INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

This course of study will take us on an exciting exploration of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These books are fundamental to the faith of Jews and Christians alike. The Pentateuch establishes the progression of divine, recorded revelation. Matters of history, geography and cultural backgrounds will be examined in this study as well as questions of authorship, date, and literary issues. There will be a special focus on issue of origins, and the themes of messianic promise, sovereignty and holiness of God, and grace. Attention will also be given to the role of the Pentateuch as the theological foundation for the rest of Scripture.

I. What is the Pentateuch?

The title ‘Pentateuch’ comes from the Greek and simply means—‘five scrolls/books.’ Other titles have also been given to these books. The Hebrew community calls them the ‘Torah’ (‘instruction’). Later books in the Bible often refer to these works as ‘The books of Moses’ or ‘The Law of Moses’ since he is attributed as the author or compiler of much of these books (see Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 28:23). This is because, according to both the inner testimony of the Bible as well as ancient tradition, Moses is thought to be the primary source behind the Pentateuch. This writing or compilation was most likely done during Israel’s forty years of wandering in the desert, or wilderness (c1446 to 1406 BC).
The Hebrew title for each of the five books is simply the first word of the Hebrew text. Our English names for the books are derived, by contrast, from the Greek and Latin titles used by translators to describe their respective contents.

Hill and Walton write: "The Pentateuch was the first divinely prompted literary collection acknowledged as Scripture by the Hebrew community. As such, it is the most important division of the Hebrew canon. It always stands first in the threefold division of the Old Testament: Law, Prophets, Writings." (A Survey of the OT, p. 47)

III. Genre

The Old Testament contains many different types of literary material. This is also true of the Pentateuch as a whole. Having said this, much of the Pentateuch (especially Genesis, Exodus and Numbers) is written in a literary type called ‘prose narrative.’ This type of material serves God’s revelatory purposes well since it is simple, straightforward and forceful.

Concerning Biblical narratives, Fee and Stuart write: “Narratives are stories. Although from time to time we use the word story to describe them, we prefer the word narrative because story has come to mean something that is fictional, as in ‘bedtime story’ or ‘likely story.’ It also tends to mean a single story with a single set of characters and a single plot. The Bible... contains God’s story - a story that is utterly true, crucially important, and often complex.” (pp. 78-79)

Narratives tell us about things that ‘happen’ using plot and characters. “The Old Testament narratives, however, have plots that are part of a special overall plot, and have a special cast of characters, the most special of whom is God himself.” (Ibid. p. 79) The Pentateuch’s narratives are generally in the third-person form.

We also encounter other literary forms in the Pentateuch. For example, there are many poetic portions that include prayers, speeches, songs, formal blessings, prophetic statements, covenantal promises as well as technical legal formulations.

As mentioned previously, the Pentateuch is often called ‘the Law’ because Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy contain well over 600 laws (instructions). Later in our study, we will see that the purpose of these laws was to regulate the moral, religious (ceremonial), and civic life of the ancient Israelites “in accordance with the holiness necessary for maintaining the covenant relationship with Yahweh.” (Hill and Walton, p. 52)

IV. A Five-Volume Book
Why are there five books and not one? The division into five books with their respective names was simply taken for granted by the time of the New Testament. Though modern synagogue scrolls contain the entire Pentateuch in a single parchment scroll (parchment is made from animal hides), scholars agree this was not possible in the past. Parchment did not come into use among the Jews until post-exilic times. The Hebrew language used for ‘scroll’ in Jeremiah 36 indicates that ancient literary works were written on the more supple media of papyrus (paper). Scholars believe that Genesis may have been close to the practical limits of a single papyri scroll since few books in the Old Testament that are actually longer. Based on the thematic unity of the Pentateuch, Hill and Walton are probably correct in saying that the Pentateuch “is better understood as a ‘five-volume’ book, a five-part mini-series of sorts.” (p. 48)

We should remember that chapter and verse divisions were late inclusions to the Bible. Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton (AD 1205) gave us our present chapter divisions. Verse divisions in the Pentateuch had been inserted earlier (c. AD 200) “to make it easier for a scholar reading the Hebrew text in a synagogue to know where to stop so that the sentence just read could then be translated into Aramaic, the spoken language of the Jews since their return from exile in Babylon six centuries earlier.” (Daniel Fuller, The Unity of the Bible, p. 103ff.)

V. Theme

Some scholars see the Pentateuch as a kind of ‘Biography of Moses’ since he is the central human character from Exodus onward. Others think of the books as representing a kind of ‘National History of the Israelites.’ Neither of these suggestions adequately accounts for what is exposed by an analysis of the Pentateuch’s timeline. The author’s preoccupation with Sinai and the giving of the Law must be considered as we look for the central theme of the Pentateuch.

