹם הַקֵּים אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן כָּסָה הָעֲנַן אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת וּבֶעֶרֶב יִהְיֶה עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן כְּמַרְאֵה-אֵשׁ עַד-בֹּקֶר:

(Numbers 9:15) “On the day of erecting the tabernacle the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire until morning.”

All of verses 15-23 go round and round on this matter of the glory cloud presence and guidance of the Lord in order to emphasize the significance of it. The most important thing about Israel was that the Lord was actually present in their midst and would lead them wherever they were to go. The tabernacle presence of God, therefore, needed to be protected from contamination lest he break out against them rather than walk with them, as Leviticus 26:12,

וְהָתְּלַכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְהִיְיִתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי לְעָם:

(Leviticus 26:12) “I will walk in your midst and will be your God, and you will be my people.”

This same visible glory cloud presence occupied the first temple on the dedication day, and consumed the dedicatory offerings on the altar (1 Kings 8:10-11, 54; 2 Chron 5:14; 7:1-3). At the time of the Babylonian captivity, however, the Lord's glory cloud presence actually departed from the temple, abandoning it to destruction (Ezek 8:4; 10:3-4, 18-19; 11:22-25). Ezekiel 43:1-9 anticipates the return of this glory to a new temple, but this does not appear to have happened at the dedication of the second temple (Ezra 6:13-18). The New Testament picks it up from here in an altogether surprising way.

### **The Presence of God in the New Testament Tabernacle/Temple**

The prologue of the Gospel of John is particularly important for making the New Testament connection back to the Old Testament pattern of the visible glory presence of the Lord. We read in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and *made his dwelling* (Greek *skēnoō* 'tabernacled') among us. We have seen *his glory, the glory of the One and Only*, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (NIV, cf. 2:11; 7:18; 17:24). Later, in his "high priestly prayer" on behalf of those who would believe in him (John 17:20), Jesus said to the Father, "I have given them *the glory* that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me" (John 17:22-23a). He transfers the visible manifestation of the glory of God to those who would believe in him.

The LXX uses Greek *skēnē* "tent, booth, tabernacle" to render Hebrew *miškān* "tabernacle." Stephen refers to "the tabernacle of the testimony" in his martyrdom speech in Acts 7 (Greek *martyrion* "testimony, witness," which renders Hebrew *mō'ēd* and/or *'ēdūt*; cf. OT "tent of meeting [*mō'ēd*] or testimony [*'ēdūt*]"). He recounts the history, according to which Moses had seen to its fabrication according to the pattern the Lord had shown him, and Israel brought it with them into the land under Joshua. It served as the sanctuary of the Lord until the building of the temple by Solomon (Acts 7:44-50; see also "the tabernacle of testimony" in Rev 15:5). It occurs twenty times in New Testament, half of them in Hebrews 8-13, referring to the holy place (e.g., Heb 9:2), the most holy place (Heb 9:3), and the heavenly tabernacle made without hands (Heb 9:11). Jesus entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary when he gave up his body, "the veil of his flesh," as our high priest once for all (Heb 10:19-21; "veil" is Greek *katapetasma*, the LXX word for Hebrew *pārōket*, the veil separating the most holy place from the holy place).

The glory presence of God comes into the church through the presence of the Holy Spirit who indwells us (2 Cor 3:17-18; 4:4, 6; cf. John 14:16-17). Several New Testament authors deal with this matter in some detail. According to the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2 and 3, for example, all Christians, Jews and gentiles alike, are together as a community of faith:

members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become *a holy temple* in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become *a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*. (Ephesians 2:19b-22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17 and 1 Pet 2:4-5)

After a digression about the mystery of the church (Eph 3:1-13), the Apostle Paul returns to the temple presence topic when he prays in Ephesians 3:16-21 that the heavenly Father

may strengthen you with power through his *Spirit* in your inner being, so that Christ may  *dwell*  in your hearts through faith,

[vv. 16b-17a; see “Spirit” and “dwelling” in Eph 2:22 above]

. . . that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how  *wide and long and high and deep*  is the love of Christ

