

Sunday School: Pentateuch

Tapestry or Ragbag

- I. Although at first sight the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible is a text with a cover, a front page and a closing page, with 1,500 or so pages in between, it needs to be remembered that for most of its early life it was never a book in this technical sense. It was a collection of books—scrolls, to be exact, kept together in an archive or library at a sacred place. Barr (1983) and Barton (1985) emphasize this, pointing out that unity was something that seems ‘read in’ to the text rather than ‘read out’, since the idea of the Bible being a ‘Book’, in the modern sense of a self-contained physical unity, with a definite beginning, fixed sequence and specific ending, is a retrojection from a later time. States Barr:
 - A. ... the books were separate individual scrolls. A ‘Bible’ was not a volume one could hold in a hand but a cupboard or chest with pigeon holes or a room or cave with a lot of individual scrolls. The boundary between what was scripture and what were other holy books was thus more difficult to indicate, and so was the order of the books and the organization (if any) of the canon (1983: 57).
- II. Thus some believe that there can be the study of individual books or scrolls or perhaps sequences of scrolls (e.g. the Pentateuch), but beyond this it becomes problematic.¹

Whispers of Unity

- I. Assume for a moment that the Old Testament does not come to us as a bound volume with the ordering of its books predetermined by tradition, but as a random pile of thirty-nine individual volumes. How would we begin to organize this pile? Which book would we begin to read?²
 - A. Thematic [Genesis 1-3 & Revelation 22:1-3]
 - B. Geographical [See figure 1 & Map]
 - C. Historical
 1. This Text is named the Tanakh by the synagogue, an acronym which points to the alleged unity of this material as well as of its three main subdivisions: the Torah, consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; the Nevi'im (the Prophets), comprising Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve; and the Ketuvim (the Writings), composed of Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.³
 - D. Proposed Scholarship
 1. Cline= Fulfillment of Promise
 2. Hans-Christoph Schmitt= Faith
 3. John Sailhamer= Faith, but before and after law

¹ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 20.

² Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 56.

³ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 36.

4. Dempster=Dominion & Dynasty [See 2.1]

Pentateuchal Structure

- I. Perhaps the most obvious structural feature of the Pentateuch is that it is a ‘Pentateuch’, a ‘five-volume’ or ‘five-scrolled’ book.
 - A. The psalter was deliberately divided into five books manifests a relevant awareness that the Pentateuch’s fivefold structure is theologically significant.
 - B. Exodus and Numbers are nearly the same length (16,713 and 16,413 words respectively) while Leviticus...is by far the shortest (11,950 words—half the length of Genesis).
 - C. Genesis and Deuteronomy both end with a patriarch (Jacob, Moses) blessing the twelve tribes before dying outside the land, and Exodus and Numbers have many parallel events.
- II. Thus, Genesis through Deuteronomy exhibits an ABCB’A’ organizational format in which Deuteronomy returns to and complements the themes of Genesis, and Numbers returns to and complements the themes of Exodus. This leaves Leviticus occupying the narrative centre of the Pentateuch, as illustrated in the chart below.⁴

A GENESIS	Separation from the nations/Blessing/Seeing the land/Descendants and the land		
B EXODUS		Israel’s desert journeys/Apostasy and plagues/Pharaoh and magicians/First-born/Levites	
C LEVITICUS			Sacrifices/Cleanliness/Holiness
B’ NUMBERS		Israel’s desert journeys/Apostasy and plagues/Balak and Balaam/First-born/Levites	

⁴ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 37, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23–24.

