

Chapter 10

From the Temple

(Late 8th /Early 7th Century)

“And Yahweh spoke”

The wealth of Judah and her population increased in the last half of the eighth century. The archaeological evidence shows a rapid growth in commerce, in luxury items and in jewellery. Refugees from the north were pouring into Judah. The land was able to support the immigrants so that the national wealth rose substantially. Under Ahaz religious observances may have been defiled by practices such as child sacrifice, but Hezekiah introduced extensive religious reforms. His reign was a time of religious renewal driven by the fusion of northern and southern theologies, by the prophetic voices of men like Isaiah, Micah and Hosea, and by the will of the king. It was a time in which ideas, energy and money abounded in Judah as never before.

The Great Text of the Aaronite Priesthood

It is generally accepted that there were two major contributors to the Priestly texts contained in today's bible; the one known as P and a second contributor, known as H, whose work included the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17 – 26) and certain other passages in Exodus and Numbers. Both of these contributors are believed to have been Aaronite Priests who officiated in the Jerusalem temple. They were acutely concerned both with the proper execution of the rituals and with the concept of holiness – a concept that required the separation from the ordinary of those priests and artefacts that had been set consecrated to the service of Yahweh. As will be discussed later, there is evidence that points to H being not only the author of the Holiness Code but also the primary editor of P.¹

The core part of the P text was the material that now forms the book of Leviticus, but excluding the Holiness Code. The P text was enclosed within material that provided a history of the world from its beginning to the death of Aaron's successor Eleazar. P was aware of the Yahwist's work; indeed it seems that he wrote more extensively where he believed the Yahwist's theology to be in error or where he wanted to add stories of his own; otherwise he contented himself with short references to the stories more fully told in J's work. Thus he included a different creation account, probably believing, amongst other things, that J's account was far too anthropomorphic; but he merely provided brief summaries of the stories of Abraham, Lot, Rebekah and others more adequately covered by J.

The style and extent of the texts

Priestly texts can be found in today's bible between the opening words of Genesis and part way through the book of Joshua. P's characteristics were:

- the use of Elohim and El Shaddai as divine names until the name Yahweh was revealed to Moses in Egypt.
- a pre-exilic language and grammar
- an emphasis on the role of Aaron
- a concern with the law and the rituals of sacrifice.
- an insistence that only the descendants of Aaron can offer sacrifices
- an interest in numbers, ages and genealogies
- the careful and precise use of words
- a distinctive vocabulary
- an avoidance of anthropomorphic terms when describing the acts of the deity.

¹ Milgrom; Leviticus 1-16; Anchor Bible; p 13.

This text can be distinguished is by the author’s fondness for particular words and phrases. For example, when P wished to refer to the congregation or assembly, he preferred the word ‘*edah*’ rather than the later ‘*qahal*’ (used by the authors of Chronicles, Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah). In P, people ‘*fall on their faces*’ in worship and, in everyday life, are required to be ‘*exceedingly fruitful*’. P writes frequently of ‘*the tent*’, ‘*the congregation*’; ‘*the community*’, ‘*the glory of Yahweh*’ and of ‘*holiness*’. When the name Yahweh is revealed in the P text, it is linked with the name ‘*Shaddai*’; only P does this.

Stylistically, the priestly authors took a particular delight in chiasmus; indeed the whole P opus takes the form of extended Chiasmus, but he also has an administrator’s appreciation for numbers, lists and dates. Unlike J, he was quite content to interrupt the flow of a narrative in order to incorporate some factual information that today’s reader may regard as tedious; it was not so to him.

The dates

As the Priestly texts were produced in Judah, then exactly the same considerations as were discussed in the previous chapter mean that these texts cannot have been produced in the 10th century BCE and probably not in the 9th Century either. The argument is strengthened by the fact that the main Priestly text, the P text, assumes the existence of the J text at a number of points.

The P text contains two references to Kadesh Barnea, an oasis in the desert that was uninhabited between the 10th and the late 8th centuries and again after the late 7th century. One reference may be a subsequent editorial insert, but Numbers 20 is a chapter focused around ‘*Kadesh*’ with several mentions of the town in this familiar form. As with the Yahwist’s work, this points to the late 8th century as the earliest time for its composition, and is one of the pieces of evidence that indicate it was not exilic – as it was once thought to be.

The work may also be dated by examining the references it makes, and the references that are made to it, from other dateable documents. For example, the Yahwist began her Epic with the words “*In the day of Yahweh’s making of earth and heavens – no plant of the field being yet in the earth... Yahweh formed man....*”, whereas the Priestly creation account began with the words *In the beginning of Elohim’s creating the heavens and the earth – the world being then unformed and unfilled... Elohim said ‘let there be light.’*” The phraseology and the choice of grammatical construction are similar and unusual. It is hard to avoid reflecting that one has influenced the other. But which was first? There would have been no particular reason for J to have reversed the Priestly phrase ‘the heavens and earth’, but there would have been every reason for a Priest to have reversed J’s order. For P, everything in heaven must have preceded anything on earth. The essence of P was his theology. He could not have tolerated a casual ‘earth and heaven’ formulation as if the order did not matter. So the opening phrase of P is a clue that suggests that P was aware of J, and made the necessary amendment.

Further evidence comes from the fact that P followed J in the sequencing of many of the episodes. Both sources included the episodes mentioned in the following table – and they contained them in the same sequence.

Episode	P’s contribution
Creation	An extensive piece, setting the creation of mankind in the context of the whole of creation and establishing the Sabbath as a day of rest.
The flood	A similar story but excluding Noah’s sacrifice after the flood. (Therefore only one pair required of each specie – not six of each of the species to be sacrificed, as required by J)
Abraham’s migration	Genealogy and Summary only
Abraham & Lot	Summary only
Hagar	Summary only
Sodom & Gomorrah	Summary only
Isaac's Birth	Summary only
Rebekah	Summary only
Jacob's return	Summary only
Joseph & brothers	Summary only
Jacob in Egypt	Summary only

Yahweh calls Moses	Emphasises the role of Aaron
Moses and Pharaoh	Emphasises the role of Aaron
The Exodus	The institution of the Passover
The Reed Sea	A similar story, but omits references to Yahweh's 'presence' in the pillar of fire and to the 'angel' that accompanied the Israelites.
Food in the desert	The long version of the story, emphasising Aaron's role.
Ten Commandments	A considerably more developed version which omits the references to the festivals present in the J version. The justification for the Sabbath is that God rested on the seventh day of creation – from the P creation story.
Moses on the Mountain	A massive expansion including the instructions for constructing the Holy Tent building and Aaron's ordination; a key P text.
Departure from the Mountain	An account that emphasises the rituals involved and the roles of the Levite families
Spies sent into Canaan and report back	A similar story, but Joshua is added as a spy who gives a good report of Canaan - possibly to account for him being chosen as Moses successor. (P omits Joshua's role as the guardian of the Tent – possibly because, in his view, this should have been a role reserved for a descendant of Aaron)
Rebellion in the wilderness	A story is added in which Korah's rebellion against Aaron's exclusive hold on the priesthood results in Korah's annihilation.
Seduction and heresy at Peor	A story is added in which Yahweh promises the priesthood to the sons of Aaron in perpetuity as a result of Eleazar's execution of a Midianite woman and her lover in the great Tent. (The J story involved Moabite women. It may be relevant that one of Moses' wives was a Midianite)

In a number of instances P's references were extremely brief, confined to some statistic that the more literary J had omitted. For example, his comment on the Hagar story, dramatic and emotional as it is in J, was simply a laconic

So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarah, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.²

It reads as if P assumed that his reader would be familiar with the J stories and only lacked the precise information that P supplied. P had no theological objections to the J story in this case. But in the flood story J had Noah sacrificing in thanksgiving for his survival of the flood. This would have been inconsistent with P's view that no-one sacrificed to Yahweh until Aaron was ordained to this role; so P created a different version where this could not happen. Much later, the J and P versions were merged together leaving P's message somewhat obscured in the bible we use today.

It was noted above that where the stories he used were the same as J's, P followed J's sequence, but some scholars argue that the sequence followed was not just J, but rather the sequence adopted by an editor who combined J and E into a single document. The JE sequence is of course the same as the J sequence as far as the J elements are concerned. Whilst nearly all of the E stories followed by P are also J stories, there is one major E story referred to by P that does not have a J version: this is the story in which water is brought forth from a rock in the wilderness. In E, the story occurs before the Israelites arrived at the Holy Mountain, whilst in P it occurs after they have left. Thus the evidence that P was following JE rather than J alone is not especially compelling. It is possible, and indeed probable in the light of further evidence to be discussed later, that P wrote before the J and E texts were combined.

References to Priestly writing in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy provide further pointers. The opening verses of Genesis once more provide a clue. 'In the beginning' the Priestly text says,

² Genesis 16:3 & 15-16

*“... the earth was unformed and unfilled, ...
And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.*

In Jeremiah, when the prophet was recording a vision of the desolation that will result from the evil-doing of the people, he said,

*“I looked on the earth and it was unformed and unfilled;
And to the heavens and they had no light.”³*

Ezekiel too quoted priestly material⁴. Propp’s analysis of Ezekiel 20 as discussed earlier showed that he had access to a version of P that was not integrated into the other works of the Pentateuch⁵. An even closer limit to the date of the priestly writings is provided by the use made of them by the Deuteronomists.

The ‘torah’, or ‘book of the law’ found in Deuteronomy 12 to 26, revised and reworked laws that are found in the priestly literature. Amongst the dependencies are:

- The law on pure and impure animals in Deuteronomy 14. This follows the priestly source. In particular the list of impure birds in verses 11 to 18 follows almost word for word, bird for bird, the list in Leviticus 11.
- The laws on hybrids in Deuteronomy 22. This follows Leviticus 19 (Holiness Code), but here the time difference between Leviticus and this part of Deuteronomy is made clear by the Deuteronomist’s need to explain the term *sha’atnez* – linen and wool woven together – presumably because the term had gone out of fashion by the time the Deuteronomist was writing.
- The law on leaving the gleanings of the field for the poor in Deuteronomy (24:19-22). This follows Leviticus 19:9-10 (part of the Holiness Code) save that the Deuteronomist modified it in accordance with his beliefs and motivations by specifically mentioning foreigners, orphans and widows and by reminding his readers that they were once slaves in Egypt
- The prohibition of pagan practices – child sacrifice, divination, soothsaying, sorcery – in Deuteronomy 18. This follows Leviticus 20 (Holiness Code), although D added to H’s list his own special concerns about magicians or those who consult the dead.

Deuteronomy also referred to the episode of the spies and the fears that their reports engendered. He had Moses remind the people that Yahweh had banned all that timid generation from entering the land of Canaan, but ‘*your little ones, who you thought would become booty*’ would enter the land.⁶ This phrase is a direct quotation from Numbers 14:39 – the priestly text that dealt with this story. The Deuteronomists certainly knew the Priestly material.

The dependency of the Deuteronomic Law Code on the priestly authors becomes particularly significant when it is recognised that that this law code was a document with a substantial editorial history. It included material from the northern Covenant Code and other sources. The Deuteronomic Law Code may have been incorporated in the book that was found during the cleansing of the temple under King Josiah in 622 or it may have added to it shortly afterwards⁷. In either case it must have been compiled within a generation of 622.

Thus P follows J and at least some parts of D follow both main priestly authors. It is interesting to note that while P required that all sacrifice should occur in front of the tent (i.e. in the temple) he assumed that slaughter for the purpose of eating meat can occur anywhere. It was H that banned slaughter anywhere other than before the tent. The centralisation of all slaughter would only have been practical when all believers were concentrated around Jerusalem – sufficiently closely for them to come to the temple every

³ Jeremiah 4:23

⁴ For examples, see Friedman; ‘Who wrote the Bible’; p 169.

⁵ See the discussion of Propp’s analysis of Ezekiel 20 within Chapter 5 in the section headed “The integrity of the sources”.

⁶ Deuteronomy 1:39

⁷ This will be discussed in the chapter dealing with Judah as the ‘Vassal of Assyria’ which looks at the provenance of the Deuteronomic law code in more detail.

time they wanted to eat meat. It could be argued that such a policy would not have been appropriate in the larger Judah that existed before 701, but was a feasible plan in the geographically much reduced country that was left after Sennacherib had sliced off parts and awarded them to the Philistine cities⁸.

The literary evidence discussed above can be supplemented by circumstantial evidence from the content of the text in the light of the history of the time. Propp⁹ sees the P text as being the work of a priest imbued with a reforming attitude – anxious to return to the old ways, including worshipping Yahweh in a tent rather than a temple.¹⁰ The reign of Hezekiah was one in which the wealth of the temple enabled nothing to be wanting: even the children of the priests as young as 3 years old were on the pay-roll.¹¹ Was this a time when a more traditional priest may have felt the need to remind his elite colleagues of their true calling as priests? Milgrom, following Kohl and others argues that H's strong opposition to the cult of Molech (child sacrifice), ancestor worship and shamans linked him to the time of Ahaz when such practices were said to be prevalent.¹² However the cults to which H objected so emphatically were equally prevalent in the time of Manasseh¹³. It is not inconsistent with the text for P to have been written under Hezekiah sometime before 701 when there were abundant resources for such an enterprise. H could then have edited P's work under Manasseh when child sacrifice was allegedly being practised, and people were visiting mediums and shamans, and idols were being worshipped. Such a date would be consistent with P's use of J.

There is one further detail that could link P to the years between about 705 and 701. P wrote that Abram came from the area around Haran in '*the land of the Chaldees*¹⁴'. In the last years of the eighth century a Chaldean delegation visited Jerusalem to discuss a possible joint insurrection against Assyrian rule. It is possible that contact with Chaldean officials led to the incorrect idea that Haran was not only under Chaldean rule at that time but also in Abram's time. This was an error, but an error that was understandable in the context of close contact with proud Chaldean officials. It was not an error that the Deuteronomists made when writing many decades later.

Thus P can plausibly be dated to the Judah of Hezekiah before the siege and H to the early part of Manasseh's reign, although this is not the traditional view of the date of Priestly texts. Reuss, Graf and Wellhausen – the fathers of the documentary hypothesis – took the view that P was post-exilic since the prophets did not quote the law.¹⁵ Recent scholarship has shown he was wrong and that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were aware of the Priestly writings. The suggestion that the main body of priestly writings occurred in the late eighth or early seventh centuries does not exclude the possibility that they incorporated some ancient material into their texts – either by quotation or by paraphrase. Burnt offerings '*of pleasing odour*

⁸ See Leviticus 1-16; pp 28-29 (Milgrom, 1991). The main argument is that H presents his ban as an innovation. H wrote in Leviticus 17 that the ban was made so that people '*will bring to Yahweh the sacrifices they have been making in the open field*'. Milgrom argues that he since P does not ban ordinary slaughter, but rather just bans the consumption of blood or suet, he must implicitly accept the slaughter.

