

# INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT GENESIS TO DEUTERONOMY

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January 2009

**Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.**

## 1. Narratives in the Pentateuch

### A. Genesis

#### 1. Outline

**Genesis - the book of beginnings**

The **Primeval** Age

Creation

Fall

Flood

Babel

Dispersal of the Nations

The **Ancestral** Age

Abraham

Jacob

Joseph

#### 2. Comparative Literature

**Myths** from Nineveh (Assyria) dating from the 7th century although possessing much earlier traditions

Enuma Elish - creation

Gilgamesh - flood

**Differences** between ANE (= Ancient Near East[ern]) and Biblical **nature of God - many and vacillating vs. one and constant value of people - playthings, servants for gods, and a nuisance**

#### 3. The Primeval Age

##### a. General Creation - 1:1-2:4a

Day 1: **Separation** of light from darkness

Day 2: Separation of heaven from earth

Day 3: Separation of dry ground from waters

Day 3: **Formation** of vegetation

Day 4: Formation of stars

Day 5: Formation of sea and sky creatures

Day 6: Formation of land creatures and people

Day 7: **Cessation** - blessing and rest

Theological Implications:

1. Creation comes from nothing and comes **completely due to God's** creative work.

2. God, in goodness, **created a good world.**

3. Creation of order comes from lack of order.

4. Order, formation, and rest are an inherent part of the world. **Rest is a goal of creation.**

**b. Specific Creation - 2:4b-25**

Man, his home, his work, his spouse  
Emphasizes a human centrality to creation  
Ordered relations  
*Reflection of God's image*

**Double** of creation stories

ch. 1 - general - cosmos  
ch. 2 - specific - civilization

**c. Fall - 3:1-4:26**

Eve and Adam - 3:1-24

serpent vs. woman - deceived into eating, decided to eat

Curse - snake and ground

**Separation** - woman from snake

man and woman from blessing and rest in life and work

man and woman from Garden of Eden

Disobedience and *marring of image of God*

**Cain and Abel - 4:1-26**

Separation from people and themselves in murder

Attempts of Cain and offspring to regain control of the land in the form of civilization.

Seth born and through him Noah

**Disordered relations**

*Destruction of God's image*

**d. The Hopeful Line** - chapter 5 - the righteous generations of Seth to Noah - cf. v. 24 and the assumption of **Enoch**.

**e. Flood** - chapters 6-9

**Humanity** totally degenerate **vs. Noah** totally blameless

anti-God civilization leads to *near effacement of God's image*

reversion to Gen. 1 with the **world again out of order**

Ark to preserve Noah, his family, and the animals of land and sea

**Flood** and all life destroyed

Water receded and a new beginning - **recreation of the world**

**altar and sacrifice**

**God's response**

no cursing of the ground again

no destruction of all life by water again

Adam's instructions given anew to Noah

*the reassertion of God's image*

Prohibition of blood eating and murder (cf. Acts 15)

Covenant of a rainbow

Noah's **Drunkness** - *Disgracing of God's image*; abuse of nature<sup>1</sup>

Ham sees and tells of his father's nakedness – What is it? Incest.

Shem and Japheth cover their father's nakedness

They are doubly corrective to place their father's robe back

on him. He had become drunk and disrobed inside

"her tent" (his wife's according to consonantal text) for

<sup>1</sup> Prov. 31:6 allows the use of wine but Genesis 9 and 19 connect drunkenness with immorality. Cf. Song of Songs 1:2 et passim.

purposes of sex. But he fell into a stupor and at that point Ham entered.

Genesis 9:24-27

Curse: Ham's son Canaan to be a slave - perhaps **symbol of Canaanites dispossessed by Israel**

Blessing: God of Shem - Israelite religion

Blessing: Territory of Japheth and dwelling with Shem - nations of the world

f. **Table of Nations** - chapter 10  
**equality of all peoples**

g. **Tower of Babel** - chapter 11

Humanity's attempt at civilization – recapitulating ch. 10

God rejects it and scatters all peoples with a confusion of tongues

Basic critique of **culture apart from God**

Destruction of civilization through chaos of humanity rather than nature

4. God's Gracious Response - The Ancestral Age

a. **Abraham - Faith**

Shem to Abraham - 10 generations

**12:1-8.** At Haran God calls Abraham, giving him the **promise** of blessing in the form of making him a nation with all the **fame which the builders of the Tower of Babel sought.**

God also gives Abram the promise of being the **instrument of universal blessing**, i.e. to undo eventually what the Babel fiasco did.

However, the means to this end is not to create some center (cf. Babel) but to leave home for an undisclosed destination.

