



Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power

William K. Gilders

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In ancient Israelite sacrifice as represented in the Hebrew Bible, the handling and use of the blood of sacrificed animals took many forms and served different functions. The Hebrew Bible refers to tossing sacrificial blood onto an altar or an assembly of people, daubing it on the altar's horns or parts of the human body, and sprinkling it on or in front of sacred objects.

William Gilders investigates the significance of these blood rituals. Offering a close reading of Leviticus 17:11, Gilders emphasizes the secondary and innovative character of this biblical text, which has often been treated as a key for understanding biblical blood ritual.

Focusing on the analysis of practice, Gilders finds that blood manipulation is regularly marked as elite activity, serving as an index of social relationships and hierarchies. Blood rituals also regulate access to sacred spaces and define the limits of such spaces. Drawing on recent theoretical approaches to ritual practices, this study offers a sophisticated new understanding of ancient rites.

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