

## Session 2: Genesis and Exodus

### “God has revealed to the world”

#### **The Pentateuch:**

The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are also called the “Books of the Law” since they form the foundation for all Jewish law from this point forward. The main focus of Genesis is the pre-history of the people of Israel and their formation into a people. The stories and themes of Exodus cannot be understated. The flight from Egypt, journey in the desert, and the covenant on Sinai are quoted more often in Scripture than any other story. These events form the basis of the identity of the Israelites. Leviticus is a book of laws. Numbers chronicles the Israelites’ journey from Sinai to the Promised Land. Deuteronomy contains Moses’ last words to his people before his death and their entry into the Promised Land. These books form the basis for the understanding of the Israelites from this point forward. Knowing these books is essential for understanding the context of the rest of the books.

The books that form the Pentateuch have a complicated history. The oldest text of the Bible comes from these books (Exodus 15), but not the oldest book. We know that Exodus 15 is the oldest text because it is a song and the language is primitive compared to the text around it. Two other passages of Scripture reference the books of the Law: Ezra 7:6 and 2 Kings 22:8. In the book of Ezra the scribe mentions that Ezra was a scholar of the Law, which implies they had a form of the law that was written by this time. The passage from 2 Kings illustrates that some of the law books were hidden and later found. Biblical scholars debate the date in which these books were written. For years they agreed that the books were written after the Babylonian Exile around 600 BC. In recent years scholars have suggested that these books were written much earlier suggesting anywhere between 1200 and 1000 BC.

The arrangement of the books of the Pentateuch informs us of their importance and the focus. A form of literary expression common in both Greek and Hebrew texts is called a chiasmus. A chiasmus is formed from pairs of repeated expressions that point towards the middle expression as the most important of all the messages: see. John 1:1-14.

For example:

1: God is good

2: goodness comes from God

3: Jesus shows us the goodness of God

4: Jesus is God’s goodness made flesh

3’ we see God’s goodness in Jesus

2’: For Jesus is from God

1’ and Jesus is good.

This simple example should help to show the pattern of the Pentateuch

1: the formation of the world and the hints at paradise and the Promised Land of the Garden of Eden

2: the Israelites journey in the desert to Sinai

3: The Law is given to the people from Sinai

2': the Israelites journey from Sinai into the desert

1': The Israelites are ready to enter the Promised Land

#### **4-source theory:**

Scholars developed what they call “the 4 source theory” to help explain some of the difficulties found throughout the Pentateuch. This theory ascribes to the idea that there are four different authors who all pooled their accounts together to create what is now these five books. The “J” source, aka. “the Yawist source”, calls God “Yahweh” and pictures God in a very active and present way. The “E” source or “Elohism” source focuses on God working in a more transcendent way, i.e. through angels. This source calls God “Elohim” compared to “Yahweh.” The “P” source or “priestly source” focuses on purity law, worship and ritual, and the codes of the laws. The “D” source or “Deuteronomist author” is primarily in the book of Deuteronomy and focuses on the laws, especially the different version found in Deuteronomy. This theory helps to smooth some of the stark differences we see, i.e. two accounts of the creation of humankind, and helps to show the different ideas of thought that permeate these texts.

#### **Genesis:**

The Hebrew names of each of the books of the Pentateuch were named based on the first words of the book. Hence, the name for Genesis is (b’reshit בְּרֵאשִׁית) “In Beginning.” From those first words we have a good sense of what will be contained in this book: the pre-history of the people of Israel.

