

Leviticus 1-10: Priesthood and Sacrifice

1. Documentary Hypothesis Review #1: Literary and narrative characteristics

- J: uses YHWH throughout; stress on covenant, with focus on continuity between Abrahamic promises and Sinaitic revelation; interest in Patriarchs; concern for Southern tribes and their eponymous ancestors (esp. Judah)
- E: uses YHWH from Ex 3; stress on covenant, with focus on Sinaitic revelation; interest in Moses; concern for Northern tribes and their eponymous ancestors (esp. Joseph); critique of Aaron (see esp. Golden Calf)
- P: knows and uses combined J+E; uses YHWH from Ex 6; stress on priesthood and sacrificial cult, with focus on Aaron as first priest; whereas J+E describes sacrifices made by Noah and Patriarchs, P forestalls the institution of sacrifice until the consecration of Aaron as priest and as head of the priestly line. P is also later than the other two, dating from after 722 BCE, when the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by Assyrians, and in time around the Babylonian Exile in 586 BCE. Friedman dates P to the reign of Hezekiah (715-687 BCE), whereas Blenkinsopp credits P to a school, noting the inclusion of material which seems to reflect the experience of the Exile as well as literary and thematic parallels with Ezekiel, whose life spanned the time before, during, and after the Exile.

2. Leviticus and the P source

- The entirety of Leviticus is attributed to P by Documentary Hypothesis. In contrast to earlier books, it is not framed or dominated by narratives; the bulk of the book consists of God's speeches to Moses at the Tent of Meeting.
- Despite the English name, it is not about Levites, but rather the institution of the priesthood (although it includes only a few instructions that pertain *only* to priests: 6:1-7:21; 10:8-15; 16:2-28).
- Leviticus forms the heart of the Pentateuch's description of the period when the Tabernacle stood at Sinai (Ex 25 to Num 10). Although the period is said to be less than a year, the description of it takes up about 1/3 of the Pentateuch as a whole, thus signaling its importance. Leviticus' significance to the redactors of the Pentateuch is clear from its placement in the very center, as the third of the five books.
- The centrality of the priesthood to P is exemplified by its parallel of the establishment of the Tabernacle with Creation (see Blenkinsopp, pp. 217-20):
 - One of the characteristics of P is its concern for noting specific dates on which important events occurred. One of the reasons for this becomes clear in the account of the Tabernacle: The Tabernacle was completed, according to P, on New Year's day (Ex 40:1, 17), the same day on which the world was created.
 - There are, for instance, notable literary parallels: The end of P's creation account features God seeing everything he had made (Gen 1:31), the statement that the heaven and earth were finished (Gen 2:1), and God blessing the Sabbath (Gen 2:3). The end of P's account of the construction of the Tabernacle uses the same language to describe the Tabernacle being finished (Ex 39:32), Moses seeing everything made by the Israelites, and Moses blessing them (Ex 39:43). In P, the Tabernacle is presented as microcosm of the cosmos, and its construction is described in terms of Israel as partner in the divine activity of creation.
 - This tight connection between human and divine recalls P's description of humankind as made in God's image as God's representative on earth in Gen 1:26-28 and P's aetiology of Sabbath-observance as imitation of God's rest on the seventh day after the six days of Creation in Gen 2:2-3.
 - Similarly, P's description of the Tabernacle—a structure based on a divine blueprint but built by humans, an example of a divine plan brought about by human hands—serves to convey its view of the sacrificial cult that takes place within it (and later in the Temple) as central to the divine/human relationship. Moreover, this parallel is consistent with P's depiction of God as outlining commandments because He wishes Israel "to be holy as I am holy" (Lev 11:44, 45, etc.; contrast J's view of God as concerned lest humankind "become like us" in Gen 3:22).

3. Leviticus 1-10

Lev 1-10 tells how the Tabernacle and priests came to be consecrated and how the institution of sacrifice was initiated, thus marking Israel's completion of the instructions laid out by God to Moses in Ex 25-31:

PLAN

Ex 25-31 (P): Divine revelation of plan for Tabernacle to Moses

PREPARATION

Ex 35-40 (P): Description of the building of Tabernacle, which culminates with God's glory filling it (40:34)

Lev 1-7: Divine revelation of sacrificial procedures to Moses

Lev 1-5: Instructions to people of Israel ("Speak to the people of Israel and say to them")

1-3: Spontaneous offerings

1: Burnt offering: whole animal as gift to God (daily)

2: Cereal: flour and oil as gift to God

3: Well-being: unblemished animal as fellowship

1-4: Expiatory offerings

4: Purification: bull, goat, lamb, doves, pigeons for purification after involuntary impurity

5: Reparation: ram, as restitution for deliberate acts

Lev 6-7: Instructions to priests ("Command Aaron and his sons, saying")

Lev 8: Consecration of Tabernacle

Lev 8: Consecration of priests (which lasts 7 days like Creation in P's account)

COMPLETION

Lev 9: Inaugural sacrificial service

4. Leviticus 10: Nadab and Abihu

- As with E's account of the covenant in Ex 20-24+32, P's account of the establishment of the sacrificial cult ends with an act of human disobedience that threatens to undo what God has done: Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu burned incense with "strange fire" and were destroyed by the fire of YHWH.
- This is followed by further instructions to the priests concerning their special responsibility (to remain pure; to teach the people). Moses then grows angry with Aaron's remaining sons for the way that they offered the purification offering meant to "remove the iniquity of the community to effect purgation on their behalf before YHWH," but Aaron explains that this deviation from usual practice was proper in this case (presumably because of Nadab and Abihu), and Moses concurs.

Within redacted form of Pentateuch, this is one of a series of human failures:

Divine act establishing relationship with humankind	Human sin foils God's plan for divine/human relationship	God's response to human sin
Creation of cosmos and humankind	Proliferation of sin	God sends Flood to destroy the entire living world and begins anew with Noah, starting a new line of humankind
Chosenness of Israel and establishment of Sinaitic covenant	False worship: Golden Calf	God considers destroying Israel and beginning anew with Moses but is convinced by Moses to change his mind and reestablish covenant after bloody purge of guilty ones (first by Levites, then by divinely-sent plague)
Establishment of Tabernacle and priesthood	False worship of God: Offering of strange fire by sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu	Covenant is not broken; problem of sin is resolved without shedding human blood, through sacrifice, with Aaron as initiator of solution