Gordon Wenham writes of the Pentateuch: “It is essentially a long narrative, which according to its own chronology covers some 2700 years of world history concluding with the death of Moses. Genesis with 50 chapters and 1534 verses covers some 2300 years. Then Exodus to Numbers 14 covers the events of Sinai, just over a year in chronological time, in 81 chapters and 2617 verses. The remaining chapters of Numbers (22 with 739 verses) deal with the 40 years of wanderings in the wilderness, and the last book, Deuteronomy, focuses on the last day or of Moses’ life, comprises some 34 chapters with 955 verses.” (Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch- Intervarsity Press, 2003) p. 1).

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<tr>
<td>Genesis 1-50</td>
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<td>1534</td>
<td>2300 yrs of Shaping a Covenant People</td>
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<td>Exodus to Numbers 14</td>
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<td>2617</td>
<td>1 yr of the Law-giving at Sinai</td>
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<td>Numbers 15-36</td>
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<td>739</td>
<td>40 yrs of Wilderness Wanderings</td>
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We can see by the above analysis that a significant weight of the Pentateuch’s material centers on the giving of the Law and matters related to it. Genesis provides the background to the giving of the law. Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers largely focus on the proclamation of the law. Deuteronomy offers Moses’ commentary on the law. It should not surprise us that the ancient Jews preferred the name ‘Torah’ which means ‘instruction’ or ‘law.’

Hill and Walton see two divisions of thought in the Pentateuch: Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12 through Deuteronomy. The authors write: “In view of the fall of humankind and the broken fellowship between God and humanity, the first division poses the question, “How can that relationship be repaired or restored?” The second division then provides an answer, or at least a partial answer, to the human dilemma depicted in Genesis 1-11. The solution is rooted in the idea of covenant bonding between God and Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. This passage constitutes the focal point of the second division and actually summarizes the key themes of the Pentateuchal narratives: Yahweh’s covenant, Abraham’s posterity, divine election and blessing, and the grant of a ‘promised land’.” (Hill and Walton p. 48)

The Pentateuch’s Central Themes:
Yahweh’s Covenant With His Elect
Abraham’s Posterity
Divine Election and Blessing
The Land

Though some argue that the Pentateuch is essentially a history of the people of Israel, the Pentateuch comprises not so much a history of Israel but a history of the covenant God made with Israel. This is why we find such a great emphasis in the Pentateuch on the events surrounding the Exodus, the giving of the law, the setting up of the tabernacle, and the establishment of the priesthood.

John Walton writes in his book Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan:

“God has a plan in history that he is sovereign in executing. The goal of that plan is for him to be in relationship with the people whom he has created. It would be difficult for people to enter into a relationship with a God whom they did not know. If his nature were concealed, obscured, or distorted, an honest relationship would be impossible. In order to clear the way for this relationship, then, God has undertaken as a primary objective a program of self-revelation. He wants people to know him. The mechanism that drives this program is the covenant, and
the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God.”
(Zondervan, 1994) p. 24

VI. Anthropomorphisms, Theophanies and Christophanies

*Anthropomorphisms* are a common feature of the Pentateuch. Because our human limitations make it almost impossible to imagine the invisible, God often describes his actions in terms of the human body: his ‘eyes’ behold us, his ‘arm’ is stretched out to save, and so on. *Anthropomorphisms* are concessions to our human weakness. God does not have physical parts at all. Wayne Grudem writes: “All that we know about God from Scripture comes to us in terms that we understand because they describe events or things common to human experience.” C. S. Lewis adds: “Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience.”

*Theophanies* are very common to the Pentateuch. Scripture teaches that ‘God is spirit’ (John 4:24) and, as such, is invisible (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). The Pentateuch records several instances where God appears visibly, often in a human form or in some other manifestation. The word *theophany* literally means ‘appearance of God.’ Genesis records several of theophanies:

- Adam, prior to the fall, walked and talked with God daily (Genesis 3:8).
- Abraham encountered God in the form of ‘a smoking pot with a blazing torch’ at the time of the establishment of the covenant between them (Genesis 15:7-21).
- God later appeared again to Abraham as a messenger (Genesis 18:1-15).
- God appeared to Moses through the burning bush that was not consumed (Exodus 3:4).
- God appeared visible to the children of Israel in the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that led them through the Wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

Theophanies are chiefly associated with the expression ‘the angel of the Lord.’ At first reading, this seems to refer to a mere angel from the general angelic company (e.g. Judges 6:11). In some cases, the description of the messenger often transcends the normal attributes of angels or men, to the point where the angel is identified with Yahweh himself. Examine the following examples:

- The angel who speaks to Hagar near a spring in the desert (Genesis 16:7-13).
- The angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses says he is God (Exodus 3:2-6).
- The one mentioned in Exodus 23:20-21 is said to have God’s Name ‘in him.’
- God promised Moses he would ‘send an angel’ before the people to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan (Exodus 33:2). Later he said, ‘My Presence will go with you’ (v. 14).

