The Loaves of the Tree of Life: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Origins and Purpose of the Bread of the Presence within the Torah

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Introduction

Overview of the Bread of the Presence Ritual

The Bible, in its depiction of the Israelite cult, includes a ritual and corresponding articles known as the bread of the Presence.[1] The great antiquity of this ritual has often been noted by commentators who see it as among the oldest of the Tabernacle rites.[2] It played a substantial role in the religious thought of early Israel and stretched to touch every era of Israelite/Jewish history.[3] The bread is mentioned a handful of times in the Bible, mainly concentrated in the Torah. However, most of these are only one sentence long. The most comprehensive text on the ritual is Leviticus 24:5-9.

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[1] These cultic loaves are given several names throughout the Bible. The most common one is לֶחֶם פָּנִים, translated as "bread of the Presence," (Ex. 25:30; 35:13; 39:36, 1 Kgs. 7:48, and 2 Chron. 4:19). The word פָּנִים usually refers to the face of an animate being or to the front part of an object that is perceived by human vision. The term can also mean the presence of an individual (see Roy Gane, "'Bread of the Presence' and Creator-in-Residence," *Vestus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (April 1992): 180). Of these choices "presence" is more suitable than "face." Other phrases for the bread in the Hebrew Bible uses include לֶחֶם הַתָּמִיד, "continual bread," (Num. 4:7); לֶחֶם קֹדֶשׁ, "consecrated bread" (1 Sam. 21:5); simply לֶחֶם (Ex. 40:23, Lev. 24:5-9, and 2 Chron. 13:11); and the noticeably later לֶחֶם הַמַּעֲרֶכֶת, translated as "pile bread" (This designation is found in 1 Chron. 9:32; 23:29, and Neh. 10:33. 2 Chron. 13:11 reverses the word order for וּמַעֲרֶכֶת לֶחֶם).

[2] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black, and Allan Menzies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 79; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2092; Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary, Old Testament Library*, trans. J.S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 206; P.A.H. de Boer, "An Aspect of Sacrifice," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel, Supplements to Vestus Testamentum Vol XXIII*, ed. W. Anderson, et. al., 27-47 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 30.

[3] Though it is impossible to go into a full analysis here, the history of the ritual is far-reaching. Starting from the origins of the Tabernacle cult, it continued to be used in the Temple and was then reinstituted by Nehemiah for use in the Second Temple (Neh. 10:33). During the Second Temple, there was a development on the part of the Pharisees (and disapproved of by the Sadducees and Essenes) where the table, with the bread, as well as the lampstand, were brought out of the Temple and showed to Israelites during the pilgrimage festivals while the priests shouted, "Behold, God's love for you" (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2085). After the Roman destruction of the Temple, the table was taken to the Temple of Peace in Rome (as depicted on the Arch of Titus), a temple-museum that contained exotic items from across the Roman empire. For this reason, Rome became a pilgrimage site to Jews at the time (Pier Luigi Tucci, *The Temple of Peace in Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9-10; David Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba comes to Rome: A Jewish Pilgrimage in Reverse?" in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. Jaś Elsner, and Ian Rutherford, 373-386 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 380-381). Even after the destruction of the Temple, the holy bread continued to play a role in Jewish life. In some places the Shabbat bread was meant to represent the twelve loaves, through the baking of two long pieces of bread (representing the letter ו, which means 6), having two loaves with six braids each, or in Ukraine to bake a type of bread called *yud-betnik* which consists of twelve pull-apart pieces (Zvi Ron, "Braided Challah," *Modern Judaism* 42, no. 2 (Feb. 2022): 44).

> 5 Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. 6 Arrange them in two stacks, six in each stack, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. 7 By each stack put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread to be a food offering presented to the Lord. 8 This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. 9 It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is a most holy part of their perpetual share of the food offerings presented to the Lord.[4]

This text, while giving some worthwhile details about the rite, does little to help us understand the ritual's purpose. While many have presented their own answers to the question of function, this paper wishes to propose a new alternative solution as to the purpose that the ritual played in the religious life of early Israel through an examination of the Torah. It is the argument of this paper that the wheat for the bread of the Presence was provided by Israel as a first fruits offering during the Feast of Weeks, which was accompanied by an "elevation offering" of two loaves of bread which mirrored the bread of the Presence. Then, the Kohathites transformed the wheat into bread loaves which were presented to Yahweh by the high priest. While in the Tabernacle the loaves were soaked in the presence and life of God, transforming the bread into the ultimate expression of God's life. However, this bread was intrinsically connected to the lampstand, the stylized Tree of Life, and represented its fruit. The priests then ate of this symbolic fruit within the new Eden as a divine meal where God and humanity came together for a blessed moment to be united via foodways. This meal, as a consistent ritual, was a part of the fabric of cultic life. It was as consistent as the seasons and as reliable as the rising sun. God and man would be reconciled.

Modern Interpretations of the Purpose of the Ritual

Through the years, scholars have given their theories to the role that the bread of the Presence played within the religious thought of ancient Israel. The two starting points for such

[4] All Bible quotations, unless otherwise stated, are NIV.

theories are generally the quantity of loaves,[5] and the intimate connection between the lampstand and the table. There seem to be as many theories as there are scholars, though none of them are fully satisfactory. Before analyzing the various proposed models for the purpose of the cultic bread, qualifications should be given as to the parameters for what a fully acceptable theory about the bread's purpose will entail.

Firstly, a good theory will have consistent and unduplicated symbolism within the ritual. Many scholars look at the ritual with its twelve loaves and assert that the bread must represent Israel. However, this overlooks the idea that the high priest and his fellow priests represented Israel. The high priest had, as part of his highly elaborate clothing, the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on two different parts of his body. He had two onyx shoulder pieces which each had engraved on them the names of six of the tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:9-12) and a breastplate that had twelve different gems on it, each inscribed with the name of a different tribe (Ex. 28:15-28). As the high priest wore the names of Israel before the Lord, he was the representative of all Israel within the shrine of Yahweh.[6] It is then more likely that the high priest was symbolic of Israel, rather than the bread, whose symbolic equation to Israel is based purely on the number twelve.[7]

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[5] Throughout the Old Testament twelve is often used as a symbolic number to represent Israel. This is especially true when twelve is divided into two groups of six (as is the case with the bread of the Presence). As such, the argument goes, the bread must represent Israel. See Gane, "'Bread of the Presence,'" 193.

[6] Alice Mandell, "Writing as a Source of Ritual Authority: The High Priest's Body as a Priestly Text in the Tabernacle-Building Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141, no. 1 (2022): 55.

[7] There are many instances where the number twelve does not represent the Israelite tribes. In the context of Revelation, the twelve fruits hanging from the Tree of Life symbolize the twelve months of the year (Brian Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary, New Testament Library* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009), 397). The Babylonians, for their bread-laying rites, also laid out their loaves in groups of twelve (or multitudes of twelve, popularly thirty-six). Though, for them it was connected to the twelve zodiacs whose position relative to the sun marked the passing of the year (Heinrich Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntis der Babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1901), 94-95; Gane, 'Bread of the Presence,'" 193, no. 43). Josephus takes this zodiac ideology and applies it to the bread of the Presence in *War of the Jews* 5.5. In this view, since Yahweh created the stars, they have no power over him. Thus the bread would represent God's control of time, since in Greco-Roman times the astral deities were symbols

The second thing that a good theory will consider is the ritual's interconnectivity to the other rituals of the holy place, particularly the lampstand. Morales recognizes this when he notes the intertwined nature of these two cultic objects, stating that the two come together to form "one symbolic picture."[8] A similar idea is expressed by Haran in reference to all the rituals that happen within the Tabernacle that "these acts could not have been associated with each other by mere accident, but were conceived as inter-related phenomena."[9] Likewise, Hundley sees all the rituals in the Tabernacle working together, fulfilling different aspects of the same goal.[10] Gorman, in his study on rituals within Leviticus, sees fit to talk about a "priestly ritual system" which included all the various rituals of the priestly cult. These various rituals were related to each other, thus one ritual done within the system could affect how another one is seen and

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of eternity and time (Joabson Xavier Pena, "Wearing the Cosmos: The High Priestly Attire in Josephus' Judean Antiquities," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 52, no. 3 (2021): 375; Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 192).

[8] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 16. Other scholars note this relationship, though often with differing conclusions. For example, Rachel Hachlili notes the close relationship between the two as they are almost always described together, however, the most she makes of it is that they are both sacred objects and both serve only as markers of sacred space (Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah: Evolving into the Most Important Jewish Symbol* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 14). Gerstenberger sees the relationship in cosmic terms as the relationship between light and life. Life requires light to bloom, for in the consuming chaos of darkness, life ceases (Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary, Old Testament Library*, ed. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 356). Sailhammer views the relationship as odd, and concludes that the only way for it to make sense is in light of Leviticus 10 where Nadab and Abihu offer "strange fire," and are slain by God which is followed by the eating of grain offerings in the sanctuary area by Aaron and his two remaining sons (John H. Sailhammer, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Leviticus, The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 937). Nihan believes that relationship is because originally these two rituals occurred within the holy of holies, for he sees no other way that the bread could earn the name "bread of the Presence" (Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 511-512). Though, the textual connection between these two objects more than likely stems from the simple fact that historically they were connected through ritual and ideological means.

[9] Menaham Haran, "The Complex of Ritual Acts Performed Inside the Tabernacle," in *Scripta Hierosolymintana Vol VIII: Studies in the Bible*, ed. Chaim Rabin, 272-302 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 287.

[10] Michael B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 97-98.

performed.[11] Given the level of interdependence the Tabernacle rituals had, it would seem appropriate to claim that whatever the symbolic role that the bread of the Presence may have had, it would fit within the ritual purpose of the lampstand so that these rituals came together to tell a single unified story about the relationship of Israel and Yahweh.[12] When the above two criteria are kept in mind, it quickly becomes clear that previous proposals for the bread's purpose need reevaluation.

The Host Model

The host model sees Yahweh as a host who made the bread of the Presence as a meal to be enjoyed by him and Israel (represented by the priests) within his house.[13] In his Leviticus commentary Hartley states that "the table with the twelve loaves of bread on it represented the twelve tribes in fellowship with God. That is, God served as the host, having a meal prepared for the twelve tribes at his place of residence. This meal was eaten weekly by the priests as representatives of the people inside the holy chamber in the presence of God."[14] One should note the change in symbolism in Hartley's thinking: the bread is symbolic of Israel during the week but at the climax of the ritual its symbolism is inexplicably downgraded to simple food. Dommershausen offers a more consistent theory where Israel offers to Yahweh the necessities of life (bread) as a perpetual offering. For this, Yahweh acts as a host and allows all Israel

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[11] Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in Priestly Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1990), 37.

[12] Space will only allow for an analysis of the relationship between the bread and the lampstand and will not delve into the role that the incense altar plays in the unified message of the rituals. This relationship must be reserved for a future study.

[13] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus, Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 402; R.E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 815.

[14] Hartley, *Leviticus*, 402.

(represented by the priests) to eat at his table, forever.[15] Though this does not consider the lampstand's role, and thus is not a wholly satisfactory answer. Gerstenberger has a similar idea, though for him humans are the hosts for Yahweh. The mortal hosts act as the symbolic representation of Yahweh himself, eating the bread for him.[16] This symbolism is highly unlikely given that the priests represented Israel, rather than Yahweh.

Benedictory Model

Another model is the benedictory model which sees the light of the lampstand shining on the bread as a request for Yahweh to show his divine favor,[17] for him to grant fertility to the land,[18] or as an actualization of Yahweh's provision of food, akin to the manna in the wilderness, or food within Eden.[19] Another version has the bread not acting as the request for blessing, but as the representation of blessings already received by an ideal Israel in an ideal relationship with

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[15] W. Dommershausen, "Lachem," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band IV*, ed. George W. Anderson, et al., 538-547 (Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1984), 545.

[16] Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 360.

[17] Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 289.

[18] John Wilkinson, "Stone Tables in Herodian Jerusalem," *Bulletin for Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 13 (1993): 17; Richard S. Hess, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Leviticus, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III, and David E. Garland, 673-974 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 940. The medieval Jewish works Shulchan Shel Arba 1:32, and Zohar 153b both view the table as symbolic of the earth, and the bread as symbolic of the food of the earth. In this way, when the bread was presented on the table food was given to the earth by Yahweh. But, if the bread of the Presence ever stopped being presented, then the earth would become devoid of food.

[19] R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 230 (Cole also sees the eating of the bread as a sort of thankfulness for God's provision of food, and as a precursor to the Lord's prayer); Joseph Kelly, "Bread of the Presence," in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), "background"; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 81; John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 146; Carol Meyers, *Exodus, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 232; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004) 85-86.

God.[20] Given that there is a lack of language relating to communicating with God, it seems unlikely that the ritual is a form of prayer or request of God. Moreover, the first option ascribes Israelite symbolism to the bread, the second option does not consider the idea that the blessings of a fertile land are tied to covenant obedience as lived out through daily life rather than through ritual,[21] and the third does not consider the lampstand. Therefore, the most likely option is the last, but it assigns Israelite symbolism to the bread, and strips the priests of their symbolism, a notion which seems unlikely for already stated reasons.

Covenantal Model

The covenantal model is perhaps the most popular proposal which sees the bread as representative of, or in Milgrom's case a reminder to Yahweh of, the covenant between Israel and Yahweh.[22] In other cases, the ritual is seen not as a reminder of the covenant, but an actual participation in it, in which humanity aids in their salvation.[23] Within this model symbolic Israel would consume the covenant, bringing it into their innermost beings, akin to the prophecy that Yahweh would write his law on the hearts of his people (Jer. 31:33). However, some see the bread as a mixture of the covenantal and benedictory models as the food represented God's perpetually ongoing creative acts, and that to accept Yahweh's provision was to engage in his

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[20] Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 26; Leigh M. Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24 within its Literary Context," *Vestus Testamentum* 59, no. 2 (2009): 303-304.

[21] Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1979), 31.

[22] Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus,* 238; Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 260; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27,* 2095; Paul V. M. Flesher, "Bread of the Presence," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary: Vol I A-C,* ed. David Noel Freedman, 780-781 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 780-781; Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 149.

[23] J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 86.

perpetual covenantal relationship.[24] The strong point of such a theory is that the bread is called an "everlasting covenant." However, this proposal does not consider the bread ritual alongside the lampstand and is not fully satisfactory. While there are other theories, they have not garnered much (if any) support amongst scholars, and do not need extensive treatment here.[25]

Methodology

Two different approaches will be used in the defense of this thesis. The first is a historical approach where the historical background of the ritual will be looked at to determine the religious traditions that birthed the bread of the Presence. This will aid in understanding how Israel took these rituals from the wider world of the ancient Near East and shaped them into something unique and Yahweh-honoring. The second approach is a textual approach through the lens of biblical theology to discover how the Israelites viewed the ritual within the framework of the narrative world of the Bible. Biblical theology is difficult to define, and it is not the place of this essay to create a new definition for it. For the purposes of this thesis, biblical theology will be composed of two distinct, yet interrelated, aspects. The first is to discern what might be called the "original theology" or the "writer's theology."[26] This would be to discover what the ritual meant to the Late Bronze Age Israelites who first engaged with the bread of the Presence. To come to such a conclusion form and redaction criticism will be used to isolate the oldest material of the scriptures.[27] The pulling apart of the threads of the Bible is not done with the intent to

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[24] Gane, "'Bread of the Presence,'" 202-203.

[25] An example is the previously discussed view by Hachlili who sees the table as a marker of sacred space only (Hachlili, *The Menorah*, 14).

[26] Ben Witherington III, *Biblical Theology: The Convergence of the Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 5.

[27] Form criticism was pioneered Hermann Gunkel and sought to uncover the shorter oral traditions from which a given biblical passage was derived. It later came to be associated with the study of the types of written texts

unravel the narrative, but simply to see how the ritual was originally conceived. Another tool is comparative studies. Understanding related rituals across the ancient Near East can help come to an understanding of Israel's unique version of the rite. Meyers, in her study of the lampstand, refers to "biblical artifacts," which are "artifacts" found in the text rather than in dirt.[28] In the same vein, what is being dealt with are not actual rituals still being performed today, but with rituals found only in text. Also, like Meyers' biblical artifacts, the purpose of understanding these rituals is not simply to come to a fuller understanding of the intricacies of the Tabernacle cult, but to come to a deeper knowledge of how ancient Israel related to Yahweh through this ritual.

The second aspect (what one might call "canonical theology," or "editor's theology," to differentiate it from both aspects combined) is to understand how the bread of the Presence fits into the wider story of the Bible. For this aspect, a literary approach[29] will be conducted to show how the editors of the Bible want the reader to view the ritual within the context of the whole

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in the Bible (William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Biblical Interpretation, Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 103). If form criticism is about uncovering the original oral history of a text, then redaction criticism is about chronicling the changes made to the written text after its initial composition. The Bible has many indicators that it was originally an oral piece of work, which would make sense given that the world of the Old Testament (and especially that of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I) was an oral culture, where verbal communication and memory were vital in the storing of cross-generational information. The fact that these oral traditions were expanded on after writing is also not a surprise, as these texts would be copied over and over, handed over from generation to generation, from scribe to scribe as material was continually added in a living tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit through the ages. See Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 8-24; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17, New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1990), 27; John H. Walton, and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 16-18, 27-35.

[28] Carol Meyers, "The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult: A Dissertation," PhD diss., Brandeis University, 3.

[29] This is to see the Bible as an intricately designed piece of literature, where the stories and word choices are deliberate and put in their places with the utmost care of Israel's scribes to create the final text. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative, Revised and Updated* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

canonical text. When dealing with literature, one is not interacting with history as it happened, but rather as a writer/editor's version of history meant to display the truths that the author is trying to guide the reader towards.[30]

Reading literature is entering into a "narrative world" that seeks to impart meaning via story.[31] The mentions of the bread of the Presence, even the ones entrenched in the laws of Exodus and Leviticus, are presented as part of the story of Israel that runs from Genesis 12 to 2 Kings 25.[32] The law tells the story of God creating a nation of flawed people, through the covenant and laws, transforming them into a political unity that can dwell with a perfect God.[33] The oracular story of Exodus and Leviticus climaxes in God inhabiting the Tabernacle, changing the course of history as creation is furthered and man and creator dwell together.[34] While understanding the original intentions of the bread is important, it is also crucial to recognize how the editors of the Bible viewed the ritual and how they wove it into the wider narrative of scripture.

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[30] Whether these edited views of history are factually accurate, but only focus on certain aspects, or if they are factually incorrect is the domain of historical analysis, not a literary one.

[31] Liane M. Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 14-15.

[32] J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012) 359.

[33] Ibid., 361.

[34] Simon Chavel, "Oracular Novellae and Biblical Historiography: Through the Lens of Law and Narrative," *Clio* 39, no. 1 (2009): 12.

Of Rituals and Symbols

The consideration that overlaps both the historical and narrative portions of this study is the idea of the bread as ritual. The study of ritual constitutes entry into a world of symbols.[35] The symbols of the ritual weave a world of meaning that points to something grander that is seen as necessary for the fullness of life. This essay will follow Gorman's approach to ritual. That is, to engage with ritual is to engage in a "ritual world." By creating actions within the "ritual world" the performer and his community recognize their place within creation and do their part to uphold its right order.[36] Geertz has a similar view of ritual in that the actions dramatize, enact, and perform, or otherwise materialize a set of symbols.[37] For him, any religious system is the weaving together of symbols into a coherent unit.[38] These symbols are all representative of beliefs which are "stored" within the symbol.[39] When these symbols that represent belief become enacted, it becomes ritual, as mentioned by Geertz, "in a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality..."[40] These two worlds could otherwise be called the physical world, and the spiritual world. The ritual, by enacting these symbols, becomes a conduit by which the convergence of the two worlds becomes a reality. This "ritual world" is similar to the "narrative world" of the Biblical text in that both

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[35] Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 15.

[36] Ibid., 17.

[37] Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

[38] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 129.

[39] Ibid., 127.

[40] Ibid., 112.

seek to transform what is real into a meaningful message about humanity and its place within the cosmos. The latter does it through words, the former through actions and symbols.

The narrative world uses metaphor to describe concept A in terms of concept B, so that A no longer is simply A, but takes on some of the qualities of B.[41] The ritual world does the same thing via symbolism.[42] Symbolism can go a step further than metaphor, for when symbolism comes into play there is a fusion between the target (what is being presented) and the source (what is being represented), with the target *becoming* the source. An example of this is a ritual of the Nuer people of South Sudan and Ethiopia in which a crocodile symbolically becomes a god in the eyes of the worshippers.[43] That is not to say that the worshipper does not cognitively know that the object of their devotions is an animal rather than some grand and mighty spiritual being,[44] but that for the moment what is truly real (in an eternal way, existing beyond the sensory realm of mortals) becomes tangible for humans. Likewise, as a ritual, the bread is a symbol for something, on this point most commentators agree. The discrepancies come about as to what exactly the bread symbolizes. Discovering this will open the key to the whole ritual. It is the thesis of this paper that the bread represents the fruit of the Tree of Life eaten by a symbolic Israel in a divine meal on the cultic cosmic mountain, and this ritual constituted the ritualistic realization of Israel's great hope of being united with God in a creation made new.

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[41] Zoltán Köveces, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

[42] Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private, Routledge Revivals* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 16.

[43] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 133.

[44] Audrey Hayley, "Symbolic Equations: The Ox and the Cucumber," *Man, New Series* 3, no. 2 (Jun 1968): 269.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter I will deal with the historical questions of the origins of the bread of the Presence. In terms of the two-part structure of the ritual, it will be argued that in the first part, prior to God's presence coming over the loaves, the ritual resembles ancient Near Eastern divine-feeding rituals. However, after the bread touches the table, it has a closer resemblance to the Ugaritic divine meals. The Israelite ritual likely mixed these two elements to create the ritual as practiced in the Tabernacle cult.

Chapter II will examine another Canaanite ritual set: the sacred tree cult, and its relation to the menorah. The lampstand and the bread have a connection tighter than any other two ritual objects in the Tabernacle and should be read together. The lampstand is likely the stylized Tree of Life, whose light is representative of God's presence. It follows that it is this light that reaches out to the bread, transforming it from fruit of the soil to a fruit of the Tree of Life.

Chapter III will look at the scriptures involving the bread of the Presence. This chapter will look at the references to the bread found in the Torah, but outside of Leviticus 24:5-9. This will include instructions for the table and bread (Ex. 25:22-30), which will reveal nuances about the Tabernacle's status as the divine realm, and what the table utensils tell us about the ritual and its relation to the life of God's presence and the sacred tree cult. Exodus 35:13 will be evaluated, along with similar passages in Numbers 7, and 1 Chronicles 9:32 and 23:29, to uncover the people who baked the loaves on a weekly basis. Exodus 39:36 and 40:23, the completion and inspection of the Tabernacle, will be looked at in terms of its connection to the creation account. This will set the bread of the Presence firmly within a creation theology, which, along with its connection to the menorah, establishes it as food within a newly created cosmos. Finally, Numbers 4:7 will be looked at regarding the travel regulations imposed upon the bread.

The final chapter will deal with the Levitical account of the ritual, trying to come to a full picture of the ritual itself from these five verses. It will trace the bread's lifecycle through the three tiers of the bread's development. First as raw wheat in the possession of Israel who gave the grain as a first fruits offering as part of the Feast of Weeks. Secondly, as cooked offering on behalf of Israel and as the fulfillment of Israel's covenantal obligations. Finally, as a life-imbued bread, where Yahweh offers it to be eaten by Israel as a reward for covenantal faithfulness. True to his word, if Israel is faithful to Yahweh, then Yahweh will dwell among Israel, and it will be as if Israel had found for itself a new Eden hidden in the hills and valleys of Canaan. An Eden which produces the food that was lost, but now has been found. The way to true life has been opened, and far from being a distant dream, the fullness of life with the creator Yahweh is within reach.

Chapter I: Bread-Laying Rites and the Divine Meal in the Ancient Near East

Introduction

Divine feeding rites are found across the world, both in antiquity and surviving to the modern day. At the Grand Ise Shrine in Japan, purified priests prepare and present large food offerings (mainly consisting of rice, the staple food of the islands, like Israel's bread) to the eating hall to feed the six kami enshrined there. This is done twice a day in silence. After the kami "eat," the food is taken back and is eaten among the priests.[45] In Mesoamerica, the Mayans offered cacao among other food to the gods and dead as materialized prayers, hoping the beings of the other world would affect the lives of the living.[46] The ancient Near East engaged with this ideology as well, and an investigation into these food-related rites can help in understanding the bread of the Presence. Since much of the Israelite cult had its origins within a pagan institution that was transformed as it was gutted of its old symbolism and Yahweh made its center,[47] it stands that this is true of the bread of the Presence as well. At the very least, the bread of the Presence interacted with the ideology and theology of the wider ancient Near East.

Bread in Mesopotamia

The Narrative World: The Bread-Cult, Creation, and Life

Within the corpus of Mesopotamian literature, the presentation of bread before the gods stretches to the very beginning, and reaches for the very purpose, of humanity. The beginning

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[45] Allan G. Grapard, "Japanese Food Offerings," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 48, no. 1 (2021): 177.

[46] Cameron L. McNeil, "Death and Chocolate: The Significance of Cacao Offerings in Ancient Maya Tombs and Caches at Copan, Honduras," in *Pre-Columbian Foodways, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food, Culture, and Markets in Ancient Mesoamerica*, ed. John Edward Staller, and Michael Carrasco, 293-314 (New York: Springer, 2010), 294.

[47] Menaham Haran. *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 224.

passage of the Sumerian poem, *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, depicts the creation of the cosmos in relation to the bread-laying rituals,

> After in days of yore all things needful were brought into being,
> After in days of yore all things needful had been ordered,
> After bread had been tasted in the shrines of the Land,
> After bread had been baked in the ovens of the Land,
> After heaven had moved away from earth,
> After earth had been separated from heaven...[48]

Gadotti notes that the grammar of the passage suggests that all these events such as the separation of heaven and earth and the institution of the bread-laying rites happened at the same moment,[49] so that to talk of the origin of the bread-cult was to speak of the very act of creation itself. Other Sumerian texts contain similar themes which connect bread and the ordering of life. For example, the story *How Grain Came to Sumer* depicts how the god An created grain and put it in the Kur, the primordial countryside, under lock and key. His sons looked at the humans and how they ate grass like sheep, and plotted with Utu, the sun god, to steal the grain and bring it to Sumer.[50] Likewise the *Debate of Cattle and Grain* depicts the Anunnaki eating grass until An made Lahar, the cattle goddess, and Ashnan (also called Ezina), the grain goddess, who is called "the nourishing bread, the bread for all,"[51] similar to the title given to her in *Enki and the World*

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[48] Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 199-200.

[49] Alhena Gadotti, *'Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld' and the Sumerian Gilgamesh Cycle* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 12.

[50] Gwendolyn Leick, *A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology* (London: Routledge, 1991), 129.

[51] Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 181.

Order where she is called "the good bread of the whole world."[52] The two goddesses went earth to establish themselves and to provide clothe and food for the gods, a gift which the gods could not make full use out of until the coming of humans.[53] The Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic* also depicts bread as connected to the creation, as originally the Igigi were responsible for providing bread for the Anunnaki, however when the lesser gods revolt, the high gods created humans, whose sole purpose was to provide all the gods with food and drink. As noted by Sigrist, "Through this myth, the whole regimen of the daily offerings in the temples, which consists simply in the feeding of the gods, is justified."[54]

The connection between bread and civilizing properties is found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* when the harlot Šamḫat implores Enkidu to "eat bread, the emblem of life,"[55] which helps transform him from his animal-like state into a true human. The connection between bread and life is also found in the *Tale of Adapa*. Within this story, Adapa is a wise and holy man of Eridu, who proves his holiness in part by baking bread for the gods at the temple there. In this tale, Adapa is taken up to the heavens where he is offered the bread of life (the bread which grants immortality). He does not eat of it, having listened to some other gods who tricked him into

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[52] Jeremy Black, et. al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 222.