⁹ See Exodus 19-40; AB; p 732. (Propp W. H., 2006). Propp writes "P makes most sense as a protest against the Temple hierarchy." His further conclusion that P obtained its final form in the exile or early restoration is, however, inconsistent with Jeremiah's apparent references to P. In making the suggestion of a late date Propp draws attention to the '*miknasayim*' worn by the priests – translated by him as 'underpants' – and suggests that since 'trousers' were a Persian innovation, so were underpants. But he also observes that the root '*kns*' normally implies gathering, so some sort of loin cloth would seem to work equally well for a garment worn from 'hips to thighs' (Exodus 28:42). The RSV prefers the uncommitted word 'undergarments'.

¹⁰ Propp (2006) rejects Friedman's thesis that the tabernacle was in the Jerusalem temple ((Freidman, 1987, chapter 10). Propp accepts most of Friedman's arguments in favour of the hypothesis (see Propp pages 732 & 708) but nevertheless rejects Friedman's conclusion mainly because he would have expected the location of the Tabernacle to be explicitly mentioned in I Kings as part of the description of the temple had it indeed been placed there – presumably feeling that the statement in Kings and Chronicles that 'they brought up the ark of Yahweh and the Tent of Meeting' to Jerusalem (I Kings 8:4 and II Chronicles 5:5) to be insufficient.

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 31:11-21

¹² Milgrom (1991) p 26

¹³ 2 kings 21:6

¹⁴ The Septuagint has 'the land of the Chaldees' not 'Ur of the Chaldees' and the Hebrew could have said the same till a scribal error misspelt 'land'.

¹⁵ See Friedman, "Who wrote the Bible", pp 161-173 for an exposition and criticism of their views.

to *Yahweh*' such as P describes were probably made even before the Israelites were an established people in the land they came to claim as their own.

The arguments adduced above principally relate to P. H was his editor and contributed texts of his own, and it was probably H who incorporated the ancient Mesopotamian law of an 'eye for an eye'. But H was active in a later and more desperate time. His work will therefore be the subject of a later chapter.

The P Text

The principal Priestly text was predominantly concerned with the establishment of the cult, and in particular the establishment of the Aaronite family as the priesthood. The overwhelming majority of the work took the literary form of the reported speech of the deity concerning his commandments to his people.

The core of the work was a large-scale chiasmus which began with the Passover in Egypt and concluded with the celebration of the Passover at Gilgal. All these events were placed in the lifetimes of Moses and Aaron. The elements of the chiasmus comprised: -

Introduction

Journey to the holy mountain

Instruction of Moses

Inauguration of the cult. Ordination of Aaron by Moses

Instruction of Aaron

Journey from the holy mountain

Postscript

The bulk of the core, over 80% of the material, was concerned with religious laws and their execution. Only a small fraction of P's work involved stories; even then, they mainly had the purpose of illustrating the laws. The core was surrounded by an introduction and a postscript. The introduction dealt with the covenants between the people and their god – covenants that were made between creation and the death of Moses. The postscript dealt with events that occurred between the death of Moses and the death of Aaron's successor Eleazar.

Introduction. The covenants;

The opening line seems to consciously imitate J's opening – "*In the day of Yahweh's making of the earth and the heavens...*" – for the grammar of both is the same and unusual. But the priest put '*the heavens*' first. His name for his god at this stage was Elohim, since it was his belief that the name *Yahweh* had yet to be revealed. He wrote: -

*In the beginning of Elohim's creating of the heavens and the earth
– the earth being then unformed and unfilled
– and darkness being over the face of the primeval deep
– and Elohim's breath hovering over face of the waters,
Elohim said, "Let there be light." and there was light.
And Elohim saw that the light was good;
And Elohim separated the light from the darkness.
And Elohim called the light Day, and he called the darkness Night.
And there was evening and there was morning, Day one.¹⁶*

The text continued with the creation of the skies or heavens, the land and seas, the plants, the stars, the sun and moon, fishes and birds, land animals and finally mankind. Some hold that the sequence of creation followed that described in *Enuma Elish*, the Mesopotamian Epic, which also started from watery chaos and proceeded through the creation of the land, the stars, the moon, and finally to man. Perhaps the truth is that those who have thought deeply about creation, have often tended to envisage a process of

¹⁶ Genesis 1:1-5. This translation attempts to render the words and structure of the original Hebrew as closely as possible - rather than produce good English.

differentiation starting with the most fundamental – dividing light from darkness, matter from chaos – and proceeding to the most complex – the creation of a human being.

In this text, the living being that was created was both male and female.

*And Elohim said, “Let us make a human in our image, according to our likeness
And let it have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle,
and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.
So Elohim created the human in his image –
in the image of Elohim he created it;
male and female he created it.
and Elohim blessed it.
and Elohim said to it, “Be fruitful and multiply” ...*

*Elohim saw everything that he had made, and it was abundantly good.
And there was evening and there was morning, Day six.¹⁷*

The creation story incorporated the first commandment, ‘*be fruitful and multiply*’, an example of a Priestly phrase that will be quoted by Jeremiah – incidentally confirming the pre-exilic date of at least this part of the P text.¹⁸ The phrase will recur a number of times in the priestly writings.

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and everything in them.
and Elohim finished on the seventh day the work that he had done.
and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.
and Elohim blessed the seventh day and made it holy
because on it, Elohim rested from all the work that he had done in creation.¹⁹*

The priestly justification for the Sabbath was here set out with a rhythmic passage filled with the devices of oral rhetoric. Whilst much of P was written as reference material for the proper administration of law and ritual, the opening passage was clearly designed for oral delivery from memory. Ong²⁰ identifies the key characteristics of oral material as being highly structured, repetitious, and filled with mnemonic devices such as alliterations, assonances, rhythmic cadences, balanced patterns, and epithets. It is additive rather than subordinate in nature. These characteristics are well exhibited in the Creation account, for example: -.

- It was highly structured. Each stanza takes the form
*God said, “Let there be...”
And there was...
And God saw that it was good
And there was evening and it was morning. Day N*
- It began with the explosive alliteration ‘*b’reshit baru*’ (‘In the beginning of creating’),
- It employed assonances such as of ‘*tohu v’bohu*’ (here rendered as ‘unformed and unfilled’)
- It was repetitious. God said what was to be created; then God created what he said was to be created.
- It has balanced patterns as in ‘*and there was evening, and there was morning*’
- The stanzas were numbered off for ease of remembering – ‘*day one*’, ‘*day two*’ etc.
- It was highly additive. The Hebrew word for ‘*and*’ occurs 13 times in the first 5 verses. Most

¹⁷ Genesis 1: 26-28 & 31.

¹⁸ Jeremiah 23:3 “I shall bring (my flock) back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply”.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:1-3. The whole of the first creation story from Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is held to be the work of the Priestly author.

²⁰ Ong, W. J. (2002). *Orality and Literature*. New York: Routledge. pp 33-37

translations omit or change some of these in order to create a more literary English rendering.

This highly rhetorical oral structure enabled the text to be easily recited and helped the listener to follow it even if he or she missed the odd word or was momentarily distracted. The text that is now the opening passage of Genesis may have been familiar to P and his contemporaries from its use in a liturgy. It provided a powerful opening to his work, was easily memorable and also a useful correction to J's story²¹.

P avoided the Garden of Eden stories (too anthropomorphic) and the story of Cain and Abel (too much direct contact between man and Yahweh) and moved on to Noah and the flood.

*Two by two, male and female, pairs of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground came to Noah and went into the ark, as Elohim had commanded.*²²

Since it was important to P that no-one sacrificed to Yahweh before Aaron, the Noah story was rewritten excluding Noah's sacrifice of thanksgiving. Therefore only two of each type of animal were needed, as none would be killed in sacrifice. This contrasts with J where seven pairs of clean animals were brought into the ark (Genesis 7:2) because some are later sacrificed.

When the flood subsided, and after a raven (not a dove) had been sent out just once (not three times), the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. Here the author recalled the words he quoted in Genesis as coming from Elohim: *"be fruitful and multiply ... every moving thing that lives shall be food for you"* But now he added some laws *"Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood"*²³ and *"Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image Elohim made humankind."*²⁴ Then he placed this commitment in the voice of Elohim:

"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you, with your descendants and with every living creature with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth - as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

*"This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."*²⁵

A significant omission in this version of the Noah story is that nowhere does God regret his action, as he does in J where he regrets that he made humans, and is grieved to his heart. Disappointment with creation may have been an idea inherited from the Mesopotamian stories of creation as expressed, for example, in Astrahasis, but the Priestly author could not envisage his God ever doing anything he would subsequently regret and grieve over.

In today's bible there are some genealogies in Genesis 11 that may have been introduced by the person who edited the three main source texts to produce an integrated version of Genesis. P, however, proceeded straight from the Covenant with Noah to the covenant with Abram pausing only briefly to introduce Abram, his wife Sarai and Nephew Lot, to move them to Canaan, to send Lot off to Sodom and to record the birth of Ishmail to Hagar, Sarai's slave. All in a total of six and a half verses which are scattered amongst four chapters in today's bible. After listing the sons of Terah, the original text therefore probably read as follows.

*Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah*²⁶. *Sarai was barren;*

²¹ If, as was suggested earlier, J was a woman writing in Lachish, she would not have been all that concerned with temple liturgy.

²² Genesis 7:8-9

²³ Genesis 9:4

²⁴ Genesis 9:6

²⁵ Genesis 9:9-13

²⁶ It is curious that Haran is identified by his daughters and not, as one might expect, by his father. This leads to the speculation that the daughters were particularly significant in some way. Perhaps by virtue of

*she had no child. Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, Haran's son, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from the land of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, the land could not support both of them living together. Since their possessions were so great that they could not live together, they separated from each other and Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the plain. After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son (whom Hagar bore) Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael*²⁷

The description of Abram's emigration to Canaan has him starting in Haran not 'Ur of the Chaldees.' The miss-apprehension about Ur is a result of a number of errors. Factually, The Chaldean kings emerged in the 9th century in southern Mesopotamia, but came to conquer Babylon and establish the neo-Babylonian empire. In all the many thousands of cuneiform records from the ancient site of Ur, the city is never ascribed to the Chaldeans.²⁸ The Chaldeans held power in Babylon during the late 7th and 6th centuries, and also , and significantly from this author's perspective, from around 780 to 748 BCE when Haran in northern Mesopotamia probably fell within their sphere of control.

Abraham	
Episode	Text in Genesis
Terah's descendants	11:27b-31a
Abram's migration	12:4b-5
Abram and Lot Separate	13:6,11b-12a
Hagar & Ishmael	16:3,15-16
Abram's Covenant	17:1-23(end)
Lot in Sodom	19:29
Isaac's Birth	21:2b-5
Abraham buys a burial cave	23:1-17(end)
Death of Abraham	25:7,8b-11a

In 705, or thereabouts the Chaldean leader Merodach was involved in discussions with Hezekiah concerning insurrection against Assyria. Thus whilst there was no 'land of the Chaldees' at any time that could be associated with Abram, a Judean writer in the last years of the eighth century, in contact with Chaldean patriots in Jerusalem, might have been persuaded that Haran had been Chaldean territory from time immemorial until its loss to the Assyrians. Such a mistake would be understandable if Judah was engaging diplomatically with Chaldean rulers at the time of writing.

Prior to this 32-year period of Chaldean control, Haran had been an Aramean city but in more ancient times it had been Hurrian. Both J (in Genesis 24) and the Deuteronomists appear to have been aware of the Aramean history, but no biblical author seems to have been consciously aware of the Hurrian one. Nevertheless, the laws and customs that they included in the Abram stories are those we now know to be Hurrian. Our knowledge is based on access to the Mari and Nuzi tablets – archaeological resources which the ancient authors did not have. It is generally accepted from Genesis 24, from the Hurrian cultural

their marriages.

²⁷ Genesis 11:27b-13a & 12:4b-5 & 13:6&11b-12a & 16:3&15-16. The text 'the land of the Chaldees' follows the Septuagint. It is possible that the Masoretic text's 'Ur of the Chaldees' resulted from a scribal error by which 'wr (Ur) replaced 'rz ('the land') – which look reasonably similar in Hebrew letters. This mistake was then editorially rationalised with the J text, where Abram was stated to have left from Haran, by supposing a stop-over in that city (Gen 11: 31b). It was not a satisfactory solution since, according to J, Elohim tells Abram whilst in Haran to leave his land and his birthplace (Genesis 12:1) and later confirms Abram's birthplace to have been in Aram Naharaim (Genesis 24).

²⁸ The confusion between Haran and Ur could have become embedded because both Haran and Ur were dedicated to the worship of the Moon god. The bible mentions the Chaldeans 80 times; three times in Genesis; eight times towards the end of the Deuteronomic History, prolifically in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and with a few references in Chronicles, Nehemiah, Daniel, Job and Habakkuk. The Hurrians are not mentioned in the Bible at all. References to the Horites, sometimes taken to be Hurrians, place them in Edom – not a place involved in the Hurrian expansion. P's mention of the land of the Chaldeans taken together with the density of Chaldean references in Isaiah is yet another indication that P was writing in the last years of the 8th century BCE.

background to the Abram stories and from the place names that match the names of Abrams relatives, that Abram's origin was in the area of Nahor and Haran.²⁹

This author included no stories of Abram passing off his wife as his sister. He moved directly into the Covenant with Abram, which began with his God stating:

"I am El Shaddai; walk before me, and be blameless."

This is the first of 6 references to *Shaddai* by the Priestly author³⁰ – all in connection with the patriarchs and all linked with the requirement that the family should be exceedingly fruitful. *Shaddai*'s etymology is obscure and its translation as 'Almighty' merely traditional. Albright has shown it to be of NW Mesopotamian origin, as would be appropriate for the Hurrian Abram.³¹ Eighth century inscriptions found at 'Tell Deir 'Alla' which tell of a vision of the prophet 'Balaam' refer to gods known there as the *Shaddayim*, one of whom was probably the deity of patriarchal stories.³² The name *Shaddai* will be linked with Yahweh when P reports God's revelation of the new divine name to Moses. In the P text, Abram '*fell upon his face*' as Elohim continued:

"As for me, this is my covenant with you:

*You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful... And I will give you and your descendants the land in which you are now an immigrant – all the land of Canaan – as an everlasting possession. And I will be their god."*³³

Much of the language here was characteristic of this author. Abram "*fell upon his face*". Elohim begins "*As for me*", and there was that further reference to becoming "*exceedingly fruitful*". The name change may have been introduced by P or may be the work of an editor concerned to harmonise the various accounts. The insertion of '*ha*' into the middle of the word was common in Aramaic and other related dialects; it has no real significance. Both versions of the name could be interpreted to mean "the father is exalted", but it is likely that the underlying etymology was more prosaic – simply indicating that the person is the 'father' of the tribe of Raham or Ram, which dwelt in Western Arabia. The name is attested in Egyptian Execration texts of the 19th century BCE as *Aburahana*³⁴.