#### **Outline of the book**

1. Proto-history (Gen. 1:1—11:9)
  - a. Creation account (1:1-2:4)
  - b. Adam and Eve, and their children (2:5—4:26)
  - c. Noah and the Flood (5:1-11:9)
2. The Patriarchs (Gen. 11:10—50:26)
  - a. Abraham (11:10—23:20)
    - i. Call of Abram (12:1-9)
    - ii. 1<sup>st</sup> Covenant: “Father of Nations” (15:1-21)
    - iii. Ishmael (16:1-16)
    - iv. 2<sup>nd</sup> Covenant: circumcision (17:1-14)
    - v. Birth of Isaac (21:1-8)

- vi. Testing of Abraham (23:1-19)
- b. Isaac (24:1—27:45)
  - i. Birth of Esau and Jacob (25:19-34)
  - ii. Jacob's deception (27:1-45)
- c. Jacob (27:46--36:43)
  - i. Jacob's dream (28:10-22)
  - ii. Marriage to Rachel and Leah (29:1-30)
  - iii. Struggle with the angel (32:23-33)
- d. Joseph (37:1—50:26)
  - i. Joseph sold into slavery (37:1-36)
  - ii. Joseph the dreamer (40:1—41:57)
  - iii. Trials in Egypt (42-45)
  - iv. The family comes to Egypt (46)
  - v. Death of Jacob and Joseph (50)

#### Themes of Genesis:

##### 1. Creation: Genesis 1:1-2:25

Every religious text of the ancient world had some type of creation myth that characterized their particular type of world view. The Bible is no different, yet it is different. Most of the near east texts explain that the gods created humans as servant or on accident. Genesis proclaims that God created humans as the pinnacle of his creation; because He wanted to create them. Notice the structure of the days of creation:

Day 1: God separates light from dark	Day 4: God creates the sun, moon, and stars
Day 2: God separates the sky from sea	Day 5: God creates all the animals of the world
Day 3: God creates plants	Day 6: God creates humans

##### 2. Covenant: Genesis 15:1-21; 17:1-14

The word “covenant” comes from the Hebrew word “to cut.” I think that the best way to understand the connection in English is through the phrase “cutting a deal.” Covenants are pacts or deals between two equal parties. One party offers their side of the bargain and the other offers their side of the bargain and they use something to mark the agreement between these two parties. Biblical example: God promises Abraham a long line of descendants, Abraham promises loyalty to God, this is ratified by the “cutting” in half of some animals. The covenant is active as long as both parties maintain their end of the agreement.

##### 3. Deception: Genesis 27:1-45, 29:14b-30, 30:25-43, 34:1-31

Deception was considered a virtue in ancient Israeli society. Basically, if you can outwit the other person, then you are smarter than them. This idea doesn't fit well with us, so we must be patient and allow the text to speak for itself.

4. God's presence and transcendence: compare Genesis 18:16-33, 28:10-22, and 39:1-23.

One of the more hidden themes of Genesis is the way that God works with his creation. In the first half of Genesis, God is very present and involved with both creation and his new believers, namely Abraham: e.g. God walked about in the Garden of Eden. As the book progresses God becomes more distant and transcendent leading to Joseph who is truly a righteous man who never experienced God.

### **Exodus:**

The Hebrew name for the book of Exodus is (w'eleh sh'mot **וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת**) "these are the generations." This book focuses on how the people of Israel became a people. The contents of this book cannot be overstated since the main theme of deliverance became the prominent theme for all of the prophetic texts.

#### Outline:

- I. In Egypt (Exodus 1:1—15:21)
  - a. Plight of the people in Egypt (1:8-22)
  - b. Moses (2:1-22)
  - c. Revelation of God (2:23-3:15)
  - d. Plagues (7:8—11:10)
  - e. Passover (12:1-28)
  - f. Flight from Egypt (12:31-36)
- II. In the desert to Mount Sinai (Exodus 15:22—18:27)
  - a. The manna and quail (16:4-36)
  - b. Appointment of judges (18:1-27)
- III. Sinai (Exodus 19:1-40:38)
  - a. The Ten Commandments (20:1-17)
  - b. Beginning of the laws (21:1—23:33)
  - c. The Meeting Tent (25:1-31:18)
  - d. The Golden Calf (32:1-29)
  - e. The final chunk of laws and meeting tent regulations (35:1—40:38)

#### Themes of Exodus

- I. Persecution and deliverance: Exodus 1:8-14 and Exodus 14-15

The theme of persecution and deliverance starts in Genesis, hits its pinnacle in both Exodus and the Exilic Prophets, and becomes a dominant theme throughout the prophets and historical books. In all of these sources, Israel thrives during persecution, awaits redemption by God, and is delivered from this persecution. However, the persecution in Egypt far surpasses anything else the Israelites face and will become the dominant theme for the rest of Scripture.