A' DEUTERONO MY	Separation from the nations/Blessing/Seeing the land/Descendants and the land		
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Moshe Kline (2006) proposes a similar schematic structure of the Pentateuch:

Genesis	Prologue
Exodus	Leaving Egypt
	Building the tabernacle
Leviticus	The tabernacle service
Numbers	Dedicating the tabernacle
	Preparing to enter Canaan
Deuteronomy	Epilogue

A Exod. 15:22-25 transformation of water from bitter to sweet

B 17:1-7 water from the rock

C 17:8-16 Amalekite—Israelite war

D 18 leadership relief for Moses

E 18:27 the Midianite Hobab, Moses' father-in-law

F 19:1-2 arrival at Sinai

SINAI

F' Num. 10:11-23 departure from Sinai

E' 10:29-32 the Midianite Hobab, Moses' father-in-law

D' 11 leadership relief for Moses

C' 14:39-45 Amalekite—Israelite war

B' 20:1-13 water from the rock

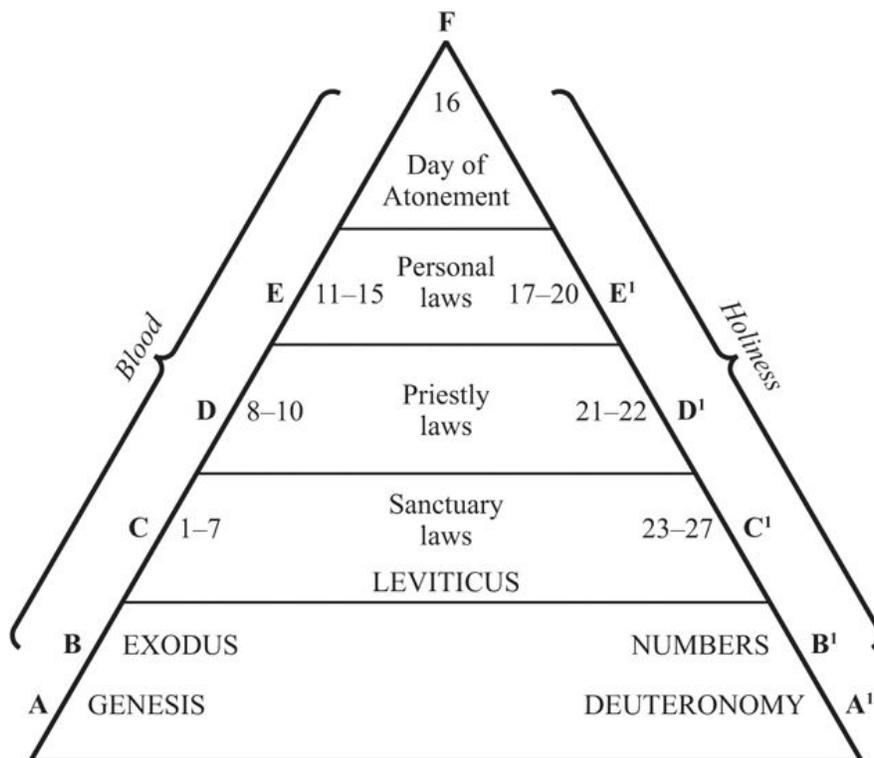
A' 21:16-18 the spring

Center of the Center

- I. Narrowing further within this central Sinai section (Exod. 19 to Num. 10), which is itself set off by itinerary notices, there are significant signals as to the literary integrity of the book of Leviticus. With reference to the tabernacle, the book is framed by a date notice:

G Exod. 40:17 1st day of 1st month of 2nd year—'the tabernacle was raised up'

The Center of the Center of the Center:



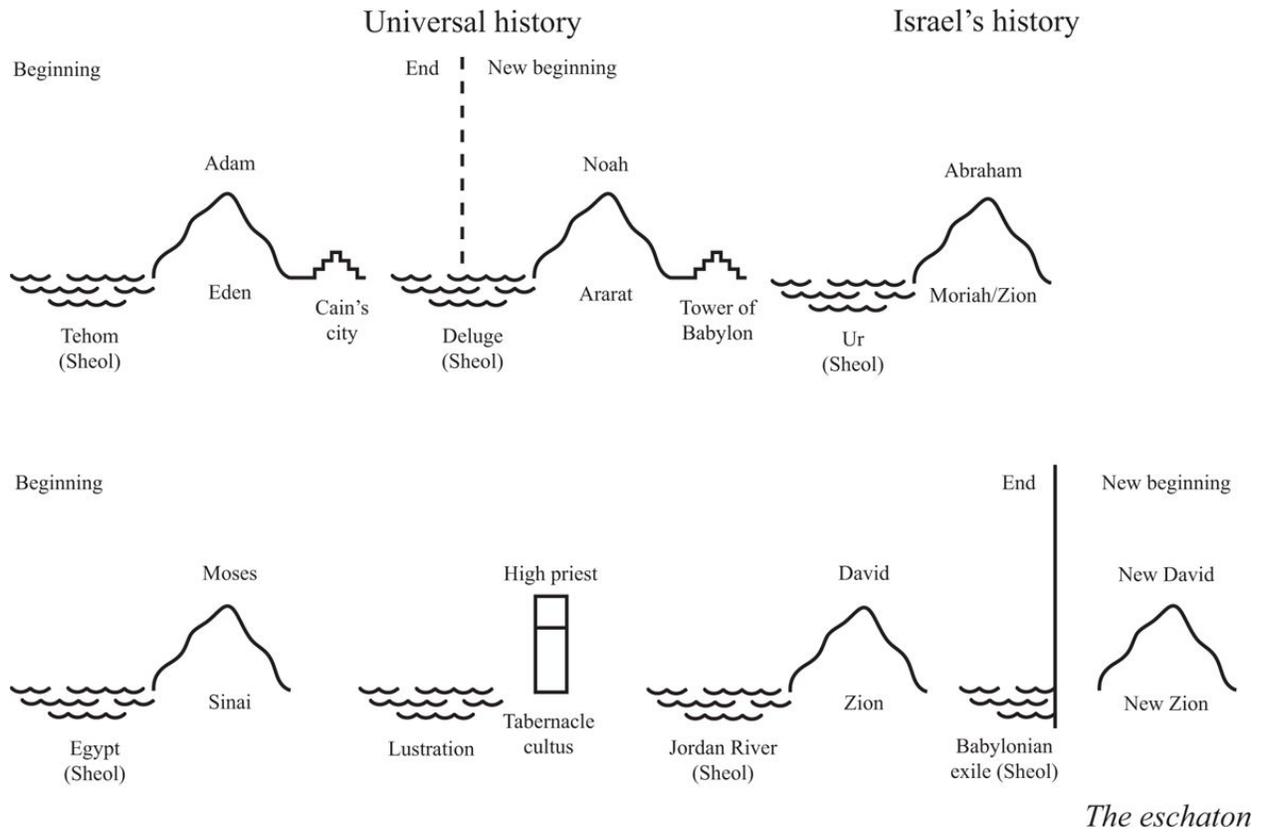
Therefore, while precise markers and thematic labels will undoubtedly vary among scholars who propose a sevenfold structure (at some level), the following outline offers a suitable overview to Leviticus:

Lev 1-7 Sacrifices	} Approaching God ATONEMENT
8-10 Institution of priesthood/inauguration of cultus	
11-15 Clean/unclean in daily life	- JUDGMENT/CLEANSING
16 Day of Atonement	
17-20 Holy/profane in daily life	} Communion with God HOLINESS
21-22 Legislation for the priesthood	
23-27 Festivals / sacred time	