Once more Elohim marked the covenant with a sign: "*You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.*". And later in the same chapter, P will describe the considerable efforts Abraham made to circumcise his people. But before that Elohim continued, "*As for Sarai*", her name should be changed to Sarah and she would be blessed and Elohim would give Abraham a son by her. "*Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?"*" Here in P's text it was Abraham who laughed, but in the very next chapter in today's bible there is J's version of the story in which Yahweh made the same promise – and in her version, it was Sarah who laughed.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah was almost certainly omitted by P (too many angels). A trace remains in these few words '*So it was that, when Elohim destroyed the cities of the plain and overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled, Elohim remembered Abraham, and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval*'³⁵.

²⁹ Speiser (1962); Genesis; AB. p. 80-81

³⁰ The P references are Genesis 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 48:3, 49:25. There is also a reference in Exodus 6:2. The bulk of the references to El Shaddai come in the book of Job (34 instances). Two others occur in the prophesies of Balaam, two in Ruth, two in the Psalms, two in Ezekiel and one each in Joel and the J text.

³¹ W.F. Albright; The names of Shaddai and Abram; Journal of Biblical literature 54; pp 180-193 (1935).

³² *Shaddayim* may be a plural, so it could be a group of divine beings. It could also be another example of the use of a plural in divine contexts to signify the greatness of a single god; as is the case with Elohim. Thus *Shaddai* may be to *Shaddayim* as El is to Elohim.

³³ Genesis 17:1-8

³⁴ R de Vaux. The early History of Israel pp 197-198 in the translation by D. Smith. Philadelphia.

³⁵ Genesis 19:29

P reported that Isaac was born “*at the time of which Elohim had spoken*”, and confirmed that Abraham did indeed circumcise his son when he was eight days old, but P made no mention of Abraham being commanded to sacrifice Isaac. No-one was going to even think about carrying out any sacrifice in this text before Aaron, the author’s apical ancestor.

The next major story in P is unique to this author.³⁶ It was the purchase of the cave of Machpelah near Hebron as a family burial site, to be used initially by Abraham for his wife Sarah. The story was important, since the author would have been a member of the Aaronite family of the tribe of Levi – a tribe with no tribal lands but a number of tribal cities, of which Hebron was one. This story thus acted to confirm the legitimacy of the Levites’ claim to the city.

Then Abraham ‘*expired and was gathered to his people*’³⁷ Archaeology has shed light on the phrase ‘*gathered to his people*’. It was ancient Canaanite practice to place the newly deceased in the same grave as their former relatives. When a new burial

took place, the bones of the previous one would be gathered to the back of the cave with all the others in order to make room for the latest body. Thus, after a while, any dead person would be ‘gathered to their people’. It was also in this purchased cave that, according to P, Isaac and Rebecca will be buried, where Leah will be buried by Jacob and where Jacob himself will be taken from Egypt to be buried by his sons³⁸.

P may have followed his account of Abraham’s life with a list of the descendants of Ishmael his elder son. This left him free to pursue the covenantal idea through the divine promise made to his younger son, Jacob. To do that, he first noted the marriages of Isaac to Rebekah and of their son Esau to a couple of Hittite girls (remarking that the girls caused Isaac and Rebekah much grief). To prevent Jacob from making a similar mistake, he was sent off to Paddan Aram to take a wife from amongst the daughters of Rebekah’s brother Laban, while Esau sought to ameliorate his parent’s displeasure by an additional marriage to one of his uncle Ismail’s daughters. P makes no mention of any attempt by Esau to steal his brother’s birthright.

Jacob did as he was told and went to his ancestral land, but P was not interested in what Jacob did whilst in his uncle’s house. He was not interested in the political metaphors of the stories of J and E, nor of the romantic stories of the marriages of Laban’s girls, nor of the lives of the girl’s maids who were given to Jacob so that their mistresses could have children through them. J’s story of the sympathetic magic by which Jacob secured the newborn lambs as his wages would have been offensive to P. P was only interested in the sons born to Jacob and he provided a complete list organised by mother³⁹ – almost the only mention that the mothers get in P. In P, Rachel gives birth to Benjamin in in Paddan-Aram even though only a few verses earlier a redactor had placed J’s account of Benjamin’s birth occurring on the road between Bethel and Ephrah (Bethlehem). The list of sons was preceded in P by the story in which God appeared to Jacob at Bethel and changed his name to Israel. (Despite this divine command, the name Jacob will continue to be used intermittently in the P text.) Then God spoke to Jacob/Israel in language that is now becoming familiar: -

"I am El Shaddai.

³⁶ Genesis 23

³⁷ Gen 25:8 (Only part of this verse is P; the phrase about being ‘full of years’ is typical J material, whilst ‘expired’ and being ‘gathered to his people’ are typical P.

³⁸ Genesis 49:29-33

³⁹ Genesis 35:23-36:

Isaac and Jacob	
Episode	Text in Genesis
Sons of Ishmael	25:13-18
Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah	25:20
Esau's Hittite marriages	26:34-35
Jacob sent to Laban	27:46 - 28:5
Esau marries again.	28:6-9
Jacob leaves Laban	31:18
Jacob's name changed	35:9-15
Jacobs sons, Isaac's death	35:22b-29(end)
Edomite Genealogies	36:1-30
Jacob in Canaan	37:1
Joseph & Pharaoh	41:45b-46a
Jacob's family go to Egypt	46:6-26a
Jacob meets Pharaoh	47:5-12
Jacob's last request	47:27b-28&48:3-6&49:29-32
Death of Jacob	49:33 & 50:12-13

*Be fruitful and multiply.
A nation and a community of nations will come from you
and kings will be your descendants.
The land that I gave to Abraham and to Isaac,
I give to you and your descendants".*⁴⁰

P recorded Isaac's death at the age of 180, and that Esau and Jacob buried him. There was no animosity between the sons in this account. P listed Esau's sons born in Canaan before stating that Esau had to part from Jacob because their possessions were too great for them to live together. Esau settled in the hill country of Seir – and for clarity, P added that Esau was Edom. Then followed more genealogies concerning Edom and either he or an unknown contributor followed up with a list of the Kings who ruled in Edom 'before there was any King in Israel' This passage was identified as early as the 11th century CE as indicating that Moses could not have written the first five books of the bible – at least not in their entirety – since these Kings postdate any conceivable date for Moses.⁴¹

The story of the emigration to Egypt in P is presently scattered between Genesis 37 and Exodus 3. In this text, it appears that Jacob took the initiative in deciding to go down to Egypt. In E the initiative came from Joseph, whilst in J Pharaoh sent wagons to collect Jacob's family. Gathering the bits of P's text together it is possible to read the brief comment that P may originally have provided: -

*Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an immigrant, the land of Canaan, but Joseph travelled throughout the land of Egypt. Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. And Jacob and all his offspring, his sons, and his sons' sons, his daughters, and his sons' daughters – took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came to Egypt. Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt....*⁴²

And P, as usual, provided detailed lists, concluding...

*All the persons of the house of Jacob - his direct descendants - who came to Egypt were seventy*⁴³.

*And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your fathers and brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen....Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him to Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ... Joseph settled his father and brothers in the best part of the land, in Ramesses, as Pharaoh had directed. And Joseph supported... all his father's household according to the number of children. And they were fruitful and multiplied greatly in numbers."*⁴⁴

Pa-Ramesses was built on the site of Avaris, the capital of the Canaanite Hyksos. P would not have referred to the place as Avaris, but by the name of the place that was usual at the time he was writing. In P, Ramesses was given to Jacob's family as a place to dwell in, whilst the E source stated that the Israelites were cruelly forced to build Ramesses as slaves and Manetho's history claimed that a Canaanite force took control of Avaris at the start of the Hyksos period. These apparently differing accounts may in fact be references to different events within the same history; the Egyptians did allow Canaanite settlers to occupy the delta area around Avaris; a Canaanite force did conquer northern Egypt aided by the substantial

⁴⁰ Genesis 35:11-12

⁴¹ Genesis 36. In this chapter there are 6 different genealogies. They are not entirely consistent. For example, the names of Esau's wives and their fathers in the genealogies differ from the names given in the narrative. P may simply have been a keen collector of lists which he incorporated into his text without editorial alteration. Alternatively some of these lists may have been added by a later editor with the intention of keeping similar material together.

⁴² Genesis 37:1 & 41:46 & 46:6-8...and the list continues to 46:27

⁴³ The more precise figure of 66 descendants of Jacob was possibly added later. The summary in Exodus 1-5 which is based on this passage quotes 70. (The Septuagint has 75 – the figure quoted in Acts 7:14)

⁴⁴ Genesis 46:27 & 48:3-7 & 27b

existing Canaanite settlement; and long after the liberation of Avaris by the Egyptians, a new city was built on the site, as Ramesses ordered, using slave labour including Canaanites.

Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt, and the years of his life were 147. And Jacob said to Joseph, “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.’ Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are.”⁴⁵

This text enabled Ephraim and Manasseh to replace Reuben and Simeon in the lists of the twelve tribes. It was politic for their apical ancestors to become 'children of Israel' even though their mother was an Egyptian⁴⁶. Jacob continued in a passage that is now scattered between Genesis 48 and Exodus 6: -

“As for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded with the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. For when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath⁴⁷ I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hethi, in the cave in the field at Machpelah... a purchase from the children of Heth”⁴⁸.

When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and was gathered to his people. His sons did for him as he had instructed them. They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hethi.⁴⁹

The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.⁵⁰The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.⁵¹ The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Their cry for help rose up to Elohim out of their slavery. Elohim heard their groaning, and Elohim remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Elohim looked upon the Israelites, and Elohim made himself known to them. Elohim spoke to Moses

and said to him. “I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them. I established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as outsiders. I have heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites,

In Egypt	
Episode	Text in Exodus
Israelites Multiply	1:7
Enslavement	1:13-14
God hears	2:23b-25
YHWH declared	6:2-8
Moses Commissioned	6:9-11
Aaron's role	6:30 & 7:1-7
Staff into serpent	7:8-13
Plagues	See table below

⁴⁵ Genesis 47:28 & 48:3-5

⁴⁶ In the middle of the list of people coming into Egypt with Jacob, P states (Genesis 46:20) that Asenath, a daughter of a priest of On, bore these sons to Joseph in Egypt. Also mentioned in Genesis 41:45 and 50 – probably E.

⁴⁷ Genesis 48:6-7

⁴⁸ Genesis 49:29-32. The Yahwist had stated Jacob/Israel's funeral took place at the threshing floor of Abel – East of Jordan. The children of Heth is another name for the Hittites (Hebrew 'hethi') living in Canaan. These 'Hittites' should not be confused with the Indo-European people who occupied Asia Minor in the 2nd Millennium BCE and became one of the great powers of the Ancient Near East.

⁴⁹ Genesis 49:33 & 50:12-13

⁵⁰ Exodus 1:7

⁵¹ Exodus 1:13-14

*I am Yahweh,
 I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them.
 I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement.
 I will take you as my people, and I will be your god
 You shall know that I am Yahweh your god,
 Who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians
 I will bring you into the land that I raised my hand to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;
 I will give it to you for a possession.
 I am Yahweh.’”⁵²*

The sudden appearance of Moses in this text may indicate that the Moses was so well known that he needed no introduction or possibly that one of P’s short passages referring to well-known J stories has been lost or omitted – perhaps when the texts were combined. In the P account embedded in today’s bible, Moses emerges as the adult who had been selected to receive the revelation of the name Yahweh. In the revelation, God stated he had previously been known by the Hurrian name El Shaddai. A change in both culture and language was implicitly reported here. P was consciously correcting J when he stated that the deity had not previously been known to the Patriarchs as Yahweh, for J had stated that people had been calling on the name Yahweh since the time of Seth (Genesis 4:26). E’s account of the commissioning of Moses was closer to that of P, but in E the name by which the Patriarchs knew the deity was not stated; instead, Yahweh identified himself as the god (*elohim*) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In E, the event took place before the burning bush in Midian and not, as here, in Egypt. Earlier in E, god (*elohim*) told Jacob to make an altar to El at Bethel, suggesting that, for the Elohist, El was the name by which Jacob knew his god.

Writing perhaps a century later, Ezekiel will refer to this passage when he quotes Yahweh as saying, “On the day when I chose Israel, I raised my hand to the offspring of the house of Jacob—making myself known to them in the land of Egypt—I raised my hand to them, saying, I am Yahweh your god. On that day, I raised my hand to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt.”⁵³ This shows that Ezekiel was looking at a text in which the divine name was revealed to Moses in Egypt (and not in Sinai) and that this occurred on the same day that Yahweh declared, “*I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians*”. This can only be a quotation from a stand-alone version of the P text, for if it were not so Ezekiel would have read, as we do in today’s bible, that God would make himself known to Moses by means of the burning bush encounter. In the original Priestly text, P continued: -

*Yahweh spoke to Moses,
 “Go and tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the Israelites go out of his land.”
 On the day when Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, he said to him, “I am Yahweh; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.” But Moses said to Yahweh, “Since I am of uncircumcised lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?”
 Yahweh said to Moses, “See, I have made you a god (*elohim*)⁵⁴ to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land.”⁵⁵*

Thus Aaron entered the story with the important role of telling Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Aaron’s entry is supported by a genealogy which emphasised the importance of the Levites and especially of

⁵² Exodus 2:23b-25 & 6:2-8.

⁵³ Ezekiel 20:5-6a

⁵⁴ The Hebrew word ‘*elohim*’, when not used as a divine name can mean god or gods (plural), or spirits or great spirit (as when the ‘witch of Endor’ called back Samuel from the dead). As an adjective it can mean god-like, great or powerful.

⁵⁵ Exodus 6: 9-11 & 28-30 & 7:1-3. The genealogy in 6:14-25 mentions the marriage of Aaron to the sister of Nahshon, the head of the tribe of Judah during the Exodus (Numbers 2:3). This genealogy may not be original P because the repetition of the contents of v10-12 in v28-30 suggests that everything in between was an editorial insertion.