[vv. 17b-18; the dimensions of the temple?],

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be  *filled*  to the measure of all the fullness of God. . . . to him be  *glory*  in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

[vv. 19 and 21; recall the glory cloud filling of the tabernacle and temple]

According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are actually the reflection of God's glory in the world: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's  *glory* , are being  *transformed*  into his likeness with  *ever-increasing glory* , which comes from the Lord,  *who is the Spirit.* ” The passage continues the topic, noting that we have this treasure of the light of the glory of God (2 Cor 4:4-6) “in jars of clay” (v. 7). The correspondence to the glory of God in the incarnated Jesus as described in John 1:14 (sighted above) is of special importance here. Moreover, as in the Old Testament, the sanctuary presence of God is nothing to trifle with. The corporate body of believers is sacred to him, and God takes violation of that sacred domain seriously: 1 Corinthians 3:17, “If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is  *sacred* , and you are that temple.”

The Apostle Peter uses up the same analogy in a similar way in 1 Peter 2:5, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” As with Paul in Ephesians 2 (cited above), Peter also refers to Jesus as the cornerstone of this temple building, but he includes the fact that Christians are not only the living stones of this living temple but also the priests who offer up sacrifices in it that are acceptable to God.

Thus, the presence of God is a key factor in tracing the theology of sacred  *space*  in the Old Testament into the New Testament in terms of the theology of sacred  *community* . This is how the New Testament, by and large, brings the practical implications of these principles in the Old Testament through into the church and the life of the Christian. According to the Apostle John, Jesus introduced it this way to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:23-24. Jesus said, yes, the Jerusalem temple was correct place to worship, not Shechem, but “. . . a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”<sup>10</sup> Earlier in the chapter he had introduced the topic by asking her for water. In the ensuing conversation he remarked that if she would ask him, he would give her the gift of “living water,” and added that “whoever drinks the water I give him

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<sup>10</sup>For a more detailed analysis of this passage and its implications see Richard E. Averbeck, “Worshipping God in Spirit,” and “Worshipping God in Truth,” in  *Authentic Worship: Scripture's Voice, Applying Its Truth* , ed. Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 79-133. See also the further discussion below.

will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (vv. 10 and 14). John informs us in chapter 7 vv. 37-39 that this “living water” is, in fact, the Spirit of God.

### **Purity and Purification in New Testament**

The shift between the Testaments from the physical visible presence in the tabernacle and temple to the presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer and amid the local church community is especially important. It is this that helps us to understand why God was so concerned with physical purity and purifications in and around the sanctuary in ancient Israel, but not so in the New Testament community of faith. Since God was *visibly physically* present in the tabernacle or temple in the form of the glory cloud over the tabernacle with a pillar of fire in it by night or in the cloud over the place of atonement in the most holy place, therefore, *physical* purity laws were necessary. Although the purity concern itself continues into the New Testament, God’s presence through his Spirit in the person or community of faith stands in contrast to the Old Testament on one essential point: since it was a *spiritual* presence, therefore, the purity was *spiritual* as well. Essentially, the kind or level of purity matches the kind or level of presence. The Lord is not physically present with us in the same way he was in the Old Testament tabernacle.

There are a number of passages in the New Testament where this concept of the tabernacle or temple presence of God connects in a general way to the issues of purity and purification. For example, for Paul the individual believer is “a temple of the Holy Spirit,” so we must not defile ourselves through immorality (1 Cor 6:18-19), but instead “honor (lit. 'glorify,' Gk. *doxazo*) God” with our bodies (1 Cor 6:20). The similarity to the demand of God that Moses recounted to Aaron in Leviticus 10:3 just after the death of Nadab and Abihu is uncanny: “Among the ones who approach me I will be show myself [or ‘be treated as’] holy, before all the people I will be *honored*” (cf. also 2 Cor 6:16-17).

