

THE PENTATEUCH III: LEVITICUS-NUMBERS

WEEK 1

Patrick Reeder

June 29, 2023

1 INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

2 LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS IN CONTEXT

Authorship Basics

Review

Wilderness and the Pentateuch

3 HISTORICITY

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This course is the third of four courses on the Pentateuch. Numbers and Leviticus probably take gold and silver medal in the contest for Books of the Bible least understood by modern Christians. They might switch places in the contest for being the butt of many Christian jokes about the Bible. Nevertheless, Leviticus contains extensive literature on the High Priesthood and the sacrificial system, which is essential to understanding the nature of Christ's atoning work as articulated in the book of Hebrews. Likewise, Numbers contains many lessons concerning the shepherding work of leadership, and God's sovereign appointment thereof. We will also explore the way in which these books elaborate on themes of Seed-Nation, the Name and God's dwelling place developed in Genesis and Exodus.

- **Attendance** You must attend 4 of 5 classes to receive credit.
- **Readings** You must turn in at least 3 of 4 of the reading “journals.”

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Date	Week	Topic	Reading and Homework
6/28	1	Review & Introduction	–
7/5	2	Sacrifice and Typology	L 1-7; 16-17; N 21
7/12	–	Go to XSI!	Go to XSI!
7/19	3	Purity and Holiness	L 11-15;18-27; N 3-9; 15; N 18-19; 28-30; 33-36
7/26	–	NO CLASS	Out of Town
8/2	4	Unbelief I: The People	N 1-2; 10-14; 21-26; 32
8/9	5	Unbelief II: The Leaders	L 8-10, N 12-14; 16-17, 20

Key:

L*x*- Leviticus, chapter *x*

N*y*- Numbers, chapter *y*

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What evidence is there that Moses wrote the Pentateuch?

Here are a few lines of thought that indicate that Moses wrote the Pentateuch with some very small exceptions (final pages of Deuteronomy):

- ① The cultural standard at the time was that Moses wrote it and Jesus never challenges that.
- ② Jesus makes direct reference to parts of the Pentateuch with remarks like “Moses wrote...” etc. (Mark 7:10, Luke 24:44, John 7:23)
- ③ There are numerous internal cues that Moses wrote certain sections (Exodus 34:37, Numbers 33:2, Deuteronomy 1:1)

Here is a more “historical” case for Moses:

- ① Moses was unanimously believed to be the author through all recorded history until the European Enlightenment.
- ② Deuteronomy and 2nd Millenium BC Hittite Suzerain-Vassal Treaties
- ③ The author and audience are familiar with Egypt and Sinai, and less so with Palestine.
- ④ Moses and the Criterion of Embarrassment

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④ SYMBOLS AND TYPES

Here are the themes we've seen so far:

SEED The Most Persistent Theme in Genesis

- Toledot Structure, Genealogies
- “Be Fruitful and Multiply”
- Development of the Nation in Exodus

THE LAND Canaan is promised to Abraham's Descendants (repeated to Isaac and Jacob)

THE NAME God is making himself known to Israel (Ex 6:3) and all the nations (Ex 7:5)

OWNERSHIP God owns Israel, not Pharaoh

COVENANT God binds himself to his people through mutual commitments.

What are some lessons from Genesis?

What are some lessons from Genesis?

- ① The Creation establishes a unique function for mankind co-regency with God: we are to hold dominion, be fruitful and multiply.
- ② The Fall: our dominion over the earth is perverted—we toil by it and return to it; our fruitfulness and multiplication is perverted—women suffer in child birth and men and women are alienated. (Cf. Gen 3:17 and Romans 8:22)
- ③ God judges but he also saves (Noah : Flood :: Believers : Fire)
- ④ All major characters are liars. This is in contrast with God's fidelity to his word (promises, covenants).

What are some lessons from Exodus?

What are some lessons from Exodus?

- ① God is supreme over Egypt and its gods. God persists in faithfulness to his word
- ② God's miraculous displays of power are two steps ahead of the people's grumbling unbelief
- ③ God desires to dwell among his people
 - Exo 25:8 Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.
 - Exo 29:46 They shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.
- ④ ...but He is a holy God (Exodus 20; 32-34)

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Hebrew literature uses the center for emphasis (unlike modern introduction).

- The Israelites journeyed to Sinai and stayed the longest before 40 year judgment. Sinai is where the narrative pieces of Leviticus take place (Cf. Exodus 19:1; Numbers 10:11-12).
- Leviticus concerns the ongoing dwelling of God among his people through the functioning tabernacle (Cf. Exodus 29:46).
- The end of Exodus concerns the construction and assembly of the Tabernacle, the beginning of Numbers concerns its disassembly
- The Wilderness episodes (Exodus-Numbers) exhibits a concentric pattern with Sinai (Leviticus) at the center.

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A	Ex 15:22-25	Provision of Water (Marah)
B	Ex 17:1-7	Water from Rock
C	Ex 17:8-16	Amalekite Battle
D	Ex 18	Relief for Moses
E	Ex 18:27	Moses' In-Laws
F	Ex 19:1-2	Enter Sinai
X		Sinai
F'	Nu 10:10	Exit Sinai
E'	Nu 10:29-32	Moses' In-Laws
D'	Nu 11	Relief for Moses
C'	Nu 14:39-45	Amalekite Battle
B'	Nu 20:1-13	Water from Rock
A'	Nu 21:16-18	Provision of Water (Beer)

Leviticus itself has a center, the Day of Atonement:

A	1-7	Sanctuary Laws
B	8-10	Priestly Laws
C	11-15	Personal Laws
X	16	Day of Atonement
C'	17-20	Personal Laws
B'	21-22	Priestly Laws
A'	23-27	Sanctuary Laws

There could be some debate about the labels, but many agree that the Day of Atonement is at the center. Notably, Chapter 16 stands out from the rest in its introduction. All other chapters begin, “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying . . .” (sometimes with Aaron).