Aaron's branch. Moses and Aaron are described as the sons of Amram by Jochebed, Amram's aunt. So they were both pure-bred Levites by means of a marriage that the yet-to-be-revealed levitical laws will declare illegitimate. Aaron was linked to Judah, by means of his marriage to the sister of the leader of Judah during the Exodus.⁵⁶

The text stated that Yahweh would harden Pharaoh's heart so that Yahweh could multiply the signs and wonders of his power. The first demonstration of Yahweh's power came when Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and it became a great serpent. When the Egyptian magicians did the same trick, Aaron's staff-serpent swallowed theirs, but "*Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them*", as Yahweh had predicted. Next, Moses was told to say to Aaron,

"Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water - so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone."

Then came the frogs, the lice and the boils, and Aaron was involved in it all. In J there were no plagues, but both P and E recorded plague traditions which involved the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. P described four plagues prior to the death of the firstborn, at least two of which (blood and frogs) were also described by E. Since the lice may have been a duplicate of E's flies, only the 'rash of boils' can definitely be regarded as unique to P. The Hebrew appears to refer to a skin disease peculiar to Egypt involving the ulceration of the lower body – possibly the affliction that used to be known by the British in Egypt as 'Nile Sores'⁵⁷. (For P, of course, any skin disease would bring ritual defilement upon the sufferer – as would contact with blood or frogs, or being infested with lice.)

The table that follows compares the two plague traditions.

Source Text	Plague		Verses	Who did Yahweh instruct?	Who mediates the initiation of the plague?	Who speaks with Pharaoh?	Are magicians involved?
E	1a	Blood	7:14-18 & 20b-21 & 23-24	Moses	Moses with his staff	Moses	No
P	1b	Blood	7:19-20a & 22	Aaron via Moses	Aaron with his staff	-	Yes
E	2a	Frogs	7:26-29 & 8:3b-11a	Moses	Yahweh alone	Moses	No
P	2b	Frogs	8:1-3a	Aaron via Moses	Aaron's hand	-	Yes
P	3	Lice	8:12-15	Aaron via Moses	Aaron's hand and staff	-	Yes
E	4	Flies	8:16-26	Moses	Yahweh alone	Moses	No
E	5	Cattle	9:1-7	Moses	Yahweh alone	Moses	No
P	6	Boils	9:8-12	Moses & Aaron	Moses with Aaron	-	Yes
E	7	Hail	9:13-35	Moses	Moses	Moses	No
E	8	Locusts	10:1-20	Moses	Moses	Moses	No
E	9	Darkness	10:21-29	Moses	Moses	Moses	No

Each of the P plagues occupies only three or four verses. All except the last, which has a slight variation, were opened by the phrase 'Yahweh said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron,' ...' and are closed by the phrase 'Pharaoh's heart was hard and he did not listen to them – as Yahweh had said.' They were typical P

⁵⁶ Exodus 6:13-27.

⁵⁷ William H C Propp; Exodus p 332; AB. 'Shechin' (rash) is also referred to Deuteronomy 28:27 as 'the rash of Egypt'. Job is afflicted by it. It is discussed extensively in Leviticus 13.

compositions – powerful repeated phrases within a formulaic construction. They differed from the E plagues in that: -

- prominence was given to Aaron;
- no plagues were reversed;
- no differentiation is made between the impact on the Egyptians and upon the Israelites;
- there were no conversations with Pharaoh after the plague;
- Pharaoh’s magicians were humiliated.

These common factors group the four accounts together, and the presence of P language and style confirm their assignment to the Priestly author. P may have inserted the plagues in order to establish Aaron as having the key priestly role of mediating between Yahweh and man.⁵⁸

One plague is particularly interesting. In the plague of the lice, Yahweh instructed Aaron to "*reach out your staff and strike the dust of the earth*" and Aaron *'reached out his hand with his staff'*, and all the dust of the earth became lice. But when the magicians tried to do likewise, they failed and said to Pharaoh, "*It is the finger of a god (elohim).*" The use of *'elohim'* in the midst of this passage, full of P language and motivation, is perhaps not surprising, since the words are placed in the mouths of Egyptian magicians. But the *'finger of Elohim'* phrase will be used in a more surprising context. It will be the means by which, according to P, the commandments were inscribed on the tablets of stone.

The plagues concluded the Priestly author's introduction to the time of Moses and Aaron. He reached this point in around two hundred and eighty verses - verses which included the great creation account and the covenants with Noah, Abram and Jacob which all referred back to the creation commandment to be fruitful. But from this point onwards, P became expansive. His main objectives were the revelation of the law, the rituals of the cult, and the establishment of the line of Aaron as the most holy priesthood.

Journey from Egypt to Sinai

Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt and said:

"This month shall mark for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.

*Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ... The whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it...*⁵⁹

From Egypt to Sinai	
Episode	Text in Exodus
The Passover	12:1-20&28
The vigil	12:40-42
The Passover regulations	12:43-50
Retreat before Pharaoh	14:1-4,8,9b,10a,10c,
Crossing the Reed Sea	14:15-18,21a,21c,22-23,
Defeat of Pharaoh	14:26-27a,28-30
Food in the desert	16:2-3,6-35a,36
Arrival in Sinai	19:1

And the Priest went on to detail the rules governing the celebration of the Passover. He allocated 21 verses to this task. Then, having stated the Israelites stayed in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, P

⁵⁸ Psalms 78 and 105 also contain versions of the plague sequence. Psalm 78 includes blood, flies, frogs, locusts and hail, which in parallel with sleet destroyed their vines and in parallel with lightning tormented their animals. Lice, boils and darkness are omitted. In Psalm 105, the sequence follows E except that darkness is the first rather than the last plague and the diseased cattle and the rash of boils are omitted, leaving 7 plagues. Thus out of all four accounts, only P mentions boils.

⁵⁹ Exodus 12:1-7

continued: -

On that very day, at the end of four hundred and thirty years, all the companies of Yahweh went out from the land of Egypt.

That was a night of vigil for Yahweh - to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

That same night a vigil is to be kept for Yahweh by all Israelites throughout their generations⁶⁰

Before returning to the action, P gave further instructions for keeping the vigil. Then came the Exodus. In today's bible the separate E, J and P accounts of the Exodus have been woven together.

In E the emphasis was on the ungrateful nature of the Israelites. It refers to 'the army' of Israel. Elohim was not directly involved, but his angel separated the armies and clogged the wheels of the Egyptian chariots. In J, Yahweh intervened directly by means of a terrifying theophany from within the pillar of cloud. Yahweh drove the waters back with a strong east wind enabling the Israelites to cross the sea on dry ground (hebrew 'harabbah'), but causing the Egyptians to flee before the flood as the water returned.

In P, there was great emphasis on Yahweh's controlling will in all these events. Yahweh states that he will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that "I will gain glory over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots and his chariot drivers". There was no theophany; instead Yahweh worked through Moses who was told to hold out his hand to divide the waters of the sea – thus allowing the Israelites to walk between them on 'dry land' (hebrew 'yabbasah')⁶¹. And P characteristically took the trouble to locate the incident precisely.⁶²

The stylistic differences are revealed by the separation of the texts. In particular P used the repetition of variations on the phrase 'Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers' to great rhetorical effect in order to emphasise the glory of Yahweh – an effect that is somewhat diminished in today's bible by the intrusion of the other texts. The three texts are given side by side: -

E	J	P
<p>14:^{5b} The attitude of Pharaoh and his staff towards the people reversed, and they said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and lost their service! // ⁷ So he took 600 chariots – chosen from all of Egypt's chariots - with officers over them all. //</p> <p>¹¹ The Israelites said to Moses, "Was it because of a lack of graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'?"</p>	<p>14:^{5a} The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, // ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; // ⁹ And Egypt pursued the Israelites. //</p> <p>^{10b} The Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them and they were terrified. //</p> <p>¹³ But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that Yahweh will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴ Yahweh will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." //</p> <p>^{19b} and the pillar of cloud moved</p>	<p>14:⁸ <i>Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out with a high hand. //</i></p> <p>^{9b} <i>They overtook them camping by the sea - all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army, - at Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.</i></p> <p>¹⁰ <i>And Pharaoh drew near//, ^{10c}And the Israelites cried out to Yahweh//</i></p> <p>¹⁵ <i>Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶ And you, you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry land. ¹⁷ Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots,</i></p>

⁶⁰ Exodus 12:40-42

⁶¹ P used the same word (yabbasah meaning 'dry land') as he had done in his account of creation and his version of the flood story, whilst J used 'harabbah', as she had done in her version of the flood story.

⁶² Enhanced Strong's lexicon translates Pi-Hahiroth as 'Place (Pi) where sedge grows'. This would fit with the name of the water which the Israelites cross - the 'Reed Sea'. Its location near Migdol – a fortress town on Egypt's northern border suggests a lake in the delta area.

<p>For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die here in the wilderness.” //¹⁹ The angel of Elohim who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; //²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel//²⁵ and clogged^[a] their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty.</p> <p>...</p> <p>15:²⁰ Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them, “Sing to Yahweh for he triumphed, Horse and rider he cast in the sea.”</p>	<p>from in front of them and took its place behind them. //</p> <p>^{20b} And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; and no-one came near the other all night. //</p> <p>^{21b} And Yahweh drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry ground; //</p> <p>²⁴ At the morning watch Yahweh looked down upon the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. //^{25b} The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt.” //</p> <p>^{27b} And at dawn the sea had gone back to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, Yahweh tossed the Egyptians into the sea. //</p> <p>³⁰ Thus Yahweh saved Israel that day from the Egyptians.</p>	<p>and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.”</p> <p>²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. //^{21c} and the waters were divided. ²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry land, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. //</p> <p>²⁶ Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, their chariots and chariot drivers.” ^{27a} So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, // ²⁸ And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers and the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them was left.</p> <p>²⁹ But the children of Israel had gone on dry land through the sea, and the waters had been a wall for them at their right and at their left.</p>
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Despite their escape from Egypt, the ‘congregation’ (a favourite P word) were ungrateful. P wrote that: -

The whole congregation (Hebrew “edah’) of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by a pot of meat and ate our fill of bread. But you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole multitude with hunger.”⁶³

But Moses promised them that

*At evening you will know that Yahweh brought you out of Egypt
And in the morning, you will see Yahweh’s glory*

And in the evening Yahweh gave them quails for meat, and in the morning provided them manna for bread. Are there echoes here of P’s mantra from his creation story “And there was morning and there was evening”? Whether this was a deliberate link or not, the next P story dealt with the law of the Sabbath.⁶⁴ There was to be a double ration of manna on the sixth day, so that the people could rest on the seventh day – as God had done in the creation story. Despite this some people went out to search for food on the Sabbath:

⁶³ Exodus 16:2-3

⁶⁴ Exodus 16:6-26

*“How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?
See that Yahweh has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; stay in your place; let no man leave his place on the seventh day.”⁶⁵*

So the people learnt to rest on the seventh day. (And Moses and Aaron kept a sample of Manna in a jar as a remembrance for the people.)

Instruction; the artefacts of the Cult

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. And the glory of Yahweh settled on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days. He called to Moses on the seventh day from inside the cloud. The appearance of Yahweh’s glory seemed like a consuming fire in the eyes of the children of Israel. Moses went into the cloud and Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, “Tell the children of Israel to take an offering for me from all those whose hearts prompt them to give...”⁶⁶

There followed six chapters of instructions as to the design of the sacred Ark, the Tent and everything associated with the cult.⁶⁷ They were to be made from people’s offerings: -

gold, silver, and bronze, blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats’ hair, rams’ skins, fine leather, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, Onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breast-piece.⁶⁸

The gold and silver articles were to be made into artefacts for the Holy Tent – or tabernacle as it is often traditionally translated.⁶⁹ The ephod and the breast-piece were garments to be worn by priests when performing their duties. Although the nature of the ephod remains a mystery to this day, P assumed his readers would be familiar with it and would need no explanation.

Throughout these instructions, there are repeated references to 'designs' that were to be 'shown' to Moses⁷⁰. It would have saved a great deal of scholarly speculation if these drawings had survived. As it is, scholars have yet to devise an interpretation of the instructions that deals consistently with all the data available. Nevertheless, it appears that the Tent could have been roughly 5 metres high, 3 to 6 meters wide and 10 to 15 metres long, built around an acacia wood frame covered in gold fastened into silver bases. It had an inner lining (*miskan*) of linen decorated with winged creatures woven in blue, purple and scarlet thread. It had an outer sheet (*ohel*) of goat’s hair. The Tent was finally protected by a covering of red dyed rams’ skins with beaded leather above.⁷¹

The Cultic Artifacts	
Episode	Text in Exodus
Moses enters the cloud	24:15b-18a
Instructions	25:1-30:38
Selection of Craftsmen	31:1-11
<i>H: Sabbath</i>	<i>31:12-17</i>
The Tablets	31:18 & 34:29-32
Moses Veil	34:33-35(end)
Sabbath	35:1-4
Donations	35:6-29
Appointment of Craftsmen	35:30-36:7
Execution	36:8-39:43(end)
Preparation	40:1-33
Yahweh's presence	40:34-38(end)

⁶⁵ Exodus 16:28-30.

⁶⁶ Exodus 19:1 & 24:16-18a & 25:1-2

⁶⁷ Exodus 26-31

⁶⁸ Exodus 25:3b-7

⁶⁹ The Hebrew words ('ohel' and 'mishkan') that are often translated as 'tabernacle', do not have the special meaning that 'tabernacle' has acquired in English. They are just ordinary words that in other contexts simply mean 'tent'. Some texts use 'ohel' to describe a kind of fly-sheet covering the 'mishkan'.

⁷⁰ Here in Exodus 25:9 and also in 25:40, 26:30, 27:8 and Numbers 8:4

⁷¹ Taking a cubit to be 52cm, the length of the Egyptian cubit (*mh*) - which may have given its name to the Israelite cubit (*amah*) and probably its size as well. Other cubits with similar names existed throughout the ANE and all are about the same size plus or minus 10%. The differences in width and length of the Holy

The Ark was to be about 120 cms long by 70 cms wide and deep, lined inside and out with pure gold and fitted with four gold rings to enable it to be carried by two gold covered poles. Over the ark was a covering of pure gold at either end of which were two winged beasts of wrought gold facing each other. Separating these most holy things from the front part of the Tent was, according to some translations, an embroidered linen veil (hebrew 'paroket'), supported on 4 columns, Others suggest that the 'paroket' should be understood simply as the roof of a four-posted pavilion covering the Ark. In the front part of the Tent there was a wooden table, plated in gold, carrying golden utensils and the show-bread. Opposite the altar was to be a substantial menorah – a seven branched lamp-stand made from a talent (43 kg) of gold.

