

Women in the Priestly Laws: A Reassessment

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Introduction

Mayer Gruber, in his article “Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code,” maintains that women have ample opportunities for cultic participation in P’s laws.¹ Gruber’s primary evidence comes from Leviticus 12 and 15, which instruct women to bring certain sacrifices, and Numbers 6 and 30, which state that a woman may make a vow that is then incumbent upon her to fulfill if her father or husband does not cancel it immediately.² Although Gruber admits that women did not share equal status with men, he argues against “the standard cliché that P with its laws of purity led to the virtual exclusion of women from the cult.”³

As insightful as Gruber’s comments are, they are limited. It is unsurprising that women can offer sacrifices and make vows, and that once they have made vows, they must fulfill them. Both offering of sacrifices and fulfillment of vows are purity concerns and it is critical for P’s theology that women be able to perform the necessary rites in order to help maintain the purity of the land. The issue is not whether women can participate in the cult, but whether their participation is less or different, which Gruber admits it is, despite his claims that women have numerous opportunities for cultic involvement. If P does in fact extend most cultic obligations to women, we must ask whether this indicates that P conceives of women as in any way approaching equal status

¹ *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, J. Neusner, B. Levine, and E. Frerichs, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 35-48.

² His use of Exod 38:8 is dubious, as it is unclear in context whether that verse (as well as the apparently similar one in 1 Sam 2:22) in fact refers to cultic activity.

³ Gruber, “Women in the Cult,” 39-40.

with men, that is, whether P was conscious of his own alleged egalitarianism. I believe the answer to this question is no. P is not suggesting that women are in any way equal in status to men, except insofar as they may contribute to the purity or impurity of the land and the resultant effects this has on Yhwh's dwelling in the land. Women are cultically culpable; they are obligated to do their part in ensuring Yhwh's presence, but little more.

Judith Romney Wegner offers an opposing perspective to Gruber's in her article "‘Coming Before the Lord’: The Exclusion of Women from the Public Domain of the Israelite Priestly Cult."⁴ Wegner argues that although women are permitted and at times required to participate in cultic activities, their participation is limited. According to Wegner, this exclusion stems from P's view of women as "so anomalous that [they] came to epitomize *otherness*."⁵ This attitude is most concretely realized in the fact that women are never explicitly said to come "before the Lord" (לפני יהוה) in the priestly material, meaning that even when they do participate in the cultus, women are limited in their access to the divine to a greater extent than men are.⁶

How is it that Gruber and Wegner can look at the same material and see such different roles for women, one largely positive and the other largely negative? Of course, each scholar's starting point is different. Gruber hopes to redeem P, frequently vilified by feminists, by showing the ways in which P gives women opportunities to participate in

⁴ *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, R. Rendtorff and R. A. Kugler, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 451-65. Phyllis Bird has also written on women in the cultus, but her essay on the topic is not limited to P and in fact does not greatly differentiate between sources. See "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus," in *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities* (OBT; Fortress, 1997), 81-102.

⁵ Wegner, "Coming Before the Lord," 452; emphasis original.

⁶ Wegner argues that the exception in Numbers 5 "proves the rule." The issue remains, though, that there may be texts in which an unspecified person, who may be male or female, is said to stand before Yhwh. The possibility that an unspecified person may be either male or female will be discussed below. A closer analysis, to see under what circumstances a man other than a priest is specifically directed or said to come before Yhwh is also required, although it is beyond the scope of the present paper.

the cult. Wegner, on the other hand, has abandoned any hope of reclaiming this source and thus rejects it as hopelessly restrictive for women. At the heart of their respective interpretations lies an issue of translation. For Gruber, the default masculine vocabulary of P—and indeed, of the entire Hebrew Bible—allows the possibility that women may be included, unless they are specifically excluded by the use of unambiguously male terminology. Wegner, in contrast, assumes the opposite: that women are excluded unless they are specifically included by the use of explicitly female terminology. The issue depends on the translation of two words in particular: נָפֶשׁ and אָדָם. Can these terms include women, and can the use of default masculine vocabulary after them also include women? Neither scholar takes a very close look at the use of these terms in the priestly material, although Gruber does include some discussion.⁷ Indeed, both articles seem to make broad claims about P without looking closely at most of this large corpus of legal and cultic material.