Immediately following the Pentateuch, at the beginning of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land, the mysterious visitor calling himself the ‘commander of
the army of Yahweh’ appears to Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15) and receives from him worship that no mere angel is permitted to receive (Revelation 19:10).

Many theologians believe these may be appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ (Christophanies). This becomes easier to grasp when one realizes that the basic meaning of ‘angel’ is ‘messenger’ (Hebrew malak, Greek angelos) and can therefore refer to people as well as to angels proper.

These appearances seem to have ended with the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem (though Daniel 3:25 is a possible exception).

VII. Traditional Authorship

The Pentateuch does not directly tell us about its human author. Though some passages claim to have originally been written down by Moses himself (Exod. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9, 24), it is not altogether clear as to how much of the text these statements may actually cover. Nearly all of the laws presented in the Pentateuch begin with the remark: ‘The LORD spoke to Moses’ or something like this. If Moses did receive these laws from the LORD himself, we would expect that he would have written them down as instructed or that he would have directed someone else to do so. It should also be noted that Deuteronomy contains three messages preached by Moses before he died.

In light of the above, orthodox Jews from pre-Christian times to the present believe the Pentateuch was written by Moses. Several other books of the Old Testament directly affirm Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (e.g. Josh. 1:7-8; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 23:21, 25; 2 Chron. 8:13; 34:14; 35:12; Erza 3:2; 6:18; Neh. 8:1; 13:1). This is also the assumption of Jesus and New Testament writers (e.g. Mt. 8:4; 19:8; Lk. 2:22; 16:29, 31; Jn. 5:46; 7:19-23; Ac. 3:22; Rom. 10:5, 19; 1 Cor. 9:9; Heb. 7:14).

We know that Moses could not have written all of the Pentateuch since details of his death are included in the last few verses of Deuteronomy. By the way, some ancient Jewish scholars (Philo and Josephus- just to mention a few) believed that Moses did write down the details of his own death as it was prophetically revealed to him. The Talmud claims that Moses wrote all of the Pentateuch except for the last eight verses. It attributes these words to Joshua as Moses’ successor.

Is it possible that Moses or others after him used ancient documents or oral traditions to compile the Pentateuch? Knowing and tracing one’s genealogical roots has always been important to the Hebrew people. No doubt there were other records. It is probable that much of what we find in early Genesis existed in the form of a well-preserved ‘oral tradition’ communicated from one generation to another. Still, the Pentateuch itself conveys the ideas of a more direct revelation to Moses. Though we know that portions of the Pentateuch were given by direct revelation while in the presence of God (cf. Exod. 31:18), there is no way of knowing how much
came in this direct manner. Neither can we know just how much may have existed in written form prior to Moses (such as family records).

If we assume the Pentateuch does owe its existence to Moses, then the earliest possible date we can affix is c. 1450 B.C.

VIII. The Documentary Hypothesis

When Bible students consult the opinions of contemporary scholars, they quickly discover that a long battle has been raging around the text of the Pentateuch and the question of its authorship. For several centuries, strong challenges have been advanced against Mosaic authorship. In our own day, many prominent Old Testament scholars- called ‘source critics’- reject Mosaic authorship. They conclude that the Pentateuch is not the work of a single author (Moses) but the work of several groups of ‘editors’ who have handled and manipulated the texts over time.

One particular theory -that has subsequently spawned additional theories- is called ‘The Documentary Hypothesis’ or ‘The Wellhausen Hypothesis.’ This theory came to its fullest expression through the work of German scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Wellhausen, like others before him, was troubled by what he saw as ‘stylistic distinctions’ and ‘repetitiousness’ within the text. He believed that the laws and customs recorded in the Pentateuch reflect a much later Near Eastern culture. Wellhausen argued that the Pentateuch is not grounded in the actual history of the Patriarchs but that it reflects patriarchal stories told by later generations. Others share Wellhausen’s view. If you read widely, you ought to be aware of this position.