Outside the Tent was a courtyard (25m by 50m) surrounded by a curtain 2.5 m high of woven linen held down by bronze pegs and suspended from bars by silver hooks. Within the courtyard was a sacrificial altar, 1.5m high and 2.5m square made of acacia wood overlaid in bronze.

Moses was commanded to make special clothes for Aaron and his sons. These were to be used once they were consecrated as priests. They were to wear an 'ephod' of gold, blue, purple and scarlet woven linen. They were to be four rows of gemstones upon it – each gem to be different and signifying a tribe of Israel. Beneath the Ephod was a blue robe whose skirts were to be decorated with golden bells alternating with woven pomegranates in blue, purple and crimson. Aaron was to wear a headdress to which would be fastened a golden blossom engraved with the words 'Holy to Yahweh'. Aaron and his sons were to be sanctified through the offering of a bull and two rams together with bread and oil.

And I shall tent among the children of Israel and I shall be a god to them. And they will know that I am Yahweh their god who brought them out of Egypt so that I might tent with them. I am Yahweh their god.⁷²

This may once have concluded the instruction, but in today's bible there remain two chapters containing some further thoughts; '*And you shall make an altar for burning incense*' which was to be placed before the paroket; and a bronze basin for washing, to be placed at the entrance to the Tent. Between the instructions for these two items, the arrangements for the financing of the Tent were explained. This was to be done by means of a census of all males over 20 years of age; each person was to give half a shekel regardless of their wealth. Later, Yahweh was held to have required the exclusion of all priests from any census⁷³ Finally instructions were given to make a special holy incense in limited quantities, with the warning that anyone who imitated the fragrance of this incense would be '*cut off from his people*'.

Then, in the text now in today's Exodus 31, Yahweh told Moses to appoint Bezalel and Oholiab as the leading artisans directing the work. Bezalel's name may be derived from 'in the shade of El' whilst Oholiab means something like 'My tent father' – both apt names for tent-builders. Both are solid Western Semitic names which can be connected to references outside the bible.

This section continued with a reminder about the Sabbath⁷⁴ – probably inserted by H – the other priestly writer – and concluded with the words

When (Yahweh) had finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two Tablets of Witness, tablets of stone, written with the finger of elohim. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets in his hand, he was not aware that his face had become radiant whilst he had been talking with Yahweh. But when Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came close, and he gave them all the commands that Yahweh had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.⁷⁵

Here were the tablets of stone which, in this version, were never broken. It appears that P

Tent depend on what assumptions are made about the arrangement of the frames and the hanging of the curtains.

⁷² Exodus 29:45-46

⁷³ Numbers 1:47-49

⁷⁴ Exodus 31:12-17

⁷⁵ Exodus 31:18 & 34:29-33

considered that the instructions which Yahweh had just finished speaking about – the instructions for making the holy artefacts and the instructions for the ordination the priests of Aaron and his sons – were written on the tablets of stone. The tablets were written with “*the finger of Elohim*”, not with the ‘finger of Yahweh’ as one might have expected from the context. Perhaps P was quoting from an established tradition in the idiom of that tradition. The phrase is rare in the bible, but as already noted, it did occur in one other place in P – in connection with the plague of lice. Since on that occasion it was placed in the mouths of Egyptian magicians it would not have offended against P’s theology; but here it may do, since in P’s theology, Yahweh did not appear to men and women, did not do things for them – such as personally closing the ark – and therefore did not personally write notes of his Words for them. But the word ‘*elohim*’ was not just a name for God, it could also be used in reference to great men – and Yahweh has already said of Moses ‘*I will make you an ‘elohim’ to Pharaoh*’. It is possible here that P meant that the tablets were written by Moses at Yahweh’s command. All that can be said is that P made no effort to rule this understanding out, and such an interpretation would be more consistent with P’s theology. The same phrase was used only once by an author other than P – and that was when the Deuteronomist referred to the same incident (Deut 9:10) and was probably quoting P’s words. The Yahwist, however, was explicit that it was Moses who inscribed the tablets (Exodus 34 27:28), whereas, according to the Elohist, Moses relayed what is now known as the Covenant Code to the people and then, secure of the people’s agreement, wrote it down; later Yahweh wrote the instructions and commandments on tablets and gave them to Moses.⁷⁶ In P the tablets were known as the ‘Tablets of Witness’; but to what did the tablets witness? Later, in what is today’s Deuteronomy, it would be asserted that the ‘Ten Commandments’, in the formulation familiar to us today, would be revealed directly to all the Israelites (Deut. 5:19), but elsewhere it seems that the tablets were a witness to the instructions that Yahweh gave Moses on the Holy Mountain, and these varied. All four versions of the dictation and recording of the laws given at or on the Holy Mountain would eventually be assembled together by a skilful redactor probably working in exile.⁷⁷

P included nothing at all about the activities in the camp whilst Moses was up in the mountain. He included nothing about the whereabouts or actions of Aaron. If P was aware of E’s accusations concerning Aaron’s blasphemous acts with a golden calf that were alleged to have occurred during Moses time on the Holy Mountain, he made no attempt to deal with them. Perhaps he was not aware of them; perhaps he regarded them as beneath contempt; perhaps this author was a reforming priest with genuine criticisms himself of the priestly hierarchy. What is clear is that this author accepted that it was to Moses alone that the tablets were given; Aaron took no part in the episode.

The next five chapters dealt with the actual manufacture of the tent (Exodus 35:4 to 40:33) following the earlier instructions (Exodus 25:1 to 31:11). This completed the literary device by which the author first recorded the instructions from the deity, and then repeated them in a description of their execution, often in exactly the same words. The device is familiar from the earlier Canaanite Epics, and elsewhere in the Ancient Near East. It is a deliberate device, common in oral literature; it can be found in many biblical and non-biblical examples⁷⁸

The instructions for finishing the frames of the outer tent (and its erection), followed by instructions for the paroket (and its assembly) follow. The instruction text is matched with the execution:

Instruction	Execution
<p><i>You shall overlay the frames with gold, and shall make their rings of gold to hold the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold.</i></p> <p><i>(Then you shall erect the Tent according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.)</i></p> <p><i>You shall make a paroket of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen; with cherubim skilfully worked into it. You shall hang it</i></p>	<p><i>He overlaid the frames with gold, and made rings of gold for them to hold the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.</i></p> <p><i>He made the paroket of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, with cherubim skilfully worked into it. For it he made four pillars of</i></p>

⁷⁶ Exodus 24: 4 & 12

⁷⁷ The origin of the ‘Ten Commandments’ will be discussed later in Chapter 11. The process by which the accounts were combined into today’s Exodus 19-34 will be discussed in Chapter 14.

⁷⁸ For a non-Canaanite example, see the Akkadian Samisuilna B inscription. It is quoted by Milgrom in AB: ‘Leviticus 1-16’ pp 549-553.

Instruction	Execution
<p><i>on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver. (You shall hang the paroket under the clasps, and bring the ark of the covenant in there, within the paroket; and the paroket shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the most holy place. You shall set the table outside the paroket, and the lamp-stand on the south side of the tent opposite the table; and you shall put the table on the north side.)</i></p> <p><i>You shall make a screen for the entrance to the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework. You shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.</i></p>	<p><i>acacia, overlaid with gold; their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver.</i></p> <p><i>He also made a screen for the entrance to the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; and its five pillars with their hooks.</i></p> <p><i>He overlaid their capitals and their bases with gold, but their five bases were of bronze.⁷⁹</i></p>

The instruction dealt with both the manufacture of the sacred artefacts and their assembly; but the execution dealt with the manufacture only, for the assembly of the artefacts was to take place later – on the anniversary of their arrival at the holy mountain. The description of that event was reserved by P for what, in today’s bible, can be found in Exodus 40. Meanwhile

“Moses saw all the works; and they were done as Yahweh had commanded, And Moses blessed them”⁸⁰.

The inauguration

Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, *“On the first day of the first month, you shall erect the Tent.”⁸¹* Instructions for this and for the ordination of Aaron and his sons followed. Then, using the established pattern of partial repetition, the author described the actual setting up of the tent but postponed the description of Aaron’s ordination for later. Meanwhile P confirmed that Moses did everything just as Yahweh had instructed.

*Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting.
And the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle.
Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled upon it.
And the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle.*

*Whenever the cloud was lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites would set out on a stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not lifted, then they did not set out until the day that it was. The cloud of Yahweh was on the Tent by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.
And Yahweh summoned Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying:
Speak to the people of Israel:⁸²*

These lines are parts of a long priestly passage – mainly P but with some H contributions and minor editorial intrusions – a passage that begins today in Exodus 34:29 and continues throughout Leviticus and into Numbers as far as 10:27. It began with 7 chapters of rules concerning sacrificial

⁷⁹ Instructions: Exodus 26: 29-37. Implementation: Exodus 36:34-38

⁸⁰ Exodus 39:43

⁸¹ Exodus 40:2

⁸² Exodus 40:34 – Leviticus 1:2. P often prefers ‘Tent of Meeting’ in place of Tabernacle (*mishkan*).

offerings. These included burnt offerings, grains offerings, well-being offerings, sin offerings, and restitution offerings along with instructions for the associated rituals. The instructions were declared by Yahweh to Moses who stood before the Tent of Meeting to hear them. Each group of instructions was introduced by the formula above beginning '*And Yahweh summoned Moses...*'. The content suggests a regulated temple-based cult serving the settled agricultural community of the late monarchy.

The importance of the Tent to the priest was that it was the place before which all sacrifices and offerings were to be made. This was emphasised many times for many different sacrifices throughout what is now Leviticus, for example:

*If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before Yahweh. ...The bull shall be slaughtered before Yahweh. Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood – dashing the blood against all the sides of the altar at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.*⁸³

The Temple in which these offerings would have been made in the author's time is not mentioned for the obvious reason that the author has chosen to set the instructions in the context of the wanderings of the Israelites, but the rules as stated would apply just as well within a Temple context since the Tent was kept in the temple – possibly covering the Ark. In describing the dedication of the Temple, the author of Kings, writing in the late 7th century, wrote that the priests brought '*the Ark of the Covenant and the Tent of Meeting and all the Holy Vessels that were in the Tent*'⁸⁴ and, by implication, placed them in the Temple.⁸⁵ It is possible that the Tent was emphasised because it remained wholly and exclusively dedicated to Yahweh. The Temple as a whole was not infrequently contaminated by Asherah poles and altars to foreign gods – as written in the Deuteronomic History and notably condemned by the prophet Ezekiel. Furthermore, the care of the Tent was given to the Levites, for Moses was told:

*You shall appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Witness, and over all its equipment, and over all that belongs to it; they are to carry the Tabernacle and all its equipment and they shall tend it, and shall camp around the Tabernacle.*⁸⁶

But it was specifically the sons of Aaron, and not Levites in general, that were to receive the sacrifices for

*Yahweh said to Aaron: You and your sons ...you yourselves shall perform the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar.*⁸⁷

The tradition of sacrifice before the Tent could not be maintained during the second temple because the

⁸³ Leviticus 1:3-5

⁸⁴ 1 Kings 8:4

⁸⁵ Friedman (1987) has laid out his reasons for believing that the Tent was in the Temple in his book 'Who wrote the Bible' pp 174-187. In addition to some ingenious dimensional analysis, he lines up a number of quotations from Kings, Chronicles and the Psalms that support his thesis. See, for example psalm 28:8 "Yahweh, I love the dwelling of your House, the place of your glory's tent" or chronicles 9:23 "So they and their descendants were in charge of the gates of the house of Yahweh, that is, the house of the tent, as guards" To appreciate two of his references (psalm 26:8 and 74:7), it is necessary to go back to the Hebrew text, since in most English translations the references to the tabernacle (*miskan*) have been rendered as 'dwelling'. William H C Propp disagrees (Propp (2006) pp 708-709 and 732). Propp argues that a more straightforward reading of the text yields a tent that is too big to fit in the temple, that the psalms are not to be taken literally and that Chronicles is suspect because of the author's particular stance on continuity of tent worship. He contends that had the tent been placed in the temple, that fact would have certainly been mentioned in the detailed description of the building of the temple in Kings; and it is not. (In this last point he is probably wrong, for it is mentioned in the dedication ceremony)

⁸⁶ Numbers 1:50 This verse could be due to P or to a Redactor, also an Aaronite priest. The 'Tabernacle of Witness' (*mishkan ha'eduth*) replaces P's usual 'Tent of Meeting' (*ohel moed*) here, and is elsewhere associated with R (e.g. Numbers 9:15-23)

⁸⁷ Numbers 18:1-5

Tent had been destroyed by the Babylonians when they flattened the first temple. Thus the constant references to the Tent point to the fact that these laws were not written down during the second temple period. Those who wish to believe that P wrote during the second temple period are therefore forced to assert that 'Tent' is not just an artefact held within the temple, but P's code-word for 'temple' – and some scholars are so committed to the late dating of P's work as proposed by Graf and others that they do just that.

The everyday job of the Priest was to tend this sacred Tent and to officiate in the ritual of the sacrifices. Therefore P devoted a major part of his text to describing these rituals. Throughout, he continued to use the literary device of having Yahweh speak the words to Moses, who stood before the Tent of Meeting, listening. All the principle sacrifices were discussed. The burnt offering or 'holocaust' now appears in chapter one of Leviticus. The whole offering was consumed on the fire in the belief that Yahweh would accept the offering by enjoying the pleasing aroma that came up from the fire. Grain offerings (chapter 2), on the other hand were only to be partially consumed by the fire: the rest was eaten by the priests. In offerings of well-being (chapter 3), it was stated that, '*all the fat is Yahweh's. ... you shall not eat any fat or any blood*'. The rest of the animal was to be shared between priest and donor. This type of offering was used mainly in private worship; indeed it may well have been the normal way for the more religious to eat meat. Chapters 4 and 5 in today's bible contain the P text that dealt with the sin offerings: firstly describing the proper response of a priest who has accidentally sinned, and later the required response of anyone else. Even the poor were able to feel that their inadvertent sins would be forgiven them, since the sin offering could be as little as a bird, or even a grain offering if need be. Part of the offering would be burnt and the rest consumed by the priest. Inadvertent sin could, for example, be failing to come forward with evidence when a matter was being enquired into, accidentally touching an unclean thing, or swearing in the heat of the moment. To obtain forgiveness, confession was first required, then the offering.