It will be impossible to move past this impasse without taking a closer look at the terminology P uses for addressing his laws to the Israelites, and thus the first part of this paper will be devoted to that subject. Then I will look at a selection of cultic and purity requirements for women, limiting myself mostly to general observations and making comparisons to parallel laws for men where applicable. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on priestly law in Leviticus and Numbers. I will be especially concerned with Leviticus 1-15, especially chapters 12, 13, and 15, which lay out the system of sacrifices

⁷ Gruber, “Women in the Cult,” 39. In a footnote (n. 33, p. 45), however, Gruber goes further and supports the claim that the use of אָדָם in a gender-neutral sense indicates that P’s creation account is “nonsexist” (although he does not mention the groundbreaking work of Phyllis Tribble on this idea). This claim is based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of the priestly creation account; see my dissertation, *Women as Looking-Glasses: Reflections in the Pentateuchal Sources* (Brandeis University, 2007). Wegner does not address the issue of translating נָפֶשׁ and אָדָם, but it clearly underlies her understanding of the priestly laws.

and purity regulations that form the basic framework of the priestly cultic system. This is also the material with which Wegner is most concerned. Discussion of Numbers will be more limited, and will mostly pertain to Numbers 6 and 30, which concern vows and are the focus of much of Gruber's argument. Given the time constraints, a comprehensive analysis of all of P's laws is not possible here, although it is certainly necessary if scholars are going to make claims about what P allows, requires, or prohibits where women are concerned. Two short articles certainly cannot be the end of the discussion. More must be done, and this study is offered as a beginning only; my remarks are largely preliminary, and I hope they will serve as a starting point for further analysis of this neglected area. Most importantly, the differences between P and H's laws governing women need to be considered. It is certain that there are significant variations between the two where women are concerned. I will make one or two observations on this point, but further analysis is needed here as well.

Gendered and Gender-Neutral Terminology in P

It is generally agreed that נִפְשׁ and אָדָם can be used generically to refer to both men and women,⁸ but in light of Gruber and Wegner's disagreement over P's inclusion or exclusion of women, it is worth taking a close look at the specific usage in the chapters they are considering. The evidence is striking in Leviticus 1-15, where the term נִפְשׁ appears seventeen times as a term for a person (and an additional five times in reference to animals or with a pronominal suffix in the reflexive "oneself").⁹ אָדָם appears seven

⁸ BDB, 9, 659. See also the references in Gruber, "Women in the Cult," 45, n. 33. More recently, on אָדָם, see D. J. A. Clines, "אָדָם, The Hebrew for 'Human, Humanity': A Response to James Barr," *VT* 53 (2003): 297-310.

⁹ Lev. 2:1; 4:2, 27; 5:1-2, 4, 15, 17, 21; 7:18, 20-21, 25, 27; in Lev. 11:10, 43-44, 46 the reference is to animals or is reflexive.

times in these chapters,¹⁰ while אִישׁ occurs fifteen times¹¹ and אִשָּׁה six times.¹² More important than the frequency of these terms, which is mixed, is the distribution and context in which each is used (see chart). While נֶפֶשׁ and אָדָם have some overlap, אִישׁ is largely used in contexts where נֶפֶשׁ and אָדָם are absent. אִשָּׁה appears most frequently in verses where אִישׁ also appears.

	נֶפֶשׁ	אָדָם	אִישׁ	אִשָּׁה
Lev 1		X (1)		
Lev 2	X (1)			
Lev 4	X (2)			
Lev 5	X (6)	X (3)		
Lev 7	X (8)	X (1)	X (1)	
Lev 12				X (1)
Lev 13		X (2)	X (4)	X (2)
Lev 14			X (1)	
Lev 15			X (7)	X (3)

The clustering of נֶפֶשׁ with אָדָם and of אִישׁ with אִשָּׁה indicates that for P, these pairs are semantically related but distinctly different from each other. A closer look at specific uses of each term clarifies this principle: when P wants to distinguish between men and women specifically, as in laws that concern biological functions of one sex or

¹⁰ Lev. 1:2; 5:3-4, 22; 7:21; 13:2, 9.

¹¹ Lev. 7:8, 10; 10:1; 13:29, 38, 40, 44; 14:11; 15:2, 5, 16, 18, 24, 33. However, the references in 7:10 and 10:1 refer to “each” of Aaron’s sons, and thus are not parallel to the other uses; for this reason, they are left out of the chart.

