

# **BIBLICAL REITERATION: EXPANSION AND CHRONOLOGY**

**BEN ZION KATZ**

There is a block of text that begins around the middle of the Book of Exodus, continues through Leviticus, and concludes with the first 10 chapters of Numbers, that is not presented in chronological order. Mainly, but not entirely, it concerns itself with priestly and levitical matters,<sup>1</sup> and there seem to be many types of duplications of material within this block. The primary goal of this article is to show that these duplications are really expansions of an original statement. Thus, often in the Book of Exodus a point is made as an introduction, while in Leviticus and especially in Numbers there is elaboration upon the point. These elaborations serve to complete the narratives, Divine injunctions, and ceremonial or levitical commands mentioned earlier, or to provide threads of connection with the earlier material.

The second goal of this article is to present a chronological arrangement of as much of the material as possible and to offer a partial explanation of why the Torah presented the material out of chronological sequence. The following notations are used: "Y" for year since the Exodus from Egypt, "M" for month of the year, "D" for day of the month.

## TYPE 1: PURE EXPANSION

An example of pure expansion is the priestly benediction, which is first alluded to in Leviticus 9:22: *Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them . . .* From this verse we know that to bless the children of Israel, Aaron needed to lift his hands and to face the people. But what was the text of that blessing? The answer to that question comes in the next book of the Torah, in a brief passage that has nothing evidently to do with what precedes it and what follows. Moses is instructed: *'Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them . . .'* (Num. 6:23). From Leviticus 9:22 we know that Aaron lifts his hands when he blesses the people, but only here in Numbers is the famous benediction recorded: *The Lord bless*  
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*you and keep you! The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!*' (Num. 6:24-6).

### TYPE 2: NARRATIVE EXPANSION

Soon after crossing the Sea of Reeds in Y 1, around M 3, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, comes to the Israelite encampment *at the mountain of God* (Ex. 18:5) together with Moses' wife and children. The very next day he advises Moses on the creation of a hierarchy of judges. Suddenly, *Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to the old land* (Ex. 18:27). We do not hear of Jethro again until Numbers 10:29-32, where he is called Hobab.<sup>2</sup> The thread of his visit is taken up:

*Moses said to Hobab, son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law: 'We are setting out for the place of which the Lord has said, "I will give it to you." Come with us and we will be generous with you for the Lord has promised to be generous to Israel.'*

*'I will not go,' he replied to him, 'but will return to my native land.'*

*He said, 'Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness and can be our guide. So if you come with us, we will extend to you the same bounty that the Lord grants us.'*

In this set of passages, Numbers completes the story of Jethro leaving the Israelite camp.<sup>3</sup> Chronology, normally a significant part of narrative, is for-gone. Did Jethro stay to witness the giving of the Ten Commandments, the building of the Tabernacle [*Mishkan*], et cetera? The Torah does not specify.<sup>4</sup>

### TYPE 3: EXPANSION OF THE LORD'S INJUNCTIONS

The last five verses of Exodus are a quick summary and conclusion to the building of the Tabernacle, *when Moses had finished the work* (Ex. 40:33). On one point, the Torah generalizes: *When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift* (40:36-37).

Numbers 9:15-23 is not only an expansion of this injunction of the Lord, but a rather specific concrete reiteration, with clear, repeated instructions, and a few added details:

*On the day that the Tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the Tabernacle, the Tent of the Pact; and in the evening it rested over the Tabernacle in the*

*likeness of fire until morning. It was always so: the cloud covered it, appearing as fire by night. And whenever the cloud lifted from the Tent, the Israelites would set out accordingly; and at the spot where the cloud settled the Israelites would make camp.*

So far, this text is only an expansion of Exodus 36-37. To be doubly sure the injunction was understood, the text continues:

*On a sign from the Lord the Israelites broke camp, and on a sign from the Lord they made camp: they remained as long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle.*

Now comes a long, detailed reinforcement of this command:

*When the cloud lingered over the Tabernacle many days, the Israelites observed the Lord's mandate and did not journey on. At such times as the cloud stayed from evening until morning, they broke camp as soon as the cloud lifted in the morning. Day or night, whenever the cloud lifted, they would break camp. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year – however long the cloud lingered over the Tabernacle – the Israelites remained encamped and did not set out; only when it lifted did they break camp.*