Laws	
Topic	Chapters in Leviticus
The offerings	1-7
The ordination of Aaron and his sons	8-9
The death of Aaron's sons	10
Clean and unclean foods	11:1-42 & 46-47
Purification after childbirth	12
Various diseases	13
The day of Atonement	16
<i>Holiness Code</i>	<i>17-26</i>
Redemptions	27

P dealt with the sins requiring restitution. By the time P was writing, a well organised temple plutocracy had established a price for sacrificial animals in its own currency:

*'When any of you commit a trespass and sin unintentionally in any of the holy things of Yahweh, you shall bring a ram without blemish from the flock as your guilt offering to Yahweh. It is convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel It is a guilt offering. And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss, and you shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf with the ram of the guilt offering, and you shall be forgiven.'*⁸⁸

In what are now Leviticus chapters 6 and 7, the author provided further detailed instructions for the proper way of carrying out these offerings - instructions that were principally addressed to the priesthood.

The ordination of Aaron and his sons

Leviticus was the core of the Priestly authors work, and at the centre of this core, in what is now contained in Leviticus 8 and 9, lay P's description of the ordination of Aaron and his sons. The instructions for this had been laid out in outline earlier (Exodus 40:12-16), but here the actual ceremony was described in loving detail.

Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. He put the tunic on Aaron, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. Then

⁸⁸ Leviticus 5:14-16

he put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it. He placed the breast-piece on him, and in the breast-piece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy crown, as Yahweh commanded Moses.

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tent and all that was in it, and consecrated them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. And Moses brought forward Aaron's sons, and clothed them with tunics, fastened sashes around them, and tied head-dresses on them, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.⁸⁹

Moses sacrificed a bull as a sin offering, then a ram as a burnt offering and finally a second ram as an ordination offering. Aaron and his sons partook of the ordination offering. Then for seven days and nights they remained in the entrance to the Tent, fasting and preparing themselves for their ordination. On the eighth day Aaron and his sons sacrificed and Aaron blessed the people. Then Aaron, with Moses accompanying him, entered the Tent for the first time. And when they came out, Aaron blessed the people:

And the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people. Fire came out from Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.⁹⁰

But immediately another lesson had to be learnt:

Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unauthorised outside fire before Yahweh, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what Yahweh meant when he said, 'Through those near to me I will show myself holy, before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron was silent⁹¹

Aaron's cousins were commanded to remove the corpses from the camp, and Aaron was commanded to make no gesture of mourning over the death of his sons, but to remain inside the Tent of the Meeting.

One interesting speculation notes the similarity of the names of Aaron's sons with the sons of Israel's Jeroboam I - Nadab and Abijah⁹². It was Jeroboam who, according to the book of Kings, set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel saying, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" - the words that E alleged were spoken over the golden calves supposedly made by Aaron whilst Moses was on the mountain. The author of Kings, who was not an Aaronite priest, further claimed that both Jeroboam's sons met their different deaths as a result of their father's blasphemous acts. Is it just coincidence that Aaron's sons have roughly the same names as the sons of Jeroboam and that all these people died as a result of irreligious acts? Or is there a parallel being acknowledged here - a parallel between Aaron and Jeroboam in the matter of golden calves? It has already been noted that P does not attempt any alternative explanations of what Aaron was doing while Moses was on the Holy Mountain. In the light of this story about Aaron's son, it seems that the absence of any justification of Aaron's may not have been accidental. It is hard to resist the idea that this author-priest was critical of the Aaronite hierarchy in the temple.

At the time P was composing his work, the Assyrians were encroaching from the north. Their form of astral worship was penetrating domestic religion in Judah. This involved the setting up of private altars on rooftops and the offering of incense to the gods. Archaeological excavations have found plentiful examples of these altars all over Israel and Jordan dating from the 10th to the 6th centuries BCE. In the view of W.G Dever (2001) they were probably used for incense offerings. There is also evidence that the larger

⁸⁹ Leviticus 8:6-12

⁹⁰ Leviticus 9:22-24

⁹¹ Leviticus 10:1-3

⁹² R. Gradwold quoted by Milgrom in AB 'Leviticus 1-16'

altars in the 'high places' that were destroyed in the reforms of the late 8th century used cultic bowls inscribed as being 'consecrated for the priests'⁹³. There would thus be a good reason for a zealous priest to tell a story about the dangers of making the sacrificial fire with 'unauthorised' coals. It is possible to speculate that by involving Aaron's sons in the story, the author may have been attacking Aaronite tolerance of, or even participation in, sacrifices which used '*outside fire*'.⁹⁴

Instruction; the purity laws

Up to this point, according to P, the instructions had largely been given to Moses alone. From now on the instructions would generally be given to Aaron and Moses together. The principle subject matter was the purity laws and in particular:

- The distinction between clean and unclean foods (Leviticus chapter 11)
- The purification of women after childbirth (chapter 12).
- Various skin diseases, their recognition and the possibilities for purification (chapters 13 and 14).
- Bodily discharges, both normal and abnormal (chapter 15).

These issues may appear to be substantially medical matters, but to P they were matters relating to ritual purity and therefore their proper management was crucial to a proper administration of the rituals of the cult.

The ritual for the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was described in what is now Leviticus 16. It was seen as an annual event, taking place just before the major festival – the festival of booths – and its purpose was to purify the sanctuary and the people. In this ritual, Aaron, as high priest, should first purify himself, then take two male goats

Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats;

- one lot for Yahweh,

- the other lot for Azazel.

*And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the lot for Yahweh fell and offer it for a sin offering. The goat upon which the lot for Azazel fell shall be stood alive before Yahweh, in order that atonement may be made with it by sending it off into the wilderness to Azazel.*⁹⁵

In some translations the name 'Azazel' is substituted by the word 'a scapegoat' and the grammar adjusted to fit. However, Azazel can be identified as the fallen angel Azazel referred to in the Book of Enoch, where that text 'ascribes all sin to Azazel'.⁹⁶ There is no other use of the word Azazel in the Torah, so the meaning has sometimes been deduced from this context alone – ignoring the Enoch references. But even in the Leviticus text Azazel is held in parallel to Yahweh, suggesting that Azazel is the name of a divine being, and not a goat. Furthermore, the wilderness to which the goat was despatched is the traditional habitation of satyrs or monsters (*saiyr, tanniyn*)⁹⁷. In Enoch, Azazel is confined in a pit in a barren desert⁹⁸ – precisely the sort of place to which the goat carrying the sins of Israel might be expected to be sent.

Today's Chapters 17 – 26 contain the 'Holiness Code', written by H, who probably edited P's work and inserted the code within it, so that today's Chapter 27 is the next occurrence of a P text. This dealt with the prices for redeeming people, animals or property consecrated to Yahweh. The prices were:

⁹³ Dever (;2001); 'What did the biblical authors know and when did they know it?'; pp 180-190.

⁹⁴ The word translated here as 'outside' or 'unauthorised' is '*zarah*'. In some translations the word 'foreign' is used – implying foreign worship. Friedman suggests the term should be understood to mean 'outside a particular group'. When used with regard to priests, for example, it means a layperson. In Exodus 30:9, '*zarah*' incense is listed amongst the things that may not be burnt on the incense altar in the temple.

⁹⁵ Leviticus 16:8-10

⁹⁶ Enoch 10:8 See the commentary by Olsen in *1 Enoch* from Eerdmans commentary on the Bible, p. 910 and Jacob Milgrom in his AB work on Leviticus 1-16 p 1020.

⁹⁷ Isaiah 13:21, 34:14 Tobit 8:3 and elsewhere.

⁹⁸ Enoch 10:4

Man between 20 and 60 years old	50 shekels
Woman between 20 and 60	30 shekels
Boy over 5	20 shekels
Girl over 5	10 shekels
Boy under 5	5 shekels
Girl under 5	3 shekels
Man over 60	15 shekels
Woman over 60	10 shekels

If property was to be redeemed, then the cost would be 20% more than the assessed value of the property. These commercial arrangements surely sprang out of a time in which Judah had developed a reasonably sophisticated economy – such as was the case in the second half of the eighth century. They do not sound like the sort of arrangements that would have been in force whilst the people of Israel were struggling to survive in the wilderness.

The priestly author was precise. Dates, family trees, sizes of artefacts and censuses of the population were important to him. In Exodus he told us that the Tent was set up on the first day of first month of the second year⁹⁹. In Leviticus we learnt that Moses was summoned to the Tent to hear the word of Yahweh, and this law was then laid out. Now in Numbers he states that it was on the first day of the second month of the second year that Moses was commanded to take a census of the people who were with him in the wilderness. Later another census would be taken, this time of those who would enter the land of Canaan; its purpose would be to ensure that all those who had lacked sufficient faith in Yahweh had died out. This first census used military terminology:

*From twenty years old and upwards, number everyone able to go out to the army of Israel. You and Aaron shall enrol them, company by company.*¹⁰⁰

The Levites however were not yet to be numbered, for their duties lay in the service of the Tent. In the layout of the camp as described by P, the Levites were positioned around the Tent of Meeting with the tribal army units around them – each unit camping and travelling by its flag. On the eastern side of the encampment, and travelling first on manoeuvres was the camp of Judah with the camps of Issachar and Zebulum next to it. To the south was Reuben flanked by Simeon and Gad. To the west was Ephraim flanked by Manasseh and Benjamin, whilst to the north and taking up the rear on manoeuvres was Dan supported by Asher and Naphali. Here the arrangement seems designed to protect the centre, a layout said to be similar to that of the Egyptian army on manoeuvres. Including the non-combatant Levites, thirteen tribes are mentioned. The Elohist, however, had described a different layout placing the Tent of Meeting outside the camp (Numbers 12:4-15) where it was theologically safer. With the central arrangement, the protective barrier of the Levites was required to prevent the potentially impure soldiers from accidentally triggering the wrath of God.

In Sinai	
Subject Matter	Chapter in Numbers
The first census	1
The Layout of the camp	2
Levites as firstborn	3
Arrangements for Moving the Tent of Meeting	4
The Purity of the camp	5:1-4
The redemption of Guilt	5:5-10
Dealing with Jealousy	5:11-31 (end)
The Nazirite	6:1-21
The priestly blessing	6:22-27 (end)
The dedication of the Tent of Meeting	7
Setting up the lamps	8:1-5
The consecration of the Levites	8:6-end
The Passover celebrated	9:1-14
The silver trumpets	10:1-10
Departure from Sinai	10:11-28

⁹⁹ Exodus 40:17

¹⁰⁰ Numbers 1:3 The military approach to the census is consistent with the last years of the 8th century when Hezekiah was preparing in every other way for an armed conflict.

In what is now Numbers 3 and 4, P gave details of a separate census of the Levites, and specified their duties. P, or possibly, H would later attribute these words to Yahweh:

*I have taken the Levites from amongst the children of Israel in place of every firstborn ... The Levites are mine since all firstborn are mine*¹⁰¹

The Levites were divided into families; they were counted and their allotted positions were defined. Although these responsibilities were defined in the context of a mobile camp in the wilderness, they could be interpreted according to needs of the times when a permanent sanctuary was established. The descendants of Aaron's sons were responsible for the equipment of sanctuary; they had to cover the holy objects so that the other Levites would not see them and die. The Kohath family was to carry the equipment of the sanctuary, the Gershonites were responsible for the hangings and coverings and the Marrari for the frames and bases.

P (or possibly H) began what is now Numbers 5 with a rule relating to preserving the purity of the community by means of excluding lepers and anyone who has an emission.

This was followed by a clarification of the law relating to the restitution of property following a civil wrong. The topic had previously been dealt with amongst the descriptions of the rituals of sacrifice¹⁰². This clarification determined that if it was impossible for the wrongdoer to make a restitution of the property (plus twenty percent) to the person wronged or to his redeemer, then the equivalent sum should be given to the priest.

This collection of rules concluded by describing the proper way to proceed when a man was suspicious of his wife and '*a spirit of jealousy comes upon him*'. In this case, the man and the woman should go before Yahweh and the man should offer a grain offering of jealousy, while the woman accepted a drink of bitterness which, if she was guilty, would – so P asserted - make her '*womb swell and her thighs sag*', as if pregnant. If she did not appear pregnant, then she was innocent. The ritual seems designed to reassure all jealous husbands: indeed, the offering that the husband brought to this ritual and which the priest put into the woman's hand is called an '*offering of jealousies*'. Perhaps the social purpose of the ritual was to restrain the husband from action until the evidence of infidelity was apparent in the form of a pregnancy not caused by him. Even if found guilty, she was not executed – the normal punishment for witnessed adultery – presumably because this adultery was only witnessed by Yahweh; therefore she must '*bear her sin*'; that is to say, it will be dealt with by Yahweh and not by men.

What is now in Numbers 6 dealt with those who, being neither priests nor Levites, wished to dedicate themselves to Yahweh as Nazarites. The Nazarite vow was seen as a temporary, not a life-long, dedication.

'All their days as Nazarites they shall not eat anything made from the grape-vine, ... they shall let their locks grow long ... and they shall not go near a corpse'.¹⁰³

Finally, Yahweh disclosed to Moses the manner in which Aaron and his sons should bless the people. They should say the beautiful words:

*May Yahweh bless you and keep you;
May Yahweh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
May Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you, and give you his peace.*¹⁰⁴

Before they left Sinai, the text stated that the tribal leaders made donations towards the dedication of the Tent. Each tribal contribution was substantial - comprising a silver dish (weighing 130 shekels – about 1.5 kg), a silver basin (70 Shekels), a gold pan (10 Shekels) full of incense together with a full range

¹⁰¹ Numbers 8:16b-17

¹⁰² Leviticus 5:20-26

¹⁰³ Numbers 6:4

¹⁰⁴ Numbers 6:24-26

of sacrificial animals for burnt and peace offerings. Once the dedication offerings had been received, the lamps were lit in the Tent and the Levites were ritually purified. This was important so that other Levites could support the work of their brothers the Aaronites in the Tent. For it was believed that a plague would break out amongst the children of Israel should any un-purified person should come near the sanctuary.

On the eve of their departure from Sinai - on the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year – the Israelites celebrated Passover once more.¹⁰⁵.

The Journey from Sinai to Canaan

It may have been a later editor who explained how the Israelites travelled 'by Yahweh's word' on their nomadic journey through the wilderness. 'Whether it was for two days or a month or a year, whenever the cloud remained over the Tent, the children of Israel stayed in the camp, but when it was lifted they travelled'.¹⁰⁶ The cloud was the cloud of the glory of Yahweh.

It was P who described the trumpets which were used to summon the people to travel, to wars and to celebrations.¹⁰⁷ The order of travel was defined, in a similar manner to the earlier description of the encampment.

The P text is next found in the story about the scouts who were sent out to reconnoitre Canaan.