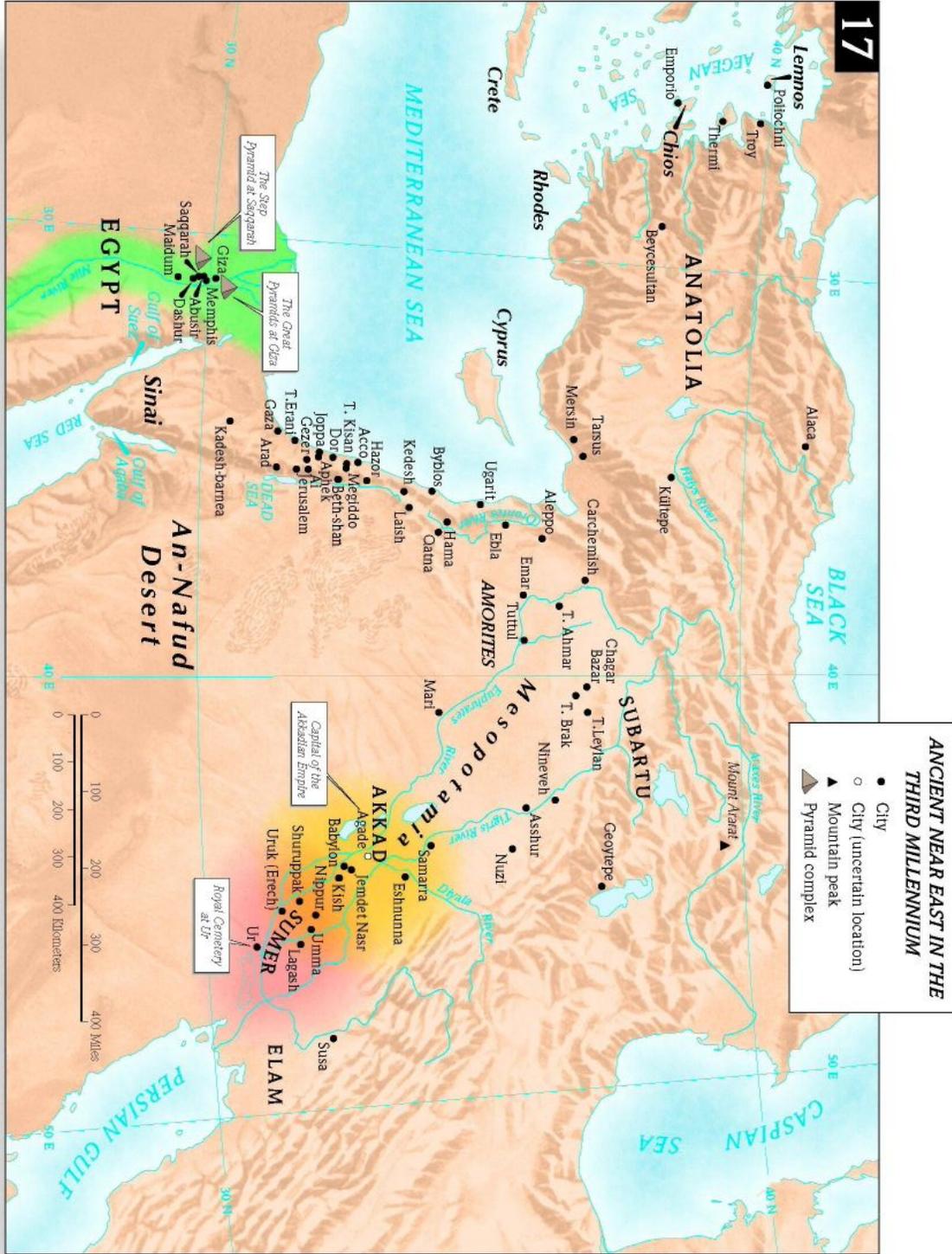
- I. The shape of the Pentateuch, I posit, follows (and forms) its unifying theme: *YHWH's opening a way for humanity to dwell in the divine Presence*. The essence of that way and the heart of the Pentateuch's theology is the Day of Atonement.⁵ This leaves us not with an either or from earlier unifying proposals. We can organize a hierarchy.

⁵ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 37, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 38.

Figure 1



Map Showing Geographical Unity



Dominion & Dynasty

Table 2.1 The development of the storyline.

<p>Narrative: storyline TORAH Genesis—Beginning of storyline Creation of Adam leading to Abraham and Judah Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p>	<p>Digression: commentary</p>
<p>PROPHETS Former Prophets Joshua Judges Samuel Kings Exile and release of Jehoiachin –Break in storyline and beginning of commentary</p>	
<p>Middle of Tanakh</p>	
<p>Latter Prophets</p>	<p>Jeremiah ‘To build and to plant’ and seventy years of exile Ezekiel Isaiah The Twelve</p>
<p>WRITINGS</p>	<p>Ruth [narrative flashback] Psalms Job Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs Lamentations</p>

Daniel—resumption of storyline

Seventy years = 490 years of exile begin

with return to Judah and rebuilding of temple

Esther

Ezra-Nehemiah

Chronicles—End of Tanakh but not of storyline

Adam to David concluding with command to return and rebuild temple: the beginning of 490 years⁶

⁶ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 51.