**Tests of Abraham's faith** continue as he ventures into Canaan/Palestine.

21-22. The greatest is that of an heir, a son, born long after Abraham and Sarah are too old. **At 100 and 90**, Isaac is born. The greatest test of faith continues when Abraham is commanded to **sacrifice his only son** to God by slaying him on Mt. Moriah. At the point of the slaughter, with the knife poised over a willing victim, the angel of God intervenes and provides a substitute ram. The promise is then renewed, including the promise of descendants possessing their enemies' cities.

**As Abraham responds to God in faith the opportunities for blessing grow. So with us.**

b. **Jacob - Grace**

**Birthright** - sold by Esau to Jacob for a bowl of stew; **Jacob** gets Isaac's blessing (reserved for Esau) by **deception**. First deception, then blessing.

**Blessing** - at **Bethel** in a dream, a promise is similar to that of Abraham. Jacob promises the tithe.

Laban - serves him 14 years to marry **Leah and Rachel**, his two daughters.

Through these and their maidservants come the **12 tribes** of Israel.

With God's blessing Jacob shrewdly builds a prosperous livestock business of his own, despite Laban's attempt to thwart him.

Jacob runs and Laban follows - They covenant to stay away from each other.

Blessing - at **Jabbok** at night, when wrestling with 'God' - name **changed to Israel** (cf. also **double names** for Abram, Esau, and Joseph [41:45]).

Jacob's sons - the **tables are turned** as they would seek to take their father's blessing and attention by getting rid of Joseph his favorite son. Then, in their own business venture in Egypt to buy grain, they would be forced to leave the other favorite son of Jacob, Benjamin, there. Thus Jacob would see his **family**, which he had rescued intact from Laban and Esau, **split apart** and his business ventures collapse in **famine**. Yet, in the end, God's grace would be with the man, and he would **die** at a blessed old age after seeing his **family restored and prosperous**.

We may question this apparently devious nature of Jacob. Others see it as a preferred alternative to violence within the family.

### c. Joseph - Forgiveness

**Dreams of a favored son** - sheaves of grain and sun, moon and stars bowing down to him. Coat of 'many colors' given by father.

Brothers plot to kill him and, instead, sell him into slavery in Egypt.

An official of pharaoh, **Potiphar**, hires him and puts him in charge of his house. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, fails, slanders him, and he is thrown into prison. He meets the **baker** and the cupbearer whose dreams he rightly interprets; the baker for the **gallows** and the **cupbearer for the throne room**.

The cupbearer forgets Joseph, then remembers him when no one else can interpret **pharaoh's dreams**. Those dreams speak of famine ahead. Joseph prepares the nation for famine. When it comes, Joseph is ready. The **people sell themselves into slavery in order to buy food** from him (cf. Hurowitz 1994 for parallels in the Ancient Near East).

Joseph's brothers come to him to buy bread but they do not recognise him. They buy bread but the second time Joseph requires them to bring along Jacob's favourite, Benjamin. They do and are at the point of losing him as a slave to the vizier when **Joseph reveals himself** as their brother. All is forgiven. Jacob and his family come to Goshen, settle there, and Jacob blesses his sons and dies. To his death **Joseph loves his brothers** and shows them no anger or revenge - 50:15-21.

## B. Exodus - Deuteronomy

Theme: The text demonstrates that **God is revealed in many different ways**. This variety makes up '**torah**' - **instruction**.

Instead of all narrative, as is largely true of Genesis, the remaining books of the Pentateuch have what might be identified as a **variety of types of literature**.

**Exodus Narrative** - *Theologically* throughout the whole narrative Israel is *repeatedly* brought to the brink of failure and extinction, and then pulled out of it by God's grace. This is designated by \*.

**i. Exodus - God chooses and creates a people.**

Oppression - Israelites in Egypt build storage cities and do field work.

Deliverance

**Preparation of a Deliverer**

Moses rescued from pharaoh's plot by pharaoh's daughter. Thus he *escapes murder*.\*

He kills one of the Egyptian taskmasters and flees to the wilderness.

He marries and becomes a shepherd for his father-in-law. Israel's deliverance is threatened by *Moses' security*.\*

God appears to Moses on Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. Moses is to be God and Aaron is to be his prophet.

**Problems of Delivering**

Moses tries to get pharaoh to release the Israelites by threats of plagues. *The mightiest ruler on earth*\* seeks to prevent Israel from becoming a nation before God.

Each plague hardens pharaoh's heart and he oppresses the Israelites all the more, so they are angry with Moses.

