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CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Leviticus
David W. Baker

Numbers
Dale A. Brueggemann

Deuteronomy
Eugene H. Merrill

GENERAL EDITOR
Philip W. Comfort

featuring the text of the
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC. CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS
CONTENTS

Contributors to Volume 2
vi

General Editor’s Preface
vii

Abbreviations
ix

Transliteration and Numbering System
xiii

LEVITICUS
1

NUMBERS
215

DEUTERONOMY
445
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GENERAL EDITOR’S PREFACE

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2007). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God’s inspired word and have a desire to make God’s word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatic powerfully. The NLT attempts to communicate God’s inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the Cornerstone Biblical Commentary aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called “Notes,” wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The “Notes” are followed by the “Commentary,” wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ’s church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God’s word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: “Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you.” May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you “grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

Philip W. Comfort
GENERAL EDITOR
ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b. Babylonian
b. Babylonian Gemara
bar. baraita
bar. baraita
ca. circa, around, approximately
ca. circa, around, approximately
ch, chs chapter, chapters
ch, chs chapter, chapters
d. contra in contrast to
d. contra in contrast to
ed. edition, editor
ed. edition, editor
e.g. example
e.g. example
et al. et alii, and others
et al. et alii, and others
fem. feminine
fem. feminine
ff. following (verses, pages)
ff. following (verses, pages)
fl. flourishing
fl. flourishing
Gr. Greek
Gr. Greek
Heb. Hebrew
Heb. Hebrew
ibid. ibidem, in the same place
ibid. ibidem, in the same place
i.e. id est, the same
i.e. id est, the same
in loc. in loco, in the place
cited
in loc. in loco, in the place
cited
lit. literally
lit. literally
LXX Septuagint
LXX Septuagint
MN Majority Text
MN Majority Text
m. Mishnah
m. Mishnah
masc. masculine
masc. masculine
mg margin
mg margin
ms manuscript
ms manuscript
mss manuscripts
mss manuscripts
MT Masoretic Text
MT Masoretic Text
n.d. no date
n.d. no date
neut. neuter
neut. neuter
no. number
no. number
NT New Testament
NT New Testament
OL Old Latin
OL Old Latin
OS Old Syriac
OS Old Syriac
OT Old Testament
OT Old Testament
p. pp. page, pages
p. pp. page, pages
pl. plural
pl. plural
Q Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
Q Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
rev. revision
rev. revision
g. singular
s. singular
T=Tosefta
T=Tosefta
TR Textus Receptus
TR Textus Receptus
v., vv. verse, verses
v., vv. verse, verses
vid. videtur, it seems
vid. videtur, it seems
viz. videlicet, namely
viz. videlicet, namely
vol. volume
vol. volume
y. Jerusalem Gemara
y. Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV American Standard Version
ASV American Standard Version
CEV Contemporary English Version
CEV Contemporary English Version
ESV English Standard Version
ESV English Standard Version
GW God’s Word
GW God’s Word
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible
JB Jerusalem Bible
JB Jerusalem Bible
KJV King James Version
KJV King James Version
NAB New American Bible
NAB New American Bible
NASB New American Standard Bible
NASB New American Standard Bible
NCV New Century Version
NCV New Century Version
NKJV New King James Version
NKJV New King James Version
NEB New English Bible
NEB New English Bible
NET The NET Bible
NET The NET Bible
NIV New International Version
NIV New International Version
NIRV New International Reader’s Version
NIRV New International Reader’s Version
NJB New Jerusalem Bible
NJB New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (Tanakh)
NJPS The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (Tanakh)
NLT New Living Translation
NLT New Living Translation
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
REB Revised English Bible
REB Revised English Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version
RSV Revised Standard Version
RSV Revised Standard Version
RSV Revised Standard Version
TEV Today’s English Version
TEV Today’s English Version
TLB The Living Bible
TLB The Living Bible

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]
ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]
ANEP The Ancient Near East in Pictures (Pritchard) [1965]
ANEP The Ancient Near East in Pictures (Pritchard) [1965]
ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Pritchard) [1969]
ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Pritchard) [1969]
BAGD Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]
BAGD Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]
BDAG Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]
BDAG Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]
BDB A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
BDB A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
BDF A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
BDF A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ABBREVIATIONS

BHS Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
CAD Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago [1956]
COS The Context of Scripture (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
DBI Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
DBT Dictionary of Biblical Theology (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
DCH Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
DJD Discoveries in the Judean Desert [1955–]
DJG Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
DPL Dictionary of Paul and His Letters (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
GKC Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Gesenius, Kautzsch, trans. Cowley) [1910]
IBD Illustrated Bible Dictionary (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
IDB The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
KBL Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libris (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
LCL Loeb Classical Library
L&N Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (Louv and Nida) [1989]
LSJ A Greek-English Lexicon (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
MM The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
NA26 Novum Testamentum Graece (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
NA27 Novum Testamentum Graece (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
NBD New Bible Dictionary (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillery) [1982]
NIDB New International Dictionary of the Bible (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
NIDBA New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology (Blaklock and Harrison) [1983]
PGM Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri. (Preisendanz) [1928]
PG The Patrologia Graeca (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
TBD Tyndale Bible Dictionary (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (8 vols., Bollerweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
TLOT Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
TWOT Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
WH The New Testament in the Original Greek (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

<table>
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<td>Neh</td>
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<td>Esth</td>
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New Testament

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<td>3 John</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
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ps, pss psalm, psalms
dan, daniel
hoosea
joel, Joel
obad, obadiah
jonah
jonah
mich, michah
nah, nahum
hab, Habakkuk
zech, Zechariah
zep, zephaniah
haggai
zech, Zechariah
mal, Malachi

new testament

matt, Matthew
eph, Ephesians
heb, Hebrews
mark, Mark
col, Colossians
phil, Philippians
luk, Luke
1 pet, 1 Peter
acts, Acts
2 pet, 2 Peter
rom, Romans
1 tim, 1 Timothy
2 tim, 2 Timothy
1 cor, 1 Corinthians
2 cor, 2 Corinthians
1 thess, 1 Thessalonians
2 thess, 2 Thessalonians
1 john, 1 John
1 pet, 1 Peter
1 tim, 1 Timothy
2 tim, 2 Timothy
acts, Acts
21–7 Esdr
1 pet, 1 Peter
pr man, Prayer of Manasseh

Deuterocanonical

bar, Baruch
add, Additions to Daniel
pr azar, Prayer of Azariah
bel, Bel and the Dragon
sg three, Song of the Three
sus, Susanna

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the Rule of the Community; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD Cairo Geniza copy of the Damascus Document
1QH Thanksgiving Hymns
1Qlsa a Isaiah copy a
1QIsa b Isaiah copy b
1QIsab Isaiah copy b
1QIsa Isaiah copy a
1QM War Scroll
1QpHab Pesher Habakkuk
1QS Rule of the Community
1Qp Job Targum of Job
11QPsa Psalms
11QPsa Psalms
11QPsa Psalms
11QPsa Psalms
11QPsa Psalms
11QPsa Psalms

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26;
luke 1-6; late 2nd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd
P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd
P15+P16 (probably part of
same codex) 1 Cor 7-8,
phil 3-4; late 3rd
P20 James 2-3; 3rd
P22 John 13-16; mid 3rd
P23 James 1; c. 200
P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd
P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1;
early 3rd
P31 Titus 1-2; late 2nd
P32 Matt 26; late 3rd
P37 Matt 26; late 3rd
P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd

ABBREVIATIONS
ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Dates and Content</th>
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<td>P45</td>
<td>Gospels and Acts; early 3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>P46</td>
<td>Paul’s Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P47</td>
<td>Rev 9-17; 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P49-P65</td>
<td>Eph 4-5; 1 Thess 1-2; 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P52</td>
<td>John 18; c. 125</td>
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<td>P53</td>
<td>Matt 26, Acts 9-10; middle 3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>P66</td>
<td>John; late 2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P70</td>
<td>Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>P72</td>
<td>1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300</td>
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<td>P74</td>
<td>Acts, General Epistles; 7th</td>
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<td>P75</td>
<td>Luke and John; c. 200</td>
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<tr>
<td>P77-P103</td>
<td>(probably part of same codex) Matt 13-14, 23; late 2nd</td>
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<td>P87</td>
<td>Phlm; late 2nd</td>
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<td>P90</td>
<td>John 18-19; late 2nd</td>
</tr>
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<td>P91</td>
<td>Acts 2-3; 3rd</td>
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<td>P92</td>
<td>Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300</td>
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<td>P98</td>
<td>Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd</td>
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<td>P100</td>
<td>James 3-5; c. 300</td>
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<td>P101</td>
<td>Matt 3-4; 3rd</td>
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<td>P104</td>
<td>Matt 21; 2nd</td>
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<td>P106</td>
<td>John 1; 3rd</td>
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<td>P115</td>
<td>Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd</td>
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**Significant Uncials**

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<td>A</td>
<td>(Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>(Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>(Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>(Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>(Claromontanusan), Paul’s Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>(Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>(Augensis) Paul’s Epistles; 9th</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>(Boermerianus) Paul’s Epistles; 9th</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>(Coislinianus) Paul’s Epistles; 6th</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>(Freerianus or Washington) Paul’s Epistles; 5th</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>(Regius) Gospels; 8th</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>(Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th</td>
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<td>P</td>
<td>(Porphyrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>(Borgiaius) Luke, John; 5th</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>(Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th</td>
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<td>Z</td>
<td>(Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th</td>
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<td>037</td>
<td>(E, Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th</td>
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<td>038</td>
<td>(Θ, Koridethi) Gospels; 9th</td>
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<td>040</td>
<td>(Z, Zacynthius) Luke; 6th</td>
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<td>043</td>
<td>(Φ, Beratinus) Matt, Mark; 6th</td>
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<td>1424</td>
<td>(or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th</td>
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<td>230</td>
<td>69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group</td>
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**Significant Minuscules**

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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Acts, Paul’s Epistles, General Epistles; 1044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>565</td>
<td>Gospels; 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>Gospels; 11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1424</td>
<td>(or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1739</td>
<td>Acts, Paul’s Epistles; 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2053</td>
<td>Rev; 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2344</td>
<td>Rev; 11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f1</td>
<td>(a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f13</td>
<td>(a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th</td>
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**Significant Ancient Versions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Dates and Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SYRIAC (SYR)</td>
<td>syr (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>syra (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>syra (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD LATIN (IT)</td>
<td>ita (Vercellensis) Gospels; 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>itb (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>itc (Cantabrigenis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John, 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>itd (Palatinius) Gospels; 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ite (Robiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic (COP)</td>
<td>copa (Boharic—north Egypt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>copb (Fayumic—central Egypt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>copc (Sahidic—southern Egypt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER VERSIONS</td>
<td>arm (Armenian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eth (Ethiopic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>geo (Georgian)</td>
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</table>
**TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM**

*Note:* For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

## HEBREW/ARAMAIC

### Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>א</td>
<td>aleph = '</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ב</td>
<td>beth = b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ג</td>
<td>gimel = g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ד</td>
<td>daleth = d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ה</td>
<td>he = h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ו</td>
<td>waw = w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ז</td>
<td>zayin = z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ח</td>
<td>heth = kh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ט</td>
<td>teath = t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>yodh = y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ק</td>
<td>kaph = k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ל</td>
<td>lamedh = l</td>
</tr>
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**Vowels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>פ</td>
<td>patakh = a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>furtive patakh = a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ק</td>
<td>qamets = a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ה</td>
<td>final qamets he = ah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>segol = e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>tsere = e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>tsere yod = e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>short hireq = i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>long hireq = i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GREEK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>alpha = a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β</td>
<td>beta = b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ</td>
<td>gamma = g, n (before η)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ</td>
<td>delta = d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε</td>
<td>epsilon = e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζ</td>
<td>zeta = z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η</td>
<td>eta = η</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ</td>
<td>theta = th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ι</td>
<td>iota = i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

- TG Tyndale-Strong's Greek number
- ZH Zondervan Hebrew number
- ZG Zondervan Greek number
- TA Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number
- TH Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number
- ZA Zondervan Aramaic number

So in the example, “love” \( \text{agape} \) \(^{[\text{ZG}26, \text{TH}27]} \), the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., \( \text{TH1912A} \)), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., \( \text{TH2013.1} \)), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of usage for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.
INTRODUCTION TO

Leviticus

WHEN PEOPLE open their Bibles to read, or even for serious study, Leviticus is not usually the first place to which they turn. In fact, it is often the last. If any other biblical book is more removed from our experience, more different and even strange to twenty-first-century readers, it is hard to decide which book that might be. Therefore, before beginning to interpret Leviticus, it is necessary to think about why we should even bother in the first place. What actually makes Leviticus worth reading at all? There are three primary reasons to study Leviticus:

1. Theological reasons. Israel was not simply another people; they were the people of the First Testament (from among whom came Jesus and his disciples, who gave us the Second Testament). In order to appreciate and understand the latter, it is necessary to understand the former. Meaning comes from context, and the First Testament, including Leviticus, is the context of the latter. Various concepts and terms familiar to Jesus and his contemporaries were only familiar because they were introduced in Leviticus and have their background there. They were part of the cultural literacy of the period and formed an element of the knowledge reservoir upon which Jesus and the Gospel writers drew in their preaching, teaching, and writing. For example, the identification of Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) would be incomprehensible without Leviticus 4:32-35. And the unspeakable condition of a hemorrhaging woman coming into a crowd and touching someone (Mark 5:25-34) is not understood apart from Leviticus 15:25-27.

2. Religious reasons. Worship is an important matter of discussion in today’s church, which is divided on this issue as well as many others concerning theology and practice. Questions are raised as to the how, who, where, when, and even the why of worship. There is also the question of whether worship must be a corporate, group exercise or whether it can equally, or even preferably, be individual, something between a person and God alone. Even more fundamentally, there is disagreement over what, in fact, worship is and what it is not.

For our purposes, we will understand worship to be service for God done by his people, since this reflects most accurately both the Hebrew and Greek terms that lie behind our English translations. This understanding as service is undoubtedly broader than what we usually assign to worship, but it is important since it highlights what we are called upon to do—namely to serve and to work—and not just how we should feel about God.
This background should shed some light on understanding the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Most Christians do not spend more time here than they have to, since the book appears distant, foreign to anything in our daily lives. Seeing it as a handbook for worship might make it a bit more understandable. For the ancient Israelite, including the Israelite priest, who instructed the people, Leviticus was the worship manual that answered many of the questions I have mentioned, especially those of who could worship, when, in what manner, and how people made themselves worthy or at least acceptable in God’s sight so that they could worship. Rather than being a dead book of dead sacrifices, Leviticus is a living book of instruction about how to worship the living God and how to act as his living people. While we do not follow the same “how” in our worship procedures today, God still expects our worship to be holy and done on his terms. Thus, we can learn that much of Leviticus is applicable or adaptable to our own situation.

3. Historical reasons. Leviticus is a historical artifact, the product of a people who played a significant role in the history and religion of the ancient Near East. As historical evidence of who these people were and what they believed, Leviticus is worth studying. This is a subdiscipline of the study of history per se, namely the field of history of religion. Leviticus is a necessary source for understanding Israel, as the Qur’an is for understanding Iraq and the Gitas for appreciating India. All these are windows into other peoples, their culture, beliefs, and existence.

AUTHOR
The Hebrew title and the first verse of the book reflect the Israelite understanding that the primary author of Leviticus was the Lord himself. The first verse also names the recipient of the message: Moses. In the ancient Near Eastern context of the Old Testament, especially in Mesopotamia but also among the neighboring Canaanites, many written documents concluded with a colophon. This included material that we find near the front of our books today. These colophons could include the name of the composition, a summary of contents, the source of the copy, the scribe who copied the text, and the date when the copy was made. There are possibly two or three of these colophons in Leviticus, which will be discussed later (see comments at 7:35-36, 37-38; 27:34). For example, one includes a composition name (“instructions”), contents summary with the various sacrifice types (7:37), source (the Lord), scribe or transmitter (Moses), and date (“when he commanded,” 7:38). In these biblical “colophons,” we can see that Moses was functioning in the place of the scribe, accurately transmitting for the reader material from God, his source.

Mosaic authorship has been traditionally accepted for Leviticus and the entire Pentateuch. Unlike some of the other Pentateuchal books, Moses is never said to have written any of the material in Leviticus (see Exod 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Deut 10:1; 31:9, 24); rather, throughout the book he receives God’s oral revelation (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24). Since the Enlightenment, people have questioned Mosaic involvement. Looking at Israelite history in conjunction with the contents of Leviti-
cus, they have noted the particular relevance of the book to the priests. The most common argument has been that these functionaries came into their strongest period of authority in the Exile, and especially after the return from Babylonia. Since there was then no king to rule Israel, the priests were able to assume secular as well as civil authority. It was then, it has been argued, that the material most specifically relevant to them, called the “Priestly Document” (or “P” for short), was collected. Among numerous other problems with this proposal, it excludes any involvement of Moses in the affairs of the book.