¹² Lev. 12:2; 13:29, 38; 15:18-19, 25.

the other, the terms אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה are used. On the other hand, when P is expounding more general laws that could at least in theory pertain to all people, he uses the terms נֶפֶשׁ and אָדָם. For example, Lev. 1:2 refers to the person bringing an עֹלָה as אָדָם. We know from Lev. 12:6 that a new mother may bring an עֹלָה. Likewise, Lev. 4:2 introduces the law for a נֶפֶשׁ who must bring a חַטָּאת, another sacrifice required of the new mother in Lev. 12:6. Leviticus 4 enumerates the various groups of people who might commit an inadvertent sin and need to bring a חַטָּאת offering. There are four categories: anointed priests; the whole community; the נְשִׂאִים; and the individual, in v. 27 called נֶפֶשׁ (וְאִם-נֶפֶשׁ) (אִחַת תַּחַטָּא בְשִׁגְגָה מֵעַם הָאָרֶץ). As this category of offense includes the accidental breaking of *any* commandment (נֶפֶשׁ כִּי-תַחַטָּא בְשִׁגְגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וַעֲשָׂה מֵאֲחַת), it must certainly include women. The terms נֶפֶשׁ and אָדָם therefore must be inclusive of women as well as men.

In contrast, אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה are used almost exclusively in places where it becomes necessary to clarify the gender of the offerant. The majority of these uses appear in Leviticus 13 and 15. The latter, which deals with various genital discharges, is a chapter in which we expect to see this differentiation, as the various problems are enumerated according to gender, first those affecting men and then those affecting women. Leviticus 13, however, has to do with skin diseases that do not generally vary according to gender. Yet in v. 29 we find the phrase אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה. Why this construction instead of נֶפֶשׁ or אָדָם? The verse addresses skin diseases that may affect the skin of the head, including the beard; P wishes to clarify that both men and women are included, despite the reference to

the (male) beard (זקן).¹³ Verse 38 repeats *איש אורא אשה*, in this case concerning a general problem with no gender-specific issues. Milgrom suggests that the author was influenced by v. 29.¹⁴ The fact that v. 40 addresses only the man may also have influenced the use of *איש אורא אשה* here; in context, shifting back to the generic terms might have been confusing or awkward, and thus P made the choice to use the more precise technical terms. Verses 40 and 44 use only *איש* and address baldness, which affects men far more often than women, so that we can conclude that P is again addressing only the single relevant sex. Likewise, P uses *אשה* at the beginning of the laws for the new mother in Leviticus 12. P's usage of these terms is thus generally careful and systematic, because P is by its very nature careful and systematic.¹⁵ The specificity of the pair *איש* and *אשה* clarifies the generality of the pair *נפש* and *אדם* by standing in contrast to it.

It is noteworthy that *איש* appears significantly more often in chapters 17-27 of Leviticus, suggesting that H in particular is addressed to men, and perhaps also that H is less even-handed or careful than P in using inclusive terms. The variations between P and H in this regard are certainly worth exploring, and it may be that the two differ substantially in how they include women in the legal and cultic system. This is particularly striking because of H's otherwise inclusive stance in extending opportunities

¹³ See Gruber, "Women in the Cult," 43, n. 16, on whether זקן can also mean chin.

¹⁴ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 799.

¹⁵ There are a few exceptions. In Lev. 7:8, the term *איש* appears in the phrase *עלה אשה*. In Lev. 14:11, the reference is to the man appearing to be purified of his skin disease. Milgrom does not remark on either of these, except to note that the former differentiates the offering from that of the priest (*Leviticus 1-16*, 411), but he does not address why P has chosen to use the specific rather than the inclusive terms here. The term *איש* also appears in Lev. 15:5, and here, Milgrom notes that one would expect a gender-neutral term, arguing that this is the sense of the word here (*Leviticus 1-16*, 910). While these exceptions indicate that P is not always as meticulous as one would hope, the rest of the evidence nonetheless establishes a noticeable trend.