**How can God harden pharaoh's heart? - by allowing an inclination to become a habit which enslaves the enslaver.**

The **10th plague**, the death of every first-born in Egypt except for Israelites who celebrate the Passover that night with a slaughtered lamb and placing its blood on the doorposts.

**Performance of Deliverance**

**Israel vs. Nations**

Pharaoh, in a fit of desperation, threw out the Israelites.

He then sends his *professional army*\* after them. In the Red Sea crossing, Israel is saved and the Egyptian army lost.

This is the salvation of Israel. Just as the exodus for the Old Testament people of God corresponds to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for Christians, so the acceptance of both is a road that begins with faith.

**Israel vs. Nature - threat of famine**\*

Provision in the Wilderness - manna and water from a rock.

Amalekites - victory under the hand of Moses.

**Establishment of a national identity**

Guidance to Sinai/Horeb so that *not lost in the desert*.\* A holy mountain with barriers and 'special effects'. Here God would teach his people what it means to be holy as God is holy.

**Giving of the Law** - Its **purpose** is becoming set apart like God for **fellowship with God (24:9-11)** - feast with God.

*Israel vs. Itself and God through Idolatry*\*

While Moses delays on Sinai, the people make Aaron create an **idol** for them from the gold they brought from Egypt. Again, they are eating and drinking, but this time it is before an idol.

**Order of the law shattered by the disorder of the people's**

**rebellion.** Sons of Levi stop the orgy with the **killing of 3,000** participants, and they receive the temple service. **32:20 drink of the idol** vs. eating with God in ch. 24. Cf. I Cor. 10:14-22.

Means of **God's continuing presence is not in an idol but in the Sabbath** and in the **Tabernacle** built with people's offerings.

Theology - The first half of the book of the Exodus with its narratives of the escape from Egypt and freedom for the Israelites, has been used as a major Hebrew Bible source for **liberation theology**. It is clear that the liberation of the people from Egyptian servitude is an important theme in this book. But, the **people do not cease being servants**. More accurately, they **transfer that loyalty from Egypt to Yahweh**. Yahweh's demands are those of a lord over a vassal. Pharaoh's rejection is the refusal to recognize Yahweh's sovereignty over Egypt and Israel. Thus **God's call for the release of Israel** that they might worship God rather than pharaoh is **both a theological and a political challenge**.

## ii. Leviticus - God creates a priesthood for His people

**Aaron and his sons consecrated as priests**

**2 sons try to offer unholy fire** before God and are burnt alive with divine fire. **10:3, "I will show myself holy** among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

**Day of Atonement** - once a year - rituals for the high priest by which he **removes the people's sins** and God's anger for their disobedience. For the people, it is a **sabbath of rest and of self-affliction**. They also have a responsibility before God.

## iii. Numbers - God disciplines his people

Preparation for journey

**Ordering** of people with census etc. including offices of Levites and Nazirites

**Ransom of the firstborn** - Exod. 13:1-2 and Num. 3:44-45.

**Prophecy** as a visionary experience by the elders and others to encourage and support Moses in his leadership role in what was to be a rebellious time for Israel.

### 7 Rebellions and Results (Gordon Wenham)

1. People *complain* of their misfortune and God sends *fire*. Moses intercedes. Num. 11:1-2.

2. People *want meat* and God sends *quails and plague*. Num. 11:4-34.

3. Miriam and Aaron *question Moses' authority* & Miriam is *leprous* for 7 days. Num. 12:1-16.

4. **People follow the spies' majority report** & they wander 40 years losing a generation. Num. 13:1-14:38.

5. *Rebellion of Korah* and murmuring against his death & *earth swallowing and plague*. Num. 16:1-50.

6. People *want water* and *Moses strikes rock*. Num. 20:1-13.

7. People *complain* about food and water, God sends *fiery serpents*. Moses makes the image of a serpent, sets it on a pole, and *those who gaze on it live*. Num. 21:4-9.

Other **hindrances** to the journey

**Sihon** of Heshbon and **Og** of Bashan defeated (Num 21:21-35)

**Moab** and New Apostasy

Balak, king of Moab, hires **Balaam**, son of Beor, to prophesy against Israel. But four times he blesses Israel. Numbers 22-24.

Israel joins Midian in **orgiastic worship** of Baal of Peor. A plague begins and is stopped when Phineas, grandson of Aaron, drives a spear through an Israelite man and a Midianite woman engaged in worship of this deity. Numbers 25.

Midian defeated in war, **Balaam and the kings slain**, and the land is given to some of the Israelite tribes. Num. 31:8.

Preparation for conquest - Ordering of settlement in the new land.