Wellhausen identified what saw as four, distinct editorial groups within the Pentateuch- each evidenced by a unique style. The theory refers to these editorial groups using the letters J, E, D, and P. ‘J’ is for what Wellhausen called ‘Yahwistic’ material. This is any material that characteristically refers to God as ‘Yahweh’ and is narrative (by the way, the name ‘Yahweh’ is spelled with a ‘J’ in German). ‘E’ represents what is called ‘Elohistic’ material. This is any text that uses the word ‘Elohim’ or any of its forms (‘Elohim’ is the Hebrew for ‘God’). According to Wellhausen, the ‘E’ editorial group also preferred narrative. ‘D’ is for all of the ‘Deuteronomic’ material (which is sermonic in nature). Finally, ‘P’ references any ‘Priestly’ material (those passages having to do with worship, and priestly codes and regulations). Here are a few of the examples Wellhausen identified:

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<th>J</th>
<th>2:4b-3:34; 4:1-26; 5:29; 6:1-8; 7:1-5, 7-10, 12, 16b-17, 22-23</th>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
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According to Wellhausen, over a long period of time, these editorial groups
collected, manipulated and merged various sources rewriting them in such a way as to give the appearance that Moses was the original author of them all. Those who reject Mosaic authorship and embrace theories like Wellhausen’s naturally propose later dates for the Pentateuch. Wellhausen dates are as follows: J is somewhere around c. BC 900; E- c. BC 850; D- c. BC 622; and P- c. BC 500.

How might we explain the Pentateuchal features Wellhausen and others have identified— the different divine names used, varied writing styles and the repetitious material within the Pentateuch? What about the argument that the laws and customs lived out in the Pentateuch reflect a much later Near Eastern culture? Let’s take the second question first.

Wellhausen’s theory dates back nearly a century. Since then, archaeology has brought an explosion of new discoveries about the world of the Bible. Archaeologist W. F. Albright has shown from ancient Near Eastern comparative evidence that the texts of the Pentateuch (even Genesis) are very much at home in the ancient world. According to Albright, the customs and laws presupposed by Genesis fit the early second millennium. Wenham writes: “This corroborates the historical accuracy of these stories of the patriarchs despite them not having been written down till many centuries after events they record (p. 172).” Scholar John Bright writes: “We can assert with full confidence that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were actual historical individuals.” (A History of Israel (Westminster Press, 1972), p. 91)

On the matter of the stylistic variations within the text and the repetitious materials, there may be better explanations for these than to suppose they represent different sources. Repetition and stylistic variation are accepted in other ancient literary documents without assuming multiple sources lie behind the text. Additionally, ancient texts often use a variety of names for deity. Why should a change in the divine name cause us to think that there has been a source change? The author may have had a purpose in mind— perhaps a theological purpose. Just think of how Exodus 3:14 would change if we removed the name ‘Yahweh’ and replaced it with ‘Elohim.’ Finally, repetition is a common devise used throughout Scripture. The Psalmists repeat themselves— sometimes whole passages are repeated. Why should we not accept this in the Pentateuch?

None of the issues raised by source critics presents a serious problem for interpreters who assume that the Holy Spirit is behind the revelation and compilation of Scripture. There is no strong evidence exists that should lead us to reject Moses as the Pentateuch’s primary author. Many who embrace the Documentary Hypothesis and theories like it, reject Scripture’s claim that God is ultimately the author and revelator behind all Scripture. These scholars often start with a fatal assumption that everything in and about Scripture must be explained in purely human terms without resorting to divine intervention. The believer rejects this assumption altogether.

(For further study of the history of the Documentary Hypothesis and other theories like it, as well as a critique of the principles of source analysis, see Gordon
IX. The Man Moses

Moses was a truly amazing individual. He lived a very unusual life. It should not come as a surprise to us that Moses would be a capable, skillful scholar and scribe. The Book of Exodus shows how Moses' life was both spared and prepared by the Spirit of God to perfectly serve God's purposes. One of those purposes was to bring us God's 'Law,' his unique self-revelation. Moses was instrumental in God's goal to fulfill his covenantal promise earlier made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 regarding the 'land' and the 'blessing.'

Plucked out of the Nile as an infant, Moses, whose name means 'drawn out,' was taken into Pharaoh's household by Pharaoh's daughter and was given all the advantages of a royal prince. He spent his youth in the glory and extravagance of an Egyptian palace. After adopting Moses as her son, it is logical to assume that Pharaoh's daughter saw to it that Moses was schooled by the world's most prominent scholars of the day. Though he was of Hebrew descent, Moses' Egyptian education exposed him to the one culture in all of human History that is most known for its sophisticated alphabet and literary-recording skills. This was no coincidence.