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As in the discussion of Exodus, the historical evidence is not direct, but it can be striking. These indirect lines of evidence serve the purpose of locating the lifeworld of these stories within the appropriate culture, viz. (a) the second millennium BCE, and (b) the region of Egypt and Sinai. By showing this literature to be a product of that culture, we elevate the authenticity of these stories.

Beyond such indirect evidence, Hoffmeier remarks:

If the historian thinks there is a problem with a text's trustworthiness, I maintain, the burden of proof lies with the modern investigator, not the ancient writer who cannot explain himself to the historian. Minimalists who insist that a statement in the Bible be proven by an external source in order to be accepted as reflecting reality are committing the historical fallacy of presumptive proof, which, according to Fischer, "consists in advancing a proposition and shifting the burden of proof or disproof to others."

Kenneth A. Kitchen . . . proposed: "It is normal practice to assume the general reliability of statements in our sources, unless there is good, explicit evidence to the contrary. Unreliability, secondary origins, dishonesty of a writer, or tendentious traits—all these must be clearly proved by adduction of tangible evidence, and not merely inferred to support a theory." (Hoffmeier, 21)

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Ramesses II's military tent bears striking connection to the tabernacle:

- ① The width-length ratio of the outer wall is 2:1.
- ② The width-length ratio of the inner tent is 3:1.
- ③ Ramesses' tent-structure lays at the center of the camping network
- ④ Ramesses' (cartouche) is flanked by winged guardians in Battle of Kadesh relief.

The tabernacle's elements are either not local to Palestine, or at least have significant cultural roots elsewhere:

- ① *Acacia*—Only found in Southeastern Israel, but is native to Sinai. (Cf. the Cedar used in temple construction.)
- ② *Hides*—The word *təḥāšîm* (very limited use) is either from the Egyptian leather (*thš*) or refers to a very coarse sea hide used in Sinai peninsula. Bottom line: not Palestinian.
- ③ *Gold*—Many of Hebrew objects of worship have gold foil overlays. Egyptians demonstrate skill in this technique (Tutankhamun's tomb).
- ④ *Ark*—Portable shrines requiring poles can be found in a variety of Egyptian tombs. Several of them exhibit winged guardian motif as well as a seat for the king.
- ⑤ *Misc.*—There are abundant examples of Egyptian loan words appearing in tabernacle descriptions: Acacia, Gold Plate, Turquoise, Amethyst, Priestly Sash, Head Opening for Priestly Robes, etc.

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There are some puzzles with the extraordinary sizes given in the Exodus and Numbers.

- Archaeological evidence places estimates of the total population of the Nile Delta was approximately 3.5 million, while the exodus population (when read literally) is between 3-4 million.
- A force of 600,000 soldiers (even untrained) would probably be able to lead a successful slave revolt
- Numbers 31:30 puts the division of the plunder at a factor of 1:50, but the actual divisions to follow are all around 1:500.

How might we solve these puzzles?

- ① Ancient numbering systems can very tricky (Cf. sexagesimal system.) This isn't an option because Egyptian and Semitic people used Decimal Systems.
- ② The “problem” word is most likely ‘elep’ (thousand).
 - In Judges 6:15, the same term is translated ‘clan’ or ‘family.’ This is an imprecise term but it shows the word’s semantic range.
 - Cf. English usage of the measurement ‘ounce.’ When I make my coffee in the morning I measure out 4 ounces (volume) which amounts to about 1.41 ounces (weight).
- ③ Could this be a scribal error? If so, it was carefully smoothed over systematically, preserving arithmetic operations

Gordon Wenham offers striking observations on OT ritual:

What then is the essence of religious ritual in the Bible? It is a means of communication between God and man, a drama on a stage watched by human and divine spectators. Old Testament rituals express rituals visually as opposed to verbally. They are the ancient equivalent of television; the ancient equivalent of radio was prophecy and prayer ... (Wenham, 33)

He continues:

Very few would care for the expense, let alone the messiness of Old Testament sacrifice. It is easy to sing,

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that They blood was shed for me;*

but to bring a whole bull, kill it, skin it, chop it up and then watch the whole lot burn on the altar, would be quite another matter. Yet this was precisely what someone who offered a burnt offering (Lev 1) was expected to do. Without doubt these Old Testament rituals were a prodigiously powerful teaching medium; the most eloquent modern preacher is dumb by comparison. (Wenham, 34)

What are some tools we can use in our interpretation to avoid the “whims of imaginative commentators”? (Wenham, 41)

What are some tools we can use in our interpretation to avoid the “whims of imaginative commentators”? (Wenham, 41)

- ① Explicit Statements of a ritual elements function! (E.g. Leviticus 16:16)
- ② The meaning of an element is illuminated elsewhere in Scripture.
- ③ Within appropriate limits, comparative (ancient) anthropology can shed some light on certain ritual symbols.
- ④ Careful analysis of the place of an element within a larger system of rituals (Cf. Hermeneutical Circle)

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