This was also a J story and in today's bible the two stories are intertwined. This text began with a list in P's style – a list of the spies sent out by tribe. The list included a reference to Hoshea, the son of Nun. Then there was a statement that Moses changed the name of Hoshea to Joshua. The name change may be due to P, or it may be due to a later editor's desire to harmonise his sources – for Joshua was an established character in the J and E texts. It is interesting to separate out the two accounts and look for the similarities and differences:

In the wilderness 1	
Subject	Text in Numbers
Scouting Canaan	13:1-16&25-26&32
The people rebel	14:1-3,5-10,26-38
A Sabath-breaker executed	15:32-36
Korah's rebellion and its consequences	16:1a&2-11&15-24&27a&32b&35 17:1-15 & 27-28
Duties of Priests and Levites	18
The red heifer	19
Water from the rock	20:2-13
Aaron's death	20:23-29 end

J Version (from Numbers 13 - 14)	P version (from Numbers 13-14)
<p>13: ^{17b} And he said to them, "Go up ... and see what the land is like... Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes. And they went up and searched...and came to Hebron and the offspring of giants were there...and to wadi Eshcol where they cut one cluster of grape (two people carried it on a pole) ...and pomegranates and figs...//</p> <p>27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.</p>	<p>13: ^{17a} Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan. //</p> <p>²⁵ At the end of forty days they returned from scouting out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the Israelite community at Kadesh in the desert of Paran; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. //</p>

¹⁰⁵ Numbers 9:1-14

¹⁰⁶ Numbers 9:15-23.

¹⁰⁷ Numbers 10:1-10

<p>Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; ... But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we."//</p> <p>³³ There we saw the Nephilim ...and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."//</p> <p>14:^{1b}and the people wept that night. //</p> <p>⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt."//</p> <p>¹¹ And Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? ... in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a greater and stronger nation than they." But Moses said to Yahweh, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it... therefore, let the power of Yahweh be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying, 'Yahweh is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity ... Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love..."</p>	<p>³²<i>They brought to the Israelites an unfavourable report of the land that they had scouted, saying, "The land that we have gone through as scouts is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. //</i></p> <p><i>14:^{1a}Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, //</i></p> <p>² <i>And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is Yahweh bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"//</i></p> <p>⁵<i>Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had scouted the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "The land that we went through as scouts is an exceedingly good land. If Yahweh is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us... Only, do not rebel against Yahweh; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and Yahweh is with us..." But the whole congregation threatened to stone them. Then the glory of Yahweh appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. //</i></p>
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Then Yahweh said, “I do forgive, just as you have asked; nevertheless...none of the people who have seen my glory ... and yet ... have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors...

But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit ..., I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. ...

²⁶ And Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, “How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me... Say to them, “...I will do to you the very things I heard you say: your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number..., who have complained against me, not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

But your little ones, who you said would become booty, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have despised. But as for you... you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.” ...

And of the men whom Moses sent to scout the land, those who had brought an unfavourable report about the land died by a plague before Yahweh.

But Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh alone remained alive.

In many ways P follows J, albeit using his own preferred words and phrases. In both texts Moses sends out the spies; in both they bring reports of the fruits of the land; in both the spies see giants; in both the people are distressed by the report and want to return to Egypt; in both Yahweh demands, ‘How long will the people reject me?’ and in both Caleb is the exception. But P makes important additions. Aaron as well as Moses intercedes with Yahweh, and Joshua as well as Caleb makes a favourable report.

In E, Joshua was the only Israelite other than Moses who was not guilty in the golden calf affair, and in J he was Moses’ assistant who guarded the tent. Joshua was to become Moses’ successor; but neither the explanations in E nor those in J were satisfactory to the Priestly author, for he did not have a golden calf story, and Joshua, not being a priest, could not – under the Priestly laws – enter the Tent. For P, Joshua’s right to lead the people into the land had to be for a different reason. The story of the spies provided that reason.

P dwelt on the irony of it being only the little ones – the ones whom the people feared would become booty – who would be permitted at last to enter the land.

Then there was the story of the Korah’s rebellion. In today’s bible it appears as the story of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but that is because the Korah rebellion has become mixed up with the J story of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram. In P, the rebels (fellow Levites but not priests) are claiming that anyone can be a priest, since all are holy. Moses proposed a test.

“Do this: take censers, Korah and all your company, and tomorrow put fire in them, and lay incense on them before the Lord; and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one. You Levites have gone too far!”

In P’s world only a priest could offer incense. But Korah and his 250 fellow rebels persisted:

‘So each man took his censer, and they put fire in the censers and laid incense on them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. Then Korah assembled the

whole congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of Yahweh appeared to the whole congregation.

Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from this congregation, so that I may consume them ..."

And they got up from around the Tent of Korah, and all the people who were with Korah, and all the property, and fire went out from Yahweh and consumed the two hundred and fifty people offering incense¹⁰⁸

P argued that disobedience to God was fatal, and that part of the required obedience was acceptance of the division between the Aaronite priests and the other Levites. To emphasise this, he stated that Yahweh required the offending censers to be picked up from the burning mass because they now had become holy. They were to be turned into a plating for the altar as a reminder that no-one other than a descendant of Aaron should ever come forward bearing incense¹⁰⁹. But the people protested to Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing Yahweh's people. In response, P has Yahweh command once more "*Withdraw from this congregation, and I will destroy them instantly.*" This time Moses ordered Aaron to run into the congregation carrying burning incense. A plague had started. Aaron stood between the living and the dead and performed a rite of expiation and the plague was contained.¹¹⁰

Then P defined the relationship between the Priests and the other Levites in a passage in which Yahweh spoke directly to Aaron:

"You and your sons and your ancestral house (i.e. the Levites generally) shall bear responsibility for offences connected with the sanctuary, while you and your sons alone (i.e. the Aaronites) shall bear responsibility for offences connected with the priesthood. So bring with you also your brothers of the tribe of Levi, your ancestral tribe, in order that they may be joined to you, and serve you. They shall perform duties for you and for the whole tent. But they must not approach either the utensils of the sanctuary or the altar; otherwise both they and you will die."¹¹¹

This led into a discussion of the rules regarding purification following contact with a dead body, which in turn involved the rite of the red heifer. This rite may be an example of a previously pagan ritual incorporated into the religion of the Aaronite priesthood. In this ritual a perfect young animal was sacrificed and completely burnt to ashes that were then used in purification rites.

Then Miriam died. And there was no water. And once more, the people gathered against Moses and Aaron. Yahweh told Moses to "*take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them*". So Moses called the people together and said: "*Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?*" Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly. Moses, in P's story, seemed to take the credit for himself.

And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." These were the waters of Quarrel (which is Meribah in Hebrew), where the people of Israel quarrelled with Yahweh, and by which he showed his holiness."¹¹²

E also had a story about the waters of Quarrel (Exodus 17:2-7). In that story, the people complained about lack of water; Moses prayed to Yahweh, then struck a rock with his staff and water gushed forth. There was no part for Aaron, and Yahweh stood on the rock which Moses was to strike and

¹⁰⁸ Numbers 16:18-21... and 27a & 32b & 35.

¹⁰⁹ Numbers 17:4-5

¹¹⁰ A similar message is contained in the story of Aaron's rod, which alone of the rods of the leaders of the tribes "*put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds*" when left in the Tent of Witness overnight. P would have called that tent, the Tent of Meeting, so this could be an R insertion.

¹¹¹ Numbers 18:1-3 omitting 2b since the 'Tent of Witness' is an R phrase, and the grammar works better without it.

¹¹² Numbers 20:10 -13

Moses gave the glory to Yahweh saying “Is Yahweh in our midst or not?” In E’s story, it was another demonstration of Yahweh working through his faithful servant Moses. In P however, it is apparently the occasion of Moses’ wrong-doing - possibly his arrogance in claiming that he himself drew the water from the rock. Aaron was condemned along with Moses, leaving the reader to ponder why that might have been.

Only a few verses later P referred to the incident again in connection with Aaron's death. Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron on the borders of Edom:

“Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Quarrel...”
And they [Moses, Aaron and Eleazar] went up mount Hor in the sight of the congregation. And Moses divested Aaron of his garments and clothed his son Eleazar with them. Aaron died there, on Mount Hor. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.
When the congregation saw that Aaron had expired, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

The account of Aaron’s death outside the promised land is followed immediately in today’s bible with a story by which the right of the sons of Aaron to minister before Yahweh was reaffirmed for all time. It was introduced by the phrase, ‘*And look*’ suggesting it was a later insertion. In the story an Israelite brought a Midianite woman to his brothers whilst they were still in mourning at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. When Phineas, Eleazar’s son, saw it, he got up and taking a spear in his hand went after the Israelite man into the ‘*qubbah*’, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, ‘*through the belly*’.¹¹³

In The Wilderness II	
Subject Matter	Text in Numbers
Execution of Israelite with a Midian woman	25:6-19
The second census	26:1-7&12-65
Zelophehads daughters	27:1-11
Joshua becomes Moses' successor	27:13-23 end
The vows of women	30:2-17
Revenge on the Midianites	31
The trans-Jordanian tribes	32
	Text in Deuteronomy
Death of Moses	34: 5a&8-9

The ‘*qubbah*’ was known in pre-Islamic Arabia as the place where sacred objects were kept; the Midians were Arabs so the *qubbah* probably refers to a tent that was sacred in the woman's religion. The crime that so excited Phineas’ zealous wrath was thus the pagan worship to which the Midianite woman had seduced her man.

Moses wife and father-in-law were from Midian, and it was from there that Yahwism came to the Israelites. It might have been expected that the author would have been sympathetic to Midian. But by the time this story was added, Midian may have fallen out of favour¹¹⁴. Peor was in Trans-Jordan and Trans-Jordanian usurpers (perhaps not Yahwists, for Peor was noted as a Baalist town¹¹⁵) were in part responsible for the collapse of the northern country in the late 8th century. It would be natural to blame foreign women for this failure to maintain the faith and thus the land. Or possibly P was exculpating Aaron and Miriam for their criticism of Moses for taking a ‘Kushite’ wife - Kushan being a location in Midian¹¹⁶.

The premature death of Aaron before they reached the land was seen as a punishment for his involvement in the waters of Quarrel incident, but this execution of a pagan couple enabled Phineas to win

¹¹³ Numbers 20:24-29 & 25:6-8. The Hebrew text is meaningless without some adjustment. It needs a repointing to yield ‘*through the belly*’, but the addition of a ‘b’ instead would yield ‘*at her qubbah*’ (*her shrine*). Since a pointing error is more likely than a missing letter, the former option is preferred. See Baruch A. Levine; Numbers 21-36; p 287.

¹¹⁴ The Midianites were involved with the Moabites in their alleged resistance to Israel travelling through Moab. There is also a tribal tradition retained in Judges 6-8 that Midian oppressed Israel for 7 years in the time of the Judges.

¹¹⁵ Hosea 9:10. The place is often called Baal Peor.

¹¹⁶ Kush could also refer to Ethiopia, but probably not in the context of Moses wife's birthplace.

Yahweh's favour not just for himself, but for his family for all time.¹¹⁷

An editor, or perhaps P himself, added some notes naming the woman as Cozbi and giving the location of these events as Peor.¹¹⁸ The identification of Cozbi as a Midianite was used by P as a justification for an aggressive policy towards Midian. P stated that Yahweh instructed Moses to: "*Harass the Midianites, and defeat them; for they have harassed you by the trickery with which they conned you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of 'Con-zbi', the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister...*"¹¹⁹ The word 'conned' is an attempt to reproduce the Hebrew wordplay based on Cozbi.

After the Peor affair, a new census was taken and among those now enrolled, P assured his readers, there was no-one who had been included in the previous census in Sinai. Since this was now the generation that should enter the land, a promise was given to apportion the land according the numbers in the tribes - specifically the numbers of those men, twenty years and upwards, able to go to war.

In what is the first of a number of appendices, the daughters of Zelophenad were recorded as pleading for an inheritance despite the lack of a brother. They won their case. They established that, in the absence of a son, the inheritance shall pass to the daughters before it goes to brothers or uncles. (Later, however, they were restricted to only marrying members of their father's clan, so that no clan lands would be lost as a result of the marriage of landed women¹²⁰.)

More laws relating to the status of women are laid out in what, in today's bible, is Numbers 30. It appears that any vows a woman may have made could be invalidated by her father if she was young, or by her husband if she was married, provided the man expressed his disapproval as soon as he heard of the vow. The woman would be forgiven by Yahweh for her '*thoughtless utterance*'. If the man did not express such disapproval, then the vow would stand. If he disapproved but did not say so until later, then the vow was nullified as far as the women was concerned, but any guilt resulting from the broken vow was born by the man.

But before this, in Chapter 27, Yahweh told Moses to go up a mountain in the Abiram range to view the land, a land that Moses himself could not enter, and meanwhile, in preparation for his death, to commission Joshua as his successor. This he did before Eleazar, the new high priest.

Now P returned to the Midianites. In this addendum to the story of Peor, Moses was reminded about the instruction to avenge Israel on the Midianites. The fighting men were despatched and every male was killed and the women and children taken prisoner, but this was not a sufficient massacre. Moses and Eleazar the priest met the returning army and Moses was angry:

"Have you allowed all the women to live? These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against Yahweh in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of Yahweh. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has slept with a man. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him."

Balaam was here accused of inciting the women to seduce Israelite men. But this was the same prophet who (in stories by other authors) intervened on Israel's behalf against the Moabites. Recent excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla (E Jordanian Valley, north of biblical Moab) may shed some light on this. The site has revealed a complex of buildings which probably had a religious purpose. Some of the walls have texts painted on them which tell of a vision by Balaam. There is much doubt over its interpretation, but there is no doubt that it was polytheist. It seems that one of the gods, in disgust at the apparent perversity of the world, intended to put a permanent dark cloud over the earth. The wall text describes a debate amongst the gods concerning this initiative. The text seems to date from roughly the mid to late eighth century¹²¹. The presence of a popular cult site rivalling Jerusalem may account for the negative priestly attitude to Balaam at the time P was writing. It may also have been a priestly editor who modified the Balaam story to

¹¹⁷ Numbers 25:12

¹¹⁸ Peor provided the editorial link that a later editor would use to join this P story to the J story of the Israelites being led astray by Moabite women at Peor. In that story, Moses ordered the execution of all those who had been led to worship Baal by the Moabite women.

¹¹⁹ Numbers 25: 17-18.

¹²⁰ Numbers 36:1-13

¹²¹ Tell Deir 'Alla texts; ABD; Jo Ann Hacket

incorporate the Midians in the invitation to Balaam – “*the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed (to go to Balaam) with the fees for divination in their hand*”. In the priestly world, there were few things worse than divination.

Following the massacre of the Midianites, P took the opportunity to reinforce his teaching on the method of purification after contact with the dead. Then he discussed - with the precision of an accountant - the exact distribution of the booty arising from the massacre.