[53] Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 220.

[54] Michael Sigrist, "Mesopotamia," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston, 330-332 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 330. This view is also taken up in the Sumerian poem, "Cattle and Grain." See G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1974), 87.

[55] A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96-97.

believing that it was, in reality, the bread of death that was brought before him,[56] as such he missed his chance to be immortal.

The Ritual World: Feeding the Gods

Twice a day the Mesopotamian priests would offer food to the gods within the temple.[57] These meals would consist chiefly of bread and beer, though other food items such as meat could accompany the offering. Sometimes these other food items (such as meat) were placed directly on the bread,[58] in a way fusing the two ritual elements. The food was placed on a tray and either offered on a table in the presence of the god,[59] or the priest made a ritual swinging motion in front of the idol. In either case, the god consumed the food merely by looking at it. In many cases, a linen curtain surrounded the table and idol while the god consumed his meal, so that there was a distinction between the mortal and supernatural realms, and not even the priests were to look on the workings of the divine realm.[60]

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[56] James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd Edition with Supplements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 101-102. Some claim that Adapa was not tricked, but rather was being obedient to the cruel gods. Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*, 89.

[57] A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization, Revised Edition*, ed. Erica Reiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 188; Edwin C. Kingsbury, "A Seven Day Ritual at the Old Babylonian Cult at Larsa," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 19, no. 62.

[58] This is seen primarily in Assyria. The connection might be because both bread and meat require human work to create the cooked product from its raw state. Salvatore Gaspa, "Meat Offerings and their Preparation in the State Cult of the Assyrian Empire," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75, no. 2 (Jan 2012): 255-256, 270.

[59] The Akkadian phrase used to denote that a bread offering is to be laid in the presence of a deity is *ana pan*, meaning "toward the face." On the surface, this is similar to the Bible's לֶחֶם פָּנִים, literally "face-bread." However, there is a key difference in that the Mesopotamian version has a preposition (*ana*, meaning towards), which the Hebrew does not, instead the bread is directly related to the "face." This means that in Mesopotamia, the bread was merely *in* the presence, but in Israel, the bread was *of* the presence.

[60] Oppenheim, *Mesopotamia: Ghosts of a Dead Civilization*, 192.

The specifics of these bread-laying rituals varied from temple to temple. For example, *GIR.LAM* were cakes made with fruit (dates, pomegranates, and apples were favorites) or even semolina cream, which were offered to Sara, the tutelary god of Umma, at his temple there.[61] Another bread variant was the ziggurat-shaped bread which was made by a palace official called the "ziggurat man."[62] These ziggurat cakes came in various sizes, such as 10, 20, and 50 liters, and generally made of four layers. The cake itself was made of *muttāqu* bread, a sweet bread of wheat, sesame oil, and date syrup. These loaves were probably also made with grapes, pistachios, crushed chick-peas, and pomegranates, as is the indication of an 8th-century administrative list.[63] These cakes were instrumental in the worship of the goddess Šeru'a (possibly the consort to Assur).[64]

Semantically, some rituals do bear a close resemblance to the bread of the Presence, such as one ritual that reads "You place a sacrificial table in the presence of Ishtar (and) place twelve loaves of bread (on it)"[65] Another such ritual text from Urkagina tells of 420 loaves which were given as food to the gods, which is followed by "40 hard-baked loaves were set in the presence;

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[61] Elizabeth Rosemary Ellison, "A Study of Diet in Mesopotamia (c.3000-600 BC) and Associated Agricultural Techniques and Methods of Food Preparation," PhD Diss., University of London, 126.

[62] Salvatore Gaspa, "Bread for Gods and Kings: On Baked Products in Profane and Cultic Consumption of Ancient Assyria," *Food & History* 9, no. 2 (2011): 16-17.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago Vol Ia*. Edited by Ignace J. Gelb, Benno Landsberger, A. Leo Oppenheim, and Erica Reiner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), 244.

1 loaf was for the table."[66] The daily offerings at Uruk required the baking of 243 loaves of bread, which were broken up amongst the gods during the four cultic daily meals.[67]

Aside from its role in the daily offerings, bread was also offered during special cultic occasions, such as the Akitu festival, originally a harvest festival that was later given creative and political overtones.[68] The *Hymn to Nisaba* describes the role of bread with the "great festival of Enlil." According to this poem, more grain grows so that "the seven great throne daises" may be provided for, and "to establish bread offerings where none existed."[69] Thus, the cult was to bring their agricultural service across the world, expanding the cult. As the boundaries of the Babylonian crops increased, so too did the reach and light of the gods.[70]

Bread in Ancient Egypt

The Narrative World: Bread, Death, and Everlasting Life

For ancient Egyptians, bread's importance was tied to Osiris and the afterlife that he ruled over. Osiris was king of the underworld and was also associated with grain, as evidenced by iconography which shows grain sprouting from his coffin. When Osiris died, so too did the grain, but when he was reborn (at least in the underworld), so too did the crops,[71] causing him to

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[66] George A. Barton, "A Comparison of Some Features of Hebrew and Babylonian Ritual," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46, no. 1/2 (1927): 88.

[67] Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 343. Each of the city's four gods received 30 loaves. 8 for the main morning meal, 8 for the second breakfast, 7 for the main evening meal, and 7 for the secondary evening meal. Also, bread was laid out before other lesser gods, and even the tiaras of Anu, and the ziggurat itself.

[68] Julye M. Bidmead, "The Akitu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimization in Mesopotamia," PhD Diss., Vanderbilt, 1.

[69] Black, T*he Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 293.

[70] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 102-103.

[71] Mark S. Smith, "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12, no. 2 (1998): 270.

be responsible for providing the living with bread.[72] The living were then to "return" the bread back to the gods and the deceased so that they too may experience the life-giving qualities of bread.

Starting in the Middle Kingdom, a new picture of the afterlife began to form. In the past, it was thought that the dead were reborn and stayed eternally within their tomb. However, by the Middle Kingdom, this changed with the emergence of the cult of Osiris. During this period there grew the belief that the body was reborn and remained in the tomb, but a person's *ka* (if righteous enough) could be reborn into Aaru, or the Field of Reeds.[73] This was an afterlife modeled after the Nile Delta, filled with waterways and canals, sailing boats, and rich fields. Here humans do in death what they did in life, harvest the crops to make bread to provide for the *ahk*- and *ka*-spirits.[74] However, there is a hope that here they may eat the bread of Osiris in his house, and daily be in the presence of the deity, having life everlasting.[75] Despite the harvesting motifs there is still a strong emphasis on the duties of the living to provide the bread for the House of Osiris.[76]

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[72] John Gwyn Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 172.

[73] Leo Roeten, *Loaves, Beds, Plants, and Osiris: Considerations about the Emergence of the Cult of Osiris* (Oxford: Archaeopress Egyptology, 2018), 147-149.

[74] Milagros Álvarez Sosa, "The Field of Offerings or Field of Reeds," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. Rita Lucarelli, and Martin Andreas Stadler 373-392 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 373.

[75] Mark S. Smith, *Following Osiris: Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from Four Millenia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 257.

[76] Tarek Sayed Tawfik, "Spell 1 of the Book of the Dead and its Vignette," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. Rita Lucarelli, and Martin Andreas Stadler, 357-372 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 358.

The Ritual World: Feeding the Gods and the Dead

The archaeological landscape of Egypt gives a rare glimpse into ancient Near Eastern bread as there are many surviving examples of bread,[77] known generally as *te*.[78] Ancient Egyptian dictionaries list thirty-eight types of cake and fifty-seven varieties of bread,[79] perhaps the most popular of these breads was *t-chedj*, a conical bread resembling a breadstick that was used in sacrificial offerings.[80] These loaves were made by pressing the dough into a mold which was baked and then broken to reveal the bread.[81]

Bread could take on a variety of shapes, as frescos from the tomb of Rameses II depict a bakery wherein bread is baked in triangles, circles, spirals, and animal shapes.[82] Similarly, a text from the Temple of Horus at Edfu states that during any given festival that "there are all kinds of bread in loaves as numerous as grains of sand."[83] Plutarch related a tradition where the Egyptians of Alexandria during certain occasions sacrifices of bread in the shape of a tied donkey, crocodile, or hippopotamus, to symbolize their wishes for the chaining of the chaotic Seth-Typhon, which these animals represented.[84] Likewise, in the same city, a feast for Adonis was

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[77] Delwin Samuel, "A New Look at Old Bread: Ancient Egyptian Baking," *Archaeology International* 3, no. 1 (1999): 28.

[78] Pierre Tallet, "Food in Ancient Egypt," in *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World*, ed. John Wilkins and Robin Nadeau (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 320.

[79] J. Vergote, *Joseph en Egypte* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959), 37.

[80] Magda Mehdawy, *The Pharaoh's Kitchen: Recipes from Ancient Egypt's Enduring Food Traditions* (New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 25.

[81] Vanessa Smith, "Food Fit for the Soul of a Pharaoh: The Mortuary Temple's Bakeries and Breweries," *Expedition* 48, no. 2 (2006): 28-29.

[82] George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 8-9.

[83] Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84.

[84] Ibid., 22-23.

marked by bread baked in the shape of flowers, birds, and animals, meant to remind the worshippers of the relation between Adonis and nature.[85]

Aside from the special festival bread, cultic loaves could be laid down on two occasions: in a temple as food for the gods, or in a tomb as food for the dead. In terms of the first of these, bread was offered to the gods three times a day, along with other foodstuffs like meat and vegetables. These foods would then be taken by the temple's priests, who would divide the food amongst them according to a system based on how many days each priest worked.[86] On some occasions, only bread was presented to the god. In such cases, the bread symbolized the other food items.[87] The bread in these cases was laid down on mats in front of the table for the gods[88] which were sprinkled with wine as a guarantee of eternal life.[89]

The second option was for bread to be presented on altars in tombs, usually in front of false doors. The number of these loaves averaged twelve, though they could be as little as six, or as many as eighteen.[90] In the symbolic thought of the Egyptians, the dead were seen as

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[85] Ibid., 22.

[86] Ibid., 37-38; Aylward M. Blackman, *Gods, Priests, and Men: Studies in the Religion of Pharaonic Egypt by Aylward M. Blackman*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Routledge, 2011), 132. The giving of these bread rations was payment for the priests. *The Turin Strike Papyrus* records the strike that resulted from the *sem* priest (the first priest who was on the Great Council of Thebes and oversaw all of the temple lands, priests, and craftsmen) did not immediately grant the priests these rations. See Teeter, *Religion and Ritual*, 51.

[87] Serge Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ann Morrissett (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 84.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Dommershausen, "Lachem," 545.

[90] Michael M. Homan, *'To Your Tents, O Israel!': The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 130.

embodiments of Osiris with the offering being an embodiment of the Eye of the Horus.[91] The Eye was often worn as an amulet which was believed to convey the strength and life of the sun to the wearer.[92] The association of the bread for the dead and the Eye of Horus stretches back to the Old Kingdom as *The Pyramid Texts* of the tomb of Unis. On the north wall of his tomb are instructions for rituals involving the preparation of the deceased during the mouth-opening meal "a king-given gift to the ka of Unis. Osiris Unis, accept Horus' eye, your bread loaf, and eat."[93] Other inscriptions include the instructions for the offerings that are to be given to the pharaoh after his passing:

> Osiris Unis, accept Horus's eye, which Seth trampled.
> 1 LOAF OF "TRAMPLED" BREAD.
> Osiris Unis, accept Horus's eye, which he pulled out.
> 1 BOWL OF "PULLED" BREAD.
> Osiris Unis, acquire for yourself your face.
> 2 LOAVES OF HT3 BREAD.
> Osiris Unis, I have gotten for you those that resemble your face.
> 2 LOAVES OF CONE-BREAD...[94]

The list continues for 10 more bread varieties meant to be laid before the king for a total of 46 loaves of 14 bread types which are to be laid by Unis. The inscriptions of Unis acted as a kind of "canon" in Ancient Near Eastern texts as all the spells within this tomb, minus one (PT 200) are replicated in Middle Kingdom texts and beyond.[95] Thus, throughout Egyptian history, the dead who consumed the symbolic bread were imbued with the life and strength of the sun, just as the amulets gave such life to the living. In *The Pyramid Texts* in particular, the symbolism

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[91] Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 325.

[92] E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 56.

[93] James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 21.

[94] Ibid., 26-27.

[95] Ibid., 15.

of food becoming the Eye of Horus was for the pharaoh to be given life as part of his resurrection, after which his *ba* would join the gods, and in one tradition he would join Ra on his celestial journey, and eat of the god's bread (though the son still had a responsibility to provide bread for his deceased father).[96] In some later cases the altars where the bread offering was placed had bread hieroglyphics etched into them, enabling the bread to be magically and symbolically present on the table, even if physical loaves were missing.[97] The lingering importance of bread in Egyptian society can be seen even in contemporary times where grain is called *dhahab al-ard*, "gold of the land," a reference to both its color and its value.[98]

A possible example of Egyptian bread-laying rites in Canaan comes from Beth-Shean, the most important Egyptian stronghold in northern Canaan[99] due to its position by three fords of the Jordan River, and on the nexus of two important trading routes. These routes were further split into at least ten sub-roads through the Beth-Shean Valley and Canaan,[100] one of which was the only caravan route connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia.[101] Here there are possibly records of at least two different bread rituals analogous to biblical ones. First, bread stamps were discovered

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[96] Samantha Edwards, "The Symbolism of the Eye of Horus in the Pyramid Texts," PhD. Diss., University of Swansea, 179-180.

[97] Sue D'Auria, Peter Lacovara, and Catherine H. Roehrig, *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1988), 91.

[98] Jessica Barnes, *Staple Securities: Bread and Wheat in Egypt* (London: Duke University Press, 2022), 83.

[99] Amihai Mazar, *The Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000-586 BCE* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 282-283.

[100] David A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 110-111.

[101] Ellen Fowles Morris, *The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and the Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt's New Kingdom* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 585.

at the shrine to Astarte at the temple of Seti I.[102] It has been argued that Astarte is the goddess behind Jeremiah's Queen of Heaven,[103] the figure that women baked stamped bread for, and who was responsible for the fertility of Israel (Jer.7:18, 44: 17-18). Thus, it may be that these breads represent an older version of Jeremiah's rituals.[104] A second possible connection is that clay balls were discovered in the same temple which Rowe interpreted as model bread offerings, based on the word *imenyt* (daily) that was stamped multiple times on them.[105] If this is true, then it could be the case that this is an analog to the bread of the Presence as these votive offerings would have likely remained in the presence of the deity, as is generally the case with votive offerings. However, this interpretation has come into dispute in recent years, based on a new reading of the characters as either "Amun-Re," or "hidden" (which would refer to Amun-Re), which could render the bread theory invalid,[106] unless it was meant to be the permanent food for Amun-Re. This is not entirely out of the question given that one use of similar mud balls is as magical food

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[102] Alan Rowe, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-Shan: Part 1 The Temples and Cult Objects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 9.

[103] Other suggestions include Shapash, Asherah, Anat, Ishtar, Lady Wisdom, and even Yahweh (see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2010) 146-150; Margaret Barker, "Wisdom: The Queen of Heaven," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 159; Teresa Ann Ellis, "Jeremiah 44: What if 'the Queen of Heaven' is YHWH?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 4 (2009): 487). However, Jeremiah's Queen of Heaven probably points to some syncretistic version of Asherah and Astarte/Ishtar based on the fusing of the celestial and fertility elements. See Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 98.

[104] Rowe, *The Four Canaanite Temples*, 9.

[105] Ibid., 90. Wimmer also reads the inscription as "daily." See S. Wimmer, "Egyptian Temples in Canaan and Sinai," in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichteim*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll, 1065-1106 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 1080; Frances W. James, *The Iron Age at Beth-Shan: A Study of Levels VI-IV* (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1966), 324-325; S. Wimmer, "Jmnjj.t-Skarabäen?," in *Skarabäen außerhalb Ägyptens: Lokale Produktion oder Import? Workshop an der Ludwig-Maximilans-Universität München, November 1999*, ed. Astrid Nunn, and Regine Schulz, 63-65 (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2004), 64.

[106] Baruch Brandl, "Scarabs, Seals, Sealings, and Seal Impressions," in *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989-1996 Vol III: The 13th-11th Century BCE Strata in Areas N and S*, ed. Nava Panitz-Cohen, and Amihai Mazar, 636-684 (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 662-663; Othmar Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von der Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit, Einleitung* (Freiburg: Göttingen Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995), 127, 320.

for use in spells.[107] Besides the balls, there are also several clay cylinder's which Rowe and James both describe as votive bread offerings,[108] while recent scholarship describes them as looms.[109] Whether or not Beth-Shean demonstrates a parallel to the bread of the Presence is up for debate, though scholarship does seem to be straying from such opinions.

Other Bread Rites

Hittite Bread

Other ancient Near Eastern cultures had bread-laying rites, though their similarities to the bread of the Presence appear to be minimal. For the Hittites, the presence of bread was so important to ritual activity that if a ritual did not need bread, it needed to be stated.[110] Like elsewhere, the laying of bread was food for the gods, though it also had another role not readily seen in Egyptian or Mesopotamian texts: motivator for the gods. People would often use bread to entice the gods into doing favors for them.[111] Such could be seen in a ritual meant for the cedar gods to return to the people. In this ritual, bread (which had a piece of red cedar tied with a string around it) was placed alongside a meal on a table along the road. This "cedar bread" was topped with butter and laid along the road, along with other food and oil, as a trail for the cedar gods to follow the trail to the table, where they would eat with the priests and then return to the city,

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[107] Ana Stevens, *Private Religion at Amarna: The Material Evidence* (Oxford: BAR Press, 2006), 113.

[108] Rowe, *Four Canaanite Temples*, 90; James, *The Iron Age at Beth-Shean*, 26.

[109] Nava Panitz-Cohen, Naama Yahalom-Mack, and Amihai Mazar, "Various Finds: Clay, Stone, Ivory, Bone and Faience Objects and Vessels," in *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989-1996 Vol III: The 13th-11th Century BCE Strata in Areas N and S*, ed. Nava Panitz-Cohen, and Amihai Mazar, 742-763 (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 746.

[110] Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *Alimenta Hethaeorum: Food Production in Hittite Asia Minor* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1974), 218.

[111] Ibid.

bringing life and power with them.[112] Bread offerings were not restricted to gods alone it would seem, as indicated by the *Kalashma Tablets* where bread offerings are given for the lance of the deer-god,[113] probably the god Runtiya who is often depicted standing on a stag and holding a spear.[114]

Greco-Roman Bread

Rather than bread as food for the divine, bread offerings where the gods did not eat the sacrificial meal, that part was intended for humans, but rather these sacrifices (with their accompanying music, dancing, and feasting) were meant to draw the eyes of the gods via their aesthetical qualities, and so bring divine attention to the worshippers as they lifted up their prayers.[115] Specifically, bread was a marker of mortality. For example, Galen believed that bread turned into blood in the human body (*On the Natural Faculties* 1.2). This belief is not restricted to the Romans, but was shared by the Greeks as well, as is recounted in the fifth book of *The Iliad* when Diomedes thrust his spear into the hand of Aphrodite on the battlefield outside Troy, "He gouged her just where the wristbone joins the palm and immortal blood came flowing quickly from the goddess, the ichor that courses through their veins, the blessed gods— they eat no bread, they drink no shining wine, and so the gods are bloodless, so we call them

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[112] William R. Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 76-78.

[113] Daniel Schwemer, *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazkoi Einundsiebzigstes Heft Nachlese und Textfunde seit 2017*, XII, Schwemer_KBo_71_1_7.pdf (uni-wuerzburg.de).

[114] Serkan Demirel, "Interpretation on Some Possible Depictions of the Hittite Tutelary Deity of the Countryside," *Tarih Incelemeleri Dergisi* 38 (2023): 64.

[115] F.S. Naiden, *Smoke Signals for the Gods: Ancient Greek Sacrifice from the Archaic Through Roman Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

deathless."[116] This is contrasted in *The Odyssey*, where one of the phrases used to denote human mortality is "men who eat their bread on earth."[117]

The Bread of the Presence and Feeding Rites

The difference between the bread of the Presence and these bread rites is a matter of form versus function. That is, they bear a resemblance in their aesthetical form. Twelve loaves of bread are laid on a table in the presence of a deity. However, in terms of deeper meanings of function, there is little similarity (the most obvious being the connection to creation present in Mesopotamian rites). Thus, while the first half of the bread of the Presence rite resembles these other rituals, there is a glaring difference in terms of their function, the bread of the Presence was not meant to feed Yahweh. There are some scholars who assume that the bread of the Presence developed from an Israelite feeding ritual, but there are reasons to argue against it. First, while in other cultures the bread was accompanied by lavish and rare meats, Yahweh's table consisted simply of bread.[118] Secondly, as Milgrom notes, the fact that the bread of the Presence is laid out in the presence of Yahweh for a week indicates that the purpose of these loaves is not consumption, but rather exposure to the presence of God.[119] Thirdly, there is no evidence to suggest that Yahweh eats the bread. The most that can be said is that God "eats" the smoke of the offering, but this is not a life-sustaining consumption, but rather the aroma is pleasing to him.[120]

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[116] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990), 189.

[117] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996), 198.

[118] Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 102. Hundley's suggestion that this is because Israel viewed Yahweh in a lesser fashion than other gods is not a compelling solution to the problem.

[119] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2092.

[120] Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, "Tomhændet må Ingen se mit Ansigt! Gavens Teologi i Det Gamle Testamente," *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 78, no. 4 (2015): 311; Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 114-115.

A line of thought has been to say God, whose presence is often manifested as fire, eats the burnt offering as it is consumed via the flames.[121] However, as Milgrom notes, the fire on the altar is to be eternally burning, maintained by the priests not because it is God's presence, but because it was God who started the fire, so that fire must be kept going.[122] In Israelite belief God existed long before he instituted the Tabernacle cult, and thus he existed for a long time without sacrifices offered to him, and as such he needs no food.[123] While these rituals do not align in function, there is another set of rituals that appear in Ugaritic texts that do: the divine meal.[124]

The Divine Meal in Ugaritic Literature

The divine meal is a specialized meal in which humans and the gods eat together, or that humans eat in the presence of the divine, which is distinct from the sacrificial cult. Such divine meals appear in the Ugaritic material. While these feasts do not mention bread (as none of the sacrificial texts so far discovered have mentioned the food item, and only a handful entertain the idea of cereals in general[125]), there is a closer parallel to these meals than the feeding rites. *The Tale of Aqhat* contains two divine meals. In one instance Danilu is by the *'adrm*[126] where he

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[121] Deena E. Grant, "Fire and Body of Yahweh," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 2 (Dec. 2015): 149-150.

[122] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 388-389.

[123] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament, Vol 1*, trans. J.A. Barker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 143.

[124] Thomas Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus, Eerdmans Critical Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 616-617; Brant James Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2015), 101-102.

[125] Daniel L. Belnap, "Fillets of Fatling and Goblets of Gold: The Use of Meal Events in the Ritual Imagery of the Ugaritic Mythological and Epic Texts," PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 181.

[126] This word has been translated both as "mighty tree" and as something along the lines of "honored dignitaries." The venue of the threshing floor would lend itself to the belief that the word is referring to people, though the activity of judgment could be associated with trees, as in Deborah and her palm tree. The word itself has a wide semantic range, being able to be used as a tree, threshing floor, granary, or "great ones." In this context, the people are the most likely option. See Gregorio del Olmo Lete, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic*

judges the case of a widow and orphan when he sees the god Kothar-wa-Khasis. Danilu commands his wife to prepare some food, which he eats with the god on the threshing floor, resulting in the crafting god gifting Danilu with a magical bow.[127] KTU 1.116 mentions a cultic feast that takes place on the threshing floor for Astarte.[128] Purely divine feasts exist in the Ba'al cycle, such as when Ba'al invites the seventy gods to his garden-mountain after the construction of his palace and his victory over Yamm,[129] though it has been postulated that such feasts were ritually redone by seventy human lords who represented the gods during the fall harvest festival.[130] KTU 1.22 displays a seven-day feast of the Rephaim "in the eating house on the summit in the heart of Lebanon."[131]

An interesting example of the divine meal is KTU 1.23. It is a single tablet that is marked by two different, yet connected texts that both center around a meal. The first is a ritual text describing a divine meal between the Goodly Gods and the royal court. The second text is a narrative involving the sons of El which ends in a feast. While both are interesting, the first text is more useful to the aims of this paper. In full, this text reads,

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Language in the Alphabetic Tradition, Part One, trans. Wilfred G.E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 21-22. A similar debate is mirrored in the biblical text as well, as 1 Samuel 14:2a states "Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron." There are those who would translate "Migron" as "threshing floor," so that there would be a tree connected to the threshing floor. See P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 235.

[127] Jaime L. Waters, *Threshing Floors in Ancient Israel: Their Ritual and Symbolic Significance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 158.

[128] Ibid., 161-162.

[129] Beth Steiner, "Food of the Gods: Canaanite Myths of Divine Banquets and Gardens in Connection with Isaiah 25:6," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27*, ed. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, 99-116 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 104.

[130] Theodor Herzl Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 192.

[131] Peter Altmann, *Festive Meals in Ancient Israel: Deuteronomy's Identity Politics in their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 169.

1 Let me invite the Goo[dly] Gods,

2 Indeed the beautiful ones, sons of...

3 Those given offerings on high...

4 In the outback, on the heights...

5 To their heads and...

6 Eat of every food, and drink of every vintage wine.

7 Peace, O King! Peace, O Queen! O enterers and guards!

8 “Death-and-Ruler (Death the Ruler) sits, in his (one) hand, a staff of bereavement

8-9 In his (other) hand, a staff of widowhood.

9 The pruner prunes him (like) a vine,

10 The binder binds him (like) a vine,

10-11 He is felled to the terrace like a vine.”

12 Seven times it is recited over the dais (?) And the enterers respond:

13 “and the field is the field of El/the gods, Field of Athirat and Rahm<ay>.”

14 On the fire seven times the boys with a good voice: coriander and milk, mint in curd.

15 On the basin seven times: incense.

16 “Rahmay goes hunting...”

17 The handsome guys are girded (or she/they (the goddesses) are girded in goodly might)

18 And the names of the enterers... (or and the name of the enterer...)

19 The divine dwellings are eight,

19-20 [...] seven times.

21 Blue, red,

22 Crimson of/are the singers (or are the two singers).

23 Let me invite the Goodly Gods, [ravenous pair a day old] day old [boys],

24 Who suck the nipple of Athirat’s breast(s) ...

25 Shapshu braids their branches (?),

25-26...and grapes.