To conclude the lesson, the Torah summarizes again, but now emphasizes the rulership of the Lord:

*On a sign of the Lord they made camp and on a sign from the Lord they broke camp; they observed the Lord's mandate at the Lord's bidding through Moses.*

#### TYPE 4: THEMATIC COMPLETION

One example will define what I mean by "thematic completion." Exodus 30:10 mandates: *Once a year Aaron shall perform purification upon the horns [of the incense altar] with blood of the sin offering of purification; purification shall be performed on it once a year throughout the ages. It is most holy to the Lord.* Clearly, this is an introduction to the Yom Kippur ceremony. It is not until Leviticus 16, however, that the details of the entire ritual are spelled out.

This example involves an elaboration that extends over two books of the Torah. The set of passages (Type 2 above) bracketed an expansion across three books of the Torah.

A second example is the report of Exodus 40:33, *when Moses had finished the work of building the Tabernacle*. The Torah then, as we saw (Type 3 above), is more interested in the matter of when the Israelites would break camp and travel, and when they would rest. The theme of the Tabernacle is temporarily dropped, until the consecration of the Tabernacle is mentioned in Leviticus 8:10: *Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and all that was in it, thus consecrating them*. When did Moses do so? This is not stated until the thread is picked up in Numbers 7. Here, the complete dedication of the Tabernacle is described by detailing the sacrifices of the chieftains of the tribes. The introduction to these ceremonies reiterates the passing reference in Exodus 40:33 about Moses finishing the building of the Tabernacle as well as his consecrating the Tabernacle and its accoutrements in Leviticus 8:10: *On the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings . . . . When he had anointed and consecrated them . . . (Num. 7:1)*.

Now the final ceremonies of dedication could begin (Num. 7:2-83). These three passages (spanning the middle three books of the Torah) having been connected, the theme of the Tabernacle is complete.

A third example is the cherubim that were among the furnishings of the Tent. In Exodus 25:22, God tells Moses that when He speaks to him the Voice will come from between the cherubim. Now, there follow dozens of times that God speaks to Moses, but only once, in Numbers 7:89, are we told that He does so from the cherubim: *When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice addressing him from above the cover that was on top of the Ark of the Pact between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him*.

It is not clear whether this is a general statement or refers to a specific instruction (e.g., the positioning of the Menorah that follows immediately).

A fourth example is the making of the Menorah, a theme established, broken off, picked up, and finally completed. This one covers no less than four intermittent passages in two books of the Torah.

1. As part of His instructions regarding the erection of the Tabernacle and its furnishings, God commands the fashioning of the Menorah: *You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered*

*work . . . its base and its shaft, its cups calxes, and petals shall be of one piece'* (Ex. 25:31). Details follow for nine more verses.

2. After an interval in which the architecture and materials of the Tent are prescribed, the Torah adds two more points about the Menorah: *'You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting . . . from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time'* (Ex. 27:21-2). The added instructions regard the oil to be used and the mandate of perpetuity.

3. Ten chapters further on in Exodus, the Torah narrates how Bezalel actually fulfilled all the dictates of the Lord concerning the Tabernacle and its furnishings through the instructions of Moses. One of those successfully completed tasks is reiterated here: [Bezalel] *made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand, its base and its shaft, of hammered work; its cups and, calyxes, and petals of one piece with it* (Ex. 37:17). The text goes on to reiterate the numerous details. One can conjecture that the repetition is a compliment to Bezalel's execution of every detail the way God wanted it.

4. Finally, in Numbers 8:2 the last knot in the thread of the theme of the Menorah is tied. It concerns how the Menorah shall be placed when lit: *'Speak to Aaron and say to him: "When you mount the lamps, let the seven lamps give light at the front of the lampstand."'* Numbers 8:4 is a one-verse summary about how the Menorah was fashioned. Once again the Torah used certain passages in Exodus as an introduction to themes and threads that were completed later.