The scene could now be set for the conquest of Canaan and the entry into the land. The Reubenites and Gaddites had been persuaded to help with the conquest even though they themselves were happy to remain on the Eastern bank of the Jordan¹²², and the allocation of land to those tribes who planned to live in Canaan was settled. Then Yahweh commanded Moses to speak to the people saying: -

When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places. You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.

...
*But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides; they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling. And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.*¹²³

In today's bible the book of Numbers concludes with some archival and legal material. Some or all of this may have been assembled later by a redactor, but some may have been part of the original P text.¹²⁴ It comprised: -

1. An independent summary of an itinerary of the Israelites during the wilderness years. Probably used by the Redactor who organised the final compilation.¹²⁵
2. A boundary definition purportedly for the future Israel, which has been shown to be the same as the boundaries of the Egyptian province of Canaan – probably produced in the last years of the seventh century.¹²⁶
3. Rules governing towns allocated to the Levites
4. Rules governing the six ‘cities of refuge’ - places where someone who had killed another accidentally could gain sanctuary.
5. A law on the judgement of murderers. No-one shall be executed on the evidence of a single witness.
6. A case study leading to a refinement on the law of female inheritance. It refers to the situation discussed earlier with reference to Numbers 27.

P concluded this part of his work with the words: -

*These are the commandments and the ordinances that Yahweh commanded through Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. Moses died there in the land of Moab. And the Israelites wept for Moses in the wilderness of Moab for thirty days. Then the period of mourning for Moses was ended*¹²⁷.

¹²² Numbers 32: 2,4,5 (middle),13-24,28-32

¹²³ Numbers 33:51b-56

¹²⁴ Friedman in “The Bible with sources Revealed” assigns the first to an independent source and the rest to P, but the second item is probably dated too late for P.

¹²⁵ Numbers 33:1-49

¹²⁶ Numbers 34:1-12. See also Baruch Levine (2000): Numbers 21-36; pp 538-541; Anchor Bible Volume 4A

¹²⁷ Numbers 36:13 & Deuteronomy 34:5(part) & 8. Thirty days was the same period of mourning as was awarded to Aaron. ‘Wilderness of Moab’ links with the previous P story. Moses laying his hands on Joshua as an act of ordination is characteristic of P (see Numbers 27:15-23). All sources will have included accounts of Moses death. An editor has brought them all together at the end of Deuteronomy. No doubt

The Postscript

It is possible that P's work ended with the deaths of Aaron and Moses, but if so it was an anti-climax. The people had not yet entered the land.

There are several passages in Joshua that are filled with Priestly vocabulary and phraseology. Thus it is possible that the Priestly work extended to include the crossing of the Jordan and settlement of the people in Canaan as described by those passages. However, the redactor who prepared the history contained in the books from Joshua to II Kings did not have the obsession with retaining his sources intact that the redactor of the books of the Torah demonstrated. The Histories were prepared with a specific agenda, and their author used his sources as raw material in assembling his argument. He was not trying to merge and retain established scripture. We should not necessarily expect to find everything that P or H wrote concerning the Israelites entry into Canaan to be retained in his work. Nevertheless, it is possible to bring together the early Priestly texts in Joshua and the last P text from Deuteronomy to form a coherent account, as follows: -

...the period of mourning for Moses ended. Now Joshua, son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as Yahweh had commanded Moses. That day Yahweh exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel. They stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses. Then Yahweh said to Joshua, "Command the priests carrying the Ark of Witness."

And they went up from the Jordan. And the children of Israel camped at Gilgal. They celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month, in the evening, in the wilderness of Jericho. And they ate some of the produce of the land - unleavened bread and roast corn - on the day after the Passover, on that very day. The manna ceased on the next day. There was no more manna for the children of Israel when they ate from the produce of the land. But they ate from the fruits of the land of Canaan that year.

The Israelites set out and on the third day came to the cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. But the Israelites did not attack them, because the

leaders of the congregation had sworn an oath to them by Yahweh, the God of Israel. The whole congregation grumbled against the leaders, but the leaders all answered, "We have given them our oath by Yahweh, the god of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God's wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them. We will let them live, but make them woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole congregation." And the whole congregation did as the leaders told them.

Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. For it was Yahweh himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.¹²⁸

In Canaan	
Episode	Text in Joshua
Going up from the Jordan	4:14-16
Passover at Gilgal	5:10-12
Gibeonite 'treaty'	9:15b & 17-21
Conquest completed	11:19-20
An Eastern Altar	22:10-end
Death of Eleazar	24:33(end)

there was some duplication. 'And Moses died' may have been common to all sources.

¹²⁸ Deuteronomy 34:9 & Joshua 4:14-16 & 5:10-12 & 9:15b & 17-21 & 11:19-20. These texts use the word 'edah' for the congregation – P's way of referring to the people; they refer to the ark of 'testimony' - P's phrase for the ark of the covenant; and they say that the congregation ate the fruit of the land on 'that very day' – another P phrase. The 'hardening of the hearts' so that Yahweh might destroy an enemy is a P idea previously explored in his account of the Egyptian plagues and the Egyptian pursuit of the departing Israelites. The topics of the 'laying on of hands' and of celebration of Passover on the correct date are Priestly themes.

It might be objected that the account P gives of the crossing of the Jordan was decidedly short: but P's accounts of some important events in the early part of his work were also notably short, especially where the matter was adequately covered more extensively by J. The crossing of the Jordan was well covered by J as was the treaty with the Gibeonites, so P may never have felt the need to deal with these matters in his own text other than briefly. J did not include any account of a Passover celebration at Gilgal, so P added that event and dated it. The conquest stories were included in J, so P could simply summarise the result.

But there was one story of importance that J omitted. The tribes that had chosen to settle to the east of the Jordan built an altar to Yahweh. In P's time it was important to the Jerusalem priesthood to establish the altar in Jerusalem as the sole place where sacrifices should be offered, so the story of the eastern altar was significant. When they heard of the eastern altar, P wrote that the whole of the congregation gathered at Shiloh and was prepared to go to war. But first they sent a delegation led by Eleazar who spoke to the Eastern tribes:

"The whole congregation of the Yahweh says: 'How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from Yahweh and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of Yahweh! Are you turning away from Yahweh now?

If you rebel against Yahweh today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Yahweh's land, where Yahweh's Tent stands, and share the land with us.¹²⁹

The Easterners argued that their altar was only a replica altar: it was never intended that sacrifices should be placed upon it. It was simply there to be a witness to the unity of the Eastern tribes with the rest of Israel across the Jordan, lest one day the Israelites might say that Easterners had '*no share in Yahweh*'. Eleazar's delegation accepted this explanation and war was averted. The story may have been particularly relevant in the late 8th century when the east rebelled against their rulers in Samaria. The destabilisation of Israel at this time was probably a factor in the fall of Israel to Assyria in 722. Shortly afterwards the priestly authorities succeeded in establishing themselves as the sole place for sacrificial worship.¹³⁰ The story concluded with peace established

Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gaddites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gaddites lived. And the Reubenites and the Gaddites gave the altar this name: "A Witness Between Us - Yahweh is God".

And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.¹³¹

The tribes are settled in the land and are at peace. Yahweh is acknowledged as God. This is surely a good place for the Priestly author to end his work.

Motivations

It is often argued that P was written in response to the J and E texts. It is argued that the loss of the northern kingdom, Israel, brought the E text into prominence in Judah and that the text's polemics against Aaron were so objectionable to the priestly establishment that they would have responded by writing an Epic of their own. It is true that the E epic would have been difficult for the Aaronite temple priesthood to accept. Not only did E show Aaron blaspheming by making the golden calf and concurring that "*these are your gods, O Israel, that brought you out of Egypt*", but it also showed him doing this at the very moment

¹²⁹ Joshua 22:16-19

¹³⁰ Chronicles 29-31

¹³¹ Joshua 22:32-34 & 24:33

when Moses was receiving from Yahweh the commandments - the first of which concerned the exclusive worship of Yahweh. If this charge could be made to stick, then surely the Aaronites were unacceptable as the only family permitted to conduct the sacred rituals. And there were other instances where E shows Aaron in a bad light. After he and Miriam had criticised Moses on account of his Kushite wife, Yahweh personally called the three of them to the Tent of Meeting and explained his special relationship with Moses to Aaron and Miriam – *“With him I speak mouth to mouth - clearly and not in riddles; and he will see the form of Yahweh. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”* Miriam turned a leprous white and Aaron pleaded with Moses, *“Oh, my lord, do not punish us for the sin that we have so foolishly committed”*.

The priesthood would have had some problems with the J text as well, for that text: -

- Indicated that any Noah, Abram or Jacob could offer sacrifices to Yahweh, and not just the priesthood.
- That sacrifices could be made anywhere, and not just in front of the Tent of Meeting.
- That Yahweh communicated with his people directly and not just through the priesthood.
- That Yahweh could be found walking in a garden or enjoying the smell of an offering; he was depicted as a god with very human characteristics.
- That angels and other heavenly beings existed, and not just Yahweh
- That the story of the faith involved such fanciful creatures as persuasive snakes and talking donkeys.

From the point of view of the Jerusalem priesthood, J was riddled with theological error and E slandered their ancestor Aaron. One can imagine that priests would have considered that if a combination of the E and J were to become the national orthodoxy then the roles of the descendants of Aaron in society would be undermined and their livelihoods threatened. To defend themselves against this potential disaster, they could well have felt the need to write an Epic of their own, steeped in their own traditions and theologically sound.

But P’s text does not seem to be that document. It did not address the allegation in E that Aaron committed blasphemy in the matter of the golden calf; it did not address the issue of what Aaron was doing while Moses was on the mountain at all. It provided no alibi for Aaron; indeed it is possible to read both the E and P accounts and not see any incompatibility. If P was aware of the E’s attack on his ancestor, he apparently chose not to counter it.

During the reign of Ahaz, according to the book of Chronicles, some of the temple vessels were cut into pieces and sacrifices were offered to Aramean gods. It was only in the time of Hezekiah that the unclean things that had been allowed into the temple were taken out and the lamps relit. These events may have occurred during the lifetime of P. If so, he would have been aware that the Aaronites of the temple had committed the same sin as that alleged to have been committed by their forefather. How then could he deny the northern story? As a reforming priest, it may have struck him as all too probable.

It is clear that P sought to establish the right of the Aaronite family to be the exclusive priests sacrificing before the Tent of Meeting in Jerusalem. P was the only text that included the stories that established Aaron’s family’s rights to the priesthood – the consecration of Aaron by Moses under the instruction of Yahweh, and the execution of the couple defiling the Tent of Meeting by Aaron’s grandson.¹³² Equally the P text showed that Levitical families which were not Aaron’s descendants were unsuitable for the Jerusalem priesthood. The story of Korah’s rebellion seems to have been designed to do this.¹³³ It was noted above that the Korah family may have had northern roots since many of their psalms use Elohim as the divine name. The Aaronite establishment in Jerusalem may have attempted to diminish the claim of at least this northern family to serve as priests in Jerusalem, but this scarcely amounted to a counter-attack against E’s polemic.

It is sometimes argued that P sought not only to boost Aaron their ancestor, but also to diminish

¹³² The budding of Aaron’s staff serves a similar purpose, but this includes the unusual phrase ‘the tent of witness’ which is otherwise associated with a R. R was probably also an Aaronite priest.

¹³³ Numbers 16:15-24 & 26 & 27a & 32b & 35. The story is intertwined with the story of Dathan and Abiram in today’s bible.

Moses. But Moses was the great leader for P too. It was to Moses alone that Yahweh gave the great body of instructions. It was Moses who ordained Aaron. And P did not give Aaron an immaculate record; his sons were destroyed by Yahweh for using un-consecrated coals when offering incense – and Moses was involved in the rebuke. Both Aaron and Moses were punished as a result of the waters of Meribah incident. Aaron never saw the land that they were destined to settle, though this privilege was granted to Moses. It is true that Aaron is treated much more generously in P than in E, but that is largely because of the anti-Aaron polemic in E, rather than in any evident anti-Moses bias in P.

Is it not much simpler, and more consistent with the text, to see P as the document that the temple priests would naturally write even if they were totally ignorant of E? They wrote that two important events occurred at Sinai. Moses received the tablets of stone and Aaron and his son were consecrated.

The work that P produced is not really a national Epic at all. It was predominantly a record written in the voice of Yahweh regarding the proper execution of the cult. It was a primarily a religious manual. Thus it was not necessary for it to deal with the issues raised by the stories in both J and E to which the priesthood might very well have objected. It did not need to have its own version of stories to which it had no substantial objection. On the contrary, it could save time and ink by endorsing much of J's material through short summary references.

The motivation for P could be very similar to that of J and E. The economic conditions were right. The level of literacy in society meant that such a venture was worthwhile. Possibly there may have been a desire to put down the essence of the cult in view of the threats to the cult posed by the growing strength of Assyria. (It may be remembered that, according to Kings, Ahaz, who came to the throne in 734 BCE, introduced Assyrian altars into the temple precincts.) Quite simply, a radical priest may have arisen who felt called to produce such a text as part of his service to Yahweh, his god.

If the text is read as a complete unit, separated out from the rest of the texts with which it is now intertwined, then it sounds very like an ideal document to use in association with the education of the children of Judah's leading citizens – be they priests or princes – in matters of the cult. The document contained all that they needed to know. It contained full data on the ancestral relationships of all the tribes and the leading families; their allocation of territory and towns. It described in detail the proper conduct of the rituals associated with the cult, and who may perform them.

The Theology

P's concept of Yahweh was of a god more remote than the god of either the Yahwist or the Elohist. For P, the struggle between justice and mercy that permeated the Yahwist's work had been won by justice. The words 'mercy' and 'repent' do not occur in his text. In the execution of ritual, the important thing was to get it precisely correct. Any deviation, however well-intended, was fatal. For P, the question of intent was irrelevant.

The Priest saw the world as being entrusted by Yahweh to mankind. Mankind had been created in the image of Yahweh, with some of his powers, and Yahweh had given man dominion over the rest of creation. The relationship between man and Yahweh was governed by just covenants, each with its sign. These covenants and the laws that were derived from them governed the proper relationship between man and god. The rituals were accessible to even the poorest in the land. No-one was to be excluded from the peace of Yahweh on the grounds of poverty alone. The Priest would protect women from jealous husbands, would ensure that the oaths of mature unmarried women were taken seriously, and would enable them to inherit land and property. The priest would protect the man who committed manslaughter from the vengeance of the family of the victim, and would only allow a judicial execution to take place on the evidence of more than one witness.

He saw himself as the channel by which Yahweh's favour could be bestowed on his people. It was the priest who would issue the blessing.

May Yahweh bless you and keep you;

May Yahweh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

May Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you, and give you his peace.