A counter-swell of opinion has pointed out the antiquity of the laws and rituals found in this supposed P document, material which seems to have greatly predated the time of the Restoration and even the Exile. I have argued that the canonical character of the laws and rituals would point logically toward a life-setting back in the period of the wilderness wanderings, the picture of their composition as it is found in the biblical text itself (Baker 1987). Even in what are considered by many to be very early sources in the Pentateuch, the ritual procedure is assumed rather than explained (e.g., Gen 8:20; 22:2, 7-8, 13), presupposing its availability either in writing or as authoritative tradition to the author of these passages. The use of rituals recorded in Leviticus, according to pre-exilic texts, even outside of Israel (Num 23:15; 1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Kgs 3:27; 10:24) argues against the necessity of the P document being from the postexilic period.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING
The biblical narrative places the events recorded in Leviticus at Mount Sinai (7:38) as part of God’s revelation to his people through Moses. God not only gave his people the Ten Commandments (Exod 20), but also other laws concerning their civil and religious life. Leviticus continues these instructions. As such, it continues the material started in Exodus, which continues through Numbers 10. Though an exact date for the events is impossible to confirm, and therefore the subject of fierce debate, the middle of the second millennium BC fits the picture chronologically, and the Sinai wilderness, that section of land between the Gulf of Aqaba and what is now the Suez Canal, fits the picture geographically.

The occasion of writing is not mentioned, so suggestions must be tentative. Elsewhere I have contended that the type of prescriptive material found in Leviticus would have been a candidate for early recording in writing (Baker 1987). Since the material consists of foundational religious rituals for Israelite life and practice, it would have become fixed and authoritative upon its reception. While the first recipient generation under Moses and Aaron would hear the instructions, the need of documentation for future generations would soon become apparent.

AUDIENCE
The text of Leviticus indicates that it was directed toward “the people of Israel” (1:2). It was not exclusively for the common people, the clergy, the laity, or the rulers since all socioeconomic groups were addressed. Nobody is too poor (see 5:7), nobody is
too powerful (see 4:22), nobody is too “religious” (see 4:3) to need the instructions found in this book.

Specifically, and most directly, the words were addressed to Moses, who was commissioned to pass the message on to another group (1:1-2; 4:1-2; 5:14; 6:1). In one case Aaron, Moses’s brother, was addressed (10:8), and in one section both brothers were addressed together (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1-2a).

The inclusion of the book within the Pentateuch and the broader Old Testament canon shows that it had relevance and an audience beyond its first hearers. The transition from oral commission to written Scripture shows an awareness of its necessity for future generations of Jews, as well. Whether we like it or not—and the lack of preaching and teaching from Leviticus today seems to indicate that we don’t—this book is also in our canon. Leviticus is God’s Word to us in some way just as much as the Gospels. We also are an audience who must seek to determine the book’s relevance to the church in our own times.

**CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY**

There never seems to have been any discussion over the inclusion of Leviticus within the canon. Even within the scope of Scripture itself, the book was seen to contain authoritative instruction or canonical law. For example, Deuteronomy 24:8 refers explicitly to the laws of Leviticus 13:1–14:57, and the numerous occasions on which sacrifice is made in the former and latter prophets never prescribe detailed procedures, apparently relying on that information contained in Leviticus 1–7. I have also argued that these laws, at least, were available to those who brought their offerings to the Tabernacle in at least one written copy very soon after they were propagated and were not just in oral form (Baker 1987). In the case of such foundational laws for Israelite religious practice, relevant to both the priests and the people, a permanent record would have been necessary within the lifetime of those who received them at Sinai.

If this is the case, there was, of course, a long period of textual transmission between the time of the first writing and the Masoretic Text, which is the received Hebrew textual tradition after the tenth century AD, and also the basis of most modern translations. There are two main earlier witnesses to the text of Leviticus. The first is the Septuagint, a Greek translation done in Egypt. Its Pentateuch translation dates to the third century BC. The Samaritan Pentateuch, though currently available in manuscripts from the late medieval period, could have originated earlier, possibly dating from the second century BC. It was preserved by the community formed by the northern tribes of Israel and those with whom they intermarried after the Assyrian deportation of the northern kingdom in 722 BC.

The Qumran community, from the area of the Dead Sea, preserved texts from before the Christian period, providing Hebrew texts a millennium earlier than those of the Masoretes. They possessed texts related to each of the traditions mentioned, i.e., forebears of what we know as the Samaritan, Septuagint, and Masoretic text traditions. To date, some 16 texts and fragments of Leviticus from the Dead Sea vicinity have appeared in publication.
Unlike some of the biblical books, the textual traditions in Leviticus are very uniform, with few variations. Of these, even fewer make a difference to interpretation, and these will be discussed at the appropriate time. The consistency of the text could well reflect its nature as a canonical legal document which would not have been open to widespread alteration (Baker 1987).

LITERARY STYLE
The majority of Leviticus is prescriptive, detailing how different rituals and practices are to be carried out. It is presented in an impersonal manner because it is applicable to anyone who either cares or needs to perform the rituals. In Hebrew, this is done by use of the third person, “if one . . .” or “if a person . . .” In English, and in the NLT in particular, the impersonal second person is used, “if you . . .” This kind of material can be fairly dry, if the “you” referred to does not seem to be the “you” who is reading. We do a theological disservice to this book, and indeed any book of the Bible, if we read it in this way, however. This also is Scripture, and must, according to Paul (2 Tim 3:16), have something of profit for every “you” who is reading it.

The prescriptive texts are couched in a narrative framework. This presents some of the who, when, where, and how of the material. Unlike some contemporary ancient Near Eastern prescriptive documents that present laws and instructions by themselves, Leviticus shows the dynamics of how they were delivered to Moses and passed on to the people. The narrative framework shows that history is theologically significant. God meets his people in and through history, which is an important differentiation between the Judeo-Christian religion and others such as New Age or Eastern mysticism. There, present reality is often seen as something to be left behind or risen above. Leviticus shows how to live in God’s world, not how to escape to some other world.

There are, in addition to prescriptive texts with a narrative framework, two short sections of historical narrative (10:1-7; 24:10-16), both showing in graphic terms the result of not following the prescriptions spelled out.

MAJOR THEMES
The unifying theme in Leviticus is personal and corporate holiness. The repeated command to “be holy because I am holy” (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; cf. 20:7) shows its importance. Words related to “holiness” occur over 150 times in the Hebrew text of the book. It is therefore appropriate to call Leviticus, or at least a portion of it, a “Holiness Code,” as some scholars do.

This holiness theme is an organizing element for most of the book’s material, but subthemes are also introduced and developed. One subtheme is sacrifice, which is detailed in the first seven chapters and used on numerous occasions throughout the book. Sacrifice maintained or reestablished a relationship with a holy God, which might have been breached through some defilement.

The offering of sacrifices needed trained and sanctified practitioners, so the priesthood was inaugurated and instructed, as described in chapters 8–10 and
OUTLINE

I. A Handbook for the People and the Priests (1:1–7:38)
   A. Commission (1:1–2)
   B. Instructions for the People about Offerings (1:3–6:7)
      1. Burnt offerings (1:3–17)
      2. Grain offerings (2:1–16)
      3. Peace offerings (3:1–17)
      5. Guilt offerings (5:14–6:7)
   C. Instructions for the Priests about Offerings (6:8–7:34)
      1. Burnt offerings (6:8–13)
      2. Grain offerings (6:14–18)
      3. Grain offering for ordination of priests (6:19–23)
      4. Sin and guilt offerings (6:24–7:10)
      5. Peace offerings (7:11–34)
   D. Concluding Formulae (7:35–38)
      1. Conclusion of the priests’ instructions (7:35–36)
      2. Conclusion of the handbook (7:37–38)

II. The Institution of the Priesthood (8:1–10:20)
   A. The Ordination of Priests (8:1–36)
   B. The First Service (9:1–24)
   C. The Sin of the Priests Nadab and Abihu (10:1–5)
   D. Instructions for Priests (10:6–15)
   E. A Dispute over Priestly Service (10:16–20)

III. Ceremonially Clean and Unclean Things (11:1–15:33)
   A. Animals (11:1–47)
      1. Land animals (11:1–8)
      2. Aquatic animals (11:9–12)
      3. Winged animals (11:13–23)
      4. Regulations concerning land animals (11:24–45)
      5. Summary (11:46–47)
   B. Childbirth (12:1–8)
   C. Surface Blemishes and Diseases (13:1–14:57)
      1. On skin (13:1–46)
      3. Cleansing procedures (14:1–57)
   D. Genital Discharges (15:1–33)
      1. Abnormal male discharges (15:1–15)
      3. Marital intercourse (15:18)
      5. Abnormal menstruation (15:25–30)
6. Summary (15:31-33)
IV. Day of Atonement: Purifying the Tabernacle (16:1-34)
   A. Introduction (16:1)
   B. Warnings and Preparations (16:2-5)
   C. Purification Ceremonies (16:6-28)
      1. For Aaron (16:6-14)
      2. For the people (16:15-19)
      3. Special purification offering (16:20-22)
   D. Perpetuating the Day (16:29-34)
V. Code for Daily Holy Living (17:1–27:34)
   A. Holiness of Blood (17:1-16)
   B. Holiness of Sex (18:1-30)
   C. Holiness of Personal Conduct (19:1-37)
   D. Penalties for Unholiness (20:1-27)
   F. Holiness of Sacrifices (22:17-33)
   G. Holiness of Festivals (23:1-44)
      1. Introduction and Sabbath (23:1-4)
      2. Passover and Unleavened Bread (23:5-8)
      3. Firstfruits (23:9-14)
      4. Harvest (23:15-22)
      5. Trumpets (23:23-25)
      6. Day of Atonement (23:26-32)
      7. Shelters (23:33-44)
   H. Holiness of Sacred Foods (24:1-9)
   I. More Penalties for Unholiness (24:10-23)
   J. Holy Living in the Land (25:1-55)
      1. Holiness of the Sabbath year (25:1-7)
      2. Holiness of the jubilee year (25:8-22)
      3. Redemption of property (25:23-34)
      4. Redemption of the poor and slaves (25:35-55)
   K. Holiness: Blessings and Punishment (26:1-46)
      1. Blessings of obedience (26:1-13)
      2. Punishments for disobedience (26:14-39)
      3. The covenant remembered (26:40-46)
   L. Holiness of Oaths (27:1-34)
      1. Pledging people (27:1-8)
      2. Pledging animals (27:9-13)
      3. Pledging property (27:14-25)
      4. Special pledges (27:26-34)
COMMENTARY ON

Leviticus

I. A Handbook for the People and the Priests (1:1–7:38)
   A. Commission (1:1–2)

The LORD called to Moses from the Tabernacle* and said to him, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you present an animal as an offering to the LORD, you may take it from your herd of cattle or your flock of sheep and goats.

NOTES
1:1 In the MT the verse begins with the conjunction "and" (וָאָמַר[W2050.1, ZH2256]), thereby joining the last verse of Exodus (Exod 40:38) with the first verse of Leviticus. As such, one can read a continuing narrative from Exodus 40 to Leviticus 1. The continuity is grammatical as well as literary, since the same characters, themes, and chronology bridge Exodus and Leviticus.

1:2 When you. This is the contemporary American English indication of an unspecified subject of a sentence. The Hebrew uses a third-person form, "one, a person" (indicating any unnamed person), much like the British use the wording "when one." The actual term used here (אדם[W120, ZH132]) denotes a human being as distinct from both God on the one hand and animals on the other. It was a general term, specifying neither male nor female exclusively. It thus referred to all of the Israelites, whether male or female (see 15:29), who could come to present sacrifices, bringing them near to God.

COMMENTARY
In Leviticus, God is primarily referred to by his personal name, Yahweh. The title "LORD" is the traditional English rendition of the Hebrew "Yahweh," which was the personal name of the God of Israel. From early in their history, the Israelites were very serious about the fourth commandment against misusing God’s personal name (Exod 20:7; Deut 5:11). In order not to misapply it, they determined not to utter it at all. Instead they read it as Adonai (Lord) or "the Name." Most English translations still take this traditional approach, refusing to put "Yahweh" in the text. Instead, they use "LORD," marking it as a distinctive divine name through the use of special small-capital letters.

Yahweh had called to Moses twice before using this same name—from the burning bush (Exod 3:4, 14-15) and from Mount Sinai (Exod 19:3). The continuity with
the previous two events in Exodus is shown by the “and” that begins Leviticus, though it is not translated in English translations (see note on 1:1). This is also shown by “the LORD” not being explicitly mentioned as the subject of the first verb of the book, only the second. These elements suggest a grammatical tie to the previous chapter—the last chapter of Exodus (Exod 40).

In Leviticus, God’s revelation comes from the Tabernacle, the inner tent that contained the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Moses was never allowed into this dwelling place of God after he had it built (Exod 40:35). He, like the other Israelites, was only able to approach it as far as the outer court. Israel’s God did not want his will to be secret, completely separate and hidden from those who might seek him. Rather, he revealed himself, calling out to his people rather than leaving them to guess at who he was and what he desired.

God revealed his will to Moses, who was to pass it along to Israel, since this section was most directly relevant to them (cf. 6:8-9a). God was separate from the people, being in the Tabernacle, while they could only remain outside. At the same time he was in their midst. The Tabernacle’s place was in the middle of the camp, equidistant from all the people to allow equal access to the place of worship (Num 2:1–3:30). God expected their worship, giving all of them instructions for “when,” not “if,” they approached him with their gifts.

The individual people of Israel were to bring or present these gifts to the Lord, since, especially in Leviticus 1–3, the offerings were voluntary—true “presents” of love (though elsewhere they were part of the daily sacrificial practice of the nation as a whole; Num 28). They also were to have been at a cost to the offerer, that is, a sacrifice. In an agricultural society where wealth and the very maintenance of life were measured in livestock, these animal presents came from the very life necessities of the people. By comparison, have not our gifts to the Lord at times become trivialized and cheap, not costing us? Does money, which is the ordinary form which offerings take today, really cost anything to many in today’s society? What would, in fact, be a sacrifice for those with abundant financial resources? Might not our time, our work, our service cost us more than cash in some cases?

**Leviticus 1–7: A Reference Manual for Offering Sacrifices.** The first seven chapters of Leviticus are a unit showing both the priests and the people how to offer sacrifices. However, it is too limiting to focus only on the “how” and thereby read these chapters as strictly functional and ritual texts (Mulholland 1985:83-93), though much of the material of the chapters themselves concern “how.” This interpretation led not only Israel but also later readers into a complete misunderstanding of the text. Israel came to view the rituals as the initiating means by which they could enter into a relationship with God, when in fact the actions described were to result from an already existing relationship with God. They served to maintain the relationship spelled out in Exodus, not to establish it. Even the most well-known “ritual” or functional text, the Ten Commandments (Exod
20:3-17; Deut 5:6-21), does not provide ways to merit participation in God’s covenant. The commandments were preceded by, and were the result of, the previous verse: “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery” (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6). Prior to Israel’s following any of God’s requests, before they even knew them, they were already God’s people and had been blessed by this relationship. The laws were then given as instruction on how to live within this covenant relationship with the greatest benefit for self, neighbor, and God himself.

Israel, as a nation, too often mistook the laws and rituals as an end in themselves, the opposite error to that mentioned in the last paragraph. Concentrating on the outward action of sacrifice without an inner commitment to the one receiving it was equally wrong for Israel. She thought that ritual functions of doing could replace a right relationship of being God’s people (Mulholland 1985:95-105). God soundly condemned this attitude through his prophets (Jer 7; Amos 5:21-24). It was not that he did not desire the actions, since he was the one who set them up in the first place. It was rather that he wanted the attitude inspiring them to be the correct one; he wanted rejoicing instead of lifeless rote.

It is important to remember that meaning comes from context and that the geographical and historical context of Leviticus is the same as that of the Ten Commandments. Israel was still at Mount Sinai (7:38) and was just learning how to maintain its covenant relationship with God. The questions giving rise to chapters 1–7 were, What happens if I do something to endanger the relationship? Am I irrevocably separated from God? A motif of the book is holiness, and these chapters indicate how holiness, upon which an intimate relationship with God depends, might be regained if it was somehow lost, as it inevitably would be. Rather than being dead, stultifying rituals, they were gracious avenues of forgiveness.

It is also important to note chronological context. The sacrifices described here were not new, since offerings were mentioned from the beginning of the human race (e.g., Gen 4:3-4; 8:20-21; 22:2; Exod 18:12). Plans had been put in place for performing them earlier at Sinai (e.g., Exod 20:24; 24:5), but here they were presented in detail. These sacrificial regulations precede the installation ceremony for the priests (ch 8), so they had not yet begun their work, which started in Leviticus 9. Chapters 1–7 anticipate the idea that the specific priestly guild was an extension of the concept that the entire nation of Israel was a priesthood (Exod 19:6). Thus, the sacrifices and offerings brought by individual, non-priestly people as described in Genesis and Exodus were not replaced but supplemented by the provisions made here (cf. Goldingay 2003:416).