26 Peace, O enterers and guards,

27 Who process with goodly sacrifice.

28 "The field is [the field of] El/the gods, Field of Athirat and Rahmay."[132]

The Invitation

The tablet begins with an invitation on the part of the ritual specialist. He goes out into the waterless outback, the peripheral of the Ugaritic world where the Goodly Gods dwell, and invites them to the feast. Invitations are an integral part of feasts from across the ancient Near Eastern world.[133] In KTU 1.21, Danilu invites the Rapi'um to his threshing floor. The warrior spirits arrive on their chariots and horses, where they feast with Danilu, who implores them to give life to his son.[134] Likewise, KTU 1.161 is a script in which the Rapi'um are invited to the festival meal commemorating the coronation of Ugarit's last king.[135] In *The Tale of Aqhat*, the goddess Anat hosts a feast, in which she gives the invitational cry to join her feast. Anat announces her feast by saying, "Eat of bread, ho! Drink of the liquor of wine, ho!" [136] (*l]ḥm [blḥm ʻay] šty bḫmr yn] ʻay*),[137] this should be compared to line 6 of KTU 1.23, which is nearly identical (*lḥm blḥm ʻay wšty bḫmr yn] ʻay*).[138] These in turn bears remarkable similarities to Lady Wisdom's own call to a feast in Proverbs 9, where she says "come, eat of my bread and

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[132] Mark S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006) 19-21.

[133] Ibid., 32.

[134] Andrew Tobolowsky, "Where Doom is Spoken: Threshing Floors as Places of Decision and Communication in Biblical Literature," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16, no. 1 (2016): 103.

[135] Baruch A. Levine, Jean-Michel de Terragon, and Anne Robertson, "The Patrons of the Ugaritic Dynasty (KTU 1.161)," in *Context of Scripture Vol I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo, and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., 357-359 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 357.

[136] Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah 55: Invitation to a Feast," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of Davie Noel Freedman in Honor of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers, and M. O'Connor, 27-55 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 28.

[137] Richard J. Clifford, "Proverbs IX: A Suggested Ugaritic Parallel," *Vestus Testamentum* 25, no. 3 (1975): 300.

[138] Clifford, "Isaiah 55," 28.

drink the wine I have mixed" (Prov. 9:5) (לְכוּ לַחֲמוּ בְלַחֲמִי וּשְׁתוּ בְּיַיִן מָסָכְתִּי/ *leku laḥamu belaḥamiy uštu beyayin masaketiy*). Generally, the usual biblical word pair for eat/drink is אָכַל/שָׁתָה but here it is לָחַם/שָׁתָה and thus follows the usual Ugaritic pattern.[139] The first verse of chapter 9 relates some important information regarding the location of the banquet. It takes place in Lady Wisdom's house, which has seven pillars (the same number as the Tabernacle, according to Josephus[140]) and is set up at the highest point of the city, the normal spot for the divine temple.[141] This should be paired with the fact that Lady Wisdom "erects" her house, which was the normal procedure of victorious gods and kings.[142] This lends itself to the belief that Lady Wisdom is in fact Yahweh.[143]

A second thing to consider is that the presence of God, God's own life and being, seeps into the bread, making it holy, just as Lady Wisdom's own being (wisdom) seeps into the feast so that whoever eats this metaphorical meal is eating of wisdom. Thus, the meal which is intrinsically connected to Yahweh's being, served in his temple, bares a striking similarity to the bread of the Presence, so that this ritual might have been talked of as the divine banquet meal of

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[139] Clifford, "Proverbs IX," 305.

[140] Barker, "Wisdom," 148.

[141] Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 30-31.

[142] Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Temple Building, A Task for Gods and Kings," *Orientalia* 32, no. 1 (1963): 56

[143] Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord*, 31. It should not be a distraction that in the biblical account Yahweh does not actually build his temple the way Lady Wisdom does, but rather it reflects a Canaanite source that the Israelite authors are taking, gutting of its old symbolism, and replacing with Yahweh. W.F. Albright suggests that Proverbs 8-9 contains a concentration of such "Canaanitisms," such as Wisdom's name being חָכְמוֹת rather than חָכְמָה, thus parallel to the Canaanite *Milkot* (queen), or that Canaanite texts also depicts El creating wisdom prior to his conquering of Tehom, which can be paired to the creation of mountains, as the Lebanon was considered a "fossilized" primordial monster, akin to Behemoth, which are elements linked to Lady Wisdom in Prov. 8. See W.F. Albright, "Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vestus Testamentum in Celebration of his 65th Birthday, 24 March 1955*, ed. Martin Noth, and Winton Thomas, 1-15 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 7-9.

life.[144] This line of thought is picked by the Jewish rabbis who associated Wisdom's meal with the bread of the Presence.[145] A similar thought is found in Isaiah 55:1-3, another call for a feast,

> 1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Here Yahweh makes an invitation to feast which is offered at his shrine (conceptualized here as "the waters"[146]). This feast happens during the return from exile, and in it God gives life. The food itself does not give life, but it is the nearness to the presence of God that gives life.[147] More than that, God also uses this feast as the opportunity to make an "eternal covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) with his guests, the same wording used in Leviticus 24:8 to describe the bread of the Presence, the meal in God's shrine that gives life due to the nearness of his presence.

The Royal Court

The human participants of the ritual are a varied group of officials. There is the king and queen (itself an odd mixture that the queen is to join in on this cultic rite[148]), along with two groups of officials: the *'rbm*, and the *tnnm*. The identity of these groups remains unknown. The former have been linked to the Babylonian *erib biti*, and thus may have served as singers.[149]

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[144] Barker, "Wisdom," 148.

[145] Leviticus Rabbah 11:9.

[146] Clifford, "Isaiah 55," 30.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 39.

[149] David Toshio Tsumura, "The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods—A Philological Study," PhD. Diss., Brandeis University, 29-30.

Alternatively (or perhaps additionally) their function could be the literal meaning of their name, "those who enter." In this case, they parallel the action of the Goodly Gods who also enter into the scene.[150] In terms of the other group, it is generally accepted that the *tnnm* are members of the military (perhaps archers or charioteers?)[151] who serve as the royal bodyguard.[152] Even though the ritual takes place outside of the bounds of the city in the "Sown" (cultivated fields, a sort of border zone breaching the wild, chaotic outlands of the Goodly Gods, and the ordered urban landscape of the court[153]), the *tnnm* seem to have some ritual component as they are the ones to offer sacrifices in lines 26-27.[154] Regardless of the identification of these participants, it is noteworthy that such a large group is involved in the ritual. King, queen, enterers/singers, and military officials represent a large swath of population, and may have more in common with the Israelite priests' representation of Israel, than the non-symbolic role of priests in divine feeding rituals.

The First Fruits of Death

Once all parties have met in the Sown, the specialist recites lines 8-11 seven times, a ritual action in which Mot, the god of death, is killed via viticultural imagery. It was not uncommon for Mot's death to be described in agricultural ways inspired by the upcoming season. In KTU 1.6 II, one of the tablets that makes up the Ba'al Cycle, the goddess Anath, enraged at the death of Ba'al, goes out and slays Mot. The death of Mot is here taken up in agricultural fashion as

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[150] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 61.

[151] Ibid., 38.

[152] Tsumura, "The Ugaritic Drama," 30.

[153] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 33; 39.

[154] Ibid., 39

She cleaves him with a sword.

She winnows him with a fan.

She burns him with fire.

She grinds him with a mill.

She sows him in the field.[155]

Mot's death in the Ba'al cycle is linked to the grain harvest,[156] just like how Mot's death in KTU 1.23 is linked to the summer fruit harvest, which lines 25-26 suggest is coming upon the world at the time of this ritual.[157] Moreover, the life of the harvest cannot commence until death has died, as the fruit must die in order to bring forth life. Thus, the life-giving vines, which produce a life-giving harvest, feed off death's own death.[158] The death of Mot via the growing of the vines acts a thematic first fruits offerings, which is generally given to the gods in their tents for Reshi-Yeni.[159] Thus, the first fruits kill death, creating life. This relates to the larger scope of the ritual because the Goodly Gods are gods of destruction. Just as the overwhelming force of life slays Mot, allowing death, for the duration of the ritual, to become a source of life, so too do the destructive gods join the fertile land of the Sown and are allowed into the realm of life.[160]

The Number Seven

There is an emphasis on the number seven throughout KTU 1.23, which is an important literary marker. Here Tsumura is probably right when he states that importance lies in the fact

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[155] Alasdair Livingston, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 163.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods*, 47-48.

[158] Ibid., 17.

[159] Ibid., 63.

[160] Ibid., 159.

that throughout the ancient Near East, there were cycles of seven years of famine and seven years of abundance.[161] This ritual took place during the end of a seven-year cycle of famine, in hopes for the fertility of the upcoming seven years.[162] Moreover, the ritual likely took place during Reshu-Yeni, an Ugaritic festival in which the king made sacrifices while living in a house made of branches and involves peace offerings of the grape harvest.[163] This month is analogous to the Israelite Sukkot festival.[164] Thus, this is a divine meal filled with life, in which humans and divine come together to share of the life of the gods. This meal happens at the end of a cycle of seven years, in the same way that bread of the Presence takes place at the end of a seven-day cycle. Also, both meals are associated with a particular festival: Rashu-Yeni for the Ugaritic meal, and the Feast of Weeks for the bread of the Presence (as will be discussed). It is from this festival's produce that the (at least part of) the food for the meal is gathered from.

The Seven Tents

It is widely believed that the seven dwellings are tents made from branches in which the idols of the gods would have been placed.[165] These tents were made during the month of Reshnu-Yeni and are akin to the booths made by the Israelites during the Feast of Booths. These tents may relate to the Tabernacle, as is the opinion of Tsumura, especially in light of the succeeding lines regarding the dress of the singers, which he takes as analogous to the codes in Exodus about

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[161] Tsumura, “The Ugaritic Drama,” 199-200.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 63-65.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 63

the dress of the priests.[166] However, it is not the Goodly Gods who dwell in these tents, but Shapshu, the sun goddess, and the stars, the astral family of El who are home in the Sown.[167] Thus, the beneficial gods of life are present in the ritual which marks perhaps the only time when the idols of the city are united with their destructive siblings. A connection might be present here between the appearance of Shapshu, who is called "the lamp of the gods,"[168] with the presence of the lampstand in the Tabernacle, itself connected to the sun (or rather the sun is connected to the lampstand, as in Gen. 1:14 the sun is called מְאֹרֹת, a designation given to the lampstand in places such as Lev. 24:2).

Incense

Lines 14-15 state that incense is burned seven times on the burners in connection to cooked food. It is likely that the incense was burned as the food was prepared.[169] The actual role of incense in the Canaanite cult is unknown, though it likely had the same role as it did in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. In various places, incense was thought of as the tears or sweat of the gods, and the burning of incense before cultic statues returned to the gods the parts of them which were lost, and thus were a necessary component to maintaining the vitality of both gods and the dead. It also is the instrument that gave life to those beyond the mortal realm who smelled it, and its smell often became associated with the gods.[170] The smoke that rose from the

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[166] Tsumura, "The Ugaritic Drama," 48-49.

[167] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 149

[168] H. Rouillard, "Rephaim," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van Der Horst, 692-700 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 694.

[169] Ibid., 57.

[170] Pearce Paul Creasman, and Kei Yamamoto, "The African Incense Trade and its Impacts in Pharaonic Egypt," *African Archaeological Review* 36, no. 3 (2019): 354-355.

incense acted as stairways by which dead kings could ascend into the heavens,[171] and carried man's prayers up to the gods.[172] It also acted a way to create sacred space, to clothe a space and people in the scent of the divine to separate that space and people from the outside world, marked by bad odors, so that that the sacred could be protected.[173]

Ritual and Narrative

As mentioned, KTU 1.23 is a mix of both ritual and narrative that are closely linked. The same is true of the bread of the Presence as the rituals of the lampstand and bread of Leviticus 24:1-9 are immediately followed by the narrative of the blasphemer in vv.10-16. The purpose of the placement has been a burning question. Milgrom suggests that there is no relation between the two passages,[174] though given the structure of Leviticus, this seems unlikely. A more likely solution is that offered by Trevaskis that while the rituals of vv.1-9 are about the holiness of the sanctuary, vv. 10-17 extends that to the whole community, so that it is not only God's shrine that is to be holy and live under his rule, but all of Israel. This has support at the end of the cultic food laws in Lev. 11, there is the call for Israel as a community to be holy (11:43-45).[175] In which case, the ritual of the bread of the Presence and the narrative connect quite well. If Israel wishes to participate in the heavenly banquet where they are unified with Yahweh, then they as a community need to be holy. They cannot communally live as the nations, and still eat with God. This is a point Clifford makes in his discussion on the feast of Isaiah 55. The presence of God at

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[171] Kjeld Nielson, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 9.

[172] Ibid., 10.

[173] Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 106-107.

[174] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2082.

[175] Trevasksis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24," 307.

the feast is to give life to Israel, that they may affect change in the nations, that they may truly be a holy people set apart for God.[176]

The Purpose of KTU 1.23

KTU 1.23 ritual and narrative tells the story of the Goodly Gods. These are gods who dwell outside of the cultic temples and the Sown. Despite their status as sons of El, they have been restricted to the outlands. However, for the duration of the meal, the boundaries are broken down. The gods of the city go out into the outlands to hunt for food, and the Goodly Gods come into the Sown. The food acts as a mode of reconciliation whereby the relationship between the Goodly Gods and their siblings are restored. The gods of death are brought into the family, and for a cultic moment, all of the gods and humans are home together in the Sown, sharing a meal that transcends the cosmic boundaries. Here is the unification of the divine family and humanity.[177] This giving of life is a component of other Ugaritic divine meals as well. An example is during Anat's divine meal in the *Tale of Aqhat*, she attempts to convince Aqhat to give her his bow by promising him a divine meal that grants immortality.

> Ask for life, O Aqhat the hero
> ask for life and I will give it to you,
> Not-dying, and I will grant it to you.
> I will cause you to count years with Ba'al,
> With the sons of El you will count months.
> For Ba'al, when he gives life, gives a feast.
> For the one brought to life he gives a feast and makes him drink.
> He sings, he serenades him,

[176] Clifford, "Isaiah 55," 33

[177] Smith, *The Rituals and Myths*, 151; 156.

With sweetness does he sing.

And I will bring you to life, O Aqhat the hero.[178]

The idea of eating food (probably bread, given Anat's feast invitation) which grants eternal life among the gods is similar to the idea found in the *Tale of Adapa.* In these instances, the divine meal of bread is meant to give eternal, divine life to the eater, but in both circumstances, it is refused.

The Divine Meal in Exodus

Exodus 18:12: The First Divine Meal

The first of the two divine meals which precede the introduction of the bread of the Presence is Exodus 18:12. At the beginning of the chapter, "Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him [Moses] in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God" (Ex. 18:5). At this meeting, Moses tells Jethro everything that happened in Egypt, which is followed by "Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God" (Ex. 18:12). Jethro and Moses go into the tent-shrine, a precursor to the Tabernacle,[179] where the telling of God's marvelous deeds prompts Jethro to offer up a divine meal. It has been suggested that this divine meal was eaten outside of the tent, as was customary for fellowship offerings,[180] and on account of the large

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[178] Clifford, "Isaiah 55," 29.

[179] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 2 (Dec 2008): 134. Propp is of the view that this tent is Moses' personal tent, but this does not match the connection between the location and the presence of God. William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 630-631.

[180] The Hebrew word translated "and other sacrifices" is וּזְבָחִיעַ, and is a reference to זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים, or fellowship offerings, which are also the only offerings to be eaten. See Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 353.

number of people present at the meal.[181] However, what is the point of the author's inclusion that Moses and Jethro go inside the tent to recount Yahweh's deeds, if they immediately leave and then have the divine meal outside the tent? The inclusion of the entrance into the tent is meant to signify that the meal (לֶחֶם) before God (לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) was eaten in the tent.[182] The only other meal associated with the inside of the tent is the bread of the Presence. Also, the number of people is not to be a detriment to the meal happening inside a tent, for example, a particular Mari text refers to a large public tent that consisted of sixteen pieces of cloth each weighing 66-119 pounds, and required 42 people to transport it,[183] large enough for all the elders of Israel.

This verse is considered one of the earliest verses within the Hebrew Scriptures. It chronologically appears early within the Pentateuch, at the beginning of the history of political Israel, but redactional studies also show it to be among the earliest in scripture.[184] If this is the

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[181] Though this text leaves the number of elders undisclosed, the second divine meal will give the number as seventy.

[182] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 631.

[183] Daniel E. Fleming, "Mari's Large Public Tent and the Priestly Tent Sanctuary," *Vestus Testamentum* 50, no. 4 (2000): 488.

[184] Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernard Anderson (Englewood Cliffs: Princeton-Hall, 1972), 178-180. Noth's methodology is built around the idea that Aaron's role within the story shifted through the years of storytelling. In his mind, Aaron was originally the leader of Israel with Hur acting as his secondary leader (two roles later to be replaced by Moses and Joshua) and in later traditions Aaron's role shifted to allow Moses a larger role. While Noth's methodology is questionable, others, such as Jaeyoung Jeon, see the verse as composing a part of the original core of the passage on the basis that Exodus 18:1-7;12 forms the conclusion to an original "Moses-Midianite Cycle" telling the story of Moses within Midian (Exod. 2-4), which forms some of the earliest material of Exodus. See Jaeyoung Jeon, "The Visit of Jethro (Exodus 18): Its Composition and Levitical Reworking," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 2 (2017): 289-306. Similarly, Fritz sees the verse as the work of E, the oldest of the Documentary sources (Volkmar Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Wüstenüberleferung des Jahwisten* (Marburg: Wlwert, 1970), 13). From a non-form criticism point of view, Axelsson sees the verse as among the oldest as well due to the prominence of the mountain of Lord in the text which is to be joined as part of the ancient mountain of the Lord tradition (Lars Eric Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir: Studies in the History and Traditions of the Negev and Southern Judah* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1987), 65), a tradition attested in the very earliest of sources (Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 64). Moreover, the vagueness as to the mountain and its location suggests a peak that was well known, possibly an already-existent mountain shrine

case, then the evidence would suggest that the concept of the divine meal stretches into the farthest reaches of Israelite cultic history, increasing the divine meal theories credibility as an origin point for the bread of the Presence ritual. This meal was also the partial fulfillment of Yahweh's promised sign in Exodus 3:12, that Israel would worship Yahweh at the mountain.[185]

In Exodus 3:12, God is manifesting himself through arboreal means via the Burning Bush, which acts as a tree of life, where God's life and deliverance encounters humanity.[186] Even though the plant of Exodus 3 is a bush compared to Genesis 2's tree, the two are connected by being arboreal. Besides, as frequently noted, the bush itself is not the concern of the passage, rather it is the fire of the presence of God manifest through the bush.[187] Just as Sinai as a whole is analogous to the Tabernacle,[188] the Burning Bush is analogous of the menorah and the Tree of Life.[189] The hope of the tree of life is fulfilled in the eating of the divine meal. Just as the lampstand and the temple are inseparable, perhaps so too is the Tree of Life and the meal that accompanies it.[190] One last point about this verse is the people who enjoy this meal. Jethro does

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visited by several Arabic tribes (Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 65; Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus, Sinai, und Moses: Erwägungen zu Ex 1-19 und 24* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 115.

[185] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 631; Jeon, "The Visit of Jethro," 292.

[186] Nicholas Wyatt, "The Significance of the Burning Bush," *Vestus Testamentum* 36, no. 3 (1986): 363.

[187] John I. Durham, *Exodus, Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 31.

[188] The foot of the mountain, where all Israel goes and waits, is reminiscent of the courtyard, the flanks of the mountain are akin to the holy place, where Moses and the priests ascend, like the high priest and his fellow priests in the Tabernacle. Finally, the summit of the mountain is the holy of holies, where Moses alone goes into the very presence of God to be given the heavenly blueprint for the earthly Tabernacle, like how the High Priest alone could enter the holy of holies to be in the presence of God See Nahum Sarna, *Exodus, The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 105.

[189] Wyatt, "The Significance of the Burning Bush," 364.

[190] One could note the example of Lady Wisdom, who offers the divine meal in the Temple in Proverbs 9 yet Proverbs 3:18 calls her a Tree of Life so that the food offered by her is the food of the Tree of Life. One could also look at the actual fruit of the Tree of Life in Genesis 2. Throughout the ancient Near Eastern texts and imagery

not have this meal alone, nor is it in the company of a few select individuals. Rather, the meal is enjoyed with the seventy elders of Israel. These elders are the symbolic representation of Israel,[191] in the same way that the priests are the symbolic representation of Israel.

Exodus 24:9-11: The Second Divine Meal

A few chapters later in Exodus 24:9-11 there is another example of the divine meal. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, along with seventy elders go up onto Mt. Sinai where they see Yahweh seated over a pavement of lapis lazuli. Like Exodus 18:12, Noth concludes that this verse is amongst the earliest verses in the Pentateuch, being originally solidified by the tribal league.[192]

As Moses and company traversed the mountainous Tabernacle, it becomes clear that they had crossed the boundary between the mortal and divine realms, or at the very least stood on ground that straddled both. They looked up and saw God, and beneath him, a pavement of lapis

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regarding the Tree of Life, particular focus is paid to the tree, and the fruit plays a minimal role, in the relatively few instances that it plays any role at all. But, in the Israelite context, there is a close connection between the fruit and the tree, so that the fruit plays a larger role in the Genesis story than it does anywhere else. Even outside Genesis, the larger Biblical narrative (both original and canonical theologies) places a close connection between the Tree of Life and food.

[191] Durham, *Exodus*, 246.

[192] Noth, *A History Pentateuchal Traditions*, 179. Though he concludes that originally it was the seventy elders alone who ate this meal, and then in later edits, Nadab and Abihu were added, and then finally Moses and Aaron. The antiquity of the verse is also suggested by Nicholson, who like Noth, does so based upon an idea that Moses was nonexistent in the earliest traditions and only put into the story at a later date (E.W. Nicholson, "The Antiquity of the Tradition in Exodus XXIV 9-11," *Vestus Testamentum* 25, no. 1 (1975): 79). Other scholars, such as Beyerlin Walter conclude that this verse is indeed one of the oldest, having a sitz im leben in the pre-monarchy tribal league, though he holds that Moses was a part of these earliest traditions. He bases his conclusion on the fact that the "elders of Israel," declined in importance after the monarchy, the name of "God of Israel," originated from the cult of Shechem, as well as the idea of them being under God's feet correlates to the Ark of the Covenant (God's footstool) which originates and is most heavily concentrated in the pre-monarchy. Finally, the concept of divine, covenant-meals is ancient. Though, he concludes that Moses was still a part of these oldest traditions. Beyerlin Walter, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions*, trans. S. Rudman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 27-35; 149-150. For an argument about a late date of the verse see Jean-Louis Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 165-183.

lazuli, as bright as the sky. They had stepped into the celestial and heavenly palace of Yahweh.[193] When the elders get into the presence of God they sit down and have a meal with Yahweh. Just as the bread of the Presence was situated within the holy place, next to the veil that divided them from the holy of holies, and just as the placement of the bread of the Presence instructions in Leviticus takes place right before the literary veil, this meal takes place on the flank of the mountain (the mountainous holy place), close enough to God's presence on the summit that they can see into the celestial palace. This is indicated by the lapis lazuli pavement, whose blue nature is the light blue of the daytime sky, and the dark blue of the night sky.[194] This is indicative that they are on the edge of the heavens. Beyond that, they see God, which means that they must be below his throne. They are below the pavement which separates them from God, in the same way that the veil separates the holy place and the holy of holies, and like how the firmament separates the waters below from the waters above in Genesis 1.[195] This meal thus takes place in the spatially corresponding location as the bread of the Presence rite that is introduced in the next chapter.

Also, just as bread of the Presence was imbued with God's life and presence, so too is this meal imbued with life. This is indicated by a pair of parallelisms in the verse: "They saw the God of Israel," and "but God did not raise a hand against these Israelites," that are paired with

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[193] William Henry Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 298.

[194] The idea that a stone pavement acts as the sky, and the border between heaven and earth is seen in Mesopotamian religion as well, where the heavens were divided up into three tiers, which were divided via stone pavements which was at least partially made of *saggilmud* stone, which is believed to be lapis lazuli, much like here in Exodus. See Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 9-11.

[195] The same Hebrew word is used in relation to the veil and firmament. See L. Michael Morales, "The Tabernacle Prefigured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus," PhD Diss., University of Bristol, 107. Though Exodus 24 does not use that word, the fact remains that the lapis lazuli is likely the firmament mentioned in Genesis 1, and thus can take the place of the Tabernacle veil.

the immediately following, “they saw God,” and “and they ate and drank.” The consumption of this meal was the act that allowed the leaders of Israel to see God and not die in his presence, as indicated elsewhere. The life of God filled the meal so that Israel could be in the presence of God.[196]

Conclusion

There are several similarities between these two divine meals. Firstly, both are considered to be ancient parts of the text and thus reflect original traditions about the divine meal. Secondly, both are meals that take place within the presence of God, one on the mountain of God, and the second by the mountain of God in the cultic manifestation of that mountain.[197] Also in both cases the meal is enjoyed by Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders of Israel who represent Israel.

The idea of a meal happening in the presence of God, partaken of a symbolic Israel, fits well with the idea of the bread of the Presence. This idea, taken alongside the similarities to KTU 1.23 and Ugaritic divine meals does suggest that this is a more plausible origin point for the bread of the Presence than the divine feeding rituals. Though the divine feeding rites held some similarities to the bread of the Presence, these similarities appear mostly about form rather than function (with perhaps the exception of the Mesopotamian connection of bread and creation). They lay down bread in the presence of the deity, though that is where the similarities end. Rather, the idea of the divine meal, as demonstrated in both the immediate context of Exodus 25 and in the Ugaritic examples, displays a more likely candidate.

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[196] Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch*, 170.

[197] John M. Lunquist, “What is a Temple?: A Preliminary Typology,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H.B. Huffman, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 85.

Chapter II: Sacred Trees and Edenic Food

Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction, the lampstand and the bread have a close bond which is practically unrivaled in terms of cultic objects. Given that these two objects are closely related, an understanding of the inter-relationship between the two objects would be beneficial, especially in light of the divine meal idea presented in the previous chapter. Once the symbolic relationship between the bread and the lampstand can be worked out, then the purpose of the bread ritual will be closer to being understood.

The Lampstand and the Table

The first thing to do is to demonstrate that the lampstand and the table/bread are closely related. There are several areas of the text that confirm this idea. Firstly, there exist several literary and syntactical similarities that fuse these two items as bound to each other. Both Exodus 25:37 and Numbers 8:3 give explicit instructions that the light of the lampstand is to face forward. As Wenham notes, the only thing in front of the lampstand is the table and bread of the Presence, thus the light was meant to fall onto these two objects.[198] Besides this, the descriptions of the lampstand and the table in Leviticus 24:1-9 share many things in common. Just as the people of Israel must bring the wheat for the bread of the Presence, they must also bring the oil for the lamp.[199] Both items had to be high quality. While for the flour that meant making it of the grainy סֹלֶת flour, for the oil this entailed pounding it in a bowl to a very fine liquid.[200] In every

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[198] Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 106-107.

[199] While the command for the provision of oil is explicitly stated in Lev. 24:2, the command to provide for wheat is implicit in Lev. 24:8. See Chapter IV for a further discussion on the topic.