Moses' middle years were spent as a fugitive on the run and as a poor shepherd in the desert. Later, Moses would lead God's people through that very same desert he came to know like the back of his hand. In the wilderness, Moses says he met the Living God who spoke to him from within the fire of a burning bush. When Moses asked God his name, he said it was ‘the LORD’ (‘I AM WHO I AM’- Exod. 3:14). The Voice identified himself as the God of Moses' ancestors- God of Adam and Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Moses', like Abraham, was being called to 'walk with God' (a common expression used to refer to personal faith-living and communion with God).

Moses' older years (nearly 40 of them) were spent as the prominent leader of the Hebrew multitudes. He led them out of Egypt, through the Sea, up to the very door of the Promised Land. Through Moses, God revealed not only that he was Creator of all, but also that he has glorious plans for the future of his people as his 'treasured possession' and 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:5-6).

As Moses lived through and witnessed many of the events recorded in the Pentateuch, it is not surprising that we discover from its pages much about him as a man. In the five books we see Moses as:

- An historian in Genesis
- An deliverer in Exodus
- A mediator in Leviticus
- A leader in Numbers
INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS: "The Beginning"

I. Introductory Comments

It is fitting that the first book of the Bible should be called, ‘The Beginning.’ This is what the word ‘Genesis’ actually means. The book borrows its name from its opening words: “In the beginning.” As we read the verses and chapters following these opening words, we see that the word *beginning* (*reshit*) is a fitting title for the book. It is through Genesis that we not only learn about the origin of God’s work of creation but also his work of redemption.

The reader is struck by the fact that the book’s author makes no attempt to explain the existence of God. There is just the simple, bold assertion: “In the beginning, GOD!” Genesis tells us about the origins of everything, except God. According to the author of Genesis, Creation- and all of History to follow- begins and ends with God, not with us.

In his book, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan*, John Walton writes: “[Genesis is] an introduction to God’s program of revelation. How did it come about that people needed a revelation of Yahweh? Why did he not just keep in contact from the start? Genesis tells the story of how God created humankind in fellowship with him, but also relates how that relationship was destroyed by the Fall. The destruction of all but Noah and his family in the flood gave humanity a second opportunity to maintain a relationship, but again sin interfered.

Walton continues: “The primeval history concludes with the important account of the Tower of Babel. Urbanization in Mesopotamia had provided fertile ground for development of anew paganism aptly represented in the symbolism of the ziggurat. The Tower of Babel represented the definitive formulation of a brand of paganism that pervaded the ancient Near East in which mythologized deity was portrayed as having all the foibles of humanity. In so doing, humanity remade deity in its own image. The perception of God that swept the ancient world was incapable of providing a sound basis for a relationship with the one true God. The result was the need for God to vouchsafe an accurate revelation of himself. He therefore instituted a revelatory program by means of the covenant. In this way chapter 1-11 of Genesis show why there was a need for a revelatory program and lead into the details of how God embarked on that program using the mechanism of the covenant.” (pp. 44-45)

II. God Is Revealed

The Genesis story introduces us to a ‘personal’ God who acts decisively to reveal Himself as a sovereign, intimate, involved Creator and Redeemer. Genesis is the story of how God, who designed and sustains the universe by the power of his
spoken words, also delights to make known the glories of his Name through his words and His mighty saving acts. It is the story of how, in spite of the way human sin has distorted the beauty of original creation, God purposefully works to bring glory to his name and blessings to those whom he chooses to call his ‘sons and daughters.’

III. Genesis and Christian Theology.

Genesis is foundational to understanding all that follows in the Bible. It is therefore of great importance that we carefully and prayerfully make it our aim to study, understand and receive what we find within its pages. Consider the following:

- Jesus, Peter, Paul and other writers frequently quote from the book.
- New Testament writers make numerous references to its stories as foundational.
- Whole portions of the Bible are patterned after Genesis (Jn. 1 and Pro. 8).
- John’s Revelation cannot be understood without a thorough background in Genesis. It depicts a time when God’s People revisit the Garden paradise, and, because of Jesus Christ, are no longer forbidden to eat of Eden’s ‘Tree of Life.’

Genesis introduces a myriad of foundational ideas, historical experiences and events, and spiritual-life illustrations upon which are built most of the major doctrines of the Christian Faith: e.g. the Doctrine of Creation; God (His attributes; sovereignty and providence); Humanity (in the ‘Image of God’ as ‘male and female’); Marriage and Family; the Personal Nature of Sin (Original Sin; Depravity); the Call and Election of the Saints; the Covenant of Grace and the Messianic Promise.