Both priest and offerer had obligations to meet and procedures to follow when coming with sacrifices into the presence of the Lord. Various aspects of these offerings are summarized in the following tables (adapted from LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:83).
### MAJOR SACRIFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Offerer’s actions</th>
<th>Priest’s actions</th>
<th>Disposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'olah  [̄הז30, וּז92] (lit., &quot;going up&quot;); [whole] burnt offering; holocaust; 1:3-17; 6:8-13; 7:8</td>
<td>Atonement</td>
<td>Bull, sheep, goat, bird; male; no defects</td>
<td>Bring; lay hand on head; slaughter; skin; cut up; wash animal</td>
<td>Sprinkle blood; build fire; burn offering</td>
<td>Completely burnt; hide saved for priest; bird crop and contents thrown on an ash heap to the east of the altar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minkhah  [̄ד4503, דִּבְּרִית] (lit., &quot;gift&quot;); grain offering; present, meal, oblation; 2:1-16; 6:14-23; 7:9-10</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Choice flour, olive oil, incense, salt; roast grain</td>
<td>Bring material; pour oil; sprinkle incense</td>
<td>Take handful; burn on altar</td>
<td>Portion burnt; priests eat remainder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shelem  [̄ב8002, בִּשְׁלֹמ] (lit., &quot;peace&quot;); peace offering; communion, common, shared, fellowship, well-being; 3:1-17; 7:11-36</td>
<td>Rejoicing</td>
<td>Cattle, sheep</td>
<td>Bring animal; lay hand on offering; slaughter</td>
<td>Sprinkle blood; burn offering on altar</td>
<td>Organ fat, liver, kidneys burnt; meat eaten by priests and offerer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khatta’th  [̄כ2403a, כְּדָד] (lit., &quot;sin&quot;); sin offering; purification; 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30; 7:7; Num 15:22-31</td>
<td>Atone for unintentional sin</td>
<td>(a) High priest: bull, no defect; (b) Community: bull; (c) Leader: goat, male, no defect; (d) Citizen: sheep/goat, female, no defect; (e) Poor: young dove/pigeon; (f) Destitute: choice flour</td>
<td>Bring offering (all); lay hand on head (a–d); slaughter (a–d); leaders act for community in each step</td>
<td>Place blood before inner curtain, on incense altar horns, at altar base; remove organ fat, kidneys, liver and burn these on altar (a–b); take the rest outside the camp; (f) burn</td>
<td>Organ fat, liver, kidneys burnt; remainder eaten by priests (c–f) or burnt (a–b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'asham  [̄ה817, וּז*] (lit., &quot;guilt&quot;); guilt offering; reparation; 5:14-6:7</td>
<td>Atonement</td>
<td>Ram, no defect, or cash equivalent</td>
<td>Bring offering; slaughter; restitution</td>
<td>Sprinkle blood; burn fat, kidneys, liver</td>
<td>Fat, kidneys, liver burnt; male priests eat rest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECONDARY SACRIFICES (Subcategories of the Peace Offering).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Offerer's actions</th>
<th>Priest's Actions</th>
<th>Disposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>todah [תּוֹדָה, תוֹדֶה] (lit., &quot;thanks&quot;); thanksgiving offering; praise; 7:12–15</td>
<td>Give thanks</td>
<td>Same as peace offering [שֶׁלֶם, שלם] (ם)</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Priest and offerer eat meat offered on the day offered and eat bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neder [נְדֶה, נדה] (lit., &quot;oath&quot;); vow; votive; 7:16–17</td>
<td>Complete a vow</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Priest and offerer eat meat offered on the day offered or the next day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nedabah [נְדָבָה, נדב] (lit., &quot;voluntary&quot;); freewill offering; 7:16–17</td>
<td>Rejoicing</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as peace offering</td>
<td>Same as vow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The layout of the text of Leviticus 1–7 is that of a reference manual, part addressed to the people (1:1–6:7) and part to the priests (6:8–7:38). It is divided into separate, easily discernable sections that could have been consulted depending on the kind of offering brought (burnt, grain, peace, sin, guilt) or what the material of the offering was (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats, or birds in ch 1) or who was bringing the offering (e.g., priest, nation, leader, or common citizen in ch 4). They were ordered according to whether the sacrifices were voluntary and spontaneous (chs 1–3) or required (chs 4–5). We don’t have any of the original documents available, but we can surmise that each section and subsection probably started a new paragraph and that the key introductory words of each option might have been highlighted in red, as they were in some Aramaic (e.g., the Deir Alla Balaam inscription) and Egyptian (e.g., some coffin spells) texts (cf. also 4QNum* XIII 27, XV 16). This would have aided in quickly finding the section applicable to the offerer’s particular needs. For reference purposes, the document was undoubtedly posted prominently at the entrance to the Tabernacle or near the altar to be readily consulted when necessary (Baker 1987).

◆ B. Instructions for the People about Offerings (1:3–6:7)

1. Burnt offerings (1:3–17)

3”If the animal you present as a burnt offering is from the herd, it must be a male with no defects. Bring it to the entrance of the Tabernacle so you* may be accepted by the LORD. 4Lay your hand on the animal’s head, and the LORD will accept its death in your place to purify you, making you right with him.* 5Then slaughter the
young bull in the LORD’s presence, and Aaron’s sons, the priests, will present the animal’s blood by splattering it against all sides of the altar that stands at the entrance to the Tabernacle. 4Then skin the animal and cut it into pieces. 5The sons of Aaron the priest will build a wood fire on the altar. 6They will arrange the pieces of the offering, including the head and fat, on the wood burning on the altar. 7But the internal organs and the legs must first be washed with water. Then the priest will burn the entire sacrifice on the altar as a burnt offering. It is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

10"If the animal you present as a burnt offering is from the flock, it may be either a sheep or a goat, but it must be a male with no defects. 11Slaughter the animal on the north side of the altar in the LORD’s presence, and Aaron’s sons, the priests, will splatter its blood against all sides of the altar. 12Then cut the animal in pieces, and the priests will arrange the pieces of the offering, including the head and fat, on the wood burning on the altar. 13But the internal organs and the legs must first be washed with water. Then the priest will burn the entire sacrifice on the altar as a burnt offering. It is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

14"If you present a bird as a burnt offering to the LORD, choose either a turtledove or a young pigeon. 15The priest will take the bird to the altar, wring off its head, and burn it on the altar. But first he must drain its blood against the side of the altar. 16The priest must also remove the crop and the feathers* and throw them in the ashes on the east side of the altar. 17Then, grasping the bird by its wings, the priest will tear the bird open, but without tearing it apart. Then he will burn it as a burnt offering on the wood burning on the altar. It is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

NOTES

1:9 special gift. This term (’isheh [1H801, 2H852]) is difficult. It has most commonly been interpreted in association with the similar word for “fire.” This whole offering was burnt, but not all offerings described by this term were burnt (e.g., the drink or wine offering, 23:37; Exod 29:41; Num 15:10). Also, not every burnt offering was described by the term (cf. sin and guilt offerings, 4:1–6:7). In 3:5, the term is placed immediately next to the word for fire, which would make a meaning such as “made by fire” redundant. A study of the same form in other Semitic languages suggests a meaning of “[food] gift” (Milgrom 1991:161-162; Hartley 1992:22), or special offering, which fits better into most of the contexts where the word is used. This term is commonly associated with the phrase “a pleasing aroma to the LORD.”

a pleasing aroma to the LORD. The phrase concerns an odor, the smell of the smoke which arose to God. Some translations see it as calming God, settling his anger (“soothing odour,” NIV; cf. the Heb. of 1 Sam 26:19). It reached God from Noah after the Flood and is presented as part of what convinced him to never again bring such widespread destruction on the earth (Gen 8:21-22). The suggested soothing function is problematic, since the phrase only occurs once in association with a sin offering (4:31), which seeks to receive God’s pardon. The other sacrifices with which it was used (burnt, grain, fellowship) were not generally for this purpose. Others see the act as bringing God delight (NIV, NIV: NIDOTTE 3.1071).

1:10 goat. A male goat was much rarer among burnt offerings than was a sheep (22:19; Num 28:30).

1:11 on the north side of the altar. The exact location of the slaughter is more specific here than in the other two cases (1:5, 15 [different verb]). It was still in the Lord’s presence (1:5), but on the north or right side of the altar as one entered the Tabernacle.
1:14 a turtledove or a young pigeon. They are both members of the dove family, which was common in the area of Israel (Isa 60:8). Two species, *Columba livia* and *Streptopelia decaocto*, were domesticated, possibly for both food and sacrificial purposes, though when this took place is unknown. Undomesticated birds were probably also accepted for sacrifice.

1:16 remove the crop. This is the reading preferred by the LXX and most early rabbinic interpreters. Others (Targum, Syriac, TEV; cf. HALOT 1.683) understand the last word as “excrement” or the matter found in the crop rather than feathers, which would fit the context since this unclean material would have been unsuitable for offering (see commentary on 1:9).

ashes. The Hebrew word here is not the regular word for ashes (‘eper [TH665, ZH709]) but one for ashes soaked by the dripped fat (deshen [TH1880, ZH2016]), which was the special part of each meat offering dedicated to God alone. Since these ashes were special, they needed special handling (4:12). The word is used elsewhere for the choicest and the best (Job 36:16; Ps 63:5; Isa 30:23).

**Commentary**

The first part of Leviticus was directed toward the people who were bringing offerings to the Tabernacle, instructing them what to bring as demanded by different occasions for sacrifice. All could come to sacrifice. Both men and women had equal access to the courtyard, the altar, and the rituals done there (12:6; 15:29); this stands in contrast to the later Herodian Temple, which had a separate “Court of Women.” All were invited to participate, and all were also enabled to do so. There were offerings affordable not only to the wealthy (the bull; 1:3-9) and the middle class (one of the flock; 1:10-13), but also to the poor (birds; 1:14-17). No one was exempt from coming. Whether high priest or leaders, common citizens or the destitute, none could reestablish a damaged relationship with God apart from the means he provides in these chapters.

The whole burnt offerings, addressed in this section, were the most important in Israel. They were offered daily (Num 28:3; cf. 2 Kgs 16:15; 1 Chr 16:40), and they were the first offering of any of the weekly (Sabbath) or annual festivals (Passover, Harvest, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Shelters—see ch 23; Num 28:4–29:40), as well as on special occasions such as finishing the Tabernacle (Exod 40:29), preparing for war (1 Sam 7:9-10), or bringing the Ark up to Jerusalem (2 Sam 24:22). The whole burnt offering seems to have become the offering par excellence, since the writer of Chronicles calls the bronze altar “the altar of burnt offering” (1 Chr 21:29; 22:1; 2 Chr 29:18), even though all of the offerings in Leviticus 1–7 were burnt on that same altar. The first offering, a sacrifice of a bull, is presented in more detail than the others since some of the details, such as the location of the altar (1:5) and building the fire (1:7), would be assumed from here on in the text and would not need repeating.

“Burnt offering” (1:3) is a single word in Hebrew (’olah [TH5930, ZH6592]), which has the root meaning of “going up,” since the complete flesh of the offering went up in smoke toward God, with none of it remaining. While many other offerings involved burning, the difference here is the relative completeness of the act—all
that remained was the skin (for the priest’s use; 7:8), or, in the case of a bird, the crop, which was cast aside (1:16). It is specifically called a “whole burnt offering” in 1 Samuel 7:9 (see Ps 51:19).

Adult male animals were the rule for the whole burnt offering, though others were used elsewhere—for example, a cow was acceptable for a peace offering (3:1; cf. Num 19:2), also a calf (9:3; Deut 21:3), and a bull (9:4). Since far fewer males were necessary to maintain the herd or flock size, male animals were more dispensable. Each of these must have had no physical defects since God demands the best (see 1:3; 3:1, 6). This was necessary for both sacrifice and sacrificer to be accepted or shown favor by God, which was the goal of the burnt offering (22:19-20; Jer 6:20) and peace offering (19:5; 22:21), but is not mentioned of the sin and guilt offerings, which have different functions (see below), though it shares with these two the function of atonement.

A person entering the Tabernacle court first encountered the altar, which was just inside the gate. A perpetual fire burned on it, welcoming worshipers to approach the Lord much as a warm hearth welcomes weary travelers. The animals were brought here and sacrificed, in plain view not only of the priests, but of other worshipers and others passing by the Tabernacle entrance. This aspect of Israelite worship was thus a public proclamation of devotion to God.

Laying one’s hand on the sacrifice (samak [תָּמָק, ZH6164]; 1:4) is perhaps better understood as pressing with some force (cf. Judg 16:29) in contrast to doing so without pressure, as one did while imparting a blessing (cf. shith [שִׁית, TH7896, ZH8883]; Gen 48:14). One hand is mentioned here, in contrast to the scapegoat ritual (16:21; cf. b. Menahot 93a), where two are mentioned. There are several suggested understandings of the act’s significance. The most likely understands the laying on of hands as indicating a substitute, as discussed below. Laying on of hands as an indication of ownership, as some suggest, seems redundant since the offerer had personally brought the animal. Another suggestion is transference, passing sin or guilt onto the animal, much as one might pass on a blessing (Gen 48:14-16). This suggestion is unlikely since the animal would then have been defiled and not have been allowed to touch the altar.

Whichever reason is accepted, the action is done to “make atonement” (1:4, NLT mg). This translates the term kapar [תַּמָּר, ZH4105], which has a range of possible meanings. The basic meaning of the verb is “to rub,” originally “to smear, rub on” (Gen 6:14), then “to rub, wipe, clean off,” or “to clean, purify.” The material with which this was done was usually blood, which was applied ritually to wipe off any impurities (4:20, 26, 31, 35; for oil, cf. 14:18), almost like a spiritual detergent. The purifying material itself must not become polluted because it would come directly into contact with the altar. There is a further meaning of the verb—namely, “to substitute for, be a ransom for,” which is not rare in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod 30:12-16; Num 35:31-33). Finally, the verb could mean “to atone for,” itself containing many of the elements of meaning included in the earlier discussion, since sin was carried away at the cost of shed blood. Atonement was only rarely associated with the burnt offering.
Though sin is not specifically mentioned in this connection, the verb could imply it, as it was part of the context of the burnt offering elsewhere (Job 1:5). (See the fuller discussion in the comments on 5:6.)

The offerer was intimately involved in the sacrificial process, which was appropriate because the offering was to serve as a substitute, taking the place of the offerer. Other examples of this include the Levites replacing the firstborn of the other tribes as dedicated to the service of God (Num 8:10). This interpretation of the relationship between the animal and the offerer is supported by Genesis 22:13, where the ram provided by God served as a substitute for Abraham to sacrifice “in place of” Isaac. Here the animal was taking the place of, and receiving the death deserved by, the offerer, as he showed by laying his hand on its head.

Transference of authority or power is a subcategory of this interpretation. A medieval monarch did this through the ritual of knighthood, and some today lay hands on the ordinand at ordination services. The person so acting indicates that the recipient of the action is a substitute for him, having some of the authority or power which he exercises.

Physical contact with the animal shows that there was no worship by proxy or at a safe distance. The worshiper personally carried out over half of the ritual steps, more than the priest did. This personal involvement is an immediate reminder of the life taken in the sacrifice, since its blood would literally have been on their hands. Blood was the life-giving element dedicated to God alone and could not be used for human consumption (17:10-14). Only the sanctified priests could use it, and only as part of the ritual. This life element was returned to God, its giver, by the priest's sprinkling, not burning, it on behalf of the offerer on the altar. Active, direct involvement of this kind precluded distancing oneself. Sacrifice cost a life, and this life was to be taken by the offerer. It was a substitute for his or her own life.

Since dirt or physically unclean matter could not be allowed to contaminate the altar, the internal organs, including the stomach and intestines (but not the liver and kidneys; Exod 29:13, 22), needed to be cleaned of partially digested matter, which could not be part of the offering. The legs, most probably the shins or lower section below the knee joint, which would have been literally as well as ritually unclean, were washed with water.

All of the previous steps were preparatory. The animal only became an offering when reduced to smoke. This burning of the offered material was the only common element of all of the offerings here in Leviticus. Sacrificial loss of life was found in most, along with manipulation of blood, but neither of these were evident in the grain offering (ch 2), which was just as efficacious as all of the others. Therefore, the burning, rendering all or part of the sacrifice into smoke, which in its turn ascends to God, is a central element for understanding Hebrew sacrifice. In anthropomorphic terms, the text says that God smells the aroma of the sacrificial smoke and finds it very pleasing. This description is common for the burnt offering (e.g., 1:9, 13, 17; Exod 29:18), grain offering (e.g., 2:2, 9, 12), and peace offering (e.g., 3:5, 16; Exod 29:25), but only occurs once in relation to the sacrifices made to seek pardon for sin
The offering found favor with God, and he accepted it (1:4), as he did when Noah presented such an offering immediately after the Flood (Gen 8:20-21). It’s almost as if it reminded God of his love for his people and attracted his attention to their worship of him (cf. Num 23:3).