[200] Sklar, *Leviticus*, 288.

instance of the Table and Lampstand being mentioned, they appear next to each other, generally with the table/bread being mentioned first (and right after the Ark of the Covenant). Exodus 25:10-40 (vv.10-22-the Ark, vv.22-30- table, vv.31-40- lampstand), Exodus 37:1-24 (vv.1-9- Ark, vv.10-16- table, vv. 17-24- lampstand), Exodus 39:35-37 (v.35- Ark, v.36- table, v.37- lampstand), Exodus 40:3-4 (v.3- Ark, v.4a- table, v.4b- lampstand), Numbers 4:4-10 (vv.4-6- Ark, vv.7-8- table, vv.9-10- lampstand) all demonstrate this. This is demonstrative of the fact that the table and bread together constituted the second holiest item in the Tabernacle, behind the Ark.[201] The only time this pattern is broken is in Leviticus 24:1-9, where the given order reflects the timing that the rituals are to be done.[202]

Douglas argues that by looking at the literary arrangement one discovers that the book of Leviticus is meant to be a sort of literary Tabernacle (and thus also a literary Sinai), its three sections broken up by the two narratives which act as the "screens" which separate the "courtyard," from "the sanctuary," from "the holy of holies."[203] Within Douglas' break-down of the tabernacle-book, the ritual of the bread of the Presence takes place immediately before the "second screen." This ritual stands on the very edge of the holy of holies, akin to its physical location, and helps to establish the holiness of the rite. To participate in this ritual was the closest

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[201] Milgrom, *Leviticus*: *A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, *Continental Commentaries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 288.

[202] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2085.

[203] Mary Douglas. *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195-251. Douglas' argument essentially is that Leviticus 1:1 shows Moses at the entrance to the Tabernacle, and then in the "courtyard" section (1-17, with 8-10 being the screen) rites are matched by their location in the book, going clockwise around the outer court. The first screen is the episode of "strange fire," which would correspond to the altar for burnt offerings right outside the first screen. Then the sanctuary (18-24:9) has laws and ideas for the communion of heaven and earth, such as festivals, and the menorah and bread of the Presence rituals. The second screen is the story of the blasphemer (24:10-22), which leads to the holy of holies, the three chapters that hold up the great liberation of God (25-27).

one could get to God's sphere without trespassing into the heart of the heavenly realm. Moreover, in Leviticus 24:1-9 Hartley notes seven different words/phrases which are shared by both the lampstand and the bread of the presence passages in Leviticus 24. 1.) תמיד continually, 2.) עדר arrange, 3.) לקה take, 4.) הק עלם a perpetual decree 5.)לפני יהוה before Yahweh, 6.) זד pure, 7.) טהר clean.[204] These similarities "indicates beyond a doubt that these two sets of instructions have been composed together."[205] The connection is also tentative in Canaanite religion as a possible table was found Tell Beit Mirsim, dating to the Late Canaanite period.[206] This stone table resided within the sanctuary and was decorated with three lion heads along the rim at three different spots. At the shrine, near the table, were discovered two lion statues, possibly taking the role of the cherubim in guarding the shrine, or the divine throne.[207] Though no god has been identified with the shrine, the lion imagery would suggest Asherah, the Lady of Lions (also depicted as a sacred tree). Some have connected this table to the table of the Israelite Tabernacle.[208] All this combined, the lampstand and the table are woven together in the biblical text in such a way that they are inseparable from each other, and thus if the bread of the Presence relates to the divine meal, then the lampstand must have, at least as part of its symbolism, a closely tied relation to that meal.

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[204] Hartley, *Leviticus*, 398

[205] Ibid., 398.

[206] William F. Albright, "The Third Campaign at Tell Beit Mirsim," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 39 (1930): 6-7.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Donald McKellar Leitch Urie, "Sacrifice at Ugarit," PhD Diss., University of St. Andrews, 10.

The Menorah as Sacred Tree

Exodus 25 gives the most complete description of the menorah. The description, as rightly noted by Meyers, portrays the lampstand in arboreal imagery so that it is meant to be perceived as a sacred tree.[209] In particular, it was an almond tree, seemingly a favorite of Yahweh's, as Aaron's rod blossomed into an almond tree as well in Numbers 17:8.[210] Just as it is likely that the bread of the Presence was rooted in the ideas of the bread-laying ritual and the divine meal, so too does the menorah likely stem from, and acts as a reaction against, the Canaanite sacred tree cult.[211]

Sacred tree cults were widespread across the ancient Near East and even continue to see adherents, though in connection to the Abrahamic religions rather than the Canaanite deities.[212] Within the concept of the sacred tree "lies the basic themes of creation, redemption, and resurrection, resting upon the conception of a source of ever-renewing life at the center of the

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[209] Meyers, "The Tabernacle Menorah," 1975.

[210] Here the word used is שָׁקֵד rather than the usual word for almond שָׁקֵד to differentiate the stylized almonds of the lampstand from actual almonds. According to Genesis 43:11, the almond was among the finest products of ancient Israel. Almond blossoms had a special connection to holiness as these blossoms adorn both the menorah (Ex. 25:33-34, 37: 19-20), and Aaron's staff (Num. 17:8). Almond trees probably had a special link to the fertility of the land since they "awoke" in February, earlier than other trees, as if winter's sleep never took hold of them (Jeremiah 1:11 uses the word play between ,שָׁקֵד to watch/rise, and ,שָׁקֵד almond. See William McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York, T&T Clark, 1986), 15). In Phrygian religion, the almond was associated with fertility and life as it was associated with the vulva of Cybele, and her husband was born from a virgin and conceived through an almond. (Patricia Casas-Agustench, Albert Salas-Huetos, and Jordi Salas-Salvado, "Mediterranean Nuts: Origins, Ancient Medicinal Benefits and Symbolism," *Public Health Nutrition* 14, no. 12A (2011): 2299).

[211] Joan E. Taylor, "The Asherah, the Menorah, and the Sacred Tree," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20, no. 66 (1995): 46.

[212] Nadav Na'aman, and Nurit Lissovsky, "Kuntillet 'Arjud, Sacred Trees, and the Asherah," *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 35, no. 2 (2013): 190-191.

cosmos, manifest and operative in the universe, in nature, and in human order."[213] Batmaz likewise states,

> A tree was an intermediary for the renewal of life; when worldly life came to an end, it represented a new life in the other world. This was not only valid for a dead person but, in a cosmic sense, symbolized the renewal of the world. A tree was filled with sacred powers because it was vertical, developed, grew, lost its leaves and then regained them, and thus was repeatedly resurrected. Consequently, the sacred tree was filled with power.[214]

The biblical accounts are filled with depictions of Asherah poles, or sacred trees. These trees were likely found in the spacious courtyards of temples and open-air sanctuaries.[215] Though, the actual remains of sacred trees are rarely found in the archaeological record, and thus are usually based on conjecture[216] Despite this, the numerous depictions of the Tree of Life in Canaanite pottery show that this idea was important to Iron Age I Canaanites as it was one of the most common motifs on Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery of the region.[217] These motifs

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[213] E.O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 1.

[214] Atilla Batmaz, "A New Ceremonial Practice at Ayanis Fortress: The Urartian Sacred Tree Ritual on the Eastern Shore of Lake Van," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 72, no. 1 (2013): 77.

[215] Amihai Mazar, "A Sacred Tree in the Chalcolithic Shrine at En Gedi: A Suggestion," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 18 (2000): 31.

[216] Typically, this conjecture takes the form of finding a stone ring in which the sacred tree would have been planted, and/or the placements of מַצֵּבָה (sacred stones), which might have acted as crude altars. Such places where these sacred trees might have been included the open air, Iron Age I "Bull Site," a Chalcolithic temple in the En Gedi, Kuntillet 'Arjud, among others. At Kuntillet 'Arjud cloth wrappings were found which suggest that the trees were wrapped up in cloth. See Mazar, "A Sacred Tree in the Chalcolithic Shrine," 31-35, Amihai Mazar "'The Bull Site': An Iron Age I Open Cult Place," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 247 (1982): 27-42; Na'aman, "Kuntillet 'Arjud," 186-208.

[217] David T. Sugimoto, "'Tree of Life' Decoration on Iron Age Pottery from the Southern Levent," *Orient* 47 (2012): 131; Gwanghyun D Choi, *Decoding Canaanite Pottery Paintings from the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I: Classification and Analysis of Decorative Motifs and Design Structures – Statistics, Distribution Patterns – Cultural and Socio-Political Implications* (Fribourg: Vandenhoeck, 2016), 213-214. In this study of Canaanite pottery, Choi analyzed 473 examples that had motifs. Out of these nearly half (220) depicted the tree of life.

probably originated in the conception of the fertility goddess as a tree in the Bronze Age because sometimes the tree in these pottery shards could be replaced with the pubic triangle.[218]

Two of the most recognized of these sacred tree pottery pieces include Pithos A at Kuntillet ‘Arjud which depicts a tree situated on a lion, which acts as its mount, with flanking ibexes.[219] The Lachish Ewer, found at the Fosse Temple at Tel Lachish, depicts a similar scene in which there are multiple trees (which consist of a straight line intersected by three semi-circles, so that it resembles the Tabernacle lampstand), flanked by two ibexes with long, backward curving horns. They are flanked by processions of animals heading away from them including a lion with a feathered tail, and a pair of fallow deer, the male with branching antlers and the female with none.[220] Amid these images is the inscription “Mattan. An offering to my lady ‘Elat.”[221] This was another name for Asherah as the primary consort of El.[222] Besides the main fertility goddess, it is possible that individual trees were bound with the life of minor divinities known as *‘elnym* in ways similar to the Greek nymphs.[223] While it seems that in the Bronze Age

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[218] Christian Locatell, Chris McKinny, and Itzhaq Shai, “The Tree of Life Motif, Late Bronze Age Canaanite Cult, and a Recently Discovered Krater from Tel Burna,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 142, no. 3 (2022): 578. The form of the naked fertility goddess has also been found on a bread mold from Mari. See Stephanie Lynn Budin, “The Nude Female in the Southern Levant: A Mixing of Syro-Mesopotamian and Egyptian Iconographies,” in *Cult and Ritual on the Levantine Coast, and its Impact on the Eastern Mediterranean Realm*, ed. A. M. Maila Afeiche, 315-335 (Beirut: Minstere de la culture, 2015), 315.

[219] Tallay Ornian, “Sketches and Final Works of Art: The Drawings and Wall Paintings of Kuntillet ‘Arjud Revisited,” *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 43, no. 1 (2016): 20.

[220] Ruth Hestrin, “The Lachish Ewer and the ‘Asherah,” *Israel Exploration Society* 37, no. 4 (1987): 212-213.

[221] Frank Moore Cross, “The Origin and Early Evolution of the Alphabet,” *Israel Exploration Society* 8 (1967): 16.

[222] John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 3 (1986): 387.

[223] William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 190.

the cult of the sacred tree was associated with the cult of the fertility goddess, by Iron Age I it became more associated with the general idea of fertility.[224]

Though the specifics of these tree cults are unknown, it is likely that they revolved around appeasing the fertility goddess so that the land and people could enjoy fertility as fruit grows from a tree. However, such a proposal only has minimal evidence to support it. Assyrian drawings often depict genies (shown as having bird heads and wings) holding buckets of fruit plucked from the tree of life to give to worshippers.[225] Mycenean (which borrow from earlier Minoan depictions) rings depict the Mother-Goddess (the lady of trees, the mistress of wild animals, and the guardian of the dead) around the sacred tree, accompanied by two attendants, one of which pours libation offerings and the other eats the fruit of the tree.[226] Also in the Mycenaean cult there were small offering tables which were upheld by pillars, representing the sacred tree, and held baskets which contained the offerings of worshippers, such as fruit.[227] Remains of the temple at Tell el-Dab'a, the Hyksos capital in Egypt, were discovered with charred acorns at the altar, suggesting that the products of sacred trees were offered back to the goddess.[228]

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[224] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 96-97.

[225] Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretation* (Fribourg: Vandenhoeck, 2007), 84.

[226] James, *The Tree of Life*, 30; 47.

[227] Arthur John Evans, *The Mycenean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 17.

[228] Matthew Susnow, *The Practice of Canaanite Cult: The Middle and Late Bronze Ages* (Münster: Zaphon Verlag, 2021), 62.

Rather than the depictions of the fertility goddesses' satisfaction coming in terms of fruit, it is possible that it came in terms of the harvest via the threshing floor. The threshing floor was a wide, circular, space built on flattened land for the purpose of threshing and winnowing the wheat and barley crops in order to get to the grain hidden inside the crops,[229] which would then be used primarily to make bread. In her work, Waters makes note that throughout the Bible these threshing floors served a religious function as sacred space, a place where humanity and the divine encountered each other.[230] These threshing floors were generally built on hills to take advantage of wind in the winnowing process, akin to temples built on cosmic mountains. These threshing floors represented the powers of sexuality, fertility, and creation,[231] as grain, the foodstuff most associated with life, was created and stored.[232] It was here on the threshing floor that humanity saw the judgment of the divine in regards to the fertility of the land.[233] Due to the nature of fertility at both sites it may be that it was at the sacred tree that Canaanites prayed for fertility, and it was at the threshing floor where the gods provided said fertility. The response to such an action was a divine, cultic meal. Due to the lack of information regarding these cults, it is impossible to know with certainty whether such a conjecture is correct, however, it is at the very least a possible scenario.

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[229] Waters, *Threshing Floors*, 2.

[230] Ibid., 1-2.

[231] Song-Mi Suzie Park, "Census and Censure: Sacred Threshing Floors and Counting Taboos in 2 Samuel 24," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 35, no. 1 (2013): 39.

[232] Tobolowsky, "Where Doom is Spoken," 109.

[233] Ibid., 105. In *The Tale of Aqhat*, Pughat receives the divine judgement of drought on the threshing floor.

The connection of tree and grain is mirrored in the Egyptian Osirian cult which is connected to both trees and grain.[234] Tree imagery was used throughout Egypt to symbolize the deceased's hopes of being revived as Osiris.[235] This can be seen in the planting of Osiris-trees over the mounds where the dead were buried in as centers for the hoped-for resurrection.[236] Thus to become Osiris, there was a mixture of tree and grain. The mixture can be seen in spell BD 152b from *The Book of the Dead*

> "To be said by Osiris N.: 'O great one who art far away, eldest child of the household, [thou art] the foremost. May Osiris N. drink the water of Tefnut.' Utterance by the Sycamore, lady of offerings, to Osiris, 'I have come to bring thee my bread.' Utterance: 'O thou sycamore of Nut which refreshes the presider over the westerners and extends (its) arms to his members, behold, he is warm. Mayest thou give cool water to Osiris N. (while he sits) under (thy) branches, which give the north wind to the Weary-hearted One in that seat forever.'"[237]

Here Nut is associated with a tree as she is called "sycamore of Nut," or simply "the sycamore," and the deceased (who is pictured as Osiris) sits under her branches. The food that this tree produces is not fruit, but bread. Echols acknowledges that with this spell Nut is forming the same life-giving function as the Tree of Life in Genesis, but states that the bread of Nut and the fruit of Genesis are not synonymous since they are two different foods.[238] However, the relationship between these two foods are closer than typically thought, as will be explored later in the paper.

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[234] Christopher Hays, '"There is Hope for a Tree': Job's Hope for the Afterlife in Light of Egyptian Tree Imagery," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2015): 48.

[235] Ibid.

[236] Pierre Koemoth, *Osiris er les Arbres: Contribution à l'étude des Arbes Sacrés de l'Égypte Ancienne* (Liège: Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres, 1994), 292-293.

[237] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 40-41.

[238] Charles L. Echols, "The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Literature," *The Tree of Life*, ed. Douglas Estes 5-31 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 22.

The Ritual of the Lampstand

The ritual of the menorah revolved around the lighting of its branches. Leviticus states that the lamp was to be tended to continually. This does not mean that the fire of the lamp was to be burning twenty-four hours a day, but rather that it was to be done regularly, every day.[239] While Milgrom proposed that the original purpose of the lampstand was to provide light for God,[240] this does not seem likely. A problem with this view is that it believes that God needs an external light. It is the same thought process that says the bread is God's food. Since, as is argued throughout the paper, the bread of the Presence was never seen as Yahweh's food, then the idea of the lamp being light for God becomes precarious. The likelihood of this scenario is further dimensioned by the fact that God's presence is often depicted through the images of fire and light.[241] If this is the case (as Meyers believes[242]), then Gerstenberger's idea about the light as a symbol of eternal day and life in God's house seems plausible.[243]

Throughout the ancient Near East night and darkness are the realm of death. For example, in Egypt, the night was viewed as the time when chaos reigned over the world and all creation held its breath to see if the sun god would emerge from the Duat victorious from his battles against the serpent Apopis and recreate the world.[244] But, there is no such fear for those who follow Yahweh. The ancient Israelites did not need to wonder if Yahweh would be defeated by

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[239] Hartley, *Leviticus*, 400.

[240] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2088.

[241] Meyers, "The Tabernacle Menorah," 198.

[242] Ibid., 145.

[243] Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 356.

[244] Andreas Schweizer, *The Sungod's Journey through the Netherworld: Reading the Ancient Egyptian Amduat*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 1.

darkness, for darkness was totally under his control, and even in the times when darkness overtook the mortal realm, it did not seep into God's realm. Gerstenberger sums this up quite eloquently as he states, "God forfeits none of his power, even as the sun goes down God asserts himself against the powers of chaos and dispatches his own sun on its heroic course (Psalm 19:5). It shines through the darkness and signals God's unbroken life, an eternal light."[245] The Tabernacle lampstand burns all through the night because it is a space where chaos has no power and cannot enter. Night and darkness have no room to exist and operate within God's sphere. Though God could surely have lit the tent up himself with his own light, by having the high priest light the lamps, he is allowing humanity to partner with him so that they could be reminded that chaos has no place in Yahweh's house, and all those who are within his sphere need not fear the shroud of night and the chaos that comes with it, for God's light conquers all.

The light that shines from the lampstand is not symbolic of sunlight, or any sort of natural light, but rather the light of God's own presence.[246] The idea of God's presence being manifest through a tree is not an unfamiliar concept to the Hebrew Bible. The most well-known is the Burning Bush of Exodus 3. But, also, God appeared to Abraham at the tree of Moreh in Shechem (Gen. 12:6-7), which also happens implicitly at the oak of Mamre where Abraham built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 13:18). The prophetess Deborah gave Yahweh's decrees under the palm tree which bore her name (Jdgs. 4:4-5). Two chapters later, the angel of the Lord sat under the oak in Ophrah where he spoke to Gideon, who was threshing wheat there, and then subsequently built

[245] Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 356.

[246] Myers, "The Tabernacle Menorah," 145.

an altar there (Jdgs. 6:11-24).[247] Trees also play prominent roles in Saul's story, though no direct theophany happens here, however, there is an indirect reference to God's presence as noted by Meyers through "the use of the definite article in introducing the trees indicates that they were well-known places and implies that Saul located himself near them for good reason, that is, to draw himself near to the divine presence that was associated with them."[248] David knew that God was with him in his battle against the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim when he heard the sound of the marching of the heavenly army on the tops of the trees (2 Sam. 5:24). Finally, the angel of the Lord appeared to Elijah when he was beneath the boom brush, giving him bread which strengthens him for the journey to Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:4-9).

With such theophanies in mind, it would not be out of place for the menorah to represent a tree that was aflame with the presence of God. Namely, this would be the theophanic tree par excellence: the tree of life in the center of an ideal creation.[249] The purpose of God's presence-light within this context is to vanquish the chaos of night and to give light and beauty to the tent. Despite this, the priests did not fear for their lives when they extinguished its flame every morning. There was no fear of dying from that encounter, nor was there fear that God's presence would not inhabit the tent during the day, when the fire was unlit. That level of respect and fear was saved for the holy of holies. Thus, the light was a representative presence meant to remind Israel of the real presence that stood behind the veil, the presence with real power and authority.

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[247] This theophany is also associated with fire in v. 21 as the angel touches the meat and unleavened bread that Gideon presents with his staff, which results in them being consumed by fire. This happens, as v.19 explicitly states, under the tree. It is at the appearance of the fire that Gideon knows that he has been in the presence of the Lord (v.22, note that even though he names the being "the angel of the Lord," he first cries out "Alas, Sovereign Lord!").

[248] Ibid., 159.

[249] Ibid., 196-197.

This presence-light creates an eternal day, creating the atmosphere necessary for true fertility and life to be developed. Perhaps this is a statement of the quality of life produced within the sphere, as no death and no chaos ever touched Yahweh's tent. To step into the tent was to step into the very essence of life. Just as sacred trees embodied the goddess/deceased and were connected to the production of wheat, so too did the presence-carrying lampstand shine forward onto the bread of the Presence, so that this tree symbolically produced (via transforming Israel's offering) twelve loaves of bread.

Fruit and Grain in the Hebrew Bible

Despite Echol's opinion that bread and fruit were to be viewed as entirely distinct food groups, there is some evidence to support the idea that there was some overlap between them. From an agricultural standpoint, they both are both grown from the ground, one via trees and the other via wheat stalks from the soil. Both need to be harvested, and both are markers of the fertility of the land. Throughout the Old Testament, there are several syntaxial similarities between the two that show that bread could be thought of in terms of fruit, which can be broken into several strands of thought as discussed below.

First Fruit

The Hebrew word that is translated as "first fruit" is בִּכּוּר and essentially has two meanings in the Old Testament: either as the first of the grain offerings presented to the Tabernacle, or the first ripe figs. The latter sense of the word can be found in such places as Isaiah 28:4, "That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like figs ripe before harvest [כְּבִכּוּרָה] as soon as people see them and take them in hand, they swallow them." Nahum 3:12 offers another example, "All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit [בַּכּוּרִים]; when they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater." The

first of the grain offerings are described in the terminology of fruit, and figs to be precise. The connection between grain and fruit is not limited to the cultic offerings but extends to other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well.

Fruit of the Soil

There is a phrase that appears twelve times[250] in the Old Testament: פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה and is often translated as "fruit of the soil" or "fruit of the ground." The first occurrence of the phrase is Genesis 4:3 where Cain offers to Yahweh מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה. Walton suggests that Cain offered fruits and vegetables to Yahweh,[251] though this is unlikely. The idea of working the ground has appeared four times up to this point: Genesis 2:5, 3:17-20, 3:23, and then in Cain's occupation in 4:2. In none of these does the idea of working the ground equate to fruit. Genesis 2:5 equates working the ground with "plants" which are bread-producing crops.[252] Secondly, Genesis 3:17-20 specifically states that the result of working the ground is bread. Contextually, fruit is not an option. This is backed by the fact that אֲדָמָה is a word that relates directly to the ground, the soil, and it would be odd to refer to fruit which comes from trees as the fruit of the soil. Secondly, there is a second phrase used throughout the Old Testament, פרי הָאָרֶץ, which refers to fruit of the tree.[253] The association with this phrase and grain extends into the New Testament as well where the phrase καρπον τες γες (which is how the LXX translates the phrase פרי הָאֲדָמָה) is used in James 5:7 which reads "Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how

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[250] Gen. 4:3, Deut. 7:13; 26:2,10; 28:4,11,42,51; 30:9, Ps. 105:35, Jer. 7:20, Mal. 3:11

[251] Walton, *Genesis,* 212.

[252] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Vol 1: From Adam to Noah; Genesis 1-8* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 102.

[253] Num. 13:26, Deut. 1:25, Isa. 4:2, There is also one occurrence of the phrase in the opposite construction in Lev. 25:19: הָאָרֶץ פִּרְיָהּ.

the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop [καρπον τες γες], patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains." The context of the farmer as well as the reference to two harvests that revolve around the spring and autumn rains points to the idea that this phrase does mean grain.

Grain as Fruit

Beyond this phrase, there are a couple of other syntaxial areas that point to the idea that grain could be thought of in terms of fruit. Psalm 72:16 literally reads, "May there always be grain in the land; may it rustle on the tops of the mountains! May its fruit shoot up like Lebanon, and may its stalks flower forth like the grass of the field."[254] Just as grain is thought of in arboreal terms, with the wheat being linked to trees with the head of the grain being related to fruit. Likewise, Psalm 107:37 uses the word פְּרִי for the harvest of the crops sowed by Israel. In the New Testament as well, the word καρπον can be used to describe the harvest of crops. This is most profoundly illustrated in the parable of the sower, where all three of the Synoptic Gospels use the word καρπον to refer to the crop of the sower.[255] Even the rabbis saw the connection as the Genesis Rabbah states that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was wheat and that the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve was actually bread.[256]

Jeremiah 11:19

Another example is Jeremiah 11:19. This text, in the NIV reads "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered more." In context, the verse is describing the thoughts of those who wish to kill Jeremiah, the proverbial

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[254] Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallet (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 286.

[255] Mat. 13:8;26, Mrk. 4:7;8;29, Luk. 8:8; 12:17.

[256] *Midrash Rabbah, Vol I*, trans. Rabbi H. Freedman, and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 122.

tree of the verse. There is one major drawback to this translation: the word fruit is not mentioned. The phrase translated "tree and its fruit" is עֵץ בְּלַחְמוֹ. Literally, this means "tree and its bread." The idea of fruit comes from the fact that the word לֶחֶם can mean food in general, and so this causes the translation of fruit. However, as noted by McKane, this is not a feasible translation as the word simply does not mean "fruit," but "bread."[257] Some have taken the word to be a scribal error, choosing instead to view the word as בְּלֹחַ a word which is only used once in Deuteronomy 34:7 to mean "vigor," resulting in a translation of "tree and its sap."[258] Given that the idea of the verse is about taking life,[259] it would make sense for Jeremiah to be using two symbols of life: tree and bread, to convey the message. Especially since the idea of fruit and bread are more closely related than generally believed. Since every attempt to circumnavigate this supposed difficulty has its problems,[260] perhaps it is best to take the passage at face value.

Manna

About two weeks after the events of the Reed Sea, the Israelites begin to grumble about being brought into the wilderness to die of hunger (Ex. 16:1-3). Yahweh, hearing the cries and discontent of the Israelites declares that he will "rain down bread from heaven for you" (Ex. 16:4). Unlike the word usage during the plague narrative, this is a life-giving rain, one that will nourish and cause Israel to prosper and flourish.[261] The manna which came down like rain was, according to Exodus 16:31, in shape like coriander seeds, which were small, globular, aromatic,

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[257] McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 257.

[258] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 636-637.

[259] Ibid.

[260] McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 257.

[261] Hamilton, *Exodus*, 318.

contained ridges, and in color could be brown, green, straw-colored, or off-white.[262] One interesting thing to note about this is that the manna, the most recognizable bread in the Bible, drops from heaven in the shape of plant seeds. These "seeds" were grounded up and baked into bread, thus creating a bread an arboreal connection.

Ingathering

The Festival of Ingathering was the old name for Sukkot used in Exodus 23:16 and 34:22. The specifics of the festival are vague, though it likely involved the gathering of the spring fruits, as well as gathering the wheat from the threshing floor.[263] This festival where the fruit was harvested and the grain threshed was ancient, possibly being connected to two feasts in Judges (Jdgs. 9:37; 21:19-21). The first involves the people of Shechem going out into the fields and gathering fruit for their wine and then eating and drinking in the temple. The second involves the annual feast of Yahweh at Shiloh, where women go into the vineyards to dance.[264] Deuteronomy 16:13-15 connects this Feast of Yahweh with Sukkot, along with the ingathering of both grain and wine.[265] The production of wine and bread from fruit and grain were intermixed, such as when Gideon threshed wheat in a winepress (Jdgs. 6:11). The gathering and production of fruit was similar to that of grain.

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[262] J.C. Trever, "Coriander Seed," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 1*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, 681 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 681; Yalçin Coşkuner, and Erşan Karababa, "Physical Properties of Coriander Seeds (Coriandrum Sativum L)," *Journal of Food Engineering* 80 (2007): 408.

[263] Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 85.

[264] Jeffery L. Rubenstein, *A History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2020), 14.

[265] Ibid., 14-15.