In thinking about Genesis, we might borrow language from the world of computing: In the early chapters of Genesis, truths are \textit{booted up} and then placed \textit{on the desktop}. Through the storyline that follow, those truths are \textit{decompressed} and finally \textit{browsed} for our understanding. (We might also illustrate this by considering a seed- after germination, it grow to reveal what was in its DNA all along).

IV. A Problematic Beginning

OT scholar John Sailhamer writes: “Few passages in Scripture have prompted so many different interpretations as have the first two chapters of Genesis. Virtually every word and certainly every verse has been combed, poked, and pulled apart in search of clues to solve the mystery of creation.” (\textit{Genesis Unbound}, p. 21)

Genesis is not an easy book to read, understand or receive- especially when living in a scientific-technological age like our own. Why is Genesis so controversial?
First, our culture’s Western, scientific world view—now permeating every arena of contemporary life—appears to fly in the face of the book’s claims regarding the origin of the universe, the age of the earth, and the antiquity of humankind.

Second, the book’s amazing miracle stories—like that of Noah and his 3 sons building a 450 foot floatable zoo in a desert—seem much too incredible for many to believe.

Third, some of the most controversial questions and issues of our times are highlighted in Genesis (e.g. the nature of Male and Female Relationships; The Sanctity of Human Life).

Finally, our culture’s embracing of moral relativism makes Genesis seem quite out of step with the times.

Furthermore, though faith has always had its obstacles, additional walls must now be overcome before many of our contemporaries will give Genesis more than a passing glance or a snub of the nose. I am referring to narrow, culturally biased interpretations of the early chapters of Genesis—promoted and popularized by the Christian media. Concerned to defend the integrity of Scripture, some have been passionate in their efforts to discredit the claims of modern science. This has added to the popular notion that Christianity is ‘anti-science.’ Unfortunately, many people in our culture now believe that there are no other legitimate interpretations of Genesis available for thinking people. Many around us now believe that the lover of the Scriptures is the bitter enemy of those who love science.

Especially troubling are those who insist that the Earth is only 6000 years old (based upon rigid interpretation of Hebrew genealogies). There are even those who say, “Dinosaurs never existed! The unearthed bones are the Devil’s diversions!”

Though good and sincere people stand on all sides of the many debates that rage around this book, we must understand that how we choose to interpret chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis will be very important for our overall study of the Pentateuch.

Here are five good rules to consider when interpreting Genesis:

1. When interpreting the Pentateuch, we should try to forget what we already think we know and allow the text to speak for itself. Sometimes the greatest obstacle to learning something new is what we believe we already know about the subject.

2. The good thing about starting with Genesis is that we are starting at the beginning. Daniel Fuller is correct to insist that we practice an inductive approach: “What are the clues within the text indicating the author’s intended meaning?” “How do the various parts of the text fit together with the whole?” “What is the basic storyline?”
3. **Ignore the chapter and verse designations when interpreting.** Fuller adds: “...the author may not have approved of such later editing.” ([The Unity of the Bible, p. 102](#)); the early chapters of Fuller’s book are invaluable in setting the stage for interpreting Genesis.

4. **Watch for repeated themes and key words.** These can often expose something of the author’s purpose, tie together various concepts, and help one follow the flow of the author’s presentation.

5. **Shed your own historical-cultural context for that which belongs to Genesis.** Ancient people did not understand the solar system as we do— with planets and other bodies rotating around the sun. They lived prior to the Copernican Revolution (1473-1543). Thus, to the ancient Hebrews, the phrase “God created the heavens and the earth” would not possibly have brought to mind the image that comes to our minds when we think of ‘Planet Earth.’ To them, the word ‘earth’ would simply have meant ‘land.’ This distinction can help us with our interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis and beyond.

6. **Keep an eye on the larger literary context.** Genesis must be understood in the context of the entirety of the Pentateuch since the five books form a unified whole. Generally speaking, what is said first is often of utmost importance to understanding what follows? Genesis therefore plays a very important role in our interpretation of the total message of Pentateuch (especially chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis).

7. The goal of interpretation should be to **understand what the author intended his first audience to understand.** (Consult Fee and Stuart for an excellent argument on this point. See citation below).

When we allow the text to speak for itself (# 1 above), we note that the Hebrew word traditionally translated ‘earth’ (eretz) in vv. 1-8 is the same word translated ‘land’ in v.v. 9-12 (# 4 above; #5 above shows us that the translation ‘earth’ is erroneous and should be ‘land’). As we read on in the Pentateuch, we notice that Eretz is also the word used by the writer wherever we see the phrase ‘Promised Land’ (# 6 above urges us to look wider).