The second permissible burnt offering was a male sheep (1:10-13). These were more commonly offered than bulls since they were more affordable. Even the affluent would have more of them in their possession (cf. Job 1:3). These, the most common domesticated animal for ancient Israel, were a reminder of a principle later exemplified by Brother Lawrence in the seventeenth century: Practicing and celebrating the presence of God in worship and service is of everyday stuff. It is not something esoteric, hidden, and inaccessible. Even in the ordinary, God is pleased to receive worship.

The ritual procedures for the sheep and goats were very similar to those for a bull. The lack of mention of laying on of hands (1:4) has led some to suggest this as particular to the bull, though I have suggested that its mention once applies to all three offering types. This omission was not unique, since three of the other necessary steps listed for the bull (slaughter, stoking the fire, and arranging wood) are not mentioned here either. This is further evidence that Leviticus 1–7 served as a reference document rather than a detailed description, since the missing steps were supplied from the written text posted for the offerer’s consultation (Baker 1987).

A bird was the third category of offering (1:14-17). This offering would have been within the economic reach of almost everyone, since wild birds could have been caught with only the cost of time. If the wild birds were acceptable, this is the only instance where nondomesticated creatures could have been sacrificed. Here a choice is specifically allowed, though a choice is also implicit in the flock offering, where either a sheep or goat could have been offered. God is often more flexible than we give him credit for (see Num 9:10 and 2 Chr 30:17-20). The birds are not explicitly required to have been without blemish (1:3, 10). This also could have been presumed from the previous two instructions, or it could have been less important or more difficult to monitor, due to the covering of feathers. There is no mention of the laying on of hands either, since they would have been presented by the hand of the offerer—unlike the other, larger animals, which were probably led by a rope.

The offerers played a less active role in this offering. The priest was the one who performed the ritual tasks mentioned (slaughter and blood sprinkling, the equivalent of skinning and cutting it up and burning it), possibly because birds were small enough that their proper handling required some skill. Each person, however, still had to bring their own offering. It was up to the offerer to make the decision, to select and approach God with something, which, while not expensive, was still valuable. God, who provides life itself and all the necessities for sustaining it, received the things given from these potential food items as a gift.

What can we take from this chapter that will help us in our worship? First, we can see that in the entire chapter, there is no explicit gradation of acceptability or honor for the offerings—that is, the bull is not better than the bird. All were welcomed by
God; all were equally pleasing to him (1:9, 13, 17). Psalm 69:30-31 indicates that prayer and praise from a truly worshipful heart are preferable to the sacrifice of animals—presumably sacrifice from a lukewarm heart. This permits even the truly destitute, those without access to any of the acceptable animal sacrifices, to be able to worship. Offering was made from love and gratitude; it was a matter of worshiping God rather than competing with one's neighbor. Second, the ritual steps listed in the chapter were most probably not exhaustive. In particular, it would be surprising if the rituals were accomplished in complete silence. Most likely there were prayers and hymns that accompanied various ritual steps. We have the "video" portion of the proceedings (if you will), while the "audio" could well have been provided by some of the psalms mentioning the burnt offering (see Pss 20:3; 66:13, 15). Third, all of the five senses would have been actively stimulated in the proceedings mentioned here and in the next chapters. There would have been a commotion of animals and people for eye and ear, the smell of animals and blood, the feel of the hand on the animal and its slaughter, and the taste of the offerer's portion of some of the sacrifices. The whole being, not just the intellect, would have been caught up in this celebration of worship for the God who held life itself in his hand, who gave blessings and heard prayers, and who even smelled the scent of his people's worship.

Is not our contemporary worship too often more cerebral than sensory, thinking about God rather than celebrating him? Sound doctrine and belief are necessary and proper, but so is physical jubilation. We need to consider the senses, the visual in architecture, art, and pageantry; the sound of music, oral prayer, and praise; the smell, taste, and feel of the communion loaf and cup, the handclasp, and the kiss.

In conclusion, we need to consider the significance of the burnt offering as presented in the New Testament. The burnt offering is referred to only twice in the New Testament, in each case being replaced by something better—in Mark 12:33, by complete love for God, and in Hebrews 10:6-8, by the obedience of Jesus Christ. Obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). The epitome of obedience in the New Testament was Jesus Christ in his life and in his death on the cross. In this act he gave his life, shed his blood, and acted as a whole burnt offering, fulfilling his description as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). He exhibited the perfection and lack of blemish required for a sacrifice (Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 2:22) and ransomed people from their sins (Mark 10:45; 1 Pet 1:18-19). He was acceptable and pleasing to God (Matt 3:17), a sweet smell to God (Eph 5:2).

In the Old Testament, an offering itself was not a thing of power, not magical stuff that would necessarily and by its own might bring results. It was to be prompted by love, an act of willing obedience. Christ's death was a sweet fragrance to God (Eph 5:2). If our spiritual sacrifices don't have this motivation, they are without effect, a stench rather than a fragrance to the God toward whom they are directed (cf. 1 Sam 15; Amos 5:21-24). These sacrifices symbolized the offerer's being sacrificed to God. This is implied in Romans 12:1, where a more general term for "sacrifice" is used. God desires lives working, serving, worshiping him, rather than dead animals. Atonement was a serious business: It cost a life. This life was lost on behalf of the
offerer, and it was also taken by the offerer’s hand (1:5, 11; cf. Isa 53:4-7). In the Old Testament, this was done daily and also at special occasions (Num 28–29), since it was at heart a symbolic act. By contrast, according to the New Testament, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was effective in bringing complete and actual atonement, and so it was necessary only once (Heb 10:1-10).

2. Grain offerings (2:1-16)

“When you present grain as an offering to the LORD, the offering must consist of choice flour. You are to pour olive oil on it, sprinkle it with frankincense, and bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests. The priest will scoop out a handful of the flour moistened with oil, together with all the frankincense, and burn this representative portion on the altar. It is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering will then be given to Aaron and his sons. This offering will be considered a most holy part of the special gifts presented to the LORD.

4“If your offering is a grain offering baked in an oven, it must be made of choice flour, but without any yeast. It may be presented in the form of thin cakes mixed with olive oil or wafers spread with olive oil. If your grain offering is cooked on a griddle, it must be made of choice flour mixed with olive oil but without any yeast. Break it in pieces and pour olive oil on it; it is a grain offering. If your grain offering is prepared in a pan, it must be made of choice flour and olive oil.

8“No matter how a grain offering for the LORD has been prepared, bring it to the priest, who will present it at the altar.

9The priest will take a representative portion of the grain offering and burn it on the altar. It is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering will then be given to Aaron and his sons as their food. This offering will be considered a most holy part of the special gifts presented to the LORD.

11”Do not use yeast in preparing any of the grain offerings you present to the LORD, because no yeast or honey may be burned as a special gift presented to the LORD. You may add yeast and honey to an offering of the first crops of your harvest, but these must never be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma to the LORD. Season all your grain offerings with salt to remind you of God’s eternal covenant. Never forget to add salt to your grain offerings.

14“If you present a grain offering to the LORD from the first portion of your harvest, bring fresh grain that is coarsely ground and roasted on a fire. Put olive oil on this grain offering, and sprinkle it with frankincense. The priest will take a representative portion of the grain moistened with oil, together with all the frankincense, and burn it as a special gift presented to the LORD.

NOTES

2:1 you. In this chapter, a different but synonymous word (nepesh [[115315, 296883]]) is used instead of ‘adam, which occurred in 1:2 (see note). Each includes both men and women (see Num 5:6-7) and is rendered with second-person forms in the NLT.

2:14 the first portion of your harvest. The word bikkurim [[1191061, 291137]] indicates something given at the beginning and is often translated as “firstfruits.” Milgrom (1991:190-191) suggests that there was a distinction between this term, indicating that which was first ripe or first harvested (rendered “first crops” in Num 18:13), and the term used in Num 18:12 (rendered “harvest gifts”), indicating that which was first processed.
INTRODUCTION TO Numbers

NUMBERS TELLS A STORY that should never have happened, a story that warns against the rejection of God’s plans. Nonetheless, the story reveals that God remains faithful to his gracious promise, even when his people neglect the means and aims of grace.

AUTHOR
Repeated references say that God spoke to Moses.1 With regard to the stages of the journey we even read that Moses “kept a written record” (33:2, emphasis mine). In addition to eyewitness material, Numbers makes use of identifiable sources, such as The Book of the Wars of the LORD (21:14-15), an Amorite song (21:27-30), and the Balaam oracles (chs 23–24). Finally, just as we see in Deuteronomy, Numbers includes some material that most likely comes from a later hand: It’s unlikely that Moses took a long look back at his own death and burial (Deut 34, especially v. 10) or that Moses personally described himself as superior to all men in humility (12:3). Settling questions as to how much material and organization comes from “another hand” is not an aim of this commentary, which follows the New Testament in referring to material from the Pentateuch as Mosaic (e.g., Matt 8:4; 19:7; Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44; John 1:17, 45; 5:45).

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING
The traditional view of Mosaic authorship puts the production of the book—or at least its substance—in the mid-second millennium BC, but the literary diversity in Numbers puts it under the source critic’s lens. In the late 1800s, J. Wellhausen set out a hypothesis that identified literary sources that had been combined together into the Pentateuch. He labeled the sources J, E, D, and P as shorthand for their differing literary characteristics: “J” for the source that speaks early and often of the name Yahweh (Jahweh in German); “E” for the source that uses the title Elohim (that is, “God”) more than it uses Yahweh; “D” for the Deuteronomist, which seemed different in style on the whole; and “P” for Priestly, referring to material that seemed to reflect the concerns of the priesthood, including details about religious ritual and the Aaronic line. Thus, the source-critical consensus speaks of a book that got its final shape and perhaps even its substance in the postexilic period, though some date even the supposedly late “P” as preexilic (Hurvitz 1974;
Kaufmann 1961:153-211; Milgrom 1983:65-81; Milgrom 1989:xxxii-xxxv). Rejecting this fragmentation, Rendtorff and Noth see the Pentateuch’s development in terms of larger blocks of traditions passed along as self-contained entities: the twelve-tribe system (Noth 1930; Noth 1968), ordering the camp (Kuschke 1961), Levitical traditions (Möhlenbrink 1934; Gunneweg 1965), murmuring traditions (Coats 1968; Fritz 1970), the Balaam cycle (Gross 1974; Mowinckel 1930), allotment of the land (Alt 1953; Noth 1972; Weippert 1973), and the conquest traditions (Weippert 1971). E. W. Davies sees so many connections between diverse elements that he even wonders if they ever had an independent existence (1995b:xlvii).

All of these suggested self-contained entities directly relate to the situation that would have prevailed during Moses’s leadership in the wilderness; conversely, many of them would have become irrelevant anachronisms for the postexilic community if they were only learning of them for the first time, rather than remembering them as a part of their nation’s spotty history of covenant faithfulness. We should not go far wrong in identifying Moses as the predominant author of the Pentateuchal material, estimating that this material would have been combined into the five books by the time of the monarchy, and characterizing any subsequent work (e.g., 12:3; Deut 34) as editorial rather than authorial.

AUDIENCE
For the community of Israel facing the promise and demands of the conquest, this message about their predecessors would have prompted them to stay with God’s well-ordered plan, to follow his chosen leaders, and to count on his protection and blessing. The wilderness complaints and wanderings, followed by the death of a whole generation of would-be conquerors, should have been a potent warning against repeating that generation’s folly. That generation became the Old Testament byword for failing to enter rest because of unbelief (Ps 95:8-11). And that generation’s story still names us as its audience for both its warnings and encouragement (Heb 3:8-11; 4:3-7).

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY
The Masoretic Hebrew text is mostly problem free. Uncertainty arises only in a few poetic portions of chapter 21 and in the Balaam oracles of chapters 23–24. The Septuagint variants tend to be name spellings, although there are a few changes in verse order. The Qumran texts yield little in the way of variant readings, and when they do, they show an affinity for the Septuagint or the expansionistic and harmonistic Samaritan Pentateuch. The Masoretic Text generally has the preferred reading.

All Masoretic texts divide the Torah into five books, and the Talmud speaks of the five books of the Torah. Numbers itself is sometimes called “the Fifth regarding the Musterings” for its place among the five and for its focus on registering the military and Levitical corps. Olson suggests that the varied length of these books indicates that they did not result from a division to split the Pentateuch into even units for
fitting them on scrolls. Indeed, the books generally include something like an introduction and conclusion.

The place of Numbers in the Pentateuch assured it of unquestioned canonical recognition. The New Testament puts forth the principle that all Scripture is useful to teach, correct, and equip (2 Tim 3:16-17). Accordingly, Paul used Israel’s sins in the wilderness to warn against immorality and grumbling (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:1-11), and the writer of Hebrews used the wilderness story as a warning to Christians (Heb 3:6–4:13). At least one commentator has voiced a sad epitaph for the first generation in the wilderness: “Numbers is a book that need not have been!” (Philip 1993:23). May we read this book with profit, so that its wandering message of doom need not be written over our own failures in walking with the Lord.

LITERARY STYLE

Title. The title Numbers (cf. LXX Arithmoi and Vulgate Numeri) reflects the book’s many itemized lists (1:20-46; 3:15-51; 7:10-83; 16:49; 25:9; 26:5-51; 28:1-29:40; 31:32-52; 34:1-29). Hebrew traditions title it bemidbar [יָ暢] (“in the wilderness”), from the book’s geography; wayedaber [וַיֶּדֶבֶר] (”and he said”), from the book’s first words; and khomesh hapequdim [קֹמֶשׁ הַפֶּקֶדֶים] (“the fifth regarding the registered ones”), denoting the book’s inclusion as “one fifth” of the five “books” of the Torah and referring to its military and Levitical counts.

Narrative Structure. If there’s any book in the Pentateuch that displays narrative tension, it is the book of Numbers. The very fact of its starting off with a military registration injects some degree of tension into the narrative. The repeated warnings against unauthorized encroachment on the holy things add to it. The book sets up the people for what looks to be a successful journey to conquer their Promised Land. But complications arise, as does conflict between the people and their leaders—and thus with the God who appointed those leaders (chs 11–20). This meant death for that first generation. The book also ends with a note of tension regarding whether the new generation will obey and inherit the land or repeat their fathers’ sins and failure.

Characterization. The Lord and his servant Moses are the two dominant characters. The Lord’s dominant action in Numbers is speech, which is nearly always to Moses, to whom he provides instruction for the nation. He backs up that speech with judgment when the people disobey, but he also follows through with repeated responses to Moses’s intercession by mitigating his initial plans for judgment and forgiving the people.

Moses’s character receives the narrator’s strong affirmation in many ways: The narrator records God’s own approval of his servant (12:7), which he prefaces with a note that Moses was “more humble than any other person on earth” (12:3). He repeatedly records Moses’s obedience to the divine command\(^8\) and emphasizes Moses’s indispensable role as intercessor.\(^9\) Second only to the the words of the Lord
himself, Moses’s speech dominates the book. Nonetheless, the book allows us a

The people’s character is ambiguous. They start out with ready and exact obedi-
ence, although even then the golden calf incident is looming in the recent back-
ground. But then they lapse into chronic grumbling, which dooms them.
Nonetheless, a second generation arises, who once again look like a redeemable
people.

MAJOR THEMES

God’s Justice and Mercy. God lived among his people in fiery, smoking pillars of
glory (9:15-23). When his people sinned, he disciplined them (11:1-3; 21:6; 25:1-5,
6-13), including their leaders: Miriam (12:10), the scouts (14:36-38), the Levites
(ch 16), Aaron, and even Moses (20:12). But God’s merciful purpose prevailed,
both in response to Moses’s repeated intercession and as the goal of his unchanging
purpose for Israel (32:10-12).

Rebellion and Faithlessness. Israel started out as an army marching on the Promised
Land, but rebellion turned them into a wandering rabble who shuffled off to desert
graves. This established a warning for the rest of Israel’s history. Sometimes the
warning might contain a positive note about Israel’s response to God in those years
(Jer 2:2), but more often the emphasis would fall on God’s faithfulness contrasted
to Israel’s faithlessness (Pss 78:18; 95:8-10; 106; Ezek 20).

Priests and Levites. Exodus refers to Aaron as a Levite and to the Levites as priests
Even this hint presupposes Ithamar’s appointment as head of the Levites, which
surfaces only in Numbers (4:28). In Numbers, the priests remain on top of the hier-
archy, with Levites functioning as auxiliary personnel (1:47-54; 3:1-4:49; 16:1–
18:32; 35:1-8).