Acorn Bread

This final example does not appear within the biblical text but rather comes from archaeological and anthropological research.[266] As mentioned, while sacred trees were doubtless an extensive part of life in ancient Canaan, the eating of their fruit does not appear to be connected to the worship of the fertility goddesses or as signs that the sacred trees were effectively bringing fertility. That all is the realm of the threshing floor and wheat. Rather, the eating of acorns was associated with a lower-class and rustic lifestyle.[267] Archaeological data suggests that the consumption of acorns was greater in hunter-gatherer societies prior to and coinciding with the rise of agriculture when societies did not have access to wheat, and when they lived near the large oak forests which covered swaths of the land.[268] Through a long process (much longer and more difficult than with wheat as it requires extracting the nut from the cup, peeling away the hard shell, tenderizing the kernel, and then washing out the acid before it can be made into flour to be turned into bread) acorns could be turned into flour which was then baked into bread.[269] As societies shifted away from the oak and towards the wheat field, perhaps memories of acorn-bread remained with the societies of the ancient Near East so that the connection of bread and trees was not an unusual thought, for there was a day when that was a reality. Of course, this idea is entirely different from the textual examples discussed above as it is mere speculation.

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[266] Danny Rosenberg, "The Possible Use of Acorns in Past Economies of the Southern Levant: A Staple Food or a Negligible Food Source?" *Levant* 40, no. 2 (2008): 167-175; Dauro Mattia Zocchi, et. al, "Food Security Beyond Cereals: A Cross-Geographical Comparative Study on Acorn Bread Heritage in the Mediterranean and the Middle East," *Foods* 11 (2022): 1-39.

[267] Zocchi, et. al, "Food Security Beyond Cereals," 3.

[268] Rosenberg, "The Possible Use of Acorns in Past Economies of the Southern Levant," 172-173.

[269] Ibid., 171.

Conclusion

The purpose of the sacred tree cult was that by having right relationship with the fertility goddess (the sacred tree cult), the fertility goddess would respond by granting abundant harvests which would be received at the threshing floor, another sacred place. In the Israelite conception, the bread of the Presence was not associated with fertility but with the meeting of God and humanity. The presence of God dwelled and was symbolically manifested through the menorah, which shined out onto the bread transforming the bread from the grain offering presented into a product of the sacred tree. Thus, when Israel presents the bread, it is simply an offering, but after seven days of resting in the presence of God, then the bread transforms into the symbolic fruit of the Tree of Life. Through the consumption of that fruit, the priests ritually entered into the life meant for them in the Garden of Eden, a fellowship with God that was unmatched anywhere else in the cosmos.

Chapter III: Non-Levitical Mentions of the Bread of the Presence

Introduction

The actual rite of the bread of the Presence is mentioned a handful of times throughout the Bible, mainly in the Torah as part of the Tabernacle regulations. The above chapters have elucidated the possible origins of the bread's ritual and its symbolic connection to the lampstand, concluding that it represented the fruit of the Tree of Life. However, if such a thesis is true, then the actual mentions of the bread of the Presence must also lend themselves to such a belief. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to such a topic.

Exodus 25:23-30: Instructions for the Table

The Heavenly Table

Following the divine meal of Exodus 24:9-11, Moses waited on the flank of the mountain for six days and then on the seventh day ascended to the cloud-covered summit of Sinai where Yahweh showed him the heavenly Tabernacle which became the pattern upon which the earthly Tabernacle was based off (Ex. 25:9).[270] Thus there was a heavenly table and bread which were the inspiration for the earthly table and the bread. The concept of the heavenly table was strong enough that when God reveals the ideal temple to Ezekiel, the only article of the holy place that remains from its earthly counterpart is the table that is situated "before the Lord," which unmistakably links this table to the table of the Presence.[271] This raises the interesting question

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[270] Meyers, *Exodus*, 227. Though, it should be noted that the Tabernacle was not an exact replica of the divine dwelling, as the heavenly sanctuary is described as huge, accommodating thousands and thousands of spiritual beings (Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τθπος Structures* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1981), 385). Rather, it is a miniaturized form of the heavenly dwelling built to accommodate the temporal and traveling concerns of the Israelites, thus a tent (Elias Brasil de Souza, "The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts," PhD., Andrews University, 170-171).

[271] Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 28-48: A New Translation and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2018), 163.

about who was meant to dine at the heavenly table. The food would not be for the sake of Yahweh, who did not need food, nor was it for the dead, whose state of existence in Hebraic thought is the subject of ongoing debate. The only other option is that the food was for the divine council in their fellowship with Yahweh.[272] This would make sense given the background of the bread of the Presence in the Ugaritic divine meal, and the popularity in the traditions of the god-attended divine meal attended only by the gods. The biblical text gives scant evidence for such a postulation. One such line of evidence is Genesis 6:4, the story of the mysterious sons of God who come down to earth to intermarry with the beautiful daughters of men. These beings were likely spiritual beings who fell and rebelled against God through their sexual unions.[273] If such beings could have such a physical encounter as sex, then it is not unlikely they could eat as well. Such concepts were certainly attributed to their children, the giant Nephilim, who, according to the Book of 1st Enoch, ate enormous amounts of food to be provided via humans. When humanity could not provide such food, the giants began to eat the humans and all sorts of living things.[274] Another text is Psalm 78:24b-25a in which manna is called "the grain of heaven, the bread of angels." The heavenly nature of the manna is apparent enough through the biblical texts,

[272] Spiritual beings, like God, did not receive sustenance via human means. This can be seen in the fact that the offerings given to the hosts of heaven in the prophets are the same as to Yahweh, and thus were likely interacted with in the same way. Rather, it is possible that their food came not from human hands, as is the case of Mesopotamian literature, but from God's hands. For a brief discussion on the offerings to the heavenly host see Cat Quine, *Casting Down the Host of Heaven: The Rhetoric of Ritual Failure in the Polemic Against the Host of Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 94-96.

[273] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 114.

[274] Helge S. Kvanvig, "The Watcher Story and Genesis: An Intertextual Reading," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 18, no. 2 (2004): 164. The idea of giants as chaotic consumers of food is apparent across the ancient Near East. They stand as too hungry, too violent, overgrown and unruly and thus are the chaotic enemies to the orderly-sized humans. See Brian R. Doak, "The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel," PhD. Diss., Harvard University, 178-179.

it shone in the morning sun like bdellium-jewels,[275] tasted like honey or olive oil,[276] it came in the morning dew as seed which has to be milled and baked into bread, and rotted after one day, except for the Sabbath where its life is miraculously sustained.[277] It is possible that the heavenly table held manna, heavenly bread, in which the divine council ate in their fellowship with Yahweh, however this is speculative.

This use of the table would get overridden through the prophets where the heavenly table on the mountain of God is not the home to celestial feasts but is the place where Yahweh hosts his victory feasts to commemorate his rule with human participants. Isaiah 24-27 is the eschatological enlargement of the divine meal of Exodus 24, where all the nations (as opposed to the symbolic seventy elders for all Israel[278]) go to the mountain of God to have a feast with Yahweh.[279] This feast is likely the Feast of Ingathering, as attendance at the feast is a necessity for fertility and rain in the nation.[280] The important thing to note is that unlike the Canaanite

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[275] Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 322.

[276] The rabbis concluded that God changed the taste of the bread to suit individual tastes. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 291.

[277] This is even more so with the jar of manna kept in the Ark of the Covenant, which was sustained for generations in the presence of God. See Durham, *Exodus*, 226.

[278] Catherine Lynn Nakamura, "Monarch, Mountain, and Meal: The Eschatological Banquet of Isaiah 24:21-23; 25:6-10a," PhD. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 181.

[279] Elizabeth Steiner, "A Discussion of the Canaanite Mythological Background to the Israelite Concept of Eschatological Hope in Isaiah 24-27," PhD. Diss., University of Oxford, 55; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 358; J. Todd Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27: The Reuse and Evocation of Earlier Texts and Traditions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 77-78.

[280] Steiner, "A Discussion of the Canaanite Mythological Background," 52

victory feasts on the mountain of the gods which Isaiah draws imagery from,[281] the participants of Yahweh's feast are humans, not divine beings.[282] Yahweh is victorious over chaos and then invites humans to the table on his mountain to eat with him, just as the original elders of Israel did on Sinai. Humanity comes to the heavenly table to celebrate Yahweh's rule. As these spiritual beings were thought to govern the nations and powers, that power is given to those who have accepted their role as made in the image of God. Feasts have always been about social relations and the formation and maintenance of "elite" groups.[283] Here, the "elite" are not the divine council, but lowly humans. It is through these creatures that God intends to share his victory and reign with, not the divine council. Whether such imagery was in the heads of the original Late Bronze Age Israelites is unlikely, but the bread of the Presence, as the earthly table and the ritualized divine meal is the ritualized equivalent of the eschatological feast.

Gold and Pure-Gold

The table itself is made of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half wide (3 feet long, 1.5 feet wide, and a little over 2 feet tall).[284] This table was, like the other objects of the holy place, overlaid with pure gold. Besides this, it was also adorned with a golden molding. Across cultures of the ancient Near East gold embodied the idea of imperishable

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[281] Ibid., 57.

[282] The Ugaritic text calls the beings *bn 'il/bn 'ilm*, which is parallel with the Hebrew term בְּנֵי אֵלִם. Ibid., 58.

[283] Jonathan S. Greer, *Dinner at Dan: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sacred Feasts at Iron Age II Tel Dan and Their Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3-4.

[284] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2096. According to Josephus, this was the same dimensions as offering tables at Delphi (*Antiquities* III 6.6).

holiness.[285] In Egypt gold conveyed holiness to the sanctuaries lined with it, and it was sometimes believed that the gods themselves had golden skin. In Mycenean Greece, golden funeral masks indicated that the deceased had transferred into the realm of immortality.[286] It was also believed to have been the material counterpart of the sun, as silver was that of the moon,[287] indicating the divine origins of gold.

Within the Tabernacle construction records, there are two types of gold: זָהָב (gold) and זָהָב טָהוֹר (pure gold). "Gold," in contrast to pure gold, was a gold alloy, smelted with either silver or copper to make the gold more pliable to work with, work out deformities, make it stronger and harder, and greatly lower the melting point. Excavations reveal the gold-copper alloy was the most prominent of these mixtures.[288] If gold was the metal of the divine, then copper was the metal of earth,[289] being produced in furnaces, while gold was extracted in its natural, God-forged state.[290]

The gold-copper maintained its golden look, which almost shone on its own. Especially with the light of the lampstand shining against the golden frames, hooks, and other instruments, the whole tent would have been covered in a beautiful glow and light indicative that the priests

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[285] David Carpenter, "Gold and Silver," in *Encyclopedia of Religion vol 6, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 3625.

[286] Nissim Amzallag, "Beyond Prestige and Magnificence: The Theological Significance of Gold in the Israelite Tabernacle," *Harvard Theological Review* 112, no. 3 (2019): 298.

[287] Carpenter, "Gold and Silver," 3625.

[288] Ibid., 305.

[289] Ibid., 310.

[290] Ibid., 309.

had left the mortal world behind them when they entered the tent, and now stood within the holy sphere of God's realm.[291]

The metallic frame of the Tabernacle recalls the lapis lazuli firmament of Exodus 24. It has been postulated that lapis lazuli and gold are connected, the former as a depiction of the dark, starry heavens, and the latter as a depiction of the shining sun-filled day.[292] This theory would make sense of why there is no lapis lazuli mentioned in the Tabernacle since the point of the lampstand was to ensure that there was no night in God's realm. Rather, the day-producing light of God's presence eternally filled the tent. Unlike Exodus 24, in which the divine meal happened in the actual heavens, the Tabernacle is about God's presence coming to earth to dwell amongst humanity. Within the context of this eternal day, the bread of the Presence was placed and eaten.

The Four Articles of the Table

Pure gold covered the table and the four articles which are placed on the table: a bowl, tray (also translated as spoon), pitcher, and basin. The use of these items is the subject of some debate, as none of these words have clear definitions and it has become the job of archaeologists and scholars to determine their function. Their position on the table relates them to the ritual, though their importance does seem to be marginalized as they are only mentioned a couple of times across the whole Bible.

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[291] Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 17.

[292] R. Drew Griffith, "Gods' Blue Hair in Homer and in Eighteenth-Dynasty Egypt," *Classical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (Dec. 2005): 333.

Propp follows Dillman in translating the word קְעָרָה as a bowl based on the Arabic cognate *q'r,* "to be deep."[293] Levine follows suit, noticing that other items carried by the קְעָרָה would best fit a bowl.[294] However, Propp admits that it is strange for a bowl to be used for presentation, an activity better suited for a tray.[295] As such, other scholars have treated the dish as a flat pan, disregarding the Arabic cognate.[296] A bowl does not seem to be extremely practical given that the loaves were fairly large.[297] Because of the functional nature of a bowl, the bowl would have to be even bigger than the loaves to allow the circular loaves to fit into the bowl and leave enough space for the priests to get their fingers between the bread and the rim to pick up the bread. If it did hold the bread, then it may possibly have been a dish similar to the domed baking tray, a dish used for the baking of bread over a hearth that gradually rose to form a dome

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[293] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 395; August Dillman, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1880), 283.

[294] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 167.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Meyers, *Exodus*, 231; James L. Kelso, and W.F. Albright, "The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 5/6 (1948): 31.

[297] Contrary to Milgrom, who states the 2/10 of an ephah was 30% less than what a daily Israelite required (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2096) it is more likely that 2/10 was actually larger than what Israelites needed. During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites were to only grab 1/10 an ephah of manna per person in their tent. Given that, according to Exodus 16:12, it would seem that Israel had two meals, one in the morning and one in the evening. If this was the case, then it could be surmised that only half of the 1/10 ephah was used at a single meal. Thus, a single loaf of bread made of 2/10 an ephah of flour would be enough to feed four priests for a single meal. When that is multiplied by the twelve loaves present, then the number comes out to forty-eight priests who could have been fed a meal's worth of bread during the ritual rite. Hartley (*Leviticus*, 401) follows Wenham's (*The Book of Leviticus*, 276), calculations that a single one of these loaves of 2/10 an ephah was likely to weigh 3.5 lbs. This is based on de Vaux's suggestion that an ephah is about 3.14 liters. (Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: It's Life and Institutions, Vol 2: Religious Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1973), 202). However Dommershausen believes it to be closer to 4 liters ("Lachem," 543). Sklar, on the other hand, calculates the weight per loaf at 5.6 lbs (*Leviticus*, 325), following Cook's determination for an ephah (E.M. Cook, "Weights and Measures," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol 4: Q-Z,* ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdman's Publishing, 1988), 1051). Dommershausen also states that wheat bread was generally flat and round (as opposed to barley bread, which was generally long as barley does not stretch well), with a general thickness of 2mm to 1cm (0.0787 inches to 0.394 inches), and a general diameter of 20cm to 50cm (7.874 inches to 1 foot, 7.685 inches) (Ibid., 539). Rabbinic texts state that the bread was ten handbreadths long (b. Menah 11:5).

structure that could be used to impress designs onto the bread.[298] In essence, these dishes were shallow bowls and are well attested in the Bronze Age and Iron Age I.[299] The one drawback to this theory is that these dishes were baking trays, and thus used for baking rather than presentation. However, given the multi-functional purposes of many ancient vessels, it is not unlikely that these dishes were for both baking and presenting the bread.[300] Also, Neo-Assyrian palaces have revealed serving plates that fit this description: a type of concaving plate that is referred to as a "bowl," despite its shallowness.[301] However, this is not the only answer to the question of the article's use. It could be that this bowl was used to hold the incense if the כַּף held the bread, a suggestion outlined below.

The second article is the כַּף, which most commonly means "palm," but in this context is usually translated as bowls or spoons. The latter translation is encouraged by hand-shaped "spoons" used for incense that have been found in sites such as En-Gev, Megiddo, and other locations.[302] These "spoons," (which are commonly called incense bowls[303]) are small ladle like objects, several of which have been found with the image of a human hand engraved on the back (though others have other designs, such as the spoon found at Tell Beit Mirsim which had a lion

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[298] Alexander Zukerman, "Baking Trays in the Second Millennium BCE Levant and Egypt," *Syria T.* 91 (2014): 103, 118.

[299] Ibid., 103.

[300] In reverse this can be seen in the fact that common serving bowls could be flipped upside down on the hearth to act as domed trays. Ibid., 107. This is not to argue that these dishes were used to bake the bread, only to argue for the possibility of baking trays being used in a serving capacity.

[301] Alice M. W. Hunt, *Palace Ware Across the Neo-Assyrian Imperial Landscape: Social Value and Semiotic Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 48.

[302] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 395.

[303] B. Mazar, A. Biran, M. Dothan and I. Dunayvsky, "'Ein Gev: Excavations in 1961," *Israel Exploration Journal* 14 no. 1 (1964): 26.

head engraved on the back[304]). However, out of these finds, the earliest is the end of the tenth century BC, within the realm of Iron Age II,[305] and thus too late for the origins of the Tabernacle and its associated rituals.[306] Besides this chronological inconsistency, and the practical considerations of where the bread was placed, it appears that the lighting of incense in bowls was a common practice.[307] However, the word כַּף when not referencing body parts, is more often translated as "pan," which would be a better fit.[308] If this is true, then the flat tray would be the perfect location to place the twelve loaves of bread.[309] This is especially true given the word's association with the power and presence of God in Exodus,[310] and its explicit connection to the

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[304] William Foxwell Albright, "The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim. Vol. III: The Iron Age," *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 21/22 (1941-1943): 70.

[305] Mazar, et. Al, "'En Gedi," 26.

[306] This problem in dating would not be a problem if one accepted Wellhausen's theory that the Tabernacle did not historically exist and was simply a creation of Monarchy era writers who modeled it after the Jerusalem Temple and simply cut the dimensions in half (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 37). However, the case for a historical Tabernacle is quite strong, as Ugaritic texts portray the Canaanite gods dwelling in tents, the Bronze Age war tent of Rameses II which he used at Qadesh has the exact same layout and dimensions as the Tabernacle, as well as numerous differences between the Tabernacle and Temple all suggest that the Tabernacle was a historical tent-shrine which originated from the conceptual world of the late Bronze Age (Homan, *'To Your Tents, O Israel!*, 89-128). Since the Tabernacle was an actual place, then it follows that the articles of the Tabernacle would also need to date from this period.

[307] B Stern, et. al, "Compositional Variations in Aged and Heated Pistacia Resin Found in Late Bronze Age Canaanite Amphorae and Bowls from Amarna, Egypt," *Archaeometry* 45, no. 3 (2003): 458.

[308] Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 815. Though Averbeck states that these pans would have been used for shaping or baking the bread, which is unlikely considering that the Kohathites would have to enter the Tabernacle to obtain these pans before they could start baking.

[309] A possible connection between hand and bread is *NINDA ŠU*, a type of Mesopotamian bread in the shape of a hand. See Rosemary Ellison, "Methods of Food Preparation in Mesopotamia (c. 3000-600BC)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27, no. 1 (1984): 91.

[310] The word is used nine times. In Exodus 4:4 it is used when Moses grabs the snake and it turns back into a staff in his palm, in 9:29 Moses tells Pharaoh he will spread his palms towards the Lord and God will stop the plague of hail, an action he follows through with in 9:33. 25:29 its used of the dishes. In 29:24 it is used twice in the context of the various breads to be placed in the hands of Aaron and his sons which they are to wave before the Lord (in the same way that the bread of the Feast of Weeks was to be waved before the Lord, Lev. 23:18). It is again used twice in 33:22-23 to refer to the palm of God which covers the face of Moses so that he does not see God's face and dies, and then finally to the dish again in 37:16.

holding of bread in Exodus 29:24. These associations would suggest that the palm-dishes were associated with the bread of the Presence itself, rather than with the incense as is commonly thought.

The last two items on the Table of the Presence to be discussed are the קָשָׂה (probably jugs or pitchers) and מְנַקִּית (probably some form of basin). These items are somewhat of an enigma. Numbers 4:7 declares that these are to be used for libation rituals.[311] Numbers 28:7 elaborates on this and says that the drink offering is to be שֵׁכָר which is a strong beer,[312] and that it is to be poured within the holy place. However, Exodus 30:9 prohibits the pouring of drink offerings on the inner altar. This has caused some scholars to see a shift in the Tabernacle libation ritual over time. In these views, the libation ritual was a very old rite that was eventually discarded, lest people think that God drank like humans and heathen gods. Thus, at the time of the writing of the Torah, the קָשָׂה was still filled with liquid and sat on the table as reminders of this rite. Eventually, it became empty, a dead fossil. During the Second Temple Period, the libation rite was reimplemented, though this time being offered on the outer altar rather than the original inner altar.[313] Haran suggests that the original libation rite was done once a week on the Sabbath, so that the water was poured out along with the eating of the bread of the Presence.[314]

If this is true, then the original ritual involved a libation of beer alongside the consumption of bread. This is interesting given the proposed connection to sacred tree cults as

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[311] Contra to Milgrom, who suggests that the beer was originally drunk by the priests alongside the bread. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2093-2094.

[312] Ibid., 2093.

[313] Pernille Carstens, "The Golden Vessels and the Song to God: Drink Offering and Libation in Temple and on Altar," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17, no. 1 (2003): 123-124.

[314] Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 216.

these cults are often accompanied by libation rituals. In Egypt, lotus flower libation cups were common ways to bring offering cups to the gods.[315] In Uratu, libation rituals were essential elements in watering the sacred tree so that the land could continue to experience fertility.[316] The watering of sacred trees via libations was a prominent feature of the Minoan-Mycenean cult, as multiple jugs, rings, and other iconography depict the mother-goddess around a fruit-bearing tree, with attendants pouring libations to the tree.[317] Among the Canaanites libations are only mentioned twice in the ritual texts (and one of them is not an entirely certain), once as the pouring out of olive oil for dead kings, and once as a drink for the gods.[318] The only other possible allusion is Ba'al's (the god of rain and fertility) close association with trees, as he lives on a forested mountain, in a cedar temple, and rules the cosmos with a cedar spear that resembles a tree and is called *'ṣ brq* (tree of lightning).[319]

Not only were these libations seen as connected to the fertility of the earth, but they could also be conceptualized as the cosmic river. Throughout Anatolia, cup marks (holes in the ground which libation offerings were poured into), have been found, which acted as "portals" allowing libations to enter the underworld like rivers. Just as springs were rivers coming out from the ground (underworld) to give life to mortals, these libation rituals were symbolic rivers flowing

[315] J. Andrew McDonald, "Influences of Egyptian Lotus Symbolism and Ritualistic Practices on Sacral Tree Worship in the Fertile Crescent From 1500 BCE to 200 CE," *Religions* 9, no. 9 (2018): 17.

[316] Batmaz, "A New Ceremonial Practice," 73.

[317] James, *The Tree of Life*, 32.

[318] Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, 269-270.

[319] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 85-86

back into the underworld to summon the deities who were there, or to provide for the dead.[320] During Sukkot of the Second Temple Period, the Israelite libation ritual had a cosmological significance as the river of healing found in Ezekiel was recreated. The chaotic waters which lay beneath Jerusalem, and which fed its springs and pools,[321] including Siloam, where the water was drawn from, were taken by the priest and then poured into a silver basin and then down the altar, which would flow into the springs which led to the Jordan and ultimately the Dead Sea, just like the river of Ezekiel.[322] It may be that the libation ritual was meant to be poured into the golden basin, which was then poured out onto the ground.[323] The liquid would travel through the ground like a river, running down from the house of God outside, reminiscent of the river that flowed from Eden, perhaps symbolically bringing the life that was found within the sanctuary to the outside world. The idea of a cosmic river running out from the deity's house has Ugaritic examples, such as El's tent-shrine being situated "…at the sources of the Two Rivers, in the midst of the pools of the Double-Deep."[324] Likewise, a Hittite retelling of a Canaanite myth puts El's tent "at the well-spring of the Mala-River."[325]

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[320] Christina Luke, and Christopher H. Roosevelt, "Cup-Marks and Citadels: Evidence for Libation in 2nd-Millennium B.C.E. Western Anatolia," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 378 (2017): 17.

[321] The evidence for the belief that the waters below Jerusalem were akin to the chaotic waters of pre-creation is the Talmudic legend of David found in B. Sukkot 53a-b, when he was digging the pits of water for the temple, he dug too greedily and too deep, and the chaotic waters surged forth, threatening to overtake the whole cosmos again. It subsided when Yahweh's name was written on a stone and cast into the surging depths, causing it to retreat and stay hidden beneath the temple.

[322] Itzhak Brand, "Following the Path of the Water Libation," *The Review of the Rabbinic Judaism* 15, no. 1 (2012): 57-59.

[323] Noth, *Exodus,* 206.

[324] Richard J. Clifford, "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 1971): 222; Jordi Vidal, "The Sacred Landscape of the Kingdom of Ugarit," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 4, no. 1 (2004): 149.

[325] Ibid.

To further the point that the libation ritual was meant to have a cosmological, healing symbolism, one should look at the liquid poured out. The שֵׁכָר liquid is, as previously noted, a strong beer or wine. The liquid appears 23 times in the Old Testament. Most of these verses shine a negative light on the drink. Priests were forbidden from drinking it (Lev. 10:9), it was a brawler (Prov. 20:1), unfit for kings (Prov. 31:4) or those who have taken a Nazirite vow (Jdgs. 13:4), and was to be given a man on the verge of death (Prov. 31:6). Only one verse seems to treat the liquid in a positive light, and the stipulation to that is that the drink is to be consumed in the presence of the Lord (Deut. 14:6).

This drink, normally associated with death and prohibitions, is acceptable in the presence of God. Thus, we have a drink that is normally off-limits due to its nature but is acceptable after it comes into contact with God. Such an idea is similar to the waters of the sukkot libation ritual, or the waters of the Dead Sea which will be healed and changed after coming into contact with God's waters. Another example of this is found in Genesis 1:2 when the waters of pre-creation are the chaotic תְּהוֹם until the Spirit of God touches the waters, after which the water turns into life-giving מַיִם. It is thus possible that the libation ritual of the Tabernacle had similar cosmological influences, where a drink of death was placed before the presence of God, transforming it into life-giving waters, which were then poured out in the sanctuary on the ground. It ran its course like a river running from the throne room of God, symbolizing the life of God that was to flow out from this temple into the world. While the libation ritual holds a minimal role, the fact that it is placed on the table might help connect the bread to the lampstand via the sacred tree cult.

Exodus 35:13: Crafting the Bread

The context of this passage is the making of items for the Tabernacle. The Israelites are commanded to bring various offerings for the construction of God's tent. In v.10 the call goes out for skilled workers to come and craft the articles. In v.13, the workers are to make "the table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the Presence." Like Exodus 25, the bread is called the "bread of the Presence," and the table is simply "the table." Another interesting thing about this verse is that the bread is included among the things to be made alongside the metallic articles rather than baked.[326] Obviously, the baking of bread is an entirely different type of making than the goldsmiths or carpenters employed for the making of the temple, yet it was equally important. While secular baking was normally the prerogative of women,[327] cultic baking was generally accomplished by men.

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[326] The LXX excludes the bread from this verse because it is focused on the creation of permanent objects. It could also be a case of haplography as the word "and" (και) is placed twice here. See Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 639.