We have now discovered something that can be very important to remember as interpret the early chapters of Genesis. Is it possible that the ‘land’ God works from Genesis 1:2 through 2:4 is the same ‘land’ God speaks of throughout the Pentateuch? Is this ‘land’ a key reason the story is being communicated in the first place? Is Moses saying, “Listen, this is how we received the promise of the land.” “This is why the land belongs to us.” “This is what the land is for (that we might have a relationship with God in this land).” “And this is what happens when we do not worship God and keep his commandments in the land.” Scholar John Sailhamer
believes that this is exactly what is going on in Genesis. You can read more in his provocative book *Genesis Unbound* (Multnomah 2003).

For additional interpretive advice, read Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* (Zondervan, Any Ed.) - Chapters 1-2, 5 and 9. Chapter 5 entitled “The Old Testament Narratives” is especially important for interpreting Genesis.

V. Outline: Two Major Sections- 1-11 and 12-50

Genesis can be divided into two major sections: Chapters 1-11 reveal the personal nature of God's Creation and his relationship with human beings. Chapters 12-50 reveal the purposeful nature of God's Creation seen most clearly in the covenant promises God makes with Abraham and his ‘seed.’

The structure of Genesis is clearly marked by the use of the formula, ‘The account of. . . .’ It appears in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2. In line with ancient patterns, this phrase usually appears at the end of each section of Genesis and tends to refer to the preceding material, not to what follows it. A simple division of Genesis is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters 1-11</th>
<th>Revelation of Personal Origins of the Universe and Humanity</th>
<th>Four notable events</th>
<th>The Creation</th>
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<td>The Tower of Babel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapters 12-50</td>
<td>Revelation of Purpose in Origins and the Hebrew Nation</td>
<td>Four notable people</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Abraham</td>
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<td>Jacob (Israel)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Joseph</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I. Revelation of Personal Origins (1-11)

A. Of the Physical Universe (1:1-2:3)
B. Of Humankind (2:4-25)
C. Of Sin (3:1-24)
D. Of Death (4:1-26)
E. Of Judgment (5:1-9:28)
F. Of Peoples and Culture (10:1-11:32)

II. Revelation of Purpose in Origins and Hebrew Nation (12-50)
VI. Key Events In Genesis Giving Shape To Christian Theology

A. The Creation- God is the Originator; The Image of God in Humanity
B. The Fall- The Personal Nature of Sin
C. Noah and The Flood- The Judgment of God
D. The Tower of Babel- The Fallen Human Systems Due to Pride
E. The Call of Abraham and God's Covenant- The Chosen People of God
F. Sacrificing Isaac- The Picture Of God's Chosen Lamb, Jesus
G. Jacob's Deceptive Life and His Dream- Wrestling With God
H. Joseph's Story- How the Israelites Got to Egypt

VII. The People We Meet In Genesis

Genesis introduces us to some of the most interesting and colorful characters of the Bible. For many of us, especially those who have heard its stories from childhood, names like "Noah", "Abraham" and "Joseph" are larger than life. It is therefore important that we keep in mind that these stories are about real people who lived real lives in the real world. Unfortunately, it was also a really long time ago and that's why it can be difficult for us to understand why they thought and responded the way they did. Some of these people’s life experiences will seem very strange to us, but we must not forget that these people were getting to know the same God we are invited to know. We do not serve these people very well- nor ourselves- by viewing them all as ‘spiritual giants.’ An honest reading of Genesis ought to cause us to wonder why God took any interest in them at all. They were not so much ‘Heroes of the Faith’ but ‘Recipients of God’s Grace’. Fee and Stuart write: “In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.” (see Ch. 5)

VIII. A Strange Beginning.

After saying that God created “the heavens and the land” (a phrase obviously meant to include all of creation), by v. 2 we are left standing in the dark: “darkness was over the surface of the deep”. The Spirit of God is then depicted as “hovering over the waters”. In good story-telling fashion, the author wants us to see that God is about to do something really BIG. Finally, God explodes into action.

And how does God do his work? He works with His words. God speaks a word in the darkness and the light of order and beauty appear. Amazingly, God has the power to make all of his ideas come into being. (We are beginning to learn about
God’s great power. Through ‘story,’ God reveals his nature and ways). Realms are first imagined and then spoken words make them real. Whirling spheres appear in the ‘heavens’ and wonders appear on ‘the land.’ Things are given their proper places in the realms. God appoints the sun, moon and stars to ‘fill’ the heavens and ‘rule the day and the night.’ God appoints flying things to fill and rule the sky, and swimming things to fill and rule the seas. Creatures that move along the ground are appointed to fill the land God has already filled with beautiful plants and trees bearing fruit. (We are beginning to learn about God’s love of beauty and order).