Peter comes at the same subject from a different direction, for example, in 1 Peter 1:22, “Now that you have *purified your souls* by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.” Earlier in the same passage, in the context of calling for obedience Peter cites the well-known theme verse in Leviticus, “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15; cf. Lev 11:45; 19:2; 20:7, 26). This leads to the second chapter of 1 Peter treated above, in which the believer is a living stone in the temple of God and, at the same time, a priest who offers up sacrifices in that temple. Yes, our purity and purification must show physically and visibly in our manner of life; for example, in avoidance of moral impurity or the way we fervently love one another from the heart. But this is different from having a tabernacle or temple out in our front yard over which the glory cloud appears, or a temple in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, therefore, there was a natural shift that moved away from physical purity regulations, transforming them into what are described as purity principles and practices that applied to the spiritual and moral dimensions of life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Of course, where the Lord is physically present he is also spiritually present, so Old Testament is also concerned with moral and spiritual purity. This comes through not only in Leviticus (see esp. Lev 19) but also throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Psalm 51:12 (ET 10), where David expresses his concern that the Lord would “create” in him “a pure heart.”

## Jesus, John the Baptist, and Baptism

The New Testament shift from the physical visible presence of God in the glory cloud to the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian and the church community, however, took place over time, not immediately or abruptly. And it took place in the context of the Judaism of that day too.<sup>12</sup> The shift is anticipated in the Gospels and takes place in the period of the Book of Acts, while the practice of the old purity regulations continued. For example, Mary the mother of Jesus abided by the ritual regulations for purification of the blood flow for giving birth to Jesus (Luke 2:21-24; cf. Lev 12 and the discussion above). Similarly, when Jesus healed lepers (i.e., skin diseased people; cf. Lev 13-14), he instructed them to follow the regulations for their ritual purification (see, e.g., Matt 8:1-4). Jesus lived as a good Jew and supported physical ritual purification procedures accordingly. In fact, even the early Jewish church (esp. in Jerusalem) continued to follow the Old Testament purification rituals, and the Apostle Paul himself continued to participate in them in his own practice as a Christian. This is clear from his Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; cf. Num 6) and participation in the ritual purification procedures for the completion of it along with others in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 21:26).

The baptism of repentance preached and practiced by John the Baptist (see, e.g., Matt 3:2, 6-7), which Jesus himself underwent at the beginning of his ministry years (vv. 13-17), brings a relatively new twist to the whole matter of Jewish ritual purification. The confusion and debate surrounding it appear even in the New Testament (John 1:19-28; 3:25), not to mention all that has been written about it from then to now.<sup>13</sup> As Mark puts it at the beginning

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<sup>12</sup> For the intertestamental (and later Rabbinic) background of purification procedures in second temple Judaism and, in some cases, references to New Testament themes, see e.g., Ian C. Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Studies in the Texts of the Desert of Judah 72 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007); Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jonathan D. Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Hannah K. Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (London: T & T Clark, 2004); Bruce Chilton, "Jesus, Levitical Purity, and the Development of Primitive Christianity," in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 93 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 358-382; Bruce Chilton, "John the Purifier"; "E. P. Sanders and the Question of Jesus and Purity"; and "A Generative Exegesis of Mark 7:1-12," in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 203-230, 231-250, and 297-317, respectively, and the extensive literature cited in these places.

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion, proposals, and extensive literature cited, e.g., in Colin Brown, "What was John the Baptist Doing?" *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 37-50; David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 241-315; Clinton Wahlen, "Peter's Vision and

of his Gospel account, “John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). On this count alone John’s baptism does not correspond to any of the water purification procedures in Leviticus 12-15, although some of the latter do indeed involve bathing in water, whether alone (in regular impurity; e.g., Lev 15:16-18, 20-21) or in combination with other procedures (in irregular or severe impurity; e.g. Lev 14:9; 15:5-8, 10-11, 13). In all these cases, however, there is no question of forgiveness of sins. Even when blood atonement was included the result was “and she/he will be clean,” not “forgiven” (see, e.g., Lev 12:8; 14:20; 16:30).