[327] Women are generally seen as the preservers of a people's culture as they keep it alive within the domestic context in ways such as food. Even when immigrating to a new land, the women bring and preserve their old foodways and cookware. This has allowed archaeologists to follow migratory patterns and intermarriage phenomena by tracing where cultural cookware is being used. See Assaf Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20-21; 314. Within the wider Ancient Near Eastern world the femininity of baking can be seen in places in domestic contexts (Cécile Michel, *Women of Assur and Kanesh: Texts from the Archives of Assyrian Merchants* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020), 217; J.J. A van Dijk, *La Sagesse Suméro-Accadienne: Recherches sur les Genres Littéraires des Textes Sapientiaux* (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 93; Kynthia Taylor, "The Erra Song: A Religious, Literary, and Comparative Analysis," PhD Diss., Harvard University, 338-339), or in royal contexts such as baking for the queen and her court (Gaspa, "Bread for Gods," 15). Within the Bible this can be seen in passages like Leviticus 26:26 which states "When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied," 1 Samuel 8:13 where Samuel warns that the king will take Israel's daughters to be bakers, or 2 Samuel 13:7 when Tamar bakes fried bread for Ammon, possibly similar to donuts (Kurtis Peters, *Hebrew Lexical Semantics and Daily Life in Ancient Israel: What's Cooking in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 196). However, there are a few noticeable exceptions to this rule. One of them being the modern observance of Hafrashat Ḥallah, the first dough offering, in which women's kitchens turn into a sort of sacred space as they prepare God's offering, and as such takes part in *tiqqun 'olam*, "the mending of the world," through observance to Yahweh's laws. See Tamar El-Or, "A Temple in your Kitchen: Hafrashat Ḥallah-The Rebirth of a Forgotten Ritual as a Public Ceremony," in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, 271- 293 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 288-289.

Among the Hittites professional, male, bakers worked at baking the bread. While bread offerings could be brought by the common folk, the daily offerings of the gods offered at temples were made by a special group of holy bakers. Every day the kitchen had to be thoroughly swept and sprinkled before baking could begin. The bakers themselves had to have bathed, be completely hairless, have pared fingernails, and wear clean clothes. They could not have sex and then return to work without bathing, either.[328] Their importance to the cult can be seen in that temple bakers were carried off alongside priests when the Kashkaean invaded.[329]

Egyptian religion likewise placed a great value on bread and its bakers. Bakeries were attached to temples where many bread molds have been found, a discovery made possible by the fact that the mold had to be broken for the cylinder bread (resembling a breadstick, some of which were over a meter [3.37 feet] in length, and a favorite amongst Egyptians) to come out. The bakery (which was part of the larger *shena*, or production wing of the temple) of Senwosrest III's mortuary temple has so far revealed about 17,200 of these broken molds.[330] For this temple, the production zone was adjacent to the temple, on its eastern side, where the bread molds were found. Here the bread was baked, and then probably brought into the eastern wing of the temple to be stored in storehouses until it would be gathered by the priests for use as a daily offering to the gods.[331] When it came time to present the bread before the god, the bread would be placed on baking trays and presented to deity (these baking trays may also have been used in the making of

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[328] Hoffner Jr., *Alimenta Hethaeorum,* 132.

[329] Ibid., 31.

[330] Smith, "Food Fit for the Soul of a Pharaoh," 28-29.

[331] Josef Wegner, Vanessa Smith, and Stine Rossell, "The Organization of the Temple NFR-K3 of Senwosret III at Abydos," *Ägypten und Levante/Egypt and the Levant* 10 (2000): 116.

flatbreads).[332] The seals found throughout this temple name some of the people in charge of the production area as male cultic officials such as Senwosret-seheku, the overseer of the production area, or an unnamed scribe to the chief of the production area.[333]

Numbers 4 states that the Kohathites[334] were in charge of the sanctuary items, with 4:7 listing the table and bread as part of those responsibilities. 1 Chronicles 9:32 explicitly mentions them as the bakers, though 1 Chronicles 23:29 states that the baking was done by Levites. The rabbinic material equates the bakers to the family of Garmu in particular, though this is nowhere in the Biblical text.[335] There are those who would see a discrepancy between Chronicles and the Torah accounts of the bread of the Presence. Rather than seeing the two accounts as complimentary, there are those who would see the role of the Levites in Chronicles as representative of an intrusion of the Levites into the sacred realm of the cult that happened as the

[332] Katherine Eaton, *Ancient Egyptian Temple Ritual: Performance, Pattern, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 138.

[333] Wegner, "The Organization of the Temple NFR-K3," 96.

[334] The Kohathites were a collection of clans descended from the four sons of Kohath: the clans of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam belonged to the clan of Amram and were thus Kohathites.

[335] Mishnah Shekalim 5:1 states that the house of Garmu was responsible for the preparation of the bread. Mishnah Yoma 3:11 expands on this and states that the house of Garmu did not want to teach anybody the secrets of making the bread of the Presence, rather they kept that knowledge within the family. When the family asked for more pay, the priests removed the family as the bread's bakers. The sages went to bakers in Alexandria, who knew how to bake bread like the bread of the Presence (as the rabbis stated that the bread had a complex shape, Menachot 94b:1 records a debate between Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yochanan about such a topic, with the former saying that it had a wide base, with two parallel walls, while the latter said it was like a rocking boat [more of a "v" shape]). However, the Alexandrian bakers could not get the bread out of the ovens without breaking it, so they baked the bread outside of the ovens, as opposed to the house of Garmu. Whether because of this reason, or some other defect in baking knowledge, the Alexandrian bread was of a lower quality and became moldy, as opposed to the bread baked by Garmu. The sages, after seeing the lower quality bread, offered the house of Garmu their positions back, which they accepted after their pay was doubled. When the house of Garmu came back, the sages questioned them on why they refused to let others know the secret of the bread's making. The bakers responded that they knew the Temple was bound for destruction and did not want the bread to be used for idol worship.

Levites began to take power away from the descendants of Aaron.[336] It is outside the scope of this paper to deduce whether this is the case for the whole of Chronicles (as some propose that the whole book is filled with such intrusions[337]), but regarding the bread of the Presence this does not seem to be the case. First, it is important to remember the structure of the priesthood and the Levitical clan. The Aaronic priesthood was made up of only Aaron and his descendants, while the other non-Aaronic families were simply Levites. There were many people, belonging to other families of the Amram clan and the other three clans, who were both Kohathite and Levites, who were in charge of the baking of the cultic bread. Thus, it was these other, Levitical Kohathites who baked the bread for the Aaronic priesthood to present it to the sanctuary.

Just like parts of the Tabernacle were more holy than others, certain people were holier than others. At the pinnacle of this was the high priest, followed by the Aaronic priesthood at large. The Levites were next, doing things that to the lay people would make them holy, but to priests made them more akin to the laity.[338] They were followed by the other eleven tribes. We see all three of these groups involved in the process of the bread of the Presence.[339] The laity provided the bread, the Levites baked the bread, and the Aaronic priests presented and ate the bread. While the laity had the wheat, there was no difference between it and regular bread. The Levites then took the bread and turned it into a tribute offering, and then it was placed in the holy place by the priests who ate it as the life-imbued bread of the Presence.

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[336] Esias E. Meyer, "Sacrifices in Chronicles: How Priestly are they?" in *Chronicles and the Priestly Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Jaeyoung Jeon and Louis C. Jonker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 177.

[337] Gary N. Knoppers, "Hierodules, Priests, or Janitors? The Levites in Chronicles and the History of Israelite Priesthood," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999): 64.

[338] Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of the Priesthood* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 59.

[339] Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 99.

Exodus 39:36 and 40:23: Inspecting and Placing the Bread

These two verses are parallel to each other. In the first Moses inspects the bread of the Presence as part of his wider inspections of the Tabernacle, while in the second of these, Moses actually sets up the Tabernacle, placing the bread of the Presence on the table. It is interesting to note the emphasis placed on Moses within these two passages, as the rest of scripture will call for the Kohathites to make the bread, and the high priesthood (along with other priests) to present and eat it.[340]

God instructs Moses to set up the Tabernacle in the first half of the chapter, and then Moses follows through with the construction. Whether or not Moses actually completed the task alone is up to debate. Either he had help, and the writer wants to hone in on Moses' role (perhaps in accordance with the creation imagery to affirm the monotheistic nature of Yahweh, lest someone say that God too had help in creation), or God granted Moses supernatural strength to achieve these acts of finishing the Tabernacle.[341] In any case, the semantics of Moses' completion of the Tabernacle mirror God's own creation of the cosmos,[342] so that the bread should rightly be seen as part of that creation.

This trend of Moses being God's ultimate representative can be seen as far back as Exodus 7:1b where God declares that Moses will be "...like God to pharaoh." Just as promised, Moses becomes the conduit by which Yahweh's judgment on Egypt flows. He becomes, in a

[340] This can be seen in the text of Leviticus 24:5 as well, where it is Moses himself who is instructed to bake the bread rather than the Kohathites, probably referring to its initial use. Moses supplies the initial bread, but after that, it is Israel's responsibility. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2095.

[341] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 672.

[342] Ibid., 675.

sense, Yahweh's idol.[343] Just as an idol was the way in which the power and presence of a deity was manifested into the world,[344] so too was Yahweh made present in Egypt via Moses. Thus, Moses is perhaps the greatest example of what it means to be made in the image of God. It was Moses alone who ascended to the holy summit of Sinai to enter into the heavens to see the heavenly Tabernacle and to talk with God. It was Moses who saw the back of God, and it was his face that radiated with light as if his very nature had been changed by the encounter. This portrayal of Moses continues in the inspection, for just as Yahweh inspected the cosmos in Genesis 1, so too did Moses inspect the cultic cosmos. Throughout the Bible, the literary formula, "X saw Y and behold, Z" only occurs three times. The first is in Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything he had made and behold, it very good," Genesis 6:12, "God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt," and Exodus 39:43 "Moses saw all the work, and behold it was done just as the Lord had commanded."[345] There are also extensive grammatical similarities that link the creation account and the Tabernacle building account.[346] The tabernacle was erected on New Years, the same day that dry land appeared after the flood.[347] The blessing that Moses gives at the end of Exodus 39 mirrors the blessing of God over creation.[348] This is not to mention the similarities between creation and the tabernacle itself.

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[343] Amy L. Balogh, *Moses Among the Idols: Mediators of the Divine in the Ancient Near East* (Lanham: Fortress Academic 2018), 83.

[344] Andreas Shüle, "Made in the Image of God: The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1-3" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117.1 (2005), 5; Michael B. Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake 1999), 57.

[345] Hamilton, *Exodus*, 722.

[346] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 676.

[347] Ibid.

[348] Durham, *Exodus*, 496.

Within this cultic cosmos, the lampstand represents the tree of life, and the bread represents, at the very least, the food of the newly created world.[349] In Genesis 1 the only food mentioned is the fruit which the trees bear on day 3. Even in Genesis 2, fruit is the only food mentioned as bread was seen as a result of the Fall,[350] not appearing in the Biblical text until God's curse on Adam. Thus, in both accounts the food of the ideal creation is fruit. The cultic bread, with its close association to the stylized tree, takes on the role of this fruit, the ideal food of the ideal world. The same role that fruit played in the original cosmos, the bread plays in the cultic cosmos, as it becomes redeemed from its original state to serve as God's food par excellence.

Numbers 4:7: The Continual Nature of the Bread

The Torah returns to the bread once more in Numbers 4:7. This verse is part of a larger passage dealing with the movement of the Tabernacle when Israel is on the move during the period of wandering through the Wilderness. The first item to be dismantled was the Ark of the Covenant, which was to be covered with the veil. This was followed by the table of the Presence. Here the Israelites are told the following about the duties of the Kohathites: "Over the table of

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[349] Walton, *Genesis*, 146.

[350] Genesis 2:5 states "Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground." The "shrubs" here refer to wild bushes, such as thorns and thistles, while the "plants" refer to crops that bear grain used to make bread, such as wheat and barley (Cassuto, *Genesis*, 102). Grain, and thus bread, was a result of the fall. This verse can be compared to Genesis 3:17-19, where God judges Adam by stating that "cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat of the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread…" Since crops were not in Eden, then neither was bread. After the Fall, humanity no longer looks upwards to the heavens to pluck fruit hanging from trees as food, rather their gaze is towards Sheol and the ground as they till the earth. Such a blackened view of bread is evident in several Psalms and portions of the prophetic literature which talk of Jerusalem eating its bread in anxiety (Ezek. 4:16) or can be used as a metaphor for sorrow (for example Psalm 80:5 refers to the "bread of tears"). But God redeems bread as he redeems Canaanite cultural and religious practices. Everything tainted by sin and death can find life in the presence of Yahweh.

the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and put on it the plates, dishes and bowls, and the jars for drink offerings; the bread that is continually there is to remain on it. 8 They are to spread a scarlet cloth over them, cover that with durable leather and put the poles in place" (Num. 4:7-8). Here, the bread of the Presence is referred to as לֶחֶם הַתָּמִיד, "the continual bread." This is the only place where the bread is so named, and in Dommershausen's view, signifies the importance of the bread as an everlasting gift.[351]

This verse gives practically the same information that Exodus 25:30 does, though here the table is called שֻׁלְחַן הַפָּנִים, though this might be shorthand for שֻׁלְחַן לֶחֶם הַפְּנִים "the table of the bread of the Presence."[352] Though, this verse comes with an interesting note that the bread does not leave the table even when Israel is on the move. The bread and table are wrapped up in a blue (a blue-purple) cloth, which was a marker of royalty.[353] This blue cloth was wrapped in a red cloth, which was, in this context, a marker of fertility.[354] This was covered with durable dolphin skin. The table was the only article, beside the ark, which had this triple covering, again signifying the importance of the table and the bread. Another interesting thing to note is that the bread was not to be removed during travel. This also suggests something about the nature of the bread and its holiness. Namely that the bread's holiness was linked not to the bread itself, but to its relative position. If the bread were to be removed from the table, then it ceased to be the bread of the Presence, losing its holy status. Rather, its holiness came from a source outside of itself.

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[351] Dommershausen, "Lachem," 543.

[352] Levine, *Numbers 1-20,* 167.

[353] Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1982), 146.

[354] Scott B. Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots: Seeing Red in the Hebrew Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 87 (2016): 25; 42.

Conclusion

The non-Levitical, Pentateuchal references to the bread of the Presence reveal certain key details about it which help to establish the bread as the symbolic fruit of the tree of life on the cosmic mountain. Exodus 25 talks of the pure-golden makeup of the table and the Tabernacle, which corresponds to the lapis lazuli of the Exodus 24 divine meal. The ritual takes place on the cosmic mountain where God makes his dwelling. The various articles on the table may reveal certain aspects of the bread as well. For example, the tray was connected to the palm of God, and the pitcher and basin were connected to a libation ritual in which the beer of death was transformed by the presence of God to be redeemed and poured out onto the ground so that the menorah was a tree by the river in the temple (Psalm 1:3; 52:8). These loaves were made by the Kohathites, who baked it. Its location within the cultic cosmos, the ideal world, which was a creation made new, also lends itself to the idea that the bread was symbolic of the fruit of the tree of life, taking on the role of the only food mentioned in the creation accounts of Genesis. Finally, the bread's holiness was not something that was intrinsic to itself but was denoted by its location.

Chapter IV: The Levitical Instructions for the Bread of the Presence

Introduction: A New View of the Bread of the Presence Ritual

Leviticus 24:5-9 is the most important passage for the bread of the Presence. Here the ritual is outlined in its fullest detail. It is best for the thesis of the chapter to be given here in sum, and then its individual parts be analyzed in the following pages. The flour for the bread of the Presence was provided by Israel during the Feast of Weeks, which was baked by the Kohathites and then presented and eaten by the priests. The new loaves were not holy by themselves, they did not obtain holiness until they were placed on the table of the Presence in the sphere of God's realm. Once here, the presence of God soaked into the bread, transforming it from mere bread to a foodstuff imbued with the life of God: the symbolic fruit of the Tree of Life. After a week (according to Leviticus) of God's presence being infused into the bread, the priests returned and lit incense to invite God to participate in the meal in which a symbolic Israel ate of God's meal, an act which tightened relationships both horizontally and vertically as a blessed part of Israel's unique covenant relationship with Yahweh. Within this scheme, the bread ritual goes through a three-tiered structure, similar to the Tabernacle, based on the stage of the bread's life cycle. The "outer court" of the ritual is when it is in possession of the people of Israel as they hand over the first fruits of the wheat harvest to the Tabernacle. The "holy place," is when it was in possession of the Kohathites, turning the raw material of the wheat into baked bread and then handing it over to the priests to be laid on the table. Finally, the "holy of holies," is when God transforms the bread with his life, turning the baked bread into something even more real, more filled with life, and then its final eating of by the priests in the great meal.

The Outer Court: The Bread as Raw Material

Flour Power: Finding the Meaning of Fine Flour

Leviticus 24:5 states that 2/10 of an ephah of סֹלֶת was to be used to make each loaf. This was a special kind of flour, as indicated by the fact almost all of the grain offerings were to be made from this type of flour,[355] and from its usage in 1 Kings 4:22 to showcase the wealth of Solomon's table.[356] In ancient Israel there were four main cereals which were farmed and produced: barley, wheat, oats, rye, and millet.[357] Rye and oats do not appear to have a presence in the Bible, while millet appears once (Ezra 27:17).[358] Barley and wheat, on the other hand, are mentioned numerous times throughout the Bible and were the most common and important grains. Their importance can be seen in that these two cereals are mentioned among the seven produces with which the land of Israel was blessed with in Deuteronomy 8:8.

Barley bread appears when Gideon had a dream of a round loaf of barley bread tumbling into the Midianite camp, destroying it (Jdgs. 7:13), and when a man from Baal Shalishah brought Elisha twenty loaves of barley bread, which the prophet used to feed one hundred men (2 Kngs. 4:42). Wheat was also used for bread as wheat bread was presented to the Lord during the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests (Ex. 29:2). Though Leviticus does not state which cereal the סֹלֶת flour came from, there are other places in the Old Testament that give that answer. 2 Kings 7:16, a passage dealing with the siege of Samaria by Ben-Hadad of Aram, recounts the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elisha concerning the end of the siege: "Then the people went out

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[355] Leviticus 2 states that all grain offerings (v.1), grain offerings made in an oven (v.4), and grain offerings made on a griddle (v.5) are to be made of סֹלֶת.

[356] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 179.

[357] Oded Borowski, "Agriculture in Iron Age Israel," PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 130.

[358] Ibid., 137.

and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a *seah* of the finest flour [סֹלֶת] sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said." There is a contrast here between סֹלֶת and barley, which means that the two cannot be the same cereal. Another verse which aids our understanding is the aforementioned Exodus 29:2a which specifically states "And from the finest wheat flour [סֹלֶת חִטִּים] make round loaves without yeast…" This verse clearly describes סֹלֶת as coming from wheat flour.[359]

Most English versions translate סֹלֶת as "fine flour," indicating a process by which the flour was sifted so that only the smoothest and finest particles of flour remained. Such a translation has rabbinic support as Menachot 76b states that the flour for the bread of the Presence was to go through eleven different sifters of varying hole sizes to ensure that only the finest grains were used in the baking of the bread of the Presence. However, modern scholars such as Milgrom[360] and Hess[361] believe this not to mean that the bread was made from the grain, but rather from the semolina, which is the grainy flour that remains on top of the sifter. Pirkei Avot 5:15, a rabbinic source with a similar view, states, "A sieve, which lets out the course meal and retains the choice flour [סֹלֶת]." This is supported by the Akkadian and Arabic cognates of סֹלֶת: *siltu*, and *sult*, which both mean "grits."[362] Further evidence for this theory is found in a linguistical survey on the word חִטִּים which came to the conclusion that סֹלֶת, when used in

[359] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 179.

[360] Ibid.

[361] Hess, "Leviticus," 940.

[362] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 179.

Mesopotamian contexts refers to the softer bread wheat, while when used in the context of Israel refers to the harder durum wheat,[363] from which semolina is made from.

The History and Theology of Durum Wheat

From the Neolithic period, emmer wheat was the prominent wheat species in the ancient Near East, though that changed around the end of the Bronze Age. Around that time in the Levant, some husked varieties of grain (grains with a hard outer shell to protect the grain) began to mutate and give way to free-threshing grains (wheat with a softer outer shell allowing for easier human usage) such as durum wheat. These free-threshing grains slowly began to become the dominant wheat variety in the Levant starting in the Iron Age, and then traveled across the Mediterranean via the Phoenicians.[364] This period (closer to Iron Age) is the time that the narrative is set in, and thus Yahweh's desire for durum semolina may be seen in the light of shifting wheat varieties. Between the two wheat varieties, Yahweh desires the newest wheat variety, not for the sake of its newness, but because it was the best, and perhaps that through this method making cultic bread became easier, and thus a barrier to the divine-human relationship was knocked down.[365]

The Cult's Procurement of the Flour

During the construction of the Tabernacle, the materials were all presented to Moses by the people of Israel (Ex. 35:20-29). In the same way, the materials for the bread of the Presence

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[363] M.E. Kislev, "Hitta and Kussemet: Notes on the Interpretation," *Leshonenu* 37, no.3 (1973): 244.

[364] Fernando Martínez-Moreno, et. al, "Durum Wheat in the Mediterranean Rim: Historical Evolution and Genetic Resources," *Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution* 67, no. 6 (Aug 2020): 1416-1420.

[365] This raises interesting questions about God's attitude towards emerging technologies for use within the church, though such a topic would have to be undertaken elsewhere.

were presented by the Israelites.[366] While the people are explicitly called to provide the oil for the lampstand in Leviticus 24:1, and Exodus 27:20-21, no such command exists for the bread. However, as Milgrom argues, the command is implicit in Leviticus 24:8 when the bread is to be placed on the table "on behalf of the Israelites." Most commentators who speak to how the bread was acquired follow Milgrom's assertion that the wheat for the bread, as well as the oil, came from the offerings of the festivals, which are elaborated on in Leviticus 23.[367] This is because the purpose of the cultic calendar in Leviticus 23 was to remind Israel that they had a responsibility to maintain the public cult, which they helped through their offerings at these festivals for maintaining the daily cult.[368] Oil and bread were two things which, as opposed to the incense (provided by the chieftains[369]), were easily accessible to the people of Israel and would have been within their means to supply. With such offerings the people of Israel would be active participants in the cult of Yahweh, not simply bystanders. They had their role to play in maintaining right relationship between them and God, just as the priests did.

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[366] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27,* 2086.

[367] Ibid., 2100. Archaeological evidence for this can also be found in a case study of Shiloh. Within area D, in the north-eastern part of the city, fourteen silos were found, two of which were discovered "with huge quantities of carbonized wheat." (Oded, "Agriculture in Iron Age Israel," 39). It is likely that these contain the wheat given by Israel at the Feast of Weeks for use by the cult, including in the baking of the bread of the Presence. While cultic-store rooms were found, they did not contain wheat. See Israel Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, but not All, of its Secrets," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 1 (1986): 33-34; Israel Finkelstein, et. al, "Excavations at Shiloh 1981-1984: Preliminary Report," *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University* (1985): 137-138. The depositing of wheat within the silos is not without its creative implications. Throughout the Old Testament, there was an association between full food-storage and the abundance of the land (Tim Frank, *Household Food Storage in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2018), 70). The results of the harvest were brought to the silos of the Tabernacle, which were filled in great abundance, representing the immense bounties of the land and the blessings which follow the cultic creation and Israel when they are obedient to God's covenant.

[368] Ibid., 2082.

[369] Ibid., 2083.

If the wheat came from Israel's festival offerings, the question becomes "which festival?" There were seven major festivals which Israel's year revolved around. Out of these seven, only three of them were pilgrimage festivals where all Israel would have gathered at the Tabernacle to celebrate. Passover (which really could be considered three festivals rolled into one extended celebration: Passover, The First Fruits Offering, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread), The Feast of Weeks (possibly originally called the Feast of Reaping,[370] or simply the Feast of the Harvest, based on Ex. 23:16[371]), and the Feast of Booths. Out of these three, only two involved the offering of bread and flour. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread the people offered the first sheaf of the barley harvest, along with a bread loaf which was made from 2/10 ephah of סֹלֶת flour, which had to be unleavened, as any leaving agent would have come from the old year's crop.[372] This unleavened bread eaten during this prolonged celebration of deliverance was called "the bread of affliction," in remembrance of the harsh life lived in Egyptian slavery.[373] For the next seven days they ate unleavened bread made from the new year's barely harvest. After this feast, the people would return home and begin the harvesting of the barley crops.[374]

The second bread associated festival was the Feast of Weeks, which took place seven weeks after the first fruits of barley were offered. During this one-day festival the first sheaf of the wheat harvest was presented, which was accompanied by two loafs of leavened wheat bread,

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[370] J. Alberto Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period: Institutions, Festivals, Ceremonies, Rituals*, trans. John Bowden (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 102.

[371] Noth, *Leviticus*, 170.

[372] Dommershausen, "Lachem," 546-547.

[373] G.E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 98.

[374] Michael LeFabvre, *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 40-41.

made from 2/10 an ephah of סֹלֶת flour,[375] to be eaten.[376] Since this festival is the only one where wheat was offered to the Tabernacle, the grain for the bread of the Presence would have had to have originated from the wheat offered on this festival.

The Feast of Weeks received its name because it took place seven Sabbaths after the first fruits of barley were offered.[377] During the seven weeks the barley harvest would be brought in and harvested. These seven weeks represented a sort of "cosmic week"[378] in which God's acts of creation were manifested as the cereals necessary for sustaining life were brought from the earth and into the storehouses of Israel. The festival itself took on much the same characteristics as the earlier grouping of festivals. There was a first sheaf offering in which the first fruits of the wheat offerings were presented to the Lord. This offering was followed by the "waving" of the two loaves of leavened סֹלֶת bread,[379] to be given to the priests. The wave offering is accompanied by a burnt offering of seven male lambs, each a year old, a young bull, and two rams as a burnt offering, which was burnt alongside a grain offering (different from the wave offering, as made clear by Num. 28 which states that the grain offering is made from 3/10 an ephah of סֹלֶת flour mixed with oil to accompany each bull offering,[380] 2/10 for the ram, and 1/10 for each of the

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[375] While the First Fruits Festival offering is one loaf of 2/10 an ephah, the Feast of Weeks is 2 loaves of 2/10 and ephah. There is some confusion in the meaning of the second of these as essentially there are two options. Either each loaf weighs 2/10 an ephah, or the two loaves collectively make 2/10 ephah (making each 1/10 ephah). The rabbis and LLX take the second option. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2004. It is likely that ambiguity is meant to connect this wave offering to the bread of the Presence elaborated on in the next chapter.

[376] LeFabvre, *The Liturgy of Creation,* 44.

[377] Ibid.

[378] Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period*, 104.

[379] Lefabvre, *Liturgy of Creation*, 44.

[380] Num. 28 switches the amounts of the bull and ram offerings, as in Numbers two bulls are to be offered and only one ram. Num. 28 is the original text with the Lev. 23 list as later. It is unlikely that the difference is due to scribal error as the Festival of Unleavened Bread and new moon sacrifices follow the Lev. 23 pattern. H deliberately

lambs) and a drink offering. Finally, there was the sacrifice of a male goat as a sin offering, and two lambs, a year old, as a fellowship offering, which was considered a wave offering alongside the first fruits bread and given to the priests to eat along with the bread. The bread offerings of the Feast of Weeks and the bread of the Presence contain some remarkable similarities, such as the amount and type of flour used, as well as these two being the only cereal offerings made without oil.[381] Due to the striking similarities between this first fruits offering and the bread of the Presence some have argued that the bread of the Presence was a weekly first fruits offering,[382] and as such a closer examination of these loaves is in order.

