

THE PENTATEUCH III: LEVITICUS-NUMBERS

WEEK 5

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1 WILDERNESS EPISODES REDUX

Nadab & Abihu

Kadesh Barnea Redux

Leadership Competition

2 CONCLUSIONS

Original Audience Lessons

Pentateuch So Far

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This stretch of the Pentateuch exhibits narrative tension that explains the laws to follow:

Narrative		Legal Counterpart	
God Appears! (in Smoke/Fire)			
Only Moses Ascends Mt	Ex 19	Decalogue, etc	Ex 20-23
God Appears! (Sapphire Pavement)			
Elders Ascend Partway	Ex 24	Tab. Instructions	Ex 25-31
Golden Calf	Ex 32	Decalogue Reissued	Ex 34
No More Presence	Ex 33		

The back-and-forth between the law and narrative becomes more obvious here:

Narrative	Legal Counterpart		
Tab. Construction	Ex 35-40	—	—
God appears! (Alights on Tabernacle)			
Moses May Not Enter	Ex 40:34ff	Sacrifices	Lev 1-5
		Priestly Consecration	Lev 6-8
God appears! (Honors Sacrifice)			
Nadab & Abihu	Lev 10	Purity Laws	Lev 11-15
		Day of Atonement	Lev 16

What do you think God is communicating with the Nadab-Abihu episode?

What do you think God is communicating with this episode?

- He is not to be approached any time, by anyone (even if those people are special in some way).
- The method by which he is approached is determined exclusively by Him (Cf. Christ's Work).
- We are never the initiators with God (Cf. Romans 5:6-10)
- Our good works, efforts to appear before God and look righteous are absolutely abhorrent (Isaiah 64:6)

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At Kadesh Barnea, unbelief did not start with the people (though they were a willing party). Observe the spies' commentary:

- They make special note of how dangerous the inhabitants are.
- When Caleb rebukes them, they reply, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."
- They continue in their negative speech after that. It was not until this that the people fall into unbelief.

For those of us who would be leaders we must seriously consider our words and (more fundamentally) our hearts.

The bad spies are judged. However! Witness the godly leaders:

- Even after the people fell prey to the spies' wicked report, Caleb continues to try to persuade.
- Moses successfully intercedes on behalf of Israel so that they are not immediately destroyed (Cf. Golden Calf Intercession)
- Moses pleads (unsuccessfully) with the people not to attempt to take Canaan after God's judgment has befallen them.

This incident suggests that the people can be prone to unbelief and leaders must provide God's life-giving word. (Cf. 2 Tim 4:1-2)

Why is Joshua nowhere mentioned until the end of the scene?

- Joshua was already allied with God's appointed leadership. He's first mentioned as early as Exodus 17 (Amalekite defeat) and explicitly as Moses' aide in Exodus 24 (accompanies Moses onto the mountain).
- Notice that Moses isn't mentioned either, but he probably said something in this argument. He's only forbidden from entering later.
- Historical narratives often exhibit "highlighting" which is particularly relevant here since Caleb was unknown before this incident.

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Korah and his followers, mostly Levites, demand to be priests (Cf. Ex 19:6).

What is problematic about this scene?

What is problematic about this scene?

- God appoints priests, not Moses (Cf. Hebrews 8:3; Num 15:11)
- They have completely forgotten about Nadab and Abihu! (How many of us forget when under the shadow of unbelief?)
- They are ungrateful. God has already separated them first as Israel and then again as Levites. Again, it's a refusal to accept God's unique calling. (Cf. Romans 9-11) *Do we ever wonder why God didn't make us like the brother or sister across the way?*

What do you notice about this passage?

Num 16:12-15—Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, “We will not come! Isn’t it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you also want to lord it over us! Moreover, you haven’t brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you want to treat these men like slaves? No, we will not come!”

What do you notice about this passage?

Smacks of treacherous irony:

- Call Egypt the land of milk and honey.
- They say Moses has enslaved them.
- They do not accept their own part in (“you have brought us out. . . to kill us”)
- They blame everything on Moses instead of seeing the Lord, or their own sin behind their situation (Cf. Numbers 16:11)

Quite serious that even Moses won’t intercede for them:

15 Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, “Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them.”

Numbers 26:11 reports, “The line of Korah, however, did not die out.”

- He had adult children who were already in their own tents.
- “The line of Korah,” is a phrase much like “the seed of the serpent.”
- Either way, Korahites appear later in temple service.

In summary, Aaron and Miriam grumble against Moses, “because of his wife.” They assert, however, that God speaks through them too.

Why did only Miriam get leprosy? Most of these are only “educated” guesses.

- As pure speculation, perhaps the charge was lead by her. Aaron does not exhibits the marks of a strong leader.
- As the priest, Aaron needs to maintain cleanliness and judging Miriam would be enough to get his attention.

- ① All of them involve a challenge to a human leader (Caleb, Moses, Aaron)
- ② In every case, God stands behind his leader
 - Korah's followers burned, tents swallowed
 - Aaron's rod buds
 - Miriam is leprous
- ③ In every case, the real accusation is against God's leadership
 - Hebrews 13:17
 - Acts 20:28
 - Romans 13:1

And yet. . . Moses is prevented from entering the Promise Land (Num 20:12)
Again, the only real hero of the Pentateuch is God Himself.

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What can we take away from the texts Leviticus and Numbers?

Nearly everything in these books come back to these lessons:

- ① God is holy and glorious!
- ② God desires to dwell among his people
- ③ Dwelling in God's presence (in varying degrees) requires purification/sanctification (in varying degrees).
- ④ Accountability (hence, judgment) are scaled to degree of revelation—a consistent theme throughout Scripture:

Luke 12:48—But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

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What else has emerged from this study?

- ① The Pentateuch continues to exhibit the highest literary craft, showing marks of a single author who was most likely present, viz. Moses!
- ② While the idea of God's judgment is distasteful to 21st C Americans, the Pentateuch presents it unhesitatingly. (Cf. Ezekiel 18:32)
- ③ God does not forsake Israel, in spite of all. Indeed, he continues to prophesy blessings! (Cf. Num 22-24)
- ④ The path of disobedience/unbelief leads to destruction. Come back for Deuteronomy!

- ① Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Baker Books, 2011.
- ② Hoffmeier, James. *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- ③ Morales, L. Michael. *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the book of Leviticus*. IVP, 2015.
- ④ Wenham, Gordon J. *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*. IVP Academic, 1981.