The background for John’s baptism appears to derive indirectly from Leviticus 11-15; from an extension of the levitical purification procedures as it appears in Ezekiel 36-37. Recall that Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet (Ezek 1:3; 2:5), and so was John the Baptist (Luke 1:5, 17). Both of them performed their prophetic ministries in a way that reflected their priestly perspective and concerns. The Ezekiel passage is concern with “moral” side of impurity on analogy with the “ritual” side of it.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, John’s baptism was about “moral” purity and repentance, but it was also considered to be a levitical washing procedure. That is why the leaders of the Jews sent priests and Levites to question him about who he was and what he was doing with his baptism (John 1:19-28). Later in John 3 we read about both John the Baptist and Jesus baptizing “disciples” (John 3:22-4:2). This gave rise to a debate about “purification” (John 3:25), which once again emphasizes the perceived connection between John’s baptism and Jewish purification rites.<sup>15</sup>

In Ezekiel 36 the Lord was concerned that his people Israel have profaned his name among the nations:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁם וַיַּחֲלִילוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קְדֹשִׁי  
בְּאָמַר לָהֶם עִם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וּמֵאֲרָצוֹ יֵצְאוּ:

“When they came into the nations where they went, they profaned my holy name in that with regard to them it was said: ‘these are the people of the LORD and yet they have gone out from his land’  
(Ezekiel 36:20; see also vv. 21, 22, 23)

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Conflicting Definitions of Purity,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 505-518; Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 37, 128-129.

<sup>14</sup>See the remarks on “moral” impurity above, nn. 8-9.

<sup>15</sup>The connection between baptism and making disciples is the burden of my earlier article, Richard E. Averbek, “The Focus of Baptism in the New Testament,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2:2 (1981) 265-301. Although the point of the article remains solid, it requires extensive updating and revision, especially in light of the more recent work on the washings of Qumran and other sources for second temple Judaism. See the extensive literature cited in note 12 above.

Their going into exile gave the Lord himself a bad reputation; that is, his name was “profaned.” The Lord’s response to this was that he will act on behalf of his own name by bringing them back from captivity into their land (v. 24).

The main point of my argument here is that, in association with this promise to return them to the land, the Lord announced to them:

וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים וְטָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמְאוֹתֵיכֶם  
וּמִכָּל-גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֶטְהַר אֶתְכֶם:

“I will splash (or ‘pour’) *clean water* on you and you will become *clean*. From all your *impurities* and from all your *idols* I will *cleans*e you” (v. 25)

It is especially important to note that earlier in the same chapter the Lord had already compared their defilement of the land, which was the reason for their going into exile in the first place, with one of the regular impurities in Leviticus 15. The Lord said specifically,

בֶּן-אָדָם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבִים עַל-אֲדָמָתָם וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ בְּדַרְכָּם  
וּבַעֲלִילוֹתָם כְּטִמְאַת הַנְּזִיָּה הִיְתָה דַרְכָּם לִפְנָי:

“Son of man, the house of Israel was in their land but they *defiled* it by their ways and deeds – like the *defilement* of the woman’s menstrual period was their way (of life) before me” (v. 17)

The impurity of the woman’s regular menstrual period lasted for seven days, after which she would bath in water and be unclean until evening (Lev 15:19-24; cf. v. 18 for the contextually apparent water purification procedures).<sup>16</sup> There was no sacrifice and blood atonement involved because this was a regular impurity. In Ezekiel 36, therefore, the Lord promised to wash the nation in clean water so that they would become clean again when he brought them back to the promised land.

This is what John’s baptism was all about. He was preparing the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah by calling the people to repentance. Their cleansing in association with their repentance follows the pattern of restoration in Ezekiel 36. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, the verses following immediately after the promise of cleansing, the Lord continues this way:

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<sup>16</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 934-35. Milgrom is probably correct in applying the washings from Leviticus 15:18 to 15:19-24. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 28 questions this on methodological grounds, but then does nothing further with it.

וְנָתַתִּי לְכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם 26

וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־לֵב הָאֶבֶן מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לְכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר:

וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־בְּחַקִּי תֵלְכוּ 27

וּמִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם:

- (26) “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.  
 (27) My Spirit I will put within you and I will make you walk in my statutes and my ordinances you will be sure to do.”

John the Baptist regularly made the same link between his water purification ritual and the action of the Lord putting his Spirit in them so that they would have a new human spirit within them – a new heart; one that is soft like flesh rather than hard like stone. Mark recounts the same essential point in John’s proclamation, “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will *baptize you with the Holy Spirit*” (Mark 1:7b-8).