Moses as the Prophet Par Excellence. Moses’s significance is hard to overestimate,
even though he was flesh and blood—in fact, sometimes all too human (20:8-13).
He was the matchless prophet with regard to the immediacy and quality of revela-
tion he mediated (12:6-8), and he was the vital interceding prophet. In spite of
this, Moses did not reserve a sole claim on the prophetic gift; rather, he wished for

Large Numbers in the Book. The traditional approach has been to take the large
numbers in the book of Numbers at face value. But most recent commentators
think these numbers improbable, referring to both extrabiblical evidence and
intra-biblical tensions with such large population figures. The figures of over
600,000 fighting men (1:46; 26:51) could indicate a total wilderness population in
excess of two million. The objection that it would be impossible to feed that many
people in the wilderness might be answered by the quite biblical assertion, “It took
a miracle.” Notes that camping and marching arrangements for that many would
know of ancient populations and also clan troop sizes: It produces none with a clan fighting unit around the too-small size of 100 and none with the too-large size of 800 or 900 (Rendesburg 2001:394).

In summary: Arguments from the ancient Near Eastern data can be circular, from either side of the debate. One view summons them as evidence for large numbers in military units (cf. endnote 11); others summon them as evidence that hyperbole was common in such figures. Supporters of the traditional view of these numbers will certainly want to see the ancient Near Eastern archaeological data reinterpreted to bring it in line with these larger numbers. Many are finding Humphreys’ approach attractive, but serious problems remain. Any solution should work for the high numbers elsewhere in the Bible, especially analogous numbers (e.g., military counts), and a conservative doctrine of Scripture makes it very hard for this commentator to make room for the necessary element of Humphreys’ argument that the editorial or scribal tradition that gave us these large numbers was mistaken.

**OUTLINE**

Various outlines have been suggested, some thematic, some chronological, and many of them geographical. The two counts of the people structure a story that revolves around two distinct generations (chs 1–4 and 26). The first rebelled and complained, was gradually extinguished during its wanderings, and was decisively terminated by the plague at the end of that period (25:9). The second count specifies that none of the first generation survived, except Joshua and Caleb (26:64-65). The end of the book shows Israel’s new generation displaying great, but still unrealized, promise; it is not a settled matter whether they will continue in obedience and receive the Promised Land.

I. Death of the Old Generation (1:1–25:18)

A. At Sinai: Preparing for the Journey to the Promised Land (1:1–10:10)

1. The first count (1:1–4:49; cf. 26:1-65)
   a. Mustering Israel’s warriors (1:1-54)
   b. Arranging the camp by tribes (2:1-31)
   c. Summary of the first census (2:32-34)
   d. Levites appointed for service (3:1-13)
   e. Counting the Levites by clans (3:14-39)
   f. Redeeming the firstborn sons (3:40-51)
   g. Enlisting the Levites (4:1-49)

2. Commands for holiness in Israel (5:1–10:10)
   a. Removing the unclean from the community (5:1-4)
   b. Holiness and restitution for sin (5:5-10)
   c. Holiness and the test for suspicions (5:11-31)
   d. Holiness and the Nazirite vow (6:1-21)
   e. Priestly blessing for the community (6:22-27)
f. Dedicating the altar with tribal offerings (7:1-89)
g. Dedicating the Levites (8:1-26)
h. Observing the second Passover (9:1-14)
i. Following the cloud (9:15-23)
j. Signaling with trumpets (10:1-10)

B. In the Wilderness (10:11–21:35)
1. Moving from Sinai to Kadesh (10:11–12:16)
   a. Departing in battle order (10:11-36)
   b. Wilderness complaints and God’s response (11:1-35)
   c. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses (12:1-16)

2. Forty years near Kadesh (13:1–19:22)
   a. Sending scouts into the Promised Land (13:1-33)
   b. Rebellion over the Promised Land (14:1-45)
   c. Miscellaneous cultic laws (15:1-41)
   d. Korah leads a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (16:1-50)
   e. A sign for the rebels (17:1-13)
   f. Regulations for the priests (18:1-32)
   g. Two rituals for cleansing (19:1-22)

3. Moving from Kadesh to Moab (20:1–21:35)
   a. Moses strikes the rock (20:1-13)
   b. Journey around Edom (20:14-21)
   c. The death of Aaron (20:22-29)
   d. Trouble on the way to Moab (21:1-35)

C. On the Plains of Moab: Preparing to Enter the Promised Land (22:1–25:18)
   a. Balaam hired to curse Israel (22:1-41)
   b. Balaam's first ritual and prophecy (23:1-12)
   c. Balaam's second ritual and prophecy (23:13-26)
   d. Balaam's third ritual and prophecy (23:27–24:13)
   e. Balaam's fourth prophecy (24:14-19)


II. Birth of the New Generation (26:1–36:13)
A. The Second Count (26:1-65, cf. 1:1–4:49)
B. Laws about Land, Offerings, and Vows (27:1–30:16)
   1. Inheritance of Zelophehad's daughters (27:1-11; cf. 36:1-13)
   2. Commissioning of Joshua (27:12-23)
   4. Regulations for vows (30:1-16)
C. Settlement Arrangements for the Transjordan (31:1–32:42)
  1. Defeating Midian (31:1-54)
  2. Transjordan tribes: Reuben and Gad (32:1-42)

D. Reprise of Wilderness Itinerary (33:1-49)

E. Laws about the Promised Land (33:50–36:13)
  1. Orders for occupying the Promised Land (33:50-56)
  2. Borders of the Promised Land (34:1-15)
  3. Appointed officials (34:16-29)
  4. Levitical holdings in the Promised Land (35:1-34)
  5. Inheritance of Zelophehad’s daughters (36:1-13; cf. 27:1-11)

ENDNOTES
4. The Samaritan Pentateuch is a sectarian recension, which differs from the MT about 6,000 times, about 1,600 times in agreement with the LXX. However, it tends to expand the text, incorporating parallel materials from Deuteronomy to harmonize the parallel accounts, e.g., Num 10:10 has Deut 1:6-8 after it; Num 12:16 has Deut 1:20-23a after it; Num 21 adds various interpolations from Deut 2.
5. b. Sanhedrin 44a; b. Haggah 14a.
6. Olson uses the Masoretic data to show that the books are decidedly uneven in percentage of the Pentateuch’s entire text (1985:52): Genesis = 1,534 verses (26%), Exodus = 1,209 (21%), Leviticus = 859 (15%), Numbers = 1,288 (22%), and Deuteronomy = 955 (16%). This argument may lack force, however, since the group of scrolls found at Qumran seem to show that scroll length varied noticeably.
7. I.e., 1:1; 36:13; Gen 1:1; 50:26; Exod 1:1-7; 40:38; Lev 1:1-2; 27:34; Deut 1:1; 34:9-12. Even though Exod 40:38 and Lev 1:1-2 don’t sound much like conclusion and introduction, we do see a major shift in the move from the narrative of Exodus to the cultic legislation of Leviticus.
9. Moses, the Old Testament prophet par excellence, interceded four times when Pharaoh sought relief from the plagues (Exod 8:8-14; 8:26-31; 9:27-34; 10:16-19). In chs 14-20, he repeatedly interceded before God when divine wrath flared up against the grumbling Hebrew people. See other occasions of prophetic intercession (Gen 18:17-32; 20:1-17; Isa 37:1-7; Amos 7:1-9). God even had to warn Jeremiah not to intercede, so bent on intercession were true prophets (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12; 15:1).
11. Archer 1982:132-134. He notes that the Egyptian King Pepi I sent “an army of many ten thousands” against the Asians (ANET 228), the Assyrian King Sennacherib claimed to have taken 20,150 prisoners from Judah’s walled cities (ANET 288), and Herodotus said the Persian troops invading Greece numbered 1,700,000 infantry plus 40,000 cavalry (Archer 1982:134, citing Anthon 1871:107).
12. The number 44,546 is double the number of firstborn sons, and assumes a roughly equal number of firstborn girls and one mother for each firstborn (male or female).
13. E. W. Davies 1995a:452, citing Holzinger 1903:5-6, 134. The use of the Hebrew letters to represent numbers is common in medieval writings and occurs in ancient documents.
COMMENTARY ON

Numbers

◆ I. Death of the Old Generation (1:1–25:18)
A. At Sinai: Preparing for the Journey to the Promised Land (1:1–10:10)
1. The first count (1:1–4:49, cf. 26:1–65)
a. Mustering Israel's warriors (1:1–54)

A year after Israel's departure from Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses in the Taberna-
cle* in the wilderness of Sinai. On the first
day of the second month* of that year he said, 2"From the whole community of Isra-
el, record the names of all the warriors by
their clans and families. List all the men
thirty years old or older who are able to
go to war. You and Aaron must register
the troops,* and you will be assisted by
one family leader from each tribe.
These are the tribes and the names of
the leaders who will assist you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>Elizur son of Shedeur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Nahshon son of Amminadab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issachar</td>
<td>Nethanel son of Zuar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebulun</td>
<td>Eliab son of Helon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim son of Joseph</td>
<td>Elishama son of Ammihud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasseh son of Joseph</td>
<td>Gamaliel son of Pedahzur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Abidan son of Gideon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>Pagiel son of Ocran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gad</td>
<td>Eliasaph son of Deuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphtali</td>
<td>Ahira son of Enan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are the chosen leaders of the
community, the leaders of their ancestral
tribes, the heads of the clans of Israel."
So Moses and Aaron called together
these chosen leaders, *and they assem-
bled the whole community of Israel on
that very day.* All the people were regis-
tered according to their ancestry by their
clans and families. The men of Israel who
were twenty years old or older were listed
one by one, *just as the LORD had com-
manded Moses. So Moses recorded their
names in the wilderness of Sinai.

This is the number of men twenty
years old or older who were able to go to
war, as their names were listed in the re-
cords of their clans and families*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>46,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>59,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gad</td>
<td>45,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>74,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issachar</td>
<td>54,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebulun</td>
<td>57,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim son of Joseph</td>
<td>40,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>62,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>41,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphtali</td>
<td>53,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These were the men registered by Moses
and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Isra-
el, all listed according to their ancestral
descent. *They were registered by fami-
lies—all the men of Israel who were
twenty years old or older and able to go to
war.* The total number was 603,550.

But this total did not include the
Levites. 48For the LORD had said to Moses, 49"Do not include the tribe of Levi in the registration; do not count them with the rest of the Israelites. 50Put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Covenant,* along with all its furnishings and equipment. They must carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings as you travel, and they must take care of it and camp around it. 51Whenever it is time for the Tabernacle to move, the Levites will take it down. And when it is time to stop, they will set it up again. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the Tabernacle must be put to death. 52Each tribe of Israel will camp in a designated area with its own family banner. 53But the Levites will camp around the Tabernacle of the Covenant to protect the community of Israel from the LORD’s anger. The Levites are responsible to stand guard around the Tabernacle."

54So the Israelites did everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

NOTES

1:1 Tabernacle. In the ancient Near East portable shrines were pitched in the center of a camp as a place for the kings and priests to meet with their gods while on campaign (Harrison 1990:32). Since Yahweh was Israel’s battle chief, the closer parallel is the Egyptian practice of placing their commander’s tent in the middle of a rectangular camp and surrounding it with his officers. This is well illustrated in the military camp of Rameses II (Kitchen 1960:11; Milgrom 1989:11; Yadin 1963:264; see note at 2:2).

1:2 record the names. Lit., “to lift the head” (cf. 26:2; Exod 30:12), which is combined with “by their skulls,” speaking of a headcount (1:2, 18, 20, 22; 3:47).

by their clans and families. Lit., “by their clans, by the house of their fathers.” Terminology for Israel’s subdivisions is inexact, especially the “paternal household” (beth ‘aboth [TH1004/1, ZH1074/3]), which is understood variously as a synonym for the whole nation (Ps 45:10?); NLT, “family”), a tribe (Josh 22:14; 1 Kgs 8:1), a tribal grouping of multiple clans (Hirsch 1971:2-3; Levine 1993:131-133), a synonym for “clan” (Milgrom 1989:5), a subdivision of the clans (Gray 1903:4-6), or a nuclear family (Exod 12:3; Ps 45:10?). Allowing for flexibility and overlapping terminology, the general hierarchy was this: All Israel was divided into 12 tribes, which were subdivided into clans, then into patriarchal houses (i.e., an extended family under a paternal grandfather’s authority), and finally into nuclear families (cf. analogous references in Josh 7:14; Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 10:21; 1 Chr 23:11).


1:6-15 The order of the tribes is listed by order of birth (Gen 29–30), minus Levi, but grouped by mother: Leah (Reuben–Zebulun), then Rachel (Ephraim–Benjamin), then the concubines Bilhah and Zilpah (Dan–Naphtali).

1:14 Deuel. This follows the Hebrew (also at 7:42, 47; 10:20); cf. “Reuel” (LXX and Syriac). Elsewhere the Hebrew has “Reuel” (re’u’el [TH7467, ZH8294]): Once for this same man (a copyist’s error at 2:14, mistaking the initial Daleth [D] for Resh [R]), but otherwise for a son of Esau, an ancestor of an Edomite clan (Gen 36:4, 10, 13, 17; 1 Chr 1:35, 37), for Moses’s father-in-law (10:29; Exod 2:18), and for a returning Benjamite exile (1 Chr 9:8).
1:50 take care of it. The Hebrew is *sharath* [טב8334, צב9250], a term referring to service like that of an administrative assistant (e.g., Exod 24:13; 1 Kgs 19:21; Ps 103:21). In the cult, it was used for priestly and for non-priestly attendants (e.g., 1:50; 3:31).

1:50, 51, 53 Here we have a cluster of Tabernacle terms: “Tabernacle” (*mishkan* [טב4908, צב5438], four times) and “Tabernacle of the Covenant” (*mishkan ha’eduth* [טב5715, צב6343], three times). The *mishkan* was God’s camp tent, making good on his covenantal promise to dwell among his people (Exod 25:8; 29:45; Lev 26:11). The *mishkan ha’eduth*, “Tabernacle of the Testimony/Covenant,” was so called because it housed the Ark of the Testimony (cf. 4:5 mg; 7:89 mg; Exod 25:22 mg), or Ark of the Covenant (10:33; 14:44; Deut 10:8; Heb 9:4), which held the tablets that testified to God’s covenant with Israel (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20).

1:51 unauthorized person. Lit., “a stranger.” Here, this refers to anyone other than the Levitical and priestly servants of the Tabernacle (3:10, 38; 18:4, 7; Lev 22:10-12).

**COMMENTARY**

At Sinai, Israel fell into idolatry and debauchery (Exod 32:1-6); nonetheless, the Lord sustained his covenant with them. So Numbers 1–10 picks up the account, recording initial high hopes and ready obedience in the people’s first steps from slavery to landed nationhood.

**Selecting the Officials (1:1–16).** Fourteen months after Israel’s departure from Egypt (1:1), God told Moses to register potential men of arms, marking a transition from a band of freed slaves to an organized military camp on its way to becoming a great nation (1:1–4:49). Here the narrator makes no complaint about this standard feature of battle plans and assessment. Later leaders instituted counts not so much for enlisting servants of God and Torah as for measuring the military assets of king and country (2 Sam 24:1-2; 1 Chr 21:1). The ancient Near Eastern counts generally focus on the militarily fit (as do 2 Sam 24:9; 2 Chr 14:8), but for this all-important expedition there was no exemption from military service (Deut 20:5-8; 28:30). *The Legend of King Keret* describes a summons that allowed none of the expected deferments:

The only son must shut up his house,
the widow hire someone (to go).

The invalid must take up his bed,
the blind man must grope his way along.

The newly-wed must go forth,
entrusting his wife to someone else,
his beloved to someone unrelated.

This entire, all-inclusive troop enlistment of Israel’s young men died in the wilderness without advancing on the Promised Land, an appalling miscarriage of national purpose.

**Counting the Fighting Men; Exempting the Levites (1:17–53).** Earlier, Moses had ascended Sinai to meet God. Thereafter, he came to the Tent of Meeting, which had been pitched outside the camp (Exod 33:7-11). Once the Tabernacle complex sited the sacred tent at camp center, the Levites formed a protective cordon between it and the camps of Israel’s twelve tribes (1:53).
The Lord had exempted the Levites from the military draft (1:48-53), but not from national service. They were to help the priests and to serve the Tabernacle as attendants in camp (1:50a), as porters when on the move (1:50b-51a), and as “military defenders of the cult and its cultic centers” (Spencer 1998:546; 1:51b-53). In the last role, they were to “put to death” anyone engaged in unauthorized cultic activity (1:51; cf. 3:10, 38; 18:7).