A fifth example is the investiture of Aaron and his sons, first outlined in Exodus 29:1-37: *'This is what you shall do to [Aaron and his sons] in consecrating them to serve Me as priests'* (Ex. 29:1) . . . [Sacrificial and vestment details follow] *'Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, just as I have commanded you. You shall ordain them through seven days'* (29:35). When did this week-long ceremony take place? When the Tabernacle was set up *On the first day of the first month*, according to Exodus 40:2 and Exodus 40:12-15. And this, of course, all takes place in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt, according to Exodus 40:17: *In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up* – that is, Y2-M1-D1.<sup>5</sup>

Leviticus 9:1 reads: *On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel.* This eighth day is probably the day following the end

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of the week-long consecration ceremony. Here the description of the culmination of the inaugural service begins. It is likely that the priestly benediction mentioned in Leviticus 9:22 (see Type 1 above), the incident with Nadav and Abihu, Moses' consolation of Aaron and his misunderstanding of Aaron's burning of the he-goat (Lev. 10:1-20) all took place on that same eighth day.

Next, chronologically, follow the 12 days of gift-giving by the chieftains of the tribes to commemorate the dedication already described in Numbers 7 (Y2-M1-D1-12).

## CONJECTURED CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE MATERIAL

The following table is an attempt to arrange some of the expansions discussed in a chronological sequence. This sequence covers Exodus 18 to Numbers 10. Some perforce are conjectural, because few dates are given in the Torah. From the presentations above, it should be expected that texts that appear in one book of the Torah may belong chronologically near material from another book.

Exodus 18:5: Jethro comes to the Israelite camp

Exodus 25:31-40 and 37:17-24: Instructions to Moses on making the Menorah and its construction

Exodus 29: Investiture of Aaron and his sons

Exodus 40:2,17,33, Leviticus 8-9, Numbers 7:1: Tabernacle is set up, Aaron and his sons are dedicated and the Menorah is lit on Y2-M1-D1

Numbers 7:2-83: Gift giving by the chieftains on Y2-M1-D 1-12

Numbers 9:1-5: Anniversary of Passover on Y2-M1-D14-21

Numbers 1:1-6:6:21: Census, arrangement of camp, levitical duties, laws of holiness (*sotah*, *nazir*) on Y2-M2-D1

Exodus 40:36-37 and Numbers 9:15-23: How Israelites encamp and break camp in the desert

Numbers 10:11: Israelites start on their journey from Sinai to the desert on Y2- M2-D-20

Exodus 18:27 and Numbers 10:29-32: Jethro (Hobab) leaves the Israelite camp

The narrative expansion related to Moses' father-in-law, bracketing the end of Exodus 18 and Numbers 10, seems to embrace these 60-odd chapters, which contain a unified corpus of material describing the Tabernacle, its ser-

vice, its officiants, and other important aspects of Israelite life in the desert and forever after – the theophany at Sinai, festivals, kashrut, laws on sexuality. The material is presented in a self-referential and expansive (but not chronological) style to emphasize this fact. At the very least, perhaps to encourage contemplation and repeated study, the reiterations beg questions of why the material is repeated where it is and not elsewhere, and why it was not presented chronologically. In conclusion I will suggest a few partial answers to this last question.

First, there are thematic links between the material the way it is currently presented. For example, note how the material in the first chapters of Numbers is presupposed by texts that are chronologically earlier but appear later: Numbers 7 assumes knowledge of levitical duties (verses 4-9), the names of the tribal chieftains and the order of the camp (verses 12-83, based on the order in which the gifts are given), as detailed in Numbers 1-6, even though Numbers 7 is dated at least two weeks earlier than Numbers 1-6. This could explain why the first seven chapters of Numbers are out of chronological sequence.

Second, from a literary perspective, note how the stage is set for the Levites in Numbers 1-4 before the Levites are dedicated in Numbers 8:5-22 (even though Numbers 8, if connected with Numbers 7, also precedes chapters 1-4 chronologically, as discussed above). The same is true for the priests and their duties in Leviticus, where the sacrifices are described in chapters 1-7 before the priests are dedicated in chapters 8-10.

#### NOTES

1. I am *not* referring here to "P" of the documentary hypothesis, which attempts to unite much of this material with preceding and following narrative.
2. Moses' father-in-law is variously called Jethro, Hobab or Reuel. For a thorough discussion, see W.H.C. Propp, "Exodus 1-18," *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) p. 173.
3. *contra* Propp, 627, where he considers the possibility that the material in Numbers is a mere doublet of what appeared in Exodus.
4. For an introduction to the problem of chronology here, see *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), vol. 6: cols. 1055-56.
5. See the discussion in W.G. Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981) pp. 792-93.