for holiness to all Israelites.¹⁶

Beyond the use of נפש and אדם in P, there is the additional issue of the use of masculine verbal and pronominal forms, especially suffixes, which may appear to limit certain observances to men. For example, Wegner argues that the זבח שלמים is limited to Israelite males.¹⁷ She bases this assertion on the use of masculine forms to refer to the offerant in Leviticus 3. However, as Wegner herself notes, this exclusion is “not absolutely explicit.” Leviticus 3, like many other P passages, uses male forms of verbs and suffixes in this chapter, but does not specifically say that only a man may bring this sacrifice. The use of default masculine terminology after a gender-neutral term like נפש or אדם should not be taken to mean that only men are included. Lev. 2:1, which opens with the feminine נפש followed by the corresponding (feminine) verb form, switches to a masculine suffix in קרבנו by the middle of the verse. This easy mixing of grammatically correct and technically incorrect (masculine) forms indicates that too much should not be read into the use of masculine verb and suffix forms specifically. On the other hand, it may also serve to indicate that although P may at times include women, as Phyllis Bird puts it, when “the Priestly writer speaks of the species, he thinks of the male.”¹⁸

Some Specific Purity Regulations

The two main sections of purity regulations specifically addressed to women are those about childbirth in Leviticus 12 and about genital discharges in Leviticus 15. The latter chapter covers (regular) menstruation as well as irregular flows of blood. These

¹⁶ See I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 223.

¹⁷ Wegner, “Coming Before the Lord,” 454-55.

¹⁸ Bird, *Missing Persons*, 162.

parallel regular and irregular male genital discharges in the same chapter, and the literary structure of the chapter indicates that the laws for women correlate closely to the discharge laws for men, neither gender being singled out as having inherently worse, or even significantly different, status owing to their bodily functions and the related opportunities for impurity.

Male and female abnormal discharges are the most closely parallel. Both result in a seven-day period of impurity after the discharge has cleared. The degree of contagion of both seems to be similar, although less detail is given in the case of women and there are minor differences including when clothing must be laundered.¹⁹ Both require a sacrifice of two birds, one as an *עלה* and one as a *חטאת*. It is noteworthy that women and men offer the same sacrifices for the same offenses and impurities—that is, one sex does not have to do more than the other in order to be purified. Although this is not often remarked upon, it is significant, and it stands in contrast to differences in other parts of these laws, including the longer period of purification required after the birth of a female as opposed to a male child.

Wegner makes much of another apparent difference between the rules for a woman and a man with an irregular discharge, namely, that the man is instructed to bathe, whereas the woman is not. Milgrom argues that women had the same requirement to bathe as men did, but that P omitted the statement of the requirement because the explanation of the male case was meant to carry over for the female.²⁰ This argument is supported by the fact that men are not always specifically instructed to bathe in places where it is likely that bathing was required, and Milgrom concludes that the statement

¹⁹ See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 936.

²⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 924.

that someone is impure until evening carries with it the assumption that the person must bathe.²¹ Wegner, on the other hand, argues that women were not required to bathe because they were not allowed into the one place that required such cleansing, namely, the presence of Yhwh (לפני יהוה).

However, while women are not instructed to bathe in Lev. 15:19-30, they are included in the injunction to bathe in v. 18—both men and women are there instructed to bathe after intercourse, a fact upon which Wegner does not remark.²² Although they do not then appear לפני יהוה, this is nevertheless a case of women being instructed to bathe as part of the purification process. Furthermore, in this and other cases, men may also be instructed to bathe without then appearing לפני יהוה, suggesting that bathing and entering the divine presence are not as closely intertwined as Wegner argues, and perhaps also indicating that her claim that women never appear לפני יהוה is wrong as well. Indeed, if this were the case, then the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5 would have to bathe, as she comes into the presence of Yhwh. In this case, the fact that the woman is brought rather than coming voluntarily (a key aspect of Wegner's argument about this example, which she calls the exception that proves the rule) cannot matter, as an impure person must be impure regardless of volition. In addition, these alleged differences in the ability of women to approach the divine reveal nothing about the relative seriousness of women's impurity itself, as compared to men's. In the meantime, we may conclude that the other regulations of Leviticus 15 indicate that a woman's abnormal discharge was in most ways equivalent to a man's. Its impurity was equally polluting and the sacrifices

²¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 667.

²² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 667, 756, 924, argues that bathing is required in most cases of impurity, for men as well as women, but is frequently left unstated.

required at the end of the period of purification were the same.