- II. Passover: Exodus 12:1-30

The Passover meal, much like the persecution and redemption theme, is the covenantal act throughout which the Israelites remember their exodus from Egypt. The Passover is also the precursor to the Last Supper and our modern Mass. Some of the details to notice: a lamb is sacrificed, unleavened bread is eaten, the people are prepared as though they are in flight, the story of their people is recited, everyone is invited, and a special ritual is inaugurated.

III. God's ever presence with his people: Exodus 14:1-22, 16:4-15, 17:1-16, 40:34-38

Throughout the next four books this theme will continue to emerge and develop. The most important point to note is that God is always caring for His people and never abandons them. Yet, they always complain and rebel against Him.

IV. Covenant: Exodus 19:16-- 20:17

Although the covenant with Noah, Abraham, and Jacob form the basis for the way the Israelites understand God's action in their society and life, the covenant on Mount Sinai is the most important and prominent of the covenants. This covenant was the first one enacted between God and his people; they were expected to follow these laws exactly. Again, the covenant is a pact or agreement between two parties where each party agrees to do something for the other and agrees to accept the terms of the other. Namely, God will take these people as His own and protect them if they agree to keep these laws. A few things to note about these new laws. First, they are not causative laws as those found in near eastern religions of this time: e.g. if you steal, the punishment is your right hand is cut off. Instead they are "apodictic laws", which means they are "thou shall" with not causative element. Second, notice the focus and order of the laws. God comes first, then the rest of society with each aspect of society that is furthest from the individual coming further down the list. Therefore the force of these laws is the preservation of society and the maintenance of God in the first place in their lives.

V. Laws and Lawlessness

The number of laws in the book of Exodus is staggering, but more are to come. Each of these laws have at their core the protection of the society and the preservation of justice. For example the law "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is a maximum penalty law. If a certain crime, such as blinding a person, is committed, then the maximum punishment is that the criminal loses his eye, i.e. it would be unjust to inflict a punishment greater than this. Familiarity with these laws greatly aid our understanding of the prophetic texts. I recommend at least some familiarity with these laws.

VI. Meeting Tent

Although these texts may seem overly specific, a quick imaginative read of these texts will help to explain the temple, when we get there, and the modern liturgy.

Key Passages:

Genesis 1:1-2:24 – Creation of the world and the story of humanity

Genesis 6:5-9:17 – first covenant, flood, precursor for our understanding of Baptism

Genesis 11:1-9 – Tower of Babel – precursor for Pentecost

Genesis 12:1-9 – the Call of Abram

Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-27 – covenants with Abraham

Genesis 22:1-19 – The testing of Abraham – precursor for Jesus' crucifixion

Genesis 28:10-22 – Jacob's dream; the land of the Canaanites becomes the Holy Land; referenced in John 3:1-21

Exodus 3:4-15 – The revelation of God's name

Exodus 5:1-11:10 – the main theme in these passage is obstinacy. Who made pharaoh obstinate God or pharaoh? Another main theme in these passage is liturgy: God demands everything to be at the sacrifice, Moses, the people, the women and children, the sheep, their goods.

Exodus 14 and 15 – These passages become the lynch pin that the prophets use to call the people back to God. Knowing the themes and ideas in these passages will aid reading the prophetic texts.

Exodus 16:4-36 – the manna forms an important element of both the Passover ritual and the later theological reflection on God's providence especially in the New Testament.

Exodus 18:1-27 – this passage is the basis for the book of Judges

Exodus 19:16—20:17 – the great covenant between God and his people

Exodus 21:1-23:33 – the laws form the background of for Israelite society. In order to understand why God acts the way he does, we need to know how the laws were broken.

Exodus 23:20-33 – the beginning of the Deuteronomic Philosophy: God rewards the just and punishes the wicked.

Exodus 32 – the Golden Calf. The issues raised in this passage are more common in Scripture than most people think.