God dwelled in the camp with his people. The incarnation of Christ would further manifest this promise to dwell among his people (John 1:1-18). Even when Jesus went away, he promised the continuation of that presence (Matt 18:20; 28:20). For that reason, the New Testament can speak of the corporate body of believers (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:5), and even of the individual believer’s body (1 Cor 6:19), as God’s dwelling place. And this sanctuary, too, must be protected against defilement (Matt 18:17; Acts 5:1-11; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5; 11:27-34; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 John 1:10). One day, full realization of the promise of his presence will be found in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-4).

A Note of Compliance (1:54). The first chapter ends on a note of obedience, a recurring note early on in the book, although in the subsequent period, we seldom hear of orders being obeyed until the second generation.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Obedience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1-3</td>
<td>Moses conducts the survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3-4</td>
<td>Moses and Aaron and the tribal leaders conduct the survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>Israel conducts a military registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>The count is organized by tribe, clan, and family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Israel’s lists always number twelve tribes, no matter how they arrive at that number. This count balances Levi’s omission by giving the Joseph tribes a double portion (1:10, 32-35; cf. Gen 49:22-26; Deut 33:13-17). The list retains the same ordering principle at work in verses 5-15, but partially adapted to the arrangement of the camp. The troop total of 603,550 accords with other accounts concerning the number of males who left Egypt (1:46; 11:21; Exod 12:37; 38:26). Including women and children, this would have constituted a camp of two to three million, demonstrating fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen 17:1-8).

ENDNOTES
1. Cited from COS 1.102:334; also found in ANET 143-144.
b. Arranging the camp by tribes (2:1-31)

Then the LORD gave these instructions to Moses and Aaron: "When the Israelites set up camp, each tribe will be assigned its own area. The tribal divisions will camp beneath their family banners on all four sides of the Tabernacle,* but at some distance from it.

2-4 The divisions of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are to camp toward the sunrise on the east side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Nahshon son of Amminadab</td>
<td>74,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issachar</td>
<td>Nethanel son of Zuar</td>
<td>54,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebulun</td>
<td>Eliab son of Helon</td>
<td>57,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the total of all the troops on Judah's side of the camp is 186,400. These three tribes are to lead the way whenever the Israelites travel to a new campsite.

5-6 The divisions of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad are to camp on the south side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>Elizur son of Shedeur</td>
<td>46,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai</td>
<td>59,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gad</td>
<td>Eliasaph son of Deuel*</td>
<td>45,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the total of all the troops on Reuben's side of the camp is 151,450. These three tribes will be second in line whenever the Israelites travel.

7-8 The divisions of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin are to camp on the west side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim</td>
<td>Elishama son of Ammihud</td>
<td>40,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasseh</td>
<td>Gamaliel son of Pedahzur</td>
<td>32,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Abidan son of Gideoni</td>
<td>35,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the total of all the troops on Ephraim's side of the camp is 108,100. These three tribes will be third in line whenever the Israelites travel.

9-10 The divisions of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali are to camp on the north side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai</td>
<td>62,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>Pagiel son of Ocran</td>
<td>41,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphtali</td>
<td>Ahira son of Enan</td>
<td>53,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the total of all the troops on Dan's side of the camp is 157,600. These three tribes will be last, marching under their banners whenever the Israelites travel."

NOTES
2:2 Hebrew the Tent of Meeting; also in 2:17. 2:14-15 As in many Hebrew manuscripts, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Latin Vulgate [see also 1:14]; most Hebrew manuscripts read son of Reuel.

2 The tribal divisions will camp beneath their family banners. Lit., "each with/under his division/banner" (‘ish al-diglo [TH376/1714, ZH408/1840]) "and with his paternal household sign" (be‘othoth lebeth abotham [TH1004/1, ZH1074/3]). Jewish tradition says each divisional
banner displayed a figure: Judah’s a lion, Reuben’s a man, Ephraim’s an ox, and Dan’s an eagle (Cohen 1983:798; see 1:52; cf. Ezek 1:10; Rev 4:7), and each tribe’s banner matched the color of its stone on the high priest’s chestpiece (Numbers Rabbinic 2:7; cf. Exod 39:14). Levine and Milgrom draw on Persian parallels to describe the degel [TH1714, ZH1840] as a “sociomilitary unit” (Levine 1993:147-148) or as a garrison of about 1,000 men living together with their families (Milgrom 1989:11). Yadin has shown this same three-tribe divisional plan in the Qumran War Scroll (1962:168-181). The ‘oth [TH226, ZH253] was an ensign or banner. For the expression “their paternal house,” see note on 1:2. The order for camping and marching in ch 2 differs somewhat from that of the military census (ch 1). In ch 1, the count began with Reuben, the firstborn; in ch 2, the camp arrangement and marching order begins with the preeminent tribe of Judah. Even so, the ordering of the subgroups that this chapter forms into larger, three-tribe groups remains the same.

four sides of the Tabernacle. The Egyptian army of Rameses (thirteenth century BC) camped in a square with the royal tent in the middle, with the officers’ tents placed round it for protection, like the Levites here (Kitchen 1960:11; Milgrom 1989:11; Yadin 1963:264).

at some distance from it. The term neged [TH5048, ZH5584] can mean “in front of” (RSV, NRSV); however, here it means “at a distance” (NLT, also KJV, NASB, NIV). The rabbis figured 2,000 cubits (i.e., 3,000 feet) for this distance; it was the limit for walking on the Sabbath (b. Sotah 5:3), and it was the distance by which the Ark led Israel when crossing the Jordan (Josh 3:4).

2:3-4 divisions of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Lit., “the division of the camp of Judah,” that is, “the Judah division,” comprising the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The same formula is followed for the other three-tribe divisions: Reuben (2:10-11), Ephraim (2:18-19), and Dan (2:25-26).

Nahshon. This was Aaron’s brother-in-law (Exod 6:23), his marriage perhaps forming a covenantal link between Aaron’s priestly line and the royal line of Judah (Milgrom 1989:300 n. 8; Galil 1985).

2:10 south side. Lit., “right,” or what is on the right as one faces east.

2:14-15 Deuel. The Hebrew has Re’u’el [TH7467, ZH8294] (see note on 1:14).

2:17 Tabernacle, carried by the Levites, will set out. Lit., “when the Tent of Meeting sets out, the camp of the Levites.” “The Tabernacle” is in apposition to “the camp of the Levites,” defining them as the Tent of Meeting division.

2:31 These three tribes . . . under their banners. The last phrase is better understood as not referring to the Danite division marching under its divisional banner (1:52; 2:2, 3, 10, 17, 18, 25, 31, 34) but to all four three-tribe divisions marching under their divisional banners (Dillmann and Knobel 1886:13).

COMMENTARY

These instructions came to both Moses and Aaron (2:1; see also 1:3, 17, 44), which is unusual; however, it is supported by a pattern of Moses’s coleadership with his brother, the priest (Exod 4:14-16). God positioned the twelve tribes in four military divisions on the compass points around the Tabernacle. Inside that ring, the Levites formed a cordon between the Tabernacle and the flanking tribes.

Reuben and Gad, who later settled in the east, camped to the south. The southern tribe of Judah camped on the east with Issachar and Zebulun, who later settled in the north. Benjamin, whose names means “southerner,” camped to the west. And so it went, with no attention to the subsequent tribal geography. Instead, symmetry,
lines of authority, and concentric holiness ruled how the camp was distributed. Dispersal around the four compass points made for a symmetrical camp. The listing of a tribal leader for each tribe and a lead tribe for each three-tribe division laid out lines of authority, a continuing motif throughout Numbers. And the concentric camp displayed concentric holiness, with holiness increasing as one worked from the boundaries of Israel’s tribal camps into the inner cordon of Levites, the Tabernacle walls, and finally all the way into the Ark inside the Holiest Place.

Hoffmeier mounts a spirited offense against dating the camp and Tabernacle description as late as a documentary hypothesis would (2005:202-208). He says, “The plan of Ramesses II’s camp, which unquestionably dates to the mid-thirteenth century, is the closest analogue to the wilderness Tabernacle as described in Exodus 25ff” (2005:208). Locating the Tabernacle in the center of a rectangular camp is especially similar to Rameses II’s camp at Kadesh, with the pharaoh’s own tent camp located at the center of the armies’ camps (Hoffmeier 2005:206; Gressmann 1913:240-242; Homan 2000; Homan 2002:ch 7; Kitchen 2003:275-283).

We recognize in the symmetry the same beauty and order that characterized Genesis 1 (Allen 1990:713). This, in turn, formed a prototype for the new Temple (Ezek 40–48), with its primacy of the eastern side (Ezek 47:1a), centrality of the divine presence (Ezek 48:8-20), and inner court walls doing what the Levites did in the wilderness and the other court walls doing what the four three-tribe divisions did (E. W. Davies 1995b:19). Finally, this points us to the new creation’s foursquare “scheme for the new Jerusalem” (Snaith 1969:123; see also G. J. Wenham 1981:68; see Rev 21:10–22:5).

**Eastern Tribes (2:1–9).** The royal tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-10) led the largest three-tribe division (2:9, cf. 2:16, 24, 31). They posted up to the east of the Tabernacle (2:3), an honored position at its entrance, and they led the way on the march (2:9). In the ancient Near East, the east was the primary direction, the front, the direction of the dawn. Eden had been sited “in the east” (Gen 2:8); therefore, although the east could also be a place of threat and exile, hope grew that God’s redemption would come from the east, from the place of Paradise Lost (Sailhamer 1992:371; see
Ezek 43:2-4; Zech 14:4; Matt 24:27). Judah’s leadership here foreshadows Judah’s future military leadership through its lionlike Davidic kings (Gen 49:8-9), a status which extends even to John’s exclamation, “Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne, has won the victory” (Rev 5:5).

**Southern Tribes (2:10-16).** Reuben led a medium-sized division (2:16, cf. 2:9, 24, 31), which camped to the south (2:10) and marched second (2:16). Sherwood says the south was a place of dishonor (Douglas 1993:175-179). It was the place for (1) Kohathites (3:28-29), from whom the Levitical rebel Korah would come (16:1); (2) Reuben, whom his father Jacob had cursed for having sexual relations with Jacob’s concubine Bilhah (Gen 35:22; 49:3-4); (3) Simeon, who was rebuked for excessive violence in avenging Dinah’s rape (Gen 34:30); and (4) Gad, with low status as a son of Leah’s servant, Zilpah (Gen 30:9-11). One might better argue that the south was the prime location after the east (Gray 1903:16-18): (1) It is mentioned first after the east in this sequence; (2) Reuben and Simeon were also sons of Leah, Judah’s mother (Gen 46:8-15); (3) the Kohathites were the premier Levitical clan, the clan of Moses and Aaron and the clan that carried the Tabernacle’s most holy furnishings; and (4) the right-hand side (which, relative to Judah’s position in the east, is the south) is a place of prominence.

**Central Tribe: Levites (2:17).** The Levites formed an interior cordon to shield the sanctuary from violation by intruders (1:51; 2:17). The Levites’ movement in their protected position in the column is described as the Tabernacle’s movement (2:17). The four tribal divisions (cf. 3:23-39; the Aaronites [and Moses], the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the Merarites) served as the Tabernacle’s vanguard and rearguard, each marching under its three-tribe divisional banner.

**Western Tribes (2:18-24).** Ephraim led the smallest division (2:24, cf. 2:9, 16, 31), comprising the three smallest tribes (2:18-23; cf. 2:3-8, 10-15, 25-30). The Ephraim division camped to the west (2:18) and moved third in the line of march (2:24), following not only the two divisions of Judah and Reuben, but also the Levitical Tabernacle division (2:9, 16).

**Northern Tribes (2:25-31).** Dan led a medium-sized tribal division (2:31; cf. 2:9, 16, 24), which camped north of the Tabernacle. It marched at the tail of the column (2:31). Dan, as the firstborn of Jacob’s children from his concubines (Gen 30:3-6), led the concubines’ offspring, except for Gad, which was incorporated into Reuben’s division (2:10).

**c. Summary of the first census (2:32-34)**

32In summary, the troops of Israel listed by their families totaled 603,550. 33But as the LORD had commanded, the Levites were not included in this registration. 34So the people of Israel did everything as the LORD had commanded Moses. Each clan and family set up camp and marched under their banners exactly as the LORD had instructed them.
Deuteronomy
EUGENE H. MERRILL
INTRODUCTION TO

Deuteronomy

DEUTERONOMY is sometimes called “the theology book of the Old Testament” because it summarizes the teachings of Moses in the rest of the Pentateuch and lays the foundation for the messages of the poets and prophets who followed him. In content, it consists of Moses’s farewell address to the nation of Israel, and in form, it is largely a covenant document reminding the people of God’s gracious act of calling them to be his special community and of their responsibility to fulfill that calling by representing him before all the nations. When tempted in the desert, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy, and the writers of the New Testament cite it more than any other Old Testament book except Isaiah and Psalms. Careful reading and study of its great theological themes will inevitably lead one to a fuller understanding of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ.

AUTHOR

Until the advent of the European Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was continuous and nearly unanimous consensus among Jews and Christians alike that Moses was the author of Deuteronomy (Eissfeldt 1965:155-159). This conviction arose from the tradition that Moses wrote the entire Torah (or Pentateuch, the fifth book of which is Deuteronomy) and from the internal evidence of the book itself as to its authorship (29:1; 31:9, 22, 24; 32:45). Further confirmation was based on the later Old Testament record (Josh 1:7, 13; 8:31-35; 23:6; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 21:8; 23:25; 2 Chr 23:18; 25:4; 33:8; 34:14; Ezra 3:2; Neh 9:14; 10:29; 13:1; Dan 9:13), the New Testament (Matt 19:7-8; 22:19; Mark 12:19; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:19; 1 Cor 9:9; Rev 15:3), and extracanonical Jewish literature such as the Apocrypha (Prologue to Ben Sirach), the Talmud (b. Baba Batra 14b), and the apologetic works of Josephus (Against Apion 1.8 [1.38-39]).

For the Christian, the testimony of Jesus on the matter is particularly compelling. For example, when the Pharisees raised the issue of divorce, they cited a text from Deuteronomy (24:1-4), which they attributed to Moses. In his response, Jesus did not correct their connecting the passage to Moses; in fact, he said, "Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts" (Matt 19:7-8). Likewise, when his critics challenged Jesus about the failure of his disciples to observe the oral traditions, he alluded to Deuteronomy 5:16 (found also in Exod 20:12): “Moses gave you this law from God: ‘Honor your father and mother’” (Mark 7:10). His statement was
designed to show that whereas the Pharisees were quick to honor human traditions, they were slow to obey the clear word of God. Thus, Jesus clearly associated Deuteronomy with Moses himself (cf. also Mark 12:18-24).

Despite this authoritative endorsement, the prevailing view in Old Testament scholarship today is that Moses did not write Deuteronomy and that, in fact, the book did not originate until 700 years after his death. Admittedly, b. Baba Batra 14b had suggested that the very end of the book—the account of Moses’s death and burial (Deut 34:5-12)—was from another pen, probably Joshua’s. Apart from this, hardly a single question was raised until the post-Renaissance period and the development of the so-called historical-critical method.

This approach, linked with such names as Simon, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Eichhorn, argued on the basis of the varying uses of divine names; evidence of repetitions, contradictions, and doublets; varying literary styles and vocabulary; and different theological and ideological perspectives that the Pentateuch was a composite of sources, none of which was as early as Moses (Eissfeldt 1965:159-162). These sources came to be known as J (standing for “Yahweh” or “the Yahwist”—both start with J in German), E (“Elohim” or “Elohist”), D (Deuteronomy), and P (the Priestly source). W. M. L. de Wette, in an 1805 dissertation, proposed that the J and E materials (most of Genesis through Numbers) were post-Mosaic and that Deuteronomy presupposed both of those alleged sources, thus making Deuteronomy later still (Rogerson 1992:40-42). He then went on to suggest that the scroll found in the Jerusalem Temple during Josiah’s reformation of 622 BC (see 2 Kgs 22:8–23:3; 2 Chr 34:14-33) was none other than Deuteronomy and that it had only recently been composed and placed in the Temple. The effect of this hypothesis is to deny Moses any hand whatsoever in the authorship of the book.¹

This point of view dominates the field of modern critical scholarship, though certain recent discoveries—such as the formal resemblance of Deuteronomy to Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC) treaty texts—have forced some scholars to reassess the situation and to look more positively at possible Mosaic input (Mendenhall 1954). Some are willing to go so far as to concede that the core religious content of Deuteronomy may go back to Moses, at least in oral form, but few are prepared to accept the ancient tradition of full Mosaic authorship (Nicholson 1967:121). On balance, however, it must be said that there is absolutely no objective evidence that compels a late provenance for the book; in fact, the available data point more strongly than ever to Moses as the author not only of Deuteronomy, but of the entire Pentateuch (Wolf 1991:78).²

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING
Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy obviously necessitates its Mosaic milieu. That is, the date of the book is linked to the date(s) of the man himself. Specifically, the writing is said to have taken place at the very end of Moses’s life, just before he ascended Mount Nebo to view the Land of Promise, to which he had been denied access (cf. 31:1, 9, 24-29; 32:44-52). This raises the need to determine, if possible,
the date of Moses’s death, a matter of some uncertainty even among those who take
seriously the historicity of the event.