The Bread of the Spring Festivals

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the presented bread is likely unleavened due to its association with the Exodus. At this festival Israel reminded themselves of their call to be exiles within the world, away from their home with God, through their reliving of the Exodus experience.[383] It was also seen as an acknowledgment of Yahweh as the owner of the land who was allowing Israel to use it. If Israel acknowledged this truth, then Yahweh would cause the crops to grow and the land to be fruitful for the rest of the season (Lev. 25:18-19).[384] This

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changes the amount. The reason for the two lists is unknown. During the Second Temple period, the two lists were combined so that that the total offering was fourteen lambs, three bulls, and three rams. However, the rabbis saw them as distinct lists, with Lev 23 being the list to accompany the first fruits offering, and Num 28 as the additional offerings, on the basis that the wave offering is an addition by H. They also postulated that the priest had the option of choosing from either list. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2005.

[381] Julia Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult: The Holiness Legislation in Leviticus 17-26* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 305.

[382] Alfred Marx, *Levitique* 17-27 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2011), 165.

[383] L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 97-98.

[384] Timothy Scott Clark, "Firstfruits and Tithe Offerings in the Construction and Narratives of the Hebrew Bible," MA thesis, Emory University, 82.

offering marks the beginning of the "cosmic week" between the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks where the earth is being "created" as the crops are harvested. After this cosmic creation week, the bread that was offered was both multiplied in number, and leavened. Milgrom states that the reason for the addition of leaven within these loaves is because they served as a thanks offering for the conclusion of the harvest of barley and wheat,[385] which is very plausible as free-will peace offerings often occurred after the harvest.[386] Another explanation for the leaven is that in the Near East leaven could be thought in terms of life and creation since the most common form of leavening agent was a sour-dough (a piece of an old leavened dough) that was stuck inside of the new bread dough being made and left to rest overnight so that the new loaves would ferment and leaven. For this reason, there are some places within the Near East where leaven is a symbol of creation. One such place is Turkey, where villages often have the symbolic association of the leavening agent with the sperm of a man, and the dough with a woman's womb. Thus bread, like humans or trees, is self-perpetuated.[387] As such, it has been suggested the Leviticus 2 prohibition against leaven is that by burning such offerings, the lines between death and life would become too blurred.[388] Regardless, the unleavened bread of the

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[385] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2004. It has also been suggested that the leaven is added because the Israelites have leisure time to bake leavened food now that the harvest is completed, but such a secular answer does not seem to fit in the sacred nature of the festival. See Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *The Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 150.

[386] Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 67. Milgrom also suggests that the reason H allows the offering of leavened bread is because of a deeply rooted, pre-priestly ritual involving leavened bread, as indicated by Amos 4:5, that Num. 28 could not get rid of. So, H allows the offering of leavened bread with certain limitations. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2003.

[387] Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 95.

[388] Timothy M. Willis, *Leviticus, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, Abindgon Press, 2009), 15. It should be noted that the most common view, however, of this prohibition is that because leavened foods decay faster it was associated with corruption (Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 61, though he notes the possibility of the life theory). But, if leavened bread represented corruption, then why offer it as a thanksgiving

previous festival was, by the Feast of Weeks, filled and transformed into something entirely new, leavened bread filled with the life of creation as it is offered as to Yahweh in thankfulness for the life and creation made manifested in the grain harvests.

Besides being a leavened thanks offering, the bread of the Feast of Weeks was also called a "wave offering." Milgrom convincingly argues that there is a mistranslation here as it should be a "raised/elevation offering," rather than a "wave offering." The act associated with the bread is the raising of the loaves in order to bring it up to the realm of the heavens and so consecrate it to Yahweh before it was consumed.[389] The Egyptian temple of Karnak had a similar ritual as part of the wider ritual system of the temple. In episode 44, the lector priest supervised as other priests presented the bread and food for the gods on trays and raised them up, while at the same time reciting the spell, "Come, O King, elevate offerings before the face (of the god). Elevate offerings to Amen-Re', Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands. All life emanates from him, all health emanates from him, all stability emanates from him, all good fortune emanates from him, like Re', Forever."[390] In light of the Feast of Weeks offering and its connection to the bread of the Presence, there are a couple of interesting similarities. Firstly, there is the elevation of the offering, just like bread of the Feast of Weeks. In both Egypt and Israel, elevation offerings are

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offering? It seems almost counterintuitive to offer something representing corruption as a sign of thankfulness to an all-holy God. Unleavened bread was associated with the Exodus event, exile, and God's salvation. Leavened bread, given as a thanks offering after an act of God, was associated with the realization of his promises. Such associations might also be present in the prohibition against sacrificing honey on the altar, as Canaan, the Promised Land, was called a land overflowing with milk and honey.

[389] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 469-470.

[390] Harold H. Nelson, "Certain Reliefs at Karnak and Medinet Habu and the Ritual of Amenophis I," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8, no. 4 (Oct. 1949): 329.

connected to the palm of the hand in which the offering is placed.[391] While the bread of the Feast of Weeks was raised in the palms of the worshippers, the bread of the Presence was raised on the "palm" of the offering trays in the Tabernacle. Secondly, the offering elevates the items into the presence of God, as Leviticus 23:20 (talking of the elevation offering of the Feast of Weeks) says תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, "elevation offering in the presence of Yahweh," a syntaxial similarity which connects this offering to the bread of the Presence in the next chapter. Thirdly, the Egyptian account makes heavy mention of the life that comes from the deity, in much the same way that the life of Yahweh played a major role in the ritual of the bread of the Presence. Fourthly, there is a connection via who consumes the bread. In Egypt, after the deity consumed the elevation offering, it was taken and eaten by the priests and king, while in Israel, the elevation offering of the Feast of Weeks was not consumed by Israel, but given to the priests (Lev. 23:20), in much the same way that the accompanying first fruits was given by Israel to be consumed by the priests via the bread of the Presence. During the Second Temple period, the festival loaves were considered "most holy offerings," just like the bread of the Presence. For example, 11QT 19:5-6 states of the festival loaves that, "they belong to the priests, and they shall eat them in the inner court," this corresponds to Leviticus 6:19, 10:12, where the most holy offerings (such as the bread of the Presence) was to be eaten beside the altar in the courtyard (alternatively, it could be anywhere in the court).[392] Levine notes another connection between the bread of the Presence and the elevation offering in both are accompanied by burnt offerings,[393] and in particular by אִשֶּׁה,

[391] For Israelite examples see Ex. 29:23-24; Num. 6:19-20, for Egyptian examples one could look at the iconography of Karnak in which the elevation offering is presented on outstretched palms. See Ibid., 330-331.

[392] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 392-393, 618.

[393] Baruch A. Levine, *In Pursuit of Meaning: Collected Studies on Baruch A. Levine, Vol I: Religion*, ed. Andrew D. Gross (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 257.

"offerings by fire." Likewise, just as the bread of the festivals was offered on a yearly basis, the bread of the Presence was offered on a weekly basis,[394] both are regular, fixed times for participating in the worship of God.[395] These combined demonstrate a connection between the elevation offerings and the cultic bread.

The Ritual Journey of the Festivals

A final thing to note about the timing of the festivals is the symbolic journey that the festivals took Israel through. Lefabvre suggests that the three pilgrimage festivals corresponded to three different major events in the history of Israel.[396] Passover is, of course, related to the Exodus and Yahweh's freeing of Israel from the hands of Egypt. And Booths is unsurprisingly related to the entrance into Canaan (this can be seen in the Eden imagery of the festival, such as when Israel turns the Tabernacle into a living garden by waving her palm branches).[397] The Feast of Weeks is a little more difficult to link, though it is more than likely connected to the coming of Israel to Mt. Sinai, and the solidification of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Such a connection can be implied from Exodus 19:1 which states that Israel came to Mt. Sinai "on that day" in the third month. The author wants the reader to be aware of the day by mentioning it, yet he does not give the exact day as he does with Passover. This indicates that something special is going on with the text. The vagueness of the day is probably correlated with the Feast of Weeks, the date of which changed from year to year. This fluidity in the date for the Feast of Weeks is

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[394] Klaus Grünwaldt, *Das Heligkeitsgestz Leviticus 17-26, Urspüngliche Gestalt, Tradition und Theologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 91.

[395] Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*, 309.

[396] Lefabvre, *Liturgy of Creation*, 53.

[397] Ibid., 50.

also found in the Numbers accounts of the festivals where all the festivals are given an exact date of celebration, except for the Feast of Weeks.[398] The Second Temple period made the connection more explicit, as Jubilees depicts God's giving of the covenant to Israel as happening on the Feast of Weeks.[399] The Essenes at Qumran also held a deep connection between Sinai and the Feast of Weeks, using the festival as the time for them to renew the covenant of Sinai, which they believed they alone truly upheld.[400]

Creation and covenant are linked together. To live in a creation made new and bountiful is to live in covenant with God, and by living in God's covenant one lives in a new creation. Yahweh's kingdom and the world as yearned for are inseparable concepts. It was during this period, when Israel ritually celebrated the giving of the covenant, and the beginning of their political history that they presented the wheat grown from the ground of the Eden-land. Just as Israel was transformed through the Exodus and made anew at Sinai, the second mountain of Eden, so too did Israel reflect that ritually through the festivals, and presented that transformation through the bread offerings.

The Holy Place: Baking the Bread with the Kohathites

Baking the Cultic Loaves and the Social Dynamic of the Ritual

Baking was a social activity in Israel. In domestic contexts, ovens could be either inside (for use during rainy weather), or outside, generally in courtyards,[401] which were probably used

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[398] Ibid., 67-69.

[399] Sejin Park, *Pentecost and Sinai: The Festival of Weeks as a Celebration of the Sinai Event* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 127.

[400] Ibid., 174-175.

[401] Carol Meyers, "Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and & Gender Issues* 5 (Fall 2002):

by several families, who would have cooked at the same time to both reduce the cost of food and to provide social interaction amongst the women who were baking.[402] This communal aspect sets Israelite baking apart from other contemporary examples, such as the Egyptian worker's village of Amarna, where households made their bread independent of each other.[403]

Each of the three tiers of the ritual were marked through social interaction. All Israel came together at the Feast of Weeks to present the wheat, which was mirrored by the Kohathites likewise coming together to transform the wheat into bread fit as an offering for the Israelites,[404] which was again mirrored by the priesthood (not just the high priest) coming together to eat of the bread. The ritual was a social one on every level. It drew together the community of Israel as one in their worship of Yahweh. Ever since the creation account, when God saw Adam's loneliness as a negative state and placed him in community to remedy that,[405] the creation and maintenance of community is essential to Yahweh's idea of an ideal world. However, one cannot be in community simply by being in proximity to others. True community is formed through a sense of cultural identity in which individuals bind themselves too, taking on a shared identity.[406]

24-25; Shafer-Elliott, Cynthia. "Food Preparation in Iron Age Israel," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, 558-568 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 563.

[402] Meyers, "Having Their Space and Eating There Too," 24-25.

[403] Delwen Samuel, "Bread Making and Social Interactions at the Amarna Workmen's Village, Egypt," *World Archaeology* 31, no. 1 (June 1999): 141.

[404] Even though 1 Chron. 9:31 describes a lone Kohathite in charge of the daily cereal offering, 1 Chron. 9:32 uses the plural בְּנֵי to describe the "sons of the Kohathites" who were in charge of preparing the bread of the Presence every Sabbath.

[405] Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 126.

[406] Lauren Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 214.

This ritual requires Israel to come together for the shared purpose of crafting Yahweh's bread, therefore creating a sense of purpose that was dependent on Yahweh which draws participants towards, thus facilitating the ideal community. Since domestic baking was a way of community formation, it follows that the sacred baking was also used as a way to strengthen the ties of the Kohathites together, creating a community that united via the worship of Yahweh.

It was likely that the bread was baked within the Tabernacle court. This was the case in both Qumran's temple scrolls (11QT 37:8-15), and in Ezekiel's Temple (Ezek. 42:13; 46:19-20). If this is the case it would likely have been baked in either an oven,[407] or a hearth. [408] The argument in favor of the hearth is due to both Leviticus 6:19-23, which states that the daily grain offering cooked by the priests had to be done so on a griddle, and 1 Chronicles 9:31 which talks about the role of a Levite named Mattithiah who was entrusted with baking the offering bread (the Hebrew word only occurs here, though it is likely a later name for the griddle offering[409]). That is to say, if the daily offerings were made with griddles, and the oven-baked offerings came from individuals outside the priestly circle, then the Tabernacle may not have an oven in the courtyard, only hearths and griddles. However, Leviticus 2:4 specifically links the oven with the חַלּוֹת bread. If חַלָּה bread was baked in the oven, then the bread of the Presence, as חַלּוֹת bread, was

[407] The ovens were made of clay in the shape of beehives or cones, with the dough being slapped against the inside walls of the oven. A lid is often placed over the opening to help the oven retain heat, and so that more items can be cooked on top of it. See Shaffer-Elliot, "Food Preparation," 562.

[408] While wandering in the wilderness, it is likely that rather than use an oven, the Israelites followed Bedouin practices and built sand ovens for the baking of their bread, including the bread of the Presence. These ovens consisted of digging a hole in the sand, lighting a fire in it, letting the fire burn to embers, placing the dough on the embers, and then placing more embers on top of the dough. This is supported by Num. 11:8, which describes the Israelites turning the manna into עֻגָה bread, which was bread cooked over hot stones. The use of a hearth would continue this idea. See Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Culture in the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 41-42.

[409] Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 217.

also baked in the oven. However, the particulars of the baking process are not of great concern to the overall thesis.

Twelve Loaves: The Bread as an Offering

The Kohathites turned the first fruits wheat into dough through the normal methods, grinding the wheat into flour, which was then mixed with water, kneaded, and then baked. Specifically, the dough was baked into חַלּוֹת loaves. What distinguishes these loaves from other bread varieties is unknown. The root word means "pierce," and on that basis, scholars have proposed that it was ring-shaped (by piercing a hole in the middle of the dough), or that it was perforated (pierced with many small holes to allow air to escape the dough prior to baking).[410] This word may also be the source for some rabbinic views of the bread that state that the four corners of the bread were turned upwards, like the horns of the altar, so that they "pierced" upwards.[411] A clue to the shape lies in 2 Samuel 6:19 when David hands out חַלָּה to all Israel as the Ark of the Covenant was moved into Jerusalem. However, when 1 Chronicles 16:3 recounts the story, the type of bread is changed to כִּכַּר, which normally means "round," being used to denote the Valley of Jordan, or talents of money. Later Jewish authors also affirm the roundness of the bread, which Yoma 75a links to the manna which was round like coriander seed.[412] While the loaves were likely round, it does not answer the question of where the hole was placed. The practical concerns behind a ring-cake would be storage, as evidenced by the popular expression "staff of bread" to refer to a community's bread supply, or the staff that ring-cakes were placed

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[410] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16,* 185.

[411] Menachot 11:4

[412] Ron, "Braided Challah," 43-44.

and stored on.[413] Secondly, the batch of dough taken from the middle of the cake would be used to satisfy the first dough offering of Numbers 15:18-20. This regulation required that every time bread was baked, a portion of it was set aside to make a loaf for the priests.[414] Punching a hole in the middle of the bread would serve both logistical and religious requirements. However, the bread of the Presence neither needed storage, nor did a portion of it need to be set aside, as it was itself a first fruits offering. Rather than a hole in the middle, these unleavened loaves were likely pierced with many small holes, as is done in modern matzah, to allow air to escape the bread. In this way the bread as presented would resemble the bread eaten at the Feast of Unleavened bread.

These flat, round, and unleavened bread loaves were baked and presented in groups of twelve. Given that the wheat came from the first fruits offering offered by Israel, and the many connections between the elevation offering of the Feast of Weeks, these loaves were offered as a weekly first fruits offering for the twelve tribes of Israel. The offering of the weekly first fruits offering was a weekly thanksgiving that Yahweh had blessed the land with food, and provided wheat and bread for Israel. This first fruits offering was at its very heart a gift from the people of Israel to Yahweh.[415] This gift on the part of Israel is a reciprocal gift given to Yahweh in response to the gift that he has given Israel: all of their food and life. But Yahweh is a generous God. Not only does he give food, which should be more than enough to warrant the gift of a weekly first fruits, but he then takes that gift and transforms it into a new gift imbued with his own life that he offers back to symbolic Israel. He has not rejected the gift but has used the gift

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[413] Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 419.

[414] Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, second edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2022), 245-246.

[415] de Hemmer Gudme, "Tomhændet må Ingen se mit Ansigt," 310. She sees the whole of the sacrificial system as a system of gift-giving to Yahweh.

in the baking of his own meal which he has elected to share with Israel. This cycle of gift-giving and meal-sharing binds Israel and Yahweh into a continual relationship. By nature of gift-giving, as long as both parties continue in the cycle of gift-giving, the relationship continues and is nourished.[416] So too the covenantal relationship is strengthened as Yahweh gives the gift of food, a reward for covenantal obedience, a part of which is given back to Yahweh, which is then transformed and shared with Israel again. And so, the cycle of hospitality and thankfulness continues for all eternity. Yahweh's gifts are greater than Israel's as a sign of humanity's smallness in the face of such a great God.[417] Then, the bread, as it sat in God's presence and life for a week, transformed into something life-giving and different, a divine meal offered by God of himself to his people on his mountain, a unification of the divine and human.

The Holy of Holies: Eating the Bread of Life

The Transforming Presence of God

Bread in general is often associated with life. Among the nomadic Bedouins, bread's association with life is strong. Grain is called "the father of our lands," for its usage in keeping them alive. Similarly, their word for bread is *aysh*, which is the same word used for life. An appropriate fact given that bread traditionally makes up 80% of their diet.[418] Ruth also contains strong connections between bread and life.[419] While the bread signified physical life, there is another layer, the fullness of life which is found in the presence of God. True life can only be

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[416] Ibid., 307.

[417] Ibid., 313. de Hemmer Gudme uses the example of a parent giving their child a Lego castle, while the child gives their parent a homemade ashtray. One is obviously worth more than the other, but they are both gifted according to the ability of the giver, and thus in the realm of sentimentality, they are equal.

[418] Bailey, *Bedouin Culture*, 30.

[419] Talia Sutskover, "The Themes of Land and Fertility in the Book of Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 3 (2010): 290-293.

found in the presence of God and in the temple where he dwelled.[420] Thus the phrase "bread of the Presence" is about the fullness of life, in every possible way. God's life overcomes the bread so that it is not the bread in the Presence, but bread of the Presence. The life of God and these loaves are one. Some suggest that the phrase "bread of the Presence" simply denotes the bread as God's personal bread.[421] This does not, however, deal enough with the nature of God's presence. God's presence is synonymous with his life. To enter into the temple is to enter into the realm of life, while to be outside the presence of God is to live among death. When God's presence enters into a sphere, that sphere is transformed. The Bible often talks about the transformation of the cosmos due to the presence of God. When God goes to war, nature languishes, and when his presence returns the world is recreated.[422] The prophets look forward to the day when the presence of God will cover all of creation and when every nation will be joined into the people of God.[423] Thus, to say that the bread was filled with the presence of God is to say that it was transformed from what it was prior. Mundane and secular dough was turned into life-filled bread. Milgrom notes that the point of the bread is "exposure" to God's presence.[424] The rabbis agree with this as well, as they note that when the bread was entering the Temple, it was placed on a

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[420] Clifford, "Isaiah 55," 29; Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 44; William R. Osborne, *Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 17-18.

[421] Aubrey R. Johnson, "Aspects of the Use of the Term פנים in the Old Testament," in *Festschrift Otto Eissfeldt Zum* (Halle: Max Niemeyerverlag, 1947), 159.

[422] Leonard J. Greenspoon, "The Origins of the Idea of Resurrection," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 262-319.

[423] J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 107; Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2015), 130.

[424] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2092.

marble table, but when it left the Temple to be eaten, it was placed on a golden table.[425] During the week, the bread became holier, it was transformed. Just as Israel gave a first fruits of raw wheat to be turned into baked bread by the priests, the priests offered as a first fruits offering "raw" bread, which Yahweh "baked" with his life, transforming it into the cooked meal that could be consumed by the priests as guests in the deity's house. This meal that Yahweh offered, created with God's life, in the new Eden, and which was intrinsically connected to the stylized Tree of Life could only become the fruit of the Tree of Life. To eat of this divine meal was to eat of the food promised to Adam.

The fruit of the Tree of Life represented the physical immortality that was lost to humanity, but more importantly the relational connection between God and humanity. In Genesis Yahweh tells Adam that on the day he eats from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, "you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:17). Yet, when Adam and Eve do eat of the fruit, Yahweh does not kill them, but banishes them from his presence in the garden. The fruit of the Tree of Life brought life, but it was more than physical life, but the fullness of life, life lived in relationship with Yahweh.[426] It was this relationship that was restored as symbolic Israel ate the ritualized divine meal with Yahweh within the cultic cosmos, on the day of creation celebrated. It was this meal that symbolized not any meal, but the divine meal that humanity and God were meant to share in the Garden of Eden, fruit imbued with the life of God's presence.

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[425] Mishnah Shekalim 6:4.

[426] J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 33.

Pure Incense as a Memorial Portion

The ritual importance of incense lies in its nature as a transitory substance. The incense smoke rises into the heavens and is made of a substance that is visible and is obviously a part of this world, though it cannot be grasped. It shifts, moves, and eventually disappears into the sky above, signaling that it is not wholly of this world. Not only this, but incense creates a "sweet aroma" which drew the attention of Yahweh.

Incense was lit with the bread of the Presence as a memorial offering, though the location of the burning is debated. There are some who state that it was burned on the nearby incense altar.[427] Others state that because the memorial portion was אִשֶּׁה "an offering made by fire," that it was burned on the altar in the courtyard, where אִשֶּׁה offerings were generally burned.[428] Still others say that the incense was burned on the table since the preposition עַל־ accompanies the word הַמַּעֲרֶכֶת, the stacks of loaves,[429] indicating that the incense was burnt on the bread,[430] or at least close to the actual loaves on the table. The problem is compounded by the fact that there are actually two different batches of bread in the ritual, the new bread that was placed on the Sabbath, and the old bread that was consumed. Leviticus 24:7 talks about placing the new batch in stacks, and then v.8 seems to be stating that the incense is to be burnt by the new bread stack. Given the

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[427] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2093-2094.

[428] August Knobel, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, KEH* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1857), 554; Jonathan Grossman, "The Significance of Frankincense in Grain Offerings," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019): 296.

[429] Older translations translate this word as "row," however that translation has dropped in favor of the more accurate "stacks," or "piles." The table was not long enough to support two rows of six large loaves. See Bill Mitchell, "Leviticus 24:6: The Bread of the Presence-Rows or Piles?" *The Bible Translator* 33, no. 4 (1982): 447-448.

[430] Gerstenberger, *Leviticus,* 360. This view is also taken by the Essenes of Qumran as described in 11QTemple VIII:9, 12.

preposition עַל־ which has the most straightforward translation of "on" it seems unlikely that the incense was burnt on any other altar.

In Grossman's treatment of incense on grain offerings he concludes that incense was burnt with flour offerings rather than baked offerings because flour does not produce a smell of its own, unlike baked goods. However, when he addresses the bread of the Presence, he states that the incense was burned because the bread of the Presence was leavened and thus could not be offered on the altar. Thus, incense was burnt on the altar to represent the bread on the altar. Again, Hebrew grammar does not seem to make that theory a probability, rather there is a more likely scenario. The priests came into the holy place with the bread and incense while the high priest performed his other functions. Then, when the high priest got to the table, the old loaves were taken off first and the new loaves were laid down. The incense was then burnt on the table to represent the old loaves of bread, whose smell had dissipated. Thus, the memorial offering represented the scent of the old loaves which rose up along with the natural smell of the new loaves so that both of these sweet aromas reached to the heavens. These were the loaves which Israel ate, thereby allowing Yahweh and humanity to interact with the same loaves.

The purpose of the memorial offering being an אִשֶּׁה is not about its location but about Yahweh's reaction to it. The purpose of the offering by fire was to transform the substance that was being offered into smoke, raising it into the heavens so that God could, in an abstract sense, "partake" of the sacrifice. In this way the divine and material realms were connected.[431] These aromas were pleasing to the Lord. It was something he enjoyed, and thus drew his attention.

[431] Christian A. Eberhart, "A Neglected Feature of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Remarks on the Burning Rite on the Altar," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (2004): 493.

Though Yahweh does not eat, he is nonetheless drawn to the table by the incense. While the priests partake through taste, Yahweh does so through "smell."

Sabbath

The bread of the Presence was offered and eaten on the Sabbath, a day intrinsically connected to creation.[432] The Sabbath is important because during the first six days of the creation narrative God created the world which functions as a cosmic temple for God to inhabit. However, while God was creating the world, he remained distant from it. Then, after six days of work, Yahweh "rested." This rest was became the prototypical Sabbath. This was not the ceasing from work and relaxing on the sofa that modern-day readers might expect. Rather, God's resting was about him coming into the world which he created and inhabiting it.[433] This Sabbath day became an integral part of Israelite life and religion as from the earliest portions of Israel's political history they observed the Sabbath as God observed the Sabbath. Exodus 20:8-11 states "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God...11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

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[432] The connections between the institution of the Sabbath day of rest and creation is most explicitly laid out in Exodus 20:8-11. The importance of the Sabbath day in the creation account can be seen in how the number seven is woven into the fabric of the account. The Sabbath was the climax of the creation week as described in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Throughout the first six days, there is a central focus on the number seven. There are seven days, after the first verse there are seven paragraphs, each of which pertains to one of the seven days. Each of the three nouns of verse 1 (God, heavens, earth) is stated a multiple of seven times: God is stated thirty-five times, heavens and earth both appear twenty-one times. God speaks ten times, out of these seven are direct commands to create. Light and day are collectively found seven times in the first paragraph, and light appears seven times in the fourth paragraph. On days 5 and 6, the term הָיָה appears seven time. The phrase "it was good" occurs seven times. The first verse has seven words, the second verse has fourteen words. The seventh paragraph, dealing with the seventh day, has three sentences of seven words each which all have the expression "the seventh day" in their middle. The seventh paragraph has thirty-five words (Cassuto, *Genesis*, 13-15).

[433] Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 63.

The Sabbath has particular emphasis in the back half of Leviticus, what is typically called the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), where "Sabbath observance is positioned as an essential precondition of the Israelites' sanctification via law observance."[434] In particular, the Sabbath is a central component to the purposes of Leviticus in chapters 23, 25. In the former, the command to keep the Sabbath initiates the festival calendar, and characterizes the festivals within (such as the date of the Feast of Weeks being determined based on the Sabbath,[435] as well as the importance of the seventh month in organizing the fall festivals[436]). In chapter 25, the command to keep the Sabbath is extended to the Sabbath year, also known as the year of Jubilee, by which the Sabbath day is connected to the joys of a new creation and the freedom of the Exodus account. Thus, the bread of the Presence's laying on Sabbath connects the Sabbath and all the festive regulations of chapters 23 and 25 with the activities of the cult in chapter 24.[437]

In the Tabernacle cult, there was a connection between the Tabernacle and its creation and the cosmos and its creation, and the idea of Sabbath bound them both, as

> The Sabbath and the sanctuary represent the same moment in the divine life, one of exaltation and regal repose, a moment free of anxiety. Thus, the account of the construction of the Tabernacle is punctuated by the injunction to observe the Sabbath in imitatione Dei (Exod. 31:12-17, 35:1-3). The two institutions, each a memorial and, more than that, an actualization of the aboriginal creative act, are woven together not in a purposeless, mindless redaction but in a profound and unitive theological statement.