According to the other two synoptic Gospels, this came with a warning, “John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’” (Luke 3:7-8a; cf. Matt 3:7-8). There are other elements in John’s warning that I will not deal with here. In Ezekiel, without the warning the Lord put the call to obedience this way, “I will make you walk in my statutes and my ordinances you will be sure to do” (Ezek 36:27b, cited above in context). The goal of the washing with water, the new heart and spirit, and the Lord’s Spirit within them was that they would walk in ways pleasing to the Lord. John the Baptist had the same goal.

The Gospel of John takes the matter further. When the Pharisee Nicodemus came to Jesus one night, Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (perhaps better ‘born from above’)” (John 3:3). This confused Nicodemus, so Jesus said it another way in v. 5:

ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

“Truthfully indeed I say to you, unless one is born of *water* and *spirit* he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>The words for “water” and “spirit” here in v. 5 are anarthrous, but the parallel in v. 8 below has the article “the Spirit.” This suggests a correspondence to “a new spirit” in Ezekiel 36:26 and “my Spirit” in v. 27 there. The human spirit and the Spirit of God are both involved in both places. See more on this below.

There has been no small amount of debate about the correct interpretation of this passage. For helpful reviews of the history of scholarship as regards the biblical background and meaning of “born of water and spirit,” see esp. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According*

Later in the passage Jesus is evidently disappointed that Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, could not seem to get his point (vv. 9-10). It seems that he should have gotten the point because the pattern of water and spirit stood out so prominently in Ezekiel 36-37, a passage that should have been familiar to him. As in the Synoptic Gospels so in this one, John the Baptist had belabored the fact that he came “baptizing with water,” but “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). John the Baptist knew exactly what he was doing with baptism of repentance. He saw himself fulfilling the pattern in Ezekiel 36, and Jesus confirmed it.

In fact, Jesus continues the pattern of reference to Ezekiel in John 3:8 when he uses the same play on words between “wind/breath” and “Spirit” for the life giving Spirit of God as the one that appears in the valley of dry bones vision in Ezekiel 37. Jesus said, “The *wind* (*pneuma*) blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the *Spirit* (*pneuma*)” (John 3:8). In the valley of dry bones the “wind” (*rûah* v. 9) blew “breath” (*rûah* vv. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) into the dry bones as they came together and flesh grew on the skeletons. Thus the bodies of Israelites would come alive, referring to their restoration from captivity, because the Lord would give them his Spirit:

וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי בְכֶם וְחַיִּיתֶם וְהִנַּחֲתִי אֶתְכֶם עַל-אֲדָמַתְכֶם

‘I will put *my Spirit* in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.’ (Ezek 37:14a)

The same image occurs again in Ezekiel 39:28-29:

Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, *I will gather them to their own land*, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for *I will pour out my Spirit* on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.

The combination of water washing for purification, the change of the human spirit and heart of the people of Israel by the Lord’s Spirit, and the image of wind, breath, and Spirit that is common between Ezekiel 36-37 and John 3 cannot be ignored in the interpretation of the latter. The vision of dead dry bones on the floor of the valley and their coming to life through the Spirit of God is about the “new birth” of the exiled nation, so to speak. John the Baptist and Jesus were also concerned with a new birth of Israel, and they followed the pattern of it from Ezekiel 36-37.

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*to John*, vol. 1, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 141-144; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 191-196; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 134; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 215-219. For a more detailed discussion of this verse, see Averbeck, “Worshiping God in Spirit,” 86-90.

This practice of baptism, of course, continued into the early church and is still a practice in the church today. The Book of Acts begins with reference to John's baptism and recalls Jesus' command that they should wait for the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to come upon them (Acts 1:4-5, 8). All this makes good sense from the perspective of the Gospels. The promise of the baptism of the Spirit was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The message of the day was: "**Repent** and be **baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness** of your sins. **And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 2:38). The baptisms of water and the Spirit, therefore, were bound together in an ongoing way.