It is impossible here to rehearse the whole debate about Old Testament chronol-
ogy, especially for the pre-monarchy period. I myself and others have done so at
great length elsewhere (Merrill 2008:83-96). However, those facts necessary to the
matter at hand must be addressed, as well as the chronological and histori-
ographical assumptions upon which they are based. A straightforward reading and
interpretation of the Masoretic chronological tradition puts beyond doubt the
datum that the exodus of Israel from Egypt took place exactly 480 years prior to the
commencement of the building of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kgs 6:1). This latter date—
967/966 BC—is virtually certain according to the best means of computation. The
Exodus, then, occurred in 1446. Moses died 40 years after the Exodus (2:7; 31:1-2;
34:7; Exod 7:7), in 1406 BC. Archaeologically speaking, this was in the Late Bronze
Age, specifically Late Bronze II.

Such information might appear to settle the case once and for all but there is
another—perhaps majority—view that dates the Exodus to the mid-thirteenth cen-
tury (c. 1250 BC) and Moses’s death 40 years after that. This date for the Exodus
appears to find support in the archaeological record, which seems to give evidence
of massive destruction in late-thirteenth-century Canaan, a destruction attributed
to the conquest under Joshua. This reading necessitates the assumption that
1 Kings 6:1 is a symbolic number (12 x 40—that is, 12 generations of a symbolic
40 years each; see Bright 1981:123), and it also disregards the clear biblical witness
that the conquest, while bloody, was virtually without violence against physical
structures, thus leaving no archaeological record (6:10-15; 19:1; cf. Josh 24:13; see
Merrill 1982:107-121). Only the cities of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor are said to have
been destroyed by Israel (Josh 6:24; 8:28; 11:13). The ravages of undisciplined
archaeological method and natural erosion have left the Jericho evidence ambigui-
ous at best, Ai has yet to be identified with certainty, and Hazor yields more than
one interpretation.3 The attested destruction of earlier sites and the eruption of
scores of highland villages in the late thirteenth century can be explained by the
tumultuous times of the judges of that period (Judg 4:3; 5:6-7; 6:1-6; 9:40-55) just
as well as by a late conquest by Israel. On the whole, the case for an early Exodus
and thus a 1400 BC date for Moses’s death and the writing of Deuteronomy has the
most in its favor.

Few books of the Bible have a more clearly articulated occasion than Deuter-
onomy. The opening statement declares that “these are the words that Moses spoke
to all the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan River”
(1:1). To this setting is added the explanation that “forty years after the Israelites left
Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel,
telling them everything the LORD had commanded him to say” (1:3). Thus, the geo-
ographical setting is the Transjordan, the chronological setting is 40 years after the
Exodus and the giving of the law at Sinai, and the purpose of the writing is to com-
 municate what God revealed to Moses at the plains of Moab.
That revelation consisted of a review of God’s dealings with the nation from the Exodus to the time of Moses’s speech (chs 1–4), the setting forth of a covenant-renewal text (chs 5–28), and a concluding series of exhortations, warnings, promises, instructions, and narratives (chs 29–34). The similarities between the contents of the covenant section of Deuteronomy and various parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers have led many readers to the rather facile conclusion that Deuteronomy is nothing but a repetition of the earlier Sinaitic covenant. In fact, the title itself feeds this misunderstanding about Deuteronomy’s intent and purpose. The word derives from the Latin Vulgate’s deuteronomium, itself a transliteration of the Greek (LXX) version’s title of the book, deuteronomion (“second law”), a title that dates from about 250–200 BC. The notion that Deuteronomy was a “second law” (second to the Sinaitic law) resulted from a faulty understanding of 17:18, in which the book is called mishne hattorah hazzo’t [TH4932/8451, ZH5467/9368] (“a copy of this law”; to deuteronomion touto in LXX). The intent of the phrase is to suggest not that Deuteronomy is just a repetition of previous legal texts, but that the book itself should be copied and preserved for future generations.

In any event, a close scrutiny of Deuteronomy’s contents makes clear the significant differences between it and the earlier legislation. It is true, the Sinai covenant is presupposed by Deuteronomy and, in fact, forms its underpinnings and raison d’être. But the covenant content of Deuteronomy is much more expansive and goes far beyond the clearly limited intent of the Sinaitic revelation. That intent was (1) to establish the fact that Israel was a redeemed people called to a divine mission and (2) to outline the basic principles by which that mission was to be carried out in the immediate future. Forty years had passed, however, and a new generation was about to embark on a new adventure—the conquest and occupation of the Promised Land. No longer would Israel be a nomadic people en route to its permanent home. They would now become a settled, domestic, urbanized community. With that radical shift of nature and prospect arose the need for a radically different version of the covenant, one suitable to a new generation in a new place and time (Longman and Dillard 2006:92-93).

Deuteronomy, then, is in its most basic form the text of that revised and expanded covenant. The Sinai generation had all but passed from the scene because of its disobedience (cf. Num 14:26-35), and now the new generation was called upon to renew its covenant commitment to Yahweh. In principle, the Deuteronomic covenant was identical to the Sinaitic; in detailed exposition and practical application, it was a considerable advancement.

AUDIENCE
The immediate audience of the book of Deuteronomy was literally that—an audience—because the book appears to consist of a series of messages first delivered orally by Moses (cf. 1:1; 5:1; 27:1, 9, 11; 29:2; 31:1, 30). Scholars have pointed out the sermonic nature of the material and, in fact, have spoken of the whole collection as Moses’s farewell address (Keil and Delitzsch n.d.:276). I have already proposed
that Moses was addressing the younger generation of Israelites, those who had survived the rigors and judgment of the desert wanderings and who were on the threshold of entering the land promised to their patriarchal ancestors. But the message was not for them alone, or it would never have been put into writing and enshrined within the canonical collection as sacred Scripture. In fact, the book itself refers regularly to the need to write down its teachings precisely so they could be preserved and transmitted to future generations (cf. 28:58; 29:20; 30:10; 31:19, 22, 24).

The audience also reached far beyond Israel and embraced the church as well. Next to Isaiah and Psalms, Deuteronomy is cited or alluded to more times in the New Testament than any other Old Testament writing, well over 100 times. Clearly Jesus, the apostles, and the early church recognized the ongoing theological significance and authority of the book and appreciated the enlargement of its horizons as going beyond the masses gathered in the plains of Moab to include men and women of faith for all time. The message as delivered by Moses may have had its most specific and immediate relevance to those who heard him, but they could not and did not exhaust its theological and practical significance.

**CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY**

Deuteronomy, as a part of the Mosaic Torah, was never subject to debate regarding its canonicity. Its very association with the inspired lawgiver guaranteed its insulation against challenges to its authenticity or authority. Its constant citation throughout the Old and New Testaments testifies to its canonical status. Rabbinical controversy regarding the canonicity of certain Old Testament books never gave a hint of concern about Deuteronomy. Finally, every ancient list of the canonical books includes Deuteronomy, and it is always listed as a constituent part of the Mosaic literature.

The text of Deuteronomy is remarkably well-preserved and uncontested in terms of both its Hebrew manuscript tradition and its relationship to the ancient versions (Tigay 1996:xi). The evidence from Qumran is quite ample and supports, for the most part, the best-attested Masoretic readings (Ulrich 1995). Its variations from the major versions such as the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch are usually because of the typical aversion of the latter two to the anthropomorphisms of Hebrew thought and language, their occasional dependence on non-Masoretic sources, and other such factors (Wevers 1977:498-505). Of special interest are the places where the Samaritan Pentateuch’s Deuteronomy goes against the Masoretic Text in order to justify the claims of the Samaritan community with regard to the proper place and mode of community worship. For example, where the Masoretic Text reads “Mount Ebal” in 27:4, the Samaritan Pentateuch has “Mount Gerizim,” the place where the later Samaritan temple stood. Such changes are so obviously ideological in nature that they confirm the authenticity of the Masoretic Text (Tov 1992:94-95).

**LITERARY STYLE**

Were one to attempt to encapsulate the entire book of Deuteronomy within one literary rubric, the most appropriate term might be valedictory. The book clearly
The covenant as a pledge of God’s promise fulfillments. Not to be overlooked in secular suzerain–vassal treaty arrangements was the self-imposed obligation of the Great King toward his subordinates. This involved protection, provision in times of want, assurance of friendship, and the like. Since these were promises made by human rulers, as often as not, they were either ignored or proved impossible to keep.

Yahweh likewise had made promises to the Hebrew patriarchs, pledges he renewed to Israel as an element of his covenant participation. These included victory over their foes (9:3), inheritance of Canaan (1:21; 6:18, 23), prosperity of spiritual and physical life (12:20; 13:17; 15:6), and, most important of all, his loyalty and faithfulness to them forever (7:12; 26:18; 28:9). The promises of Yahweh in the context of a formal covenant document were not to remind him of his commitments, as goes without saying, but to remind Israel that the God who cannot lie had staked his own reputation on his covenant with them, enshrined in a written text.

OUTLINE

I. The Covenant Setting (1:1–5)

II. The Historical Review and Mosaic Exhortation (1:6–4:40)

A. The Past Dealings of Yahweh with Israel (1:6–3:29)
   1. Events at Sinai (1:6–18)
   2. Instructions at Kadesh-barnea (1:19–25)
   3. Disobedience at Kadesh-barnea (1:26–33)
   4. Judgment at Kadesh-barnea (1:34–40)
   5. Unsuccessful attempt at conquest (1:41–46)
   6. Instructions concerning Edom (2:1–8a)
   7. Instructions concerning Moab (2:8b–15)
   8. Instruction concerning Ammon (2:16–25)
   9. Defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon (2:26–37)
  10. Defeat of Og, king of Bashan (3:1–11)
  11. Distribution of the Transjordanian allotments (3:12–17)
  12. Instructions to the Transjordanian tribes (3:18–22)
  13. Moses denied the Promised Land (3:23–29)

B. The Exhortation of Moses (4:1–40)
   1. The privileges of the covenant (4:1–8)
   2. Reminder of the Horeb covenant (4:9–14)
   3. The nature of Israel’s God (4:15–24)
   4. Threats and blessings (4:25–31)
   5. The uniqueness of Israel’s God (4:32–40)

III. The Preparation for the Covenant Text (4:41–49)

A. The Narrative concerning Cities of Refuge (4:41–43)
B. The Setting and Introduction (4:44–49)
IV. The Principles of the Covenant (5:1–11:32)
   A. The Opening Exhortation (5:1-5)
   B. The Ten Commandments (5:6-21)
      1. Commandments pertaining to one's relationship with God (5:6-15)
      2. Commandments pertaining to the people's relationships with one another (5:16-21)
   C. The Narrative Relating the Sinai Revelation and Israel's Response (5:22-33)
   D. The Nature of the Principles (6:1-25)
      1. Exhortation to obey the covenant principles (6:1-3)
      2. The essence of the covenant principles (6:4-5)
      3. Exhortation to teach the covenant stipulations (6:6-9)
      4. Exhortation to give Yahweh exclusive obedience (6:10-19)
      5. Exhortation to remember the past (6:20-25)
   E. The Content of the Principles (7:1–11:32)
      1. Driving out the nations (7:1-26)
         a. Exhortation to holiness (7:1-6)
         b. The basis of Israel’s election (7:7-11)
         c. Promises of blessing for covenant obedience (7:12-15)
         d. Exhortation to destroy Canaanite paganism (7:16-26)
      2. Yahweh as the source of blessing (8:1-20)
         a. Yahweh’s provision in the wilderness (8:1-10)
         b. Exhortation to remember that blessing comes from God (8:11-20)
      3. Blessing as a product of grace (9:1–10:11)
         a. Victory by God’s grace (9:1–6)
         b. A history of Israel’s stubbornness (9:7–24)
         c. Moses’s plea on behalf of Yahweh’s reputation (9:25–29)
         d. The opportunity to begin again (10:1–5)
         e. Conclusion of the historical résumé (10:6–11)
      4. Love of Yahweh and love of people (10:12–22)
      5. Obedience and disobedience and their rewards (11:1–32)
         a. Reiteration of the call to obedience (11:1–7)
         b. The bounties of the Land of Promise (11:8–15)
         c. Exhortation to instruction and obedience (11:16–25)
         d. Anticipation of a blessing and cursing ceremony (11:26–32)
   V. The Specific Stipulations of the Covenant (12:1–26:15)
   A. The Exclusiveness of Yahweh and His Worship (12:1–16:17)
      1. The central sanctuary (12:1–14)
      2. The sanctity of blood (12:15–19)
3. The problem of distance (12:20–28)
4. The abomination of pagan gods (12:29–31)
5. The evil of false prophets (12:32–13:11)
6. Punishment of community idolatry (13:12–18)
7. The distinction between clean and unclean animals (14:1–21)
8. Tribute to the sovereign (14:22–29)
9. Release for debtors (15:1–6)
10. The spirit of liberality (15:7–11)
11. Release of debtors (15:12–18)
12. Giving God the best (15:19–23)
13. The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (16:1–8)
14. The Festival of Harvest (16:9–12)
15. The Festival of Shelters (16:13–17)
B. Kingdom Officials (16:18–18:22)
1. Judges and officers (16:18–17:13)
   a. Provision for the offices (16:18–20)
   b. Examples of legal cases (16:21–17:1)
   c. Judgment for idolatry (17:2–7)
   d. Appeal to a higher court (17:8–13)
2. Kings (17:14–20)
3. Priests and Levites (18:1–8)
4. Prophets (18:9–22)
C. Civil Law (19:1–21:23)
1. Legal provisions for manslaughter (19:1–13)
2. The testimony of witnesses (19:14–21)
3. The Manual of War (20:1–20)
4. Disposition of unsolved murder (21:1–9)
5. Laws concerning captive wives (21:10–14)
7. Disposition of a criminal’s remains (21:22–23)
D. Laws of Purity (22:1–23:18)
1. Laws concerning preservation of life (22:1–8)
2. Illustrations of principles of purity (22:9–12)
4. Purity in worship (23:1–8)
5. Purity in personal hygiene (23:9–14)
7. Purity in worship practice (23:17–18)
1. Respect for others’ property (23:19–24:7)
2. Respect for human dignity (24:8–25:4)
3. Respect for the significance of others (25:5-16)
4. Revenge on the Amalekites (25:17-19)
F. Laws of Covenant Celebration and Confirmation (26:1-15)
   1. The offering of the firstfruits (26:1-11)
   2. Presentation of the third-year tithe (26:12-15)
VI. Exhortation and Narrative Interlude (26:16-19)
VII. The Curses and Blessings (27:1–29:1)
   A. The Gathering at Shechem (27:1-13)
   B. The Curses That Follow Disobedience (27:14-26)
   C. The Blessings That Follow Obedience (28:1-14)
   D. The Curses That Follow Disobedience of General Stipulations (28:15-68)
      1. Curses as reversal of blessings (28:15-19)
      2. Curses of disease and drought (28:20-24)
      3. Curses of defeat and deportation (28:25-37)
      5. Curse of an enemy siege (28:49-57)
   E. Narrative Interlude (29:1)
VIII. The Epilogic Historical Review (29:2–30:20)
   A. Review of the Exodus, Wandering, and Conquest (29:2-8)
   B. The Present Covenant Setting (29:9-15)
   C. The Cost of Disobedience (29:16-29)
   D. The Results of Covenant Disobedience (30:1-10)
   E. Exhortation to Covenant Obedience (30:11-20)
IX. Deposit of the Text and Provision for Its Future Implementation (31:1-29)
   A. Joshua’s Succession of Moses (31:1-8)
   B. The Deposit of the Text (31:9-13)
   C. Joshua’s Commission (31:14-23)
   D. Anticipation of Covenant Disloyalty (31:24-29)
X. The Song of Moses (31:30–32:43)
   A. Invocation of Witnesses (31:30–32:4)
   B. The Indictment of God’s People (32:5-6)
   C. Recital of God’s Past Benefits (32:7-14)
   D. Israel’s Rebellion (32:15–18)
   E. A Promise of Judgment (32:19-25)
   F. The Impotence of Heathen Gods (32:26-38)
   G. The Lord’s Vindication (32:39-43)
XI. Narrative Interlude (32:44–52)
XII. The Blessing of Moses (33:1–29)
A. Introduction to Moses’s Blessing of the Tribes (33:1-5)
B. The Blessing of Reuben (33:6)
C. The Blessing of Judah (33:7)
D. The Blessing of Levi (33:8-11)
E. The Blessing of Benjamin (33:12)
F. The Blessing of Joseph (33:13-17)
G. The Blessing of Zebulun and Issachar (33:18-19)
H. The Blessing of Gad (33:20-21)
I. The Blessing of Dan (33:22)
J. The Blessing of Naphtali (33:23)
K. The Blessing of Asher (33:24-25)
L. Final Praise and Benediction (33:26-29)

XIII. Narrative Epilogue (34:1-12)
A. The Death of Moses (34:1-8)
B. The Epitaph of Moses (34:9-12)

ENDNOTES

1. For a convenient review of alternative hypotheses, see Tigay 1996:xxii-xxiv. Tigay holds a view—widely espoused—that Deuteronomy arose within prophetic circles in the northern kingdom, perhaps under Hosea in the eighth century BC.