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[434] Julia Rhyder, "Sabbath and Sanctuary Cult in the Holiness Legislation: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 4 (2019): 721.

[435] Ibid., 724.

[436] Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, *Old Testament Library*, trans. J.E. Anderson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 172-173.

[437] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 467.

> Sabbath and sanctuary partake of the same reality; they proceed, pari passu, from the same foundational event, to which they testify and even provide access.[438]

Since the Sabbath was simply the temporal Tabernacle, as the Tabernacle was the physical Sabbath, the two both pointed towards God's acts of creation. Through their celebrations of the Sabbath, Israel entered into a weekly rhythmic cycle, whereby once a week, in a manner as set and cosmic as the voyage of the stars through the heavens, Israel entered into a holy time, a time set apart from the other six, secular days. This time was sacred, and by entering into and properly engaging with this time, they too became closer to Yahweh and the spiritual order of the world.[439] This was the day that celebrated God coming stepping out of the heavens and entering into the creation he had made.[440] While other cultures celebrated the renewal of creation at the New Year via the re-enactment of mythical epics,[441] Israel celebrated the completion of creation on a weekly basis every Sabbath.[442] It was on this day, within the Tabernacle, that the priests brought the bread.

> The world which the Temple incarnates in a tangible way is not the world of history but the world of creation, the world not as it is but as it was meant to be and as it was on the first Sabbath...The Temple offers the person who enters it to worship an opportunity to rise from a fallen world to partake of the Garden of Eden. The Temple is to space what the Sabbath is to time, a recollection of the protological dimension bounded by mundane reality. It is the higher world in which the worshiper characteristically wishes he could dwell forever (Pss. 23:6, 27:4).[443]

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[438] Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (1984): 288.

[439] Eviatar Zerbavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 108-109.

[440] Terence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 63.

[441] Bidmead, "The Akitu Festival," 29.

[442] Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple Building, and the Enthronement of the Lord," *Bet Miqra* 22 (1977): 188.

[443] Levenson, "The Temple and the World," 297-298.

These are the images and ideologies that are present when the priests offer the bread of the Presence. This combination of time and place is among the holiest on earth, within the bounds of God's tent, humanity returned to Eden. After the divine meal, Moses' ascension up the mountain only occurred after six days, alluding to the days of creation so that Moses entered into the presence of Yahweh on the Sabbath.[444] It was on this day of creation and God's presence that the priests baked[445] and then offered the twelve loaves as a first fruits offering, perhaps symbolic of the first fruits of the creation whose completion was being celebrated. It was also in this context that the old loaves were eaten. With such heavy creation imagery occurring between the Tabernacle and Sabbath, and the tight connection between the bread and the symbolic tree of life, it is perhaps becomes more difficult to say that the bread did not represent the divinely recreated fruit of the Tree of Life.

There is a caveat to this conversation in that while the Sabbatical requirement is given in Leviticus, it is unlikely that such timing was an original part of the ritual. It is difficult to say that

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[444] B. Och, "Creation and Redemption: Towards a Theology of Creation," *Judaism* 44, no. 2 (1995): 238.

[445] Leviticus 24 gives a time for the laying of the bread, but not for its baking. Gerstenberger maintains that the bread was prepared on the Sabbath day itself so that fresh bread would have been available for the Lord (Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 358). Milgrom shares the same thought process, stating that the Sabbath prohibitions were suspended within Yahweh's sphere (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2099). Rabbinical material however states the opposite. The Midrash Rabba on Leviticus says that the bread was baked on the day before Sabbath, or if a festival fell on that day, the day before Sabbath eve (de Boer, "An Aspect of Sacrifice," 28). These rabbis were not concerned about the freshness of the bread, as a statement by Joshua ben Levi makes clear, as he believed that the bread maintained its freshness due to a divine miracle (Ibid.). The Rabbinical concern about baking the bread is brought about because of the Rabbinical obsession with keeping the Sabbath through a set of thirty-nine prohibitions laid out in Mishnah Shabbat 7:2. Grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking are four of those items. But, as Milgrom and others point out, the priests break the sabbath every week, as God's tent requires service. If the Sabbath laws do not apply to the laying down of the bread, should it apply to the baking of said bread as well? While only the priests are seen breaking sabbath law, their ability to break the commandment of rest does not lie in who they are, but in where they are. While in the sphere of God, the sabbath could be broken. Shiloh, being the priestly city, was considered synonymous with the sanctuary of Yahweh, as evident in texts such as Joshua 18:8-10. Since the whole city was in God's sphere, Sabbath regulations were suspended across the whole city, so that the gathering of wheat from the silos, the kneading, and the baking of the bread was trespassing on the Sabbath regulations.

the bread could have lasted in the hot and arid weather of the Near East for a full week and still be edible.[446] This is to be paired with Noth's idea in Exodus that idea of the bread being continually set before the Lord invokes a daily presentation of the bread.[447] The Levitical writer thus likely made the change as part of his wider scheme of centralizing the cult. Thus, the creation aspects of the ritual (which are implicant in the connection with the lampstand, which is original[448]) were enhanced in this edit.

Joy and Covenant

After the transformation of the bread, on the Sabbath, the priests would take the bread and retreat out of the sanctuary to the courtyard, where they would eat the bread, since as a "most holy food offering," it was to be eaten by the altar. One might wonder why the bread was eaten outside the tent rather than at the table. The first thing to note is that God's presence was not restricted to the actual tent, as the whole complex was his. In fact, the phrase, "before Yahweh," often denoted the area by the altar, in front of the doorway to the Tabernacle. It was at the place in the courtyard where God met with humanity, where worshippers gave their burnt offerings to Yahweh, where the guilty found forgiveness, and where atonement for the sins of the nation was enacted. This is the space where God's transformative power comes out to encounter humanity.[449] Not only that but within the theology of Deuteronomy, the Lord calls for all Israel to come to this spot, within his presence, to eat of the bread and food.

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[446] De Boer, "An Aspect of Sacrifice," 29-30.
[447] Noth, *Exodus*, 206.

[448] Meyers, "The Tabernacle Menorah," 149.

[449] Michael B. Hundley, "Before YHWH at the Entrance of the Tent of Meeting: A Study of Spatial and Conceptual Geography in the Priestly Texts," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123, no. 1 (2011): 22.

> 5 But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; 6 there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and your special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. 7 There in the presence of the Lord your God, rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord has blessed you…12 And there rejoice before the Lord your God-you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no allotment or inheritance of their own…17 You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and olive oil…18 Instead you are to eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose…and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God in everything you put your hand to (Deut. 12:5-18).

The people come to the same spot where the priests eat the bread of the Presence and eat their own meals in the presence of Yahweh. The bread of the Presence does not give to the priests what was denied to the everyday Israelite. While the burnt offerings that Israel ate of did symbolically become the fruit of the Tree of Life, such symbolism was unnecessary. They were with God eating a meal with him in his house. The priests simply get to have this meal on a weekly basis as a reminder that God's faithfulness does not end. While the Israelites only ate in Yahweh's presence during the festival periods around the harvest,[450] the priests knew that within the cultic cosmos, God was always present.

This meal in the presence of God was about furthering the connection between man and God. This is particularly evident in the eating of the bread, in which Yahweh presented the loaves back to Israel. The Hebrew word for bread is לֶחֶם and can be translated also as food in general. However, the cognates of the word in other languages does not always mean bread. The Arabic *laḥm* means "meat," while in the Southern Arabic dialect of the island of Soqotra, *leḥem* means "fish."[451] The Semitic root word thus seems to be concerned not with the type of food

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[450] Adam Warner Day, "Eating Before the Lord: A Theology of Food According to Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 1 (Mar. 2014): 96.

[451] Dommershausen, "Lachem," 538.

being eaten, but with the fact that it is the staple food of a particular community, which would cause the word's meaning to differ from region to region.[452] The widening of the root word increases when derivatives of לְחֶם are looked at. This includes the Hebrew לָחַם which can mean to devour, as well as to fight. This warring connotation is found in the Moabite word *lṯḥm*, meaning "to fight." The Syriac *laḥhem* means "to connect," while Arabic has *laḥhama*, meaning "soldering, or welding," and *luḥma*, meaning "wefting thread of fabric," or "kinship." In each of these the basic idea is connection, whether connecting with an adversary in battle, or connecting two pieces of material together, or connecting with friends and family over a meal.[453]

Meals are more than the simple consummation of food; meals hold special social functions in any given community. It defines the social hierarchies,[454] that is the host of the meal is the one individual with the power in the social setting as they have the resources that the guests require.[455] Since the Tabernacle is God's house, the bread is God's bread which he shares with the priests, so the meal defines the roles of Yahweh and Israel. Even though Israel provides the bread, the food is Yahweh's food. This can be seen in how God's presence touches it. To God, the "cooked" food offered by Israel is mere raw ingredients, which he himself "bakes" and transforms into real, life-giving food.

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[452] Edward Ullendorff, "The Contribution of South Semitics to Hebrew Lexicography," *Vestus Testamentum* 6, no. 2 (1956): 192.

[453] Dommershausen, "Lachem," 538.

[454] Peter-Ben Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom: Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 86.

[455] Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, "Invitation to Murder: Hospitality and Violence in the Hebrew Bible," *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* 73, no. 1 (2019): 91.

Meals also serve the function of including and excluding people from a select community. Like how feasts were markers of "elite formation," by which the members of society's higher echelons were known,[456] the meal served as a marker of community involvement. Meals were thus ways that hosts could turn tangible agrarian resources into intangible social resources, creating a web of alliances amongst those present at the meal,[457] whether it be between city nobles or the various members of a farming family. Thus, these community-shaping events were microcosms of the whole community. For example, the priests ate the bread of the Presence, God's meal, in the cultic Sinai. The priests, as a representative of Israel, acted as a microcosm of God's call for Israel to be a nation of priests, a call which the Israelites rejected. The idea of "a nation of priests," can be interpreted in one of two ways. Either it is a harkening to old, pre-monarchial family religion in which the family patriarch acted as the priest for his family at local shrines, a role which was absorbed by the priesthood,[458] or it is about the missional call for Israel to be mediators between God and the nations.[459] Either way, the priests as symbols of Israel do not simply symbolize Israel as she was, but Israel as she should have been: a community of priests, eating of the meal hosted by God in God's paradise. It is this vision that was fulfilled at the festivals when all Israel ate their meals within the presence of God in a spectacular feast and thus returned to Eden.

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[456] Greer, *Dinner at Dan*, 3-4.

[457] Mary K. Dabney, Paul Halstead, and Patrick Thomas, "Mycenaean Feasting on Tsoungiza at Ancient Nemea," Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens 73, no. 2 (2004): 213.

[458] Simeon Chavel, "A Kingdom of Priests and its Earthen Altars in Exodus 19-24," *Vestus Tesamentum* 65, no. 2 (2015): 187.

[459] Malone, *God's Mediators*, 141.

This meal was also a covenant affirming meal. As implied through Israel's giving of the wheat on the Feast of Weeks, the festival commemorating covenant renewal, the covenantal nature of the bread of the Presence is quite strong. Not only because the bread is explicitly called "a lasting covenant," but also because of the verbs used throughout Leviticus 24:5-9 to describe the presentation of the bread, שׂוּם (set out, v.6), נָתַן (put, v.7), and עָרַךְ (arrange, v.8) are the same verbs used for the making of a covenant.[460] The laying down and eating of these loaves was meant to be a lasting covenant before Yahweh. Some have used this passage as prooftext that the bread symbolizes Israel living in an ideal covenant relationship with Yahweh.[461] This is not a necessity, especially given the similar phrase "this is to be a lasting ordinance" appears several times throughout Leviticus 23, including during the commands for the Feast of Weeks, to refer to objects that obviously do not represent the covenant.[462] The statement that the laying down of the loaves as a covenant to Yahweh does not mean that the loaves had to represent Israel, but only that the action was a pledge that Israel would uphold the covenant.[463] One wonders which action is the covenant. Some argue that the action being referred to is the Israelite's presentation of grain to the sanctuary,[464] while others state that it is in reference to the bread itself.[465] This second reading is the most common of the two, though caution must be administered here, as the

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[460] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2094.

[461] Trevaskis, "The Purpose of Leviticus 24," 303-304.

[462] Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*, 305-306.

[463] de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 422; Kathrine M. Smith, "The Persuasive Intent of the Book of Leviticus," PhD diss., University of Bristol, 234. Contrary to Smith, this does not invalidate the theory of a meal with Yahweh, which would be hard to do so given that the priests are to eat of the bread whose very name suggests a close association with the presence of God.

[464] Rhyder, "Sabbath and Sanctuary," 729.

[465] 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), 119-120.

conclusion to such readings is that the twelve loaves represented covenant-abiding Israel.[466] It has already been shown that this cannot be. The first assumption argues that the phrase בְּרִית עוֹלָם should not be translated as "eternal covenant," but rather as "eternal requirement," based on a parallelism with חָק־ עוֹלָם ("eternal statute") at the end of v.9.[467] However, while true that the characteristic of "eternal" does connect the two phrases, we are not dealing with poetry whereby the parallel lines mean the same thought.[468] We are dealing with law that is embedded in narrative, as such poetic characteristics need not find their place here. Besides this, the word בְּרִית simply does not denote a one-sided "requirement," but rather the two-sided covenant.

The immediately preceding text to the eternal covenant is מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־ יִשְׂרָאֵל. Given that the whole placement of this text in its current position is to highlight the importance of the public involvement in the Levitical cult, it would make the most sense that this phrase means "from the sons of Israel." This would highlight the role of the giving of the bread as the covenantal action, rather than its presentation. This can be taken along with the fact that the presentation of first fruits concludes (or closely follows the conclusion) of every major segment of law in the Torah, suggesting the important connection between these offerings and Israel's legal and covenantal duties.[469] Rather than see the two phrases as synonyms, or as unrelated, it is more likely that they highlight two aspects to the presentation. The presentation of the grain, which takes place during

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[466] Ibid.

[467] Karl Elliger, *Leviticus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 329.

[468] David Toshio Tsumura, *Vertical Grammer of Parallelism in Biblical Hebrew* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2022), 4-5.

[469] Peter Altmann, "Feast, Famine, and History: The Festival Meal Topos and Deuteronomy 26, 1-15," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 124, no. 4 (2012): 557, note 8.

the Feast of Weeks, itself a remembering of the giving of the covenant at Sinai, is part of Israel's covenant obligations. Likewise, the priests bake the covenantal flour and then present the bread as a covenant, a fact highlighted by the author's covenantal vocabulary of the ritual. The covenant obligations encompass both Israel and the priests. Israel's presentation of the grain is a matter of covenant obedience, just as the priest's presentation of the bread is a matter of covenantal obedience. To each group of people, covenantal obligations are limited to what is achievable for them. Even though the resources and skills available to priests and lay-people are different, they both have their own separate, yet equal duties in ensuring the right relationship of Yahweh and Israel. The bond between Israel and Yahweh is strengthened during their presentation of raw and cooked grain, and then climaxes during the ceremonial meal.

With the transformation of the bread, the eating of the bread is not a covenantal obligation, but rather a reward for covenant obedience. It works in tandem with Deuteronomy's decree that covenant fidelity results in the fertility of the land. The land is fruitful because of Israel's covenant obedience, so Israel, in covenant obedience and thankfulness, presents the fruits of that obedience back to the cult as pledges of their continued obedience. This pledge of obedience will be made again every week as the priests bake and present the loaves affirming Israel's covenant obedience, which are then infused with God's life and presence and then consumed by symbolic Israel as a reward for said covenant fidelity. The breaking of this ritual might have been severe enough to be considered a breaking of the whole covenant in general, as some scholars postulate that the Sabbath day regulations and the bread of the Presence's misuse

are behind Yahweh's lament of the broken everlasting covenant in Isaiah 24:5.[470] If this is true, then the importance of this ritual in maintaining the covenant cannot be overstated.

The Regularity of the Ritual

According to Gorman's theory of ritual, the fact that the loaves were offered on a regular basis would constitute this as a ritual of maintenance. This is opposed to rituals of founding (which create a normative environment), and rituals of restoration (which craft a return to the normative environment).[471] These rituals of maintenance are meant to maintain the normative environment of goodness and order that Yahweh established in the cosmos.[472] This order was embedded into the world. In the ancient Near East, the concept of time was different, not moving in a linear fashion, but in a cyclic fashion. There was no time that could be called the beginning, as the mythic actions of gods and creation took place in a sphere outside of time, nor was there a future towards which history drove itself.[473] There was only the present, with its constant cycle of seasons, death, and rebirth.

With the bread of the Presence ritual, the purpose was not to create order, nor was it a return to a previously lost order. It was about maintaining an order that Yahweh had already established. Here, every week perpetually, the Israelite priests would have a meal with Yahweh. This was a part of maintaining order. Not because this meal was meant to prevent the destruction

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[470] J. Todd Hibbard, "Isaiah 24-27 and Trito-Isaiah: Exploring Some Connections," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27*, ed. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, 183-200 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 195.

[471] Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers, NIV Application Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 341.

[472] Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55.

[473] John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 50.

of the ordered cosmos. Rather, to not participate in the meal was to not participate in the hope found within Yahweh. In this way, the hopes of the eschaton which the prophets yearned for, that future day when Israel would live with Yahweh and feast in his courts, was made a ritualized reality with the bread of the Presence. This is similar to the way that Christian communion anticipates, and allows partial participation in, the eschaton.[474] While it is almost certain Israel had developed as eschatology by the Exilic period, its existence within the Late Bronze Age/Iron Age I cult is less certain. When looking at the Tabernacle cult, one of the main concerns was about reaching back towards a utopian past (itself a novelty in the ancient Near East) to help cleanse the present of sin, so that the future (in the immediate sense of tomorrow, the day after, rather than "the eschaton") could be free of sin, allowing Israel and God to exist in the present as they did in the past.[475] This future kingdom of God is one in which abundant bread is among the gifts Yahweh gives (Isa. 30:23).[476] The answer to the question of early Israelite eschatology question does little for the purpose of the ritual. If Israel had an eschatology, then the bread of the Presence was an actualization of that eschaton. A ritual that took joy and hope from the future and planted it in the present so that the meal originally sealed off for a future day could be accessed in the here and now. If Israel had no eschatology, then the meal was the ushering into an ideal, the hope of what Yahweh was doing in the world as he sought to bring creation to himself in the here and now. Just as in Mesopotamia, the kings ate (at least at certain times) the food that was "eaten" by the gods so that he might share in their life and blessings,[477] so too did

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[474] Dermot A. Lane, "The Eucharist as Sacrament of the Eschaton," *The Furrow* 47, no. 9 (1996): 473.

[475] Nicholas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 271-272.

[476] Dommershausen, "Lechem," 542.

[477] Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1973), 81.

the priests eat from Yahweh's table, partaking of his life and blessings for themselves and for all of Israel.

Conclusion: Ritual, Eschaton, and the Divine Hope of Eating with God

This thesis began with a look at the various models of purpose that scholars have proposed for the bread of the Presence. The results of this thesis are not enough to warrant the creation of a whole new model. Rather, it straddles the line of the benedictory and the covenantal models, akin to Ganes' proposal. It is like the benedictory model (Morale's iteration in particular) in that the ritual is about Israel entering into an ideal state in the presence of God. Yet, this ideal state is made real and tangible. It is not something purely to be looked at, an image simply to be perceived. Rather is a state to be experienced via the divine meal. The proposed model is also like the covenantal model in that this ritual is a covenant with Yahweh. One cannot enter the presence of God without being in covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Israel gives to Yahweh their wheat and allegiance, and he in turn brings them into his house.

The bread of the Presence ritual was an antique rite, and likely developed out of the ancient concept of the divine meal. While the bread shared many similarities to the divine feeding rites of the ancient Near East, the similarities were purely aesthetical, as nowhere does the Bible suggest that God actually consumed food. Rather, its functional similarities came from the idea of the divine meal. This meal centered around the unification of the divine and human spheres and is seen in the oldest portions of scripture and throughout the Ugaritic material, especially KTU 1.23, where the divine family is reconciled together, which as a whole is also reconciled to humanity. The bread of the Presence was a meal on the symbolic mountain of God in which God and humanity were brought into unity with each other. This seems to be the core of the ritual present in the earliest versions of the rite. This does not necessitate that the bread was the fruit of the Tree of Life. But the divine meal is associated with the mountain of the Lord in the biblical texts.

The purpose of the bread can be further divined through the Biblical texts. Scripture roots the bread in a theology of creation and gives it a tight association with the menorah. While in the biblical text the lampstand appears in later texts, Meyers argues that its form is reminiscent of Late Bronze Age cultic stands.[478] Besides this, it is probable that the fire of the lampstand represents the fire of the presence of God,[479] and the association of the sacred tree and the presence of the deity is strongest in the Late Bronze Age, dying away starting in Iron Age I until the sacred tree was merely a marker for fertility in general. It can thus be deduced that since the Bible describes the lampstand in terms of the presence of God made manifest through the sacred tree, its origins lie in the Late Bronze Age. Since the bread likely developed as the cultic reenactment of the divine meal on the mountain of God, in the presence of God, another Late Bronze Age ritual, then it would make sense for the two objects to have been connected in the Late Bronze Age. This is especially true given that trees are often associated with mountains, as vast forests adorned places of higher elevation.[480] The idea of the tree of life growing from the cosmic mountain was a simple outgrowth of the lived experience of the ancient Near East.

The biblical texts certainly uphold the idea that the bread of the Presence was rooted in creation ideology. Exodus gives the accounts of God's instructions for the table and bread, its crafting, its inspection, and its placement. The table is adorned in pure gold and placed around the pure gold frames of the Tabernacle so that the ritualized divine meal happened around precious stones like the lapis lazuli of Exodus 24:9-11. On the table, there was placed strong alcohol which Numbers states was used for a libation ritual. Since this particular liquid was, in

[478] Meyers, "The Tabernacle Menorah," 149.

[479] Ibid., 145.

[480] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 31.

normal situations, off limits for human consumption outside of the presence of God, it can be assumed that God's healing and life-giving presence touches the liquid, enabling it to be poured out. This is a similar process to that of the bread, in which the regular bread was touched with God's presence to transform it into life-filled food. It can be assumed that if this is correct, then the life-filled bread (which was also associated with death, as it is not formed until after the Fall) and the life-filled drink are a corresponding pair. Since the libation ritual is an old rite, as it slowly fades away from use in the cult, then it is to be believed that the life-touched food is an original part of the ritual.

Besides this, Exodus 39:36 and 40:23 clearly paint the Tabernacle in cosmic terms. As God inspected and created the cosmos, so too does Moses inspect and create the cultic cosmos. Since the Tabernacle is the cultic cosmos, the bread would correspond to the original food of Eden, which in every version is fruit, and in particular the fruit of the tree of life. But Numbers 4:7 is clear that this fruit is not a one-time meal, but an everlasting gift. God's life is not restricted to a one-time usage in the garden but is a meal that is meant to be continually enjoyed by those who follow him. Leviticus only strengthens the cosmic connection by having the bread be presented on the Sabbath day, the day commemorating God's completion of creation. Just as God entered into his creation on the Sabbath to be joined into relationship with humanity, on the Sabbath the priests enter into the cultic creation to be joined in relationship with Yahweh.

Despite some of the later additions to the rite, Leviticus elucidates several components of the ritual, particularly its relationship to all Israel and the Feast of Weeks, which provided the flour for the bread. The Feast of Weeks is an old festival and likely derived from the Canaanite

harvest festivals,[481] which would be within the writer's theology. Since both Leviticus 23, the older Numbers 28, and the oldest Exodus 34:22,[482] all mention the bringing of a first fruits offering, it must be assumed that this is an original part of the ritual. The only part of the ritual which may reflect a later change is the addition of the two loaves of leavened bread. Though, as Milgrom suggests, these loaves may always have been there, and Leviticus is simply constraining a popular practice.[483] Israel handed the first fruits over as part of their covenantal obligations to Yahweh, which were then stored within the Tabernacle. The Kohathites, on the Sabbath, baked the twelve loaves as first fruits and presented them before Yahweh. It is likely that the idea of the weekly consumption of the eating of the bread was a later conception and that the original ritual was performed on a daily basis[484] based on the unlikelihood of bread (even perforated and unleavened bread) being able to last a week in the open air.[485] Another portion of the ritual which was likely not original are the twelve loaves, as it is likely that historical Israel had fewer tribes to begin with and whose numbers were added on later.[486] Thus, as more tribes were added to the Tribal League, more loaves were added to the ritual, which helped to establish the Tabernacle as the League's central shrine, for it was here that the political entity was made

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[481] Georg Braulik *The Theology of Deuteronomy: Collected Essays of Georg Braulik*, trans. U. Lindbald (N. Richalnd Hills: BIBAL Press, 1994), 81.

[482] Shimon Bar-On, "The Festival Calendars in Exodus XXIII 14-19 and XXXIV 18-26," *Vestus Testamentum* 48, no. 2 (1998): 161.

[483] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2003.

[484] Noth, *Exodus*, 206.

[485] De Boer, "An Aspect of Sacrifice," 29-30.

[486] Andrew Tobolowsky, *The Myth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel: New Identities Across Time and Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 47.

whole in Yahweh's sight.[487] Despite all of these changes, the antiquity of the divine meal, and the connection to the menorah (which as Meyers notes, is likely to have been an original part of the Late Bronze Age cult), suggest that the original historical meaning of the ritual did not change. God's presence shone on to the bread via the lampstand, transforming it from Israel's first fruits offering, into the food imbued with his presence on the cosmic mountain. Covenant obligation was turned into covenantal reward as symbolic Israel routinely ate of the new Eden, and Israel had the chance to do the same thing during the festivals when they ate their elevation offerings in the presence of Yahweh.

In terms of biblical theology, the bread of the Presence developed from pure ritual. The meal of Lady Wisdom was connected to the rite, as well as the blasphemous offerings to the Queen of Heaven. As time moved on, the divine meal of the earthly Tabernacle became connected to a heavenly meal at the cosmic table. As such Isaiah developed the idea of Yahweh's banquet, an idea picked up by Jesus and the New Testament authors. They longed for a day when the meal with God was made a tangible reality when the promises of ritual broke free from the constraints of symbolism to shout and rejoice in a creation liberated by King Yahweh. While the Israelites waited for that day, Jesus made a new promise. He told of a new bread filled with the life of God that whoever would eat of it would never go hungry again (John 6). During this discourse Jesus refers to this bread as "the bread of God," the wording the LXX uses to describe the bread of the Presence.[488] The Bread of Life is eaten both in an abstract sense by following Jesus, and in a concrete sense through Holy Communion. For as believers, surrounded

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[487] Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*, 310-311.

[488] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, Pillar New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1990), 253.

by their brothers and sisters in Christ, eat of the bread that is infused with God's own life and being, they too enjoy the ritualistic divine meal of God's presence. A meal that for those early Israelites was about coming into, for that blessed moment, the presence of God. There they found the fullness of life and joy as they were unified with their creator over a meal. It is also a meal which, for the editors, was a foretaste of the eschatological meal that all nations were to enjoy. The prophets maintain there will come a day when the joy and life of this ritual is not mere ritual but explodes into being. The conceptual and the symbolic will be made manifest, and humanity will eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life in the new Eden in the presence of God Almighty. This ritual encapsulates the hope that beats in the heart of every soul, and the longing that many fear will never come true: coming to a loving home after a long time away, being welcomed by laughter and fellowship, and being ushered to the table, where the smell of fresh cooked food wafts through the house. The ability to look across the meal and say, "I am home." This is the heart and hope of the bread of the Presence ritual.

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