Two very important passages later in Acts emphasize this bond between water and Spirit baptism. First, in Acts 10 water and Spirit baptism step front and center on gentiles in the church. Peter had seen a vision of a sheet coming down out of heaven that contained "all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air" (v. 12). He was told to kill and eat from them, but answers that he would never do such a thing because: "I have never eaten anything that is profane (i.e., "common," κοινὸν) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτον)" (v. 14, NRSV; cf. 11:8). God responds: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (v. 15). This happened three times. One of the original purposes of the clean and unclean animal regulations in Leviticus 11 was to serve as a means of keeping the Israelites separate from the corrupt nations around them (see Lev 20:25-26). The main purpose of the vision was to provide the backdrop for Peter to understand what would happen in his following encounter with the gentile, Cornelius. The gentiles were to be incorporated into the church, no longer considered to be sources of uncleanness for the Jews in the church. Since the Spirit baptism came upon them there was no reason to deny them water baptism, which in this context perhaps meant that these gentiles had been cleansed from their idolatry and other moral impurities with the same Jewish purification rite; the baptismal rite that John the Baptist had initiated (Acts 10:44-48).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Peter stayed with them for a few days (v. 48b), so when he returned to Jerusalem the charge was made against him: "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:3). He did not deny the charge, but explained why he did it (vv. 4-18).

I will leave aside for now any in depth discussion of the question of whether or not the "born of water" reference in John 3:5 might, in a secondary way at least, refer also to regular physical birth (cf. perhaps a correspondence to John 1:12-13). The image in Ezekiel 37 requires, at least metaphorically, that the dry bones belonged to people who had once been alive physically but now needed to be raised (i.e., resurrected) to a new life. It is interesting that, on the one hand, this is actually how the Apostle Paul explains baptism in Romans 6:4, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (cf. also v. 5; and consider also Colossians 2:12). Peter, on the other hand, comes at it from the perspective of water purification that is really about purification of the conscience. He moves from God's deliverance of Noah through the flood to analogy of "baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good **conscience**, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 3:21 NRSV).

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<sup>18</sup>For a very helpful new discussion of the categories "profane/common" and "unclean," and baptism as a cleansing ritual for gentiles too, see Wahlen, "Peter's Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity."

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this reference to purification of the “conscience” leads naturally to consideration of blood atonement purification in the New Testament based on the Old Testament principles and practices outline earlier in this essay. We cannot even begin to consider this subject in any detail here. Just a few sentences will have to suffice.

Briefly, for example, the book of Hebrews begins with the profound recognition of the all-important fact that Jesus, “after he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb 1:3). Hebrews 9-10, in fact, develops this point extensively. According to Hebrews 9:13-14, there is a distinct and overwhelming contrast between the OT purification sacrifices (including the sprinkling of the water of the ashes of the red heifer, Num 19) and the cleansing effect of the blood of Jesus Christ:

<sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (NRSV)

The OT system purified people on the level of “their flesh” (Heb 9:13), but the sacrifice of Christ purifies “our consciences” so that we become free “from dead works to worship the living God” (v. 14). The move from the levitical ritual physical purification in Leviticus 11-15 to the spiritual and moral purification called for in Ezekiel 36, for example, becomes apparent. Similarly, the OT sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animals but God’s throne room sanctuary in heaven with the blood of Christ: “Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these” (Heb 9:23 NRSV; cf. also Heb 9:1-11). Thus we are back at the basic principle of Leviticus 15:31 with which this essay begins.

Furthermore, the OT sacrifices could not cleanse sins permanently or at the level of the conscience, and, for that reason, they had to be offered continually, year after year (Heb 10:2; cf. v. 11). But the sacrifice of Christ was done once and for all (10:10; cf. also v. 12) so that we can “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (10:22 NUV). One can hardly find a more concentrated use of the purity terminology! It is obvious that just as Jesus did not actually become a literal lamb, so we are not called to the literal cleansing of the flesh. The concern here is with spiritual purity in the conscience that manifests itself in ethical and relational purity in the way we live. All of this is based squarely on the salvific purity provided for us in the sacrifice of Christ. It corresponds to the fact that we are the temple of the Spirit of God and that level of divine presence requires purity and purifications at that level, here referred to as the “conscience.”