COMMENTARY ON

Deuteronomy

◆ I. The Covenant Setting (1:1–5)

These are the words that Moses spoke to all the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They were camped in the Jordan Valley near Suph, between Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab on the other.

Normally it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, going by way of Mount Seir. But forty years after the Israelites left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel, telling them everything the LORD had commanded him to say. This took place after he had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, who had ruled in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who had ruled in Ashtaroth and Edrei. While the Israelites were in the land of Moab east of the Jordan River, Moses carefully explained the LORD's instructions as follows.

1:1 Hebrew the Arabah; also in 1:7.
1:2 Hebrew Horeb, another name for Sinai; also in 1:6, 19.
1:3 Hebrew In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month. This day in the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar occurred in January or February.

NOTES

1:1 east of the Jordan River. Lit., "on the other side of the river." Obviously, if Moses wrote Deuteronomy in the land of Moab, "the other side of the river" would ordinarily refer to Canaan to the west. However, the possibility exists that among the indigenous peoples of Canaan this was a technical term for the eastern region. For a modern example, until the formation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946, the region was called the Emirate of Transjordan (1921–1946), even by those who lived there.

Jordan Valley. The Hebrew is the Arabah (see NLT mg), which means "wasteland." Though it sometimes includes the depression between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea (cf. 2:8), here it refers to the deep valley between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

1:2 Mount Sinai. NLT interprets the name Horeb (see NLT mg) here to be Mount Sinai, a correct assumption. Deuteronomy favors the name Horeb for the place of covenant (1:6, 19; 4:10, 15; 5:2; 9:8; 18:16; 29:1, NASB). Sinai occurs only in 33:2, a poetic piece.

1:3 the first day of the eleventh month. By the Hebrew calendar this would be Shebat 1, corresponding to a date in January/February on the modern Gregorian calendar (cf. NLT mg).

COMMENTARY

Deuteronomy, as a composition shaped largely on the model of an ancient Near Eastern treaty text (see Introduction), contains all the literary elements common to those texts. These treaty texts invariably begin with what some scholars call a
“preamble,” a brief section introducing the parties to the agreement, the setting in which the agreement was implemented, and other such preliminary incidentals. The first five verses of Deuteronomy serve this function.

The setting is an assembly of all the people of Israel in the Transjordan, preparatory to the conquest of Canaan to the west. The purpose of the assembly is for Moses to outline in detail the renewal of the covenant originally made with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod 19–24). The generation with whom that covenant had been made had, for the most part, died off (Num 26:63-65) because of their incessant and unrepentant rebellion against Yahweh (Num 14:20-24). Only Joshua, Caleb, and those under 20 years old survived to see the Land of Promise (Num 14:26-35; cf. Deut 1:34-40).

The phrase “all the people of Israel” (1:1) need not mean that every individual was there or could hear; for the word kol [הַלֹּא, z̄h3972] (all) also means “as a whole.” That is, the words of covenant were intended for the nation as a collective entity. The specific location of the encampment is unclear because the place names of 1:1 refer to camping places in the Sinai northward to the Transjordan (Tigay 1996:3-4, 417-422). What is certain from the narrative is that the conclave took place in the lower Jordan Valley not far north of the Dead Sea.

By referring to the ordinarily short time of 11 days to travel from Sinai to Kadesh-barnnea (1:2), Moses was already drawing attention to the rebellious spirit of his people, which had caused 11 days to stretch into nearly 40 years (1:3; cf. 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5). The journey of faith may be difficult, but it is direct. The journey of unbelief is interminable. As well as describing literal periods of time (as here), the number 40 is also of unusual symbolic value in the Bible, its main significance having to do with trials or testings (see 25:3; Gen 7:12, 17; Num 13:25; 14:33, 34; 1 Sam 17:16; 1 Kgs 19:8; Ps 95:10; Ezek 29:12, 13; Jonah 3:4; Matt 4:2; Mark 1:13). It is also a way of describing an era, a generation, or a time of reigning, perhaps the ideal in these cases (Gen 25:20; 26:34; Exod 24:18; Josh 14:7; Judg 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 13:1; 1 Sam 4:18; 2 Sam 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11; 11:42).

The setting of Moses’s address is further specified as having occurred after Israel had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites and King Og of Bashan (1:4). A full account of these campaigns appears in Numbers 21:21-35, and Moses reiterates them in Deuteronomy 2:26–3:11. For now, the intent is simply to note that all the Transjordan was under Israel’s domination—from Bashan in the north to the Amorite territory in the south—and that the stage is now set for the conquest of Canaan and possession of the Promised Land.

-II. The Historical Review and Mosaic Exhortation (1:6–4:40)
A. The Past Dealings of Yahweh with Israel (1:6–3:29)
1. Events at Sinai (1:6–18)

“When we were at Mount Sinai, the LORD our God said to us, ‘You have stayed at this mountain long enough. It is time to break camp and move on. Go to the hill
country of the Amorites and to all the neighboring regions—the Jordan Valley, the hill country, the western foothills, the Negev, and the coastal plain. Go to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, and all the way to the great Euphrates River. Look, I am giving all this land to you! Go in and occupy it, for it is the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to all their descendants."

Moses continued, "At that time I told you, 'You are too great a burden for me to carry all by myself.' The LORD your God has increased your population, making you as numerous as the stars! And may the LORD, the God of your ancestors, multiply you a thousand times more and bless you as he promised! But you are such a heavy load to carry! How can I deal with all your problems and bickering? Choose some well-respected men from each tribe who are known for their wisdom and understanding, and I will appoint them as your leaders:"

Then you responded, 'Your plan is a good one.' So I took the wise and respected men you had selected from your tribes and appointed them to serve as judges and officials over you. Some were responsible for a thousand people, some for a hundred, some for fifty, and some for ten.

At that time I instructed the judges, 'You must hear the cases of your fellow Israelites and the foreigners living among you. Be perfectly fair in your decisions and impartial in your judgments. Hear the cases of those who are poor as well as those who are rich. Don't be afraid of anyone's anger, for the decision you make is God's decision. Bring me any cases that are too difficult for you, and I will handle them.'

At that time I gave you instructions about everything you were to do.

1:7 Hebrew the Shephelah.

NOTES

1:7 The hill country of the Amorites. This refers to the great central part of Canaan, the series of mountain ranges extending from the Jezreel Valley in the north to the Negev in the south. The OT tradition (not in any way contradicted by archaeological evidence) is that the hill country at that time (c. 1400 BC, the Late Bronze Age) was populated by Amorites, whereas the valleys and plains were home to the Canaanites. Thus, Moses pointed out elsewhere that in patriarchal times, this hill country was inhabited by Canaanites (Gen 12:6; cf. Gen 13:7). He was even more precise in recording the report of the 12 spies that "[the] Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley" (Num 13:29). Clearly a change had occurred between Abraham’s time and Moses’s, the Canaanites evidently having been displaced in the hill country by the Amorites.

The land of the Canaanites. Both the historical facts (see previous note) and the grammar support a translation here of "the coastal plain, the land of the Canaanites" (Thompson 1974:85; Tigay 1996:9).

Euphrates River. The command to occupy the land as far as the Euphrates is in line with the promises to the patriarchs (Gen 15:18) and Moses’s previous statements to Israel (Exod 23:31; cf. also Deut 11:24; Josh 1:4). Historically, David may have controlled Aram as far as the Euphrates (2 Sam 8:3), and Solomon certainly did (1 Kgs 4:21, 24; 2 Chr 9:26; Ps 72:8). Eschatological texts speak of Messiah’s dominion extending to the Euphrates (Zech 9:10). The territorial assignments of the tribes under Joshua are, however, limited to Palestine proper (Josh 13:8–19:48), and Israel in the end times also seems to find its primary locus there (Ezek 47:13–48:29). Palestine, thus, will be the center of a future messianic kingdom, which will extend secondarily as far as the Euphrates.
1:10 **as numerous as the stars.** From the standpoint of modern astronomy, this is obviously hyperbole, for there appear to be hundreds of millions of stars. However, from the phenomenological viewpoint of Moses’s time, the statement is most understandable.

1:17 **the decision you make is God’s decision.** Lit., “for the judgment is God’s.” Since this is so, human judges were not to make decisions based on their own prejudices, in response to bribes or other pressures, or without careful thought. They must depend on God and realize that they represent him to the people (see Exod 4:16; 7:1).

**COMMENTARY**

The second major element of standard ancient Near Eastern treaty documents was the historical prologue, a section describing the past relationship of the covenant partners and their forebears. This appears in Deuteronomy as well, consisting of 1:6–4:40. Here Moses recounts Israel’s history from the time of the giving of the law at Sinai to the present moment, the reaffirmation of the covenant in Moab. This historical review is divided into two parts: the past dealings of Yahweh with Israel (1:6–3:29) and Moses’s exhortation (4:1–40).

The first of these encounters of Yahweh with his people was at Sinai (1:6–18). Moses did not rehearse the story of God’s appearance (the theophany) and bestowal of the covenant law at this point (see 4:9–14; 5:22–33); his interest was in the series of events that brought the nation to its present place. The Lord had told them that they had stayed at Sinai long enough; it was time to move on (1:6–7). They had arrived there two months after the Exodus (Exod 19:1) and departed for Canaan on the twentieth day of the second month (called Ziv or Iyyar = April/May) of the second year (Num 10:11). In all, they had been at Sinai for a little over a year.

Their destination was clear: They had to go to the land promised to their patriarchal ancestors (1:8). This land was comprised of a number of regions: the hill country (see notes on 1:7), the Jordan Valley (lit., “the Arabah”), the foothills (modern Shephelah), the Negev (lit., “the south”—namely, the desert land from Beersheba southward), and the coastal plain—that is, the area along the Mediterranean Sea. The order is from east to west, a pattern that makes best sense when viewed from the perspective of a group camped on the east side of the Jordan. Beyond the immediate land of Palestine, God’s promises extended to the conquest of Lebanon and the territories to the north and east as far as the Euphrates River (see notes on 1:7).

Occupation of the land was not an option but an edict. In two staccato-like commands, Yahweh had said “go in” and “occupy”! Justification for the people’s taking this mandatory action was the fact that the land was already theirs by promise to the patriarchs (Gen 15:18–21; 17:9; 26:3–4). No permission was needed from its occupants nor was any apology to them expected as a result of conquest, for they were squatters on land already belonging to Israel by divine oath (1:8).

God’s blessing of Israel proved to be a two-edged sword to Moses. He rejoiced at how God had multiplied the people until they had become as numerous as the stars (1:10). And he prayed that this might be only the beginning, that they might become a thousand times as populous (1:11)! But since he had taken the responsi-
bility to be their judge, as well as theocratic mediator, Moses found himself overwhelmed by their needs. Using a verb commonly employed to suggest onerous, back-breaking labor (1:9; nasa’ [35375, 24951], “lift up, carry”), Moses complained that he could not sustain the people by himself. In this comment, Moses is referring to the days when he acted as a one-man judicial system for the whole nation (Exod 18:13-26). Seeing his exhaustion, his father-in-law, Jethro, had advised him to set up a system whereby lower courts would hear ordinary cases and only those beyond their capacity to judge would be appealed to Moses. This particular solution was put into place but was never mentioned again in the record. Presumably, it had flaws or deficiencies in actual implementation and so it quickly died out.

In the Deuteronomy version, Moses says that he had urged the people to “choose” candidates as judges, and he would appoint them to their office (1:13). The Exodus account says that Moses himself chose them (Exod 18:25). Technically, the Hebrew verb in Deuteronomy is the imperative habu [3051, 2035], a word that means “get” (KBL 223). The verb in Exodus 18:25 is bakh’ar [9777, 1047], the meaning of which is “choose” or “elect” (KBL 117-118). A simple harmony of the passages is that Moses asked the people to get a slate of candidates (1:13), from which he would choose (Exod 18:25) the best.

The qualifications were that they be well-respected men of wisdom and understanding (1:13). All of these are summarized in the Exodus narrative as “capable” (Exod 18:25). In the Old Testament, “wise” (khakam [2450, 2682]) is more descriptive of godliness than of intellect (Knierim 1995:283-285). “Understanding” (nebonim [9995, 1067]) has more to do with discernment and discretion. And “well-respected” is the translation of widu’im (the conjunction and Qal passive participle of yada’ [3045, 3359], “to know”). Literally, then, these were “known men” or, in the modern idiom, “known quantities.” There were no secrets here, no coverups that someday would be exposed. They were solid citizens.

Still recounting the past, Moses said the people liked his plan (1:14). Actually, the overall idea was Jethro’s (Exod 18:14), but the revelation of that plan to the people and the means of carrying it out were Moses’s. The qualified men were then appointed (lit., “given”) to serve as judges and officials (1:15). The text reads literally, “I took the heads of your tribes . . . and gave them to be heads over you, leaders of thousands.” The idea is that men already known for leadership skills—as well as being wise, discerning, and of good reputation—became leaders in a different capacity. Leadership is not an office; it’s a gift.

The leaders (sar [8269, 8569], generic for any kind of leader; KBL 929) of the different groupings are also called “officials” (shoter [7860, 8854]) in 1:15. Although the two terms are parallel here, “officials” derives from a root having to do with writing or record keeping and seems to focus more on the need for careful documentation of legal proceedings. In 1:16 these same officials are called “judges” (shapet [8199, 9149]). Hence sar and shoter and also shapet appear to be interchangeable ways of describing these men and their functions.

Above all else, Moses told them, the judges must render their verdicts fairly, no
matter who the parties to the dispute might be (1:16). The principle is that they must act rightly. The fundamental idea of the word *tsedeq* [6664, 7406] and its various cognate forms (cf. [6659/6662/6663/6666, 7401/7404/7405/7407]) is adherence to a norm, in this case to the divine standard (NIDOTTE 3.746). To be fair is to be true to God’s own character and expectations as revealed in his covenant law. An evidence of fairness is a refusal to be partial (1:17). The Hebrew idiom here for “to be partial” is “to recognize faces.” That is, when a judge holds court, he is not to say, “Oh, I know him, so I must treat him with special favor.” Rather, as the Hebrew so pungently puts it, “As the small, so the great” (1:17, lit.). In God’s community the ground is level at the courthouse.

Frequently, the application of righteous justice brings negative and fearful repercussions, especially from people of power and influence. Moses says, however, that such people are not to be feared (1:17). If they have a complaint, they should take it up with God himself, for the human judge is simply his instrument (see note on 1:17). But God is a difficult target, so it is the way of the world to attack more visible targets such as the men and women who try to represent and serve him—Moses was such a man. Nonetheless, with great sensitivity and courage, Moses urged the judges to pass on to him the difficult cases they could not handle. A sign of compassionate leadership is the willingness to “take the heat,” as Moses did here.

Moses then summarized the section by reminding his listeners that the bottom line of what the experience at Sinai was about was instruction in the things Israel was to do. The Hebrew is a little stronger than the NLT, asserting “At that time I commanded you” (1:18). We should be reminded that God gave the Ten Commandments and not the Ten Suggestions.

2. Instructions at Kadesh-barnea (1:19-25)

19"Then, just as the Lord our God commanded us, we left Mount Sinai and traveled through the great and terrifying wilderness, as you yourselves remember, and headed toward the hill country of the Amorites. When we arrived at Kadesh-barnea, 20I said to you, ‘You have now reached the hill country of the Amorites that the Lord our God is giving us. 21Look! He has placed the land in front of you. Go and occupy it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Don’t be afraid! Don’t be discouraged!’

22“But you all came to me and said, ‘First, let’s send out scouts to explore the land for us. They will advise us on the best route to take and which towns we should enter.’

23“This seemed like a good idea to me, so I chose twelve scouts, one from each of your tribes. 24They headed for the hill country and came to the valley of Eshcol and explored it. 25They picked some of its fruit and brought it back to us. And they reported, ‘The land the Lord our God has given us is indeed a good land.’

NOTES
1:20 is giving us. This translates a participle, a verb form commonly used (as here) as a *futur instans*—that is, it communicates that something is about to happen or to become a reality: “is about to give us.”