Women's and men's regular genital discharges, on the other hand, are significantly different. A regular discharge of semen renders a man and a limited number of objects impure until evening. A woman's period of impurity for a normal discharge lasts seven days, roughly equivalent to the average length of menstruation. That the impurity does not last an additional seven days after the flow ends, as in the case of both male and female irregular discharges, indicates that this is a less serious category of impurity.²³ Likewise, no sacrifices are required for purification, although a menstruating woman is more contaminating than a man with a regular genital discharge. This is manifested not only in the list of items and people she contaminates, but also in the statement that sex with a menstruant conveys the full seven-day impurity, apparently regardless of which day of the woman's seven-day period it occurs on.²⁴ Notably, this is another instance in which P and H differ significantly in their laws concerning women: according to H (Lev. 18:19; 20:18), sex with the menstruant results in the *karet* penalty for both people involved.²⁵

Claims that the prohibition against having sex with a menstruating woman is the

²³ Taking 15:28-30, with Milgrom (*Leviticus 1-16*, 944), to refer only to the abnormal discharge, not to menstruation as well.

²⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 938-39, argues that v. 23 pertains to "tertiary transmission of impurity" from the menstruant to a pure person via an object sitting on bedding or a seat on which the menstruant is (currently) sitting.

²⁵ Cf. I. Be'er, "Blood Discharge: On Female Im/Purity in the Priestly Code and in Biblical Narrative," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, A. Brenner, ed. (FCB 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 159, who argues that the difference between Lev. 15:24 and Lev. 18:19 and 20:18 is intentionality, the former being unintentional sex with a menstruant and the latter two being intentional. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 940, says the same, although in *Leviticus 17-22* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1550, 1755-56 he says that "H overturns P" and that intention is not the issue. It is most likely that the two are contradictory laws. Tikva Frymer-Kensky suggests that the two different laws are not mutually exclusive, noting that this is "the only instance in which a deed is believed to result both in temporary pollution and in *karet*"; see her "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 405.

only instance of contagion through sexual contact (excepting intercourse between two clean people, covered in 15:18) are not entirely clear. Lev. 15:7 states that anyone who touches the “flesh” of a man with an abnormal discharge becomes impure. The term בִּשְׂר as used here is usually a euphemism for genitalia, the fuller form כָּל־בִּשְׂר being required for the rest of the body. Although Milgrom argues that the whole body is nevertheless the sense here,²⁶ it is possible that it is in fact meant to refer to touching the genitals and would thus cover sexual intercourse, which we might reasonably expect to see mentioned as a prohibited form of contact.²⁷

Menstrual impurity occupies a place between normal male discharge and abnormal male and female discharges. However, it also stands apart from men’s regular discharge in terms of its severity, and while this may be explained by the fact that it involves blood, an inherently very dangerous substance, such an argument is belied by the fact that male irregular impurities do not necessarily involve blood and yet are just as contaminating as women’s irregular flows, which do involve blood—and they are more severe than menstruation! Likewise, as Milgrom notes, menstruation is not singled out as inherently more abhorrent than other kinds of impurity, nor is anything explicit said about women in general as a class of people because they are subject to this impurity. In other words, it is treated commensurately with other kinds of impurity—albeit more like irregular ones—in terms of severity, duration, and purification. The laws of Leviticus 15 also indicate that both women and men had considerable opportunities for impurity, and the argument that menstruation was cause for the exclusion of women from the

²⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 914.

²⁷ Suggesting that sexual relations would be included in other forms of contact is belied by the separate references to touching and having sex with the menstruant in vv. 19 and 24, respectively.

priesthood is a straw man. There must be a deeper reason for this exclusion, although efforts to determine what that reason might be have been unsuccessful.

These laws for male and female genital impurities in Leviticus 15 are separated by v. 18, which covers an otherwise pure couple having sexual relations. The semen from intercourse renders the couple impure until evening. It is noteworthy here that it is the man's semen that is the defiling substance; as with other emissions of semen, the man and the woman (on whom the semen "falls") are rendered impure until evening. As noted above, both of them are required to wash in water—both have the same status of impurity and require the same process to become pure again.

Leviticus 12 deals with impurities after childbirth, which of course have no male parallel. The period of impurity is remarkably long, and like the woman with an irregular genital discharge, the new mother offers an *עֵלֶה* and a *חַטָּאת*, although in this case the former is a lamb and the latter is a bird, rather than both being birds. The most remarkable—and perplexing—feature of this chapter is that the period of the mother's impurity after the birth of a daughter is longer than that for a son. The significance of this difference is elusive,²⁸ but it seems likely that the longer period after the birth of a girl is in some way related to the status of females in P.²⁹ Although P's laws pass no explicit judgment on women (or indeed on men) for their impurities, neither do they treat women as fully equal to men.

²⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 750.