#### iv. Deuteronomy - God reminds His people

Moses' farewell address

**Moses** passes the leadership on to **Joshua**

Moses is taken up to the mountain and no one knows where his grave is.

## 2. Other Types of Literature in the Pentateuch

### A. Poetry

- a. Exodus 15:1-18, 21 - God's victory over pharaoh's chariots
- b. Numbers 21:14-15, 17-18, 27-30 - victory over Sihon of Heshbon
- c. Deuteronomy 32:1-43 - Song of Moses

### B. Prophecy

- a. Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-24 - Balaam
- b. Deuteronomy 33:2-29 - Moses to the tribes of Israel

### C. Legal Stipulations

- a. General: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Lev. 19:18; Ten Commandments.
- b. Specific

Societal Case Law - Exod. 21:1-23:9

Ritual: Calendar - Exod. 23:10-19

10 Commandments - Exod. 34:10-26

Tabernacle Construction - Exod. 26-30

Sacrifices - Lev. 1-7

Priests - Lev. 21

Unlawful Sexual Relations - Lev. 18 (cultic uncleanness)

One altar - Deut. 12

Festivals - Deut. 16:1-17

Civil

Judges, Kings, Priests, Prophets - Deut. 16:18-18:22

Homicide - Deut. 19

Warfare - Deut. 20

Beloved and despised wives and rebellious sons in war and in peace - Deut. 21

Misc.

transvestism - Deut. 22:5

mother bird and young - Deut. 22:6-7

parapet - Deut. 22:8

Prohibited mixtures, improper sexual relations, purity - Deut. 22:13-23:18  
 Business matters: lending, vows, taking part of a neighbour's crop,  
 debtors, indigent, criminals - 23:19-25:3  
 false weights and measures - 24:13-16

#### Conclusion

- i. Specific as well as general laws touch upon **every area of life**; private and public; religious, moral, business, property, injury and murder, sexual, military, etc.
- ii. These are not just a collection of isolated instances, but they represent **a culture and life being molded, guided, and given meaning in every area and on all levels**. This religion is not sentimentality; it touches very earthy concerns as well as lofty ones. Everything comes under God's rule and he thereby is able to bring all of life into a meaningful whole. This is an attempt to reconstitute the image of God.

#### D. Blessings and Curses - Deut. 28

### 3. Purpose and Significance of the Pentateuch

Narratives, Poetry, Prophecy, Legal Stipulations, Historical Recollections, and Blessings and Curses - all represent parts of torah or instruction.

- A. The biblical idea of '**law; instruction**' is more than what we may think. It includes all sorts and types of literature. It represents many **emotions** and experiences: despair and elation, hopelessness, defeat, loneliness, hope, love, faith, peace and war. It includes both specific and general matters. It involves songs and poetry, dancing and feasting, mourning and fasting. It is a composite of the types of literature found in the Old Testament.
- B. You **cannot just principalize** and get the whole meaning of this material. It is here for **meditation**, for community **liturgy**, for **celebration**. It demands being read and reread; it demands being lived so as to be understood and appreciated. Torah creates a culture and provides a **world view** and a people of God.
- C. We are here in a **different world than the modern world**. Distinctions of knowledge such as different departments of a university, do not apply here. There are not the same complete divisions between the spiritual and the material. Distinctions and groupings that do exist are not easy to identify. Let us not be hasty to condemn the material as confused or primitive. Let us be cautious to **let the text speak for itself**. Let us learn to appreciate it for what it has to say on its own terms.

D. **Loss of such a holistic, integrative world view and culture has resulted in widescale fragmentation in our age on all levels:** national, family, and personal.

### 4. Application

- A. What baseline exists for recognizing Christian character? A key component is the ability to live in harmony with others in family and among friends (Gen 1-3). Qualities key to a child of God are recognized in the characterizations of faithfulness in Abraham, of God's grace at work despite Jacob, and of both of these as well as loving forgiveness in Joseph. Problems are also found in the polygamous relations that contribute to dysfunctional families torn apart by jealousy, favoritism, and anger.

- B. When everything seems hopeless, is there reason to still believe? Yes, again and again Israel was brought to the point of extinction and yet God's faithfulness continually rescued them.
- C. What evidence is there that God is concerned about more than worshipping him one day a week? Deuteronomy and the rest of the types of literature in the Pentateuch. All of these reflect the concern of God for every area of life and all aspects of culture.

### **Bibliography**

For suggestions for commentaries and other studies, go to the Denver Seminary website and click on *Denver Journal*. Click on the "Annotated Old Testament Bibliography" and scroll down to the "Commentaries" section where recommended commentaries are listed under each book of the Old Testament, with especially good ones given an asterisk.