²⁹ Gruber disagrees with such an assessment, arguing that "greater defilement is not necessarily an indication of lesser social worth" (Gruber, "Women in the Cult," 43, n. 13; see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 751). However, the converse, that the longer period of uncleanness reflects a higher social status for females is unimaginable in P. There is at least a difference between the two, although the significance of this difference remains unclear.

Other Legal/Cultic Texts Pertaining to Women

Most of the other priestly laws that pertain to women are addressed directly to men.³⁰ The law of the *sôṭâ* in Numbers 5, while it involves a woman, is primarily concerned with the man's perspective, in this instance his right to prosecute his possibly adulterous wife on the basis of suspicion rather than fact.³¹ Part of the concern in this passage, though, has to do with the fact that the woman has taken an oath, for which she bears some cultic liability. This is related to the realm of women's vows, which are covered by Numbers 6 and 30. Women who make vows are required to fulfill them, but they may be overridden within a certain time-frame by their fathers or husbands. This may be related to issues of property ownership, as Baruch Levine argues.³² However, Levine's explanation ignores the cultic aspect of the vow. The vow is, after all, made to Yhwh (Num 30:4) and thus its fulfillment is linked to issues of purity and pollution.³³ Levine also notes that failure to fulfill a vow "constituted profanation," indicated by the use of the verb *ללל* in Num 30:3.³⁴

The fact that a woman's father or husband may cancel her vows indicates that women are not fully autonomous in this area. However, if he does not cancel them, the woman must uphold her cultic obligations, as is the case with all purity regulations that apply to women. The power of the vow itself becomes a matter of purity and the woman is therefore responsible for it—she cannot be constantly watched and physically

³⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1412. Like Gruber, Milgrom is eager to point out the ways in which P treats women positively; in the end, though, both Gruber and Milgrom sound like apologists.

³¹ On this text, see, e.g., T. Frymer-Kensky, "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31)," *VT* 34 (1984): 11-26; S. Shectman, "Bearing Guilt in Numbers 5:12-31," in the forthcoming *Festschrift for Tzvi Abusch, J. Stackert, D. P. Wright, and B. N. Porter*, eds. (Bethesda: CDL).

³² Levine, *Numbers 21-36* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 435.

³³ See Knohl, *Sanctuary*, 228.

³⁴ Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 428.

restrained from making any vow she so desires, and if no father or husband learns of the vow and cancels it, major problems would ensue in the event that she did not fulfill it. It should therefore be unsurprising that women are able to make vows and, more importantly, are expected to fulfill them. Interestingly, women are also allowed to make a nazirite vow, which conveys a special religious status on the person who takes it.

Conclusions

Although this discussion has only dealt with a limited amount of material, and has not delved too deeply into many texts, nevertheless some conclusions are possible. P does include women in the terms נפש and אדם, and thus Gruber is right that women were included in the sacrificial system even where they are not explicitly referenced. This is hardly surprising, since purity is a paramount concern for P and women have ample opportunities for impurity. However, although P looks even-handed here, it goes beyond the evidence to argue that P is in fact an equal-rights legislator or theologian. Milgrom points out that P is not concerned with issues like *how* people with diseases get better;³⁵ neither is he concerned with *why* people contract diseases and become impure. Rather, P is concerned with the proper rites for purity when disease and impurity happen. P's concern with women, too, is limited to the impact of their impurity on the purity of the land and temple and its effect on Yhwh's presence there. Inasmuch as women, like men, may incur guilt and be required to make expiation, to offer sacrifices, and to purify themselves, P is careful to include them in his legislation. P is interested in women mostly in terms of how they fit into his overall conception of the order of things, in this case of purity and impurity. Beyond this concern, women are simply not on P's radar.

³⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 887-88.

The same attitude is reflected in P's creation story, which is not concerned with the equality of the sexes despite its description of the simultaneous creation of man and woman. Rather, P is concerned with sexual dimorphism as a necessary precursor for the increase of humans on the earth and, later, the fulfillment of the promise. In order to be fruitful and multiply, both sexes, male and female, are needed. The use of the technical terms זכר and נקבה in Gen. 1:27 reinforces this interpretation.³⁶ In this way, women are treated similarly to men: both women and men are necessary for the creation and perpetuation of the species. Likewise, both men and women are responsible for the continued well-being of Israel where cultic purity is concerned. P's inclusion of women in the legal corpus is pragmatic, but it is little more.

³⁶ See Sheckman, *Women as Looking-Glasses*, 380-87.