Next, like a surging crescendo in the finale of a great symphony- with stars and planets charting their courses across the heavens (like metronomes keeping time); new winged-designs flying; finned-designs swimming; legged-designs crawling and dancing- God fashions a perfect man and later a woman who will call Paradise ‘home.’ They, alone, are made in God’s ‘image’- while everything else is made ‘after its kind.’ They will have a unique role in God’s creation and have been made to know and relate to God. The man and woman are to be like God, to be creative rulers over things spoken into reality. These ‘Image-bearers’ are commissioned to fill and subdue the earth and to rule over all the flying, swimming, climbing, creeping-crawling creatures God has made just as God rules over his Image Bearers. They are commanded to ‘name’ things- to give them place and definition.

By the rhythm of their lives- working and resting in his grace and provisions- they will proclaim the glory of their creator as they enjoy the blessing of his nearness. Amazingly, God chooses to “dwell with them” (Immanuel) in this special place he has prepare for them. He will be their God and they will be a people delighting in him.

Finally, a closing song is sung: "Life is good!” VERY good! And then God ‘rests.’ LIFE is now the way it’s supposed to be (that is, until... chapter three!)

Unfortunately and unexplainably, though God ‘rested,’ his Image Bearers are ‘restless.’ Even though God’s powerful words spoke them into being, tragically, they reject God’s words. Now they will ‘surely die.’ As sin breaks in, so does the darkness of chaos and disorder dimming Eden’s light. The beauty of original creation is marred. From beauty, order and purpose, creation’s symphony of joy disintegrates into chorus of confusion.

But... all hope is not gone. God is a gracious and determined God. There will be people who will treasure God’s words and receive them as “Life”. There will be a people who will know and delight in God. God himself will bring this to pass.

IX. The Name Game and the Creation of Eve

Why was Adam commanded to ‘name’ the animals? The text seems to suggest two reasons for this. First, this act of naming (giving identity) underscores that Adam is designated as the appointed ‘ruler’ (‘viceroy’) of the many creatures of the earth.
Secondly, we see that it is this experience that cultivates in Adam a feeling of his loneliness. As Adam sees the many creatures and their various mates pass before him, he recognizes that none of these creatures shares the ‘image of God’ as he does. Though Adam can enjoy living with the animals, there is no ‘community’ in the best sense of the word.

Adam has been made for community and for fellowship with one ‘suitable’ to himself. Interestingly, when God says in 1:26, “Let us make man in our own image,” God betrays something of his own nature as a ‘plurality.’ Thus, Humanity is made for community because he is made in the ‘image’ of a God who by nature is himself plural.

Why create Eve ‘out of’ Adam? What does this suggest? That Adam is incomplete without Eve. That Adam and Eve are made to be one. That humanity is made for community that is both unified and yet diverse.

Notice, the image of God in humanity is reflected most clearly when man and woman are both present. 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

X. The Promised Land and the Garden

John Sailhamer argues that ‘land’ and ‘blessing’ are two central themes of Genesis. “Throughout the first two chapters of Genesis and the whole Pentateuch, Moses keeps coming back to the preparation of the land and the divine blessing. These key themes form the basis of his treatment of the patriarchal narratives and the Sinai Covenant.” (p. 87)

After reading John Sailhamer’s book, I have personally taken a fresh look at Genesis and its relationship to one of the main focuses of the Pentateuch- the Promised Land. I think Sailhamer has given a fair treatment to the issues and makes a strong case that the ‘land’ prepared for the Garden (in which God and Adam once enjoyed fellowship) is the same ‘land’ later promised to Abraham. The Tabernacle and the Temple were set up to then be a kind of ‘Paradise’ in the land. Curiously, they are even graced with pomegranates.

XI. A Look at the Fall and the History of Sin

Moses records the original fall into sin by Adam and Eve, our first parents, a fall that to this day affects each one of us (chapter 3). Without this record of the Fall of Man, we would not understand the human predicament.
Daniel Fuller argues that the essence of Satan’s influence in the Garden was his suggestion that God has created humanity not to bless humanity but to abuse humanity to fulfil some need in himself (Unity of the Bible, p. 180). It should be noted that God is never presented in Scripture as a ‘needy’ God. He is full and delightfully satisfied in himself (for more on this, see Fuller- chapters 8 and 9).

A. How did Satan approach Adam and Eve?

- He **approached them at a point of weakness**: Eve- 3:1. God spoke directly to Adam about not eating the fruit. Eve learned this through Adam (2:16-17).
- By **twisting God’s words** (adds ‘any’- v. 3:1)
- By **rejecting God’s words** (3:4)
- By **questioning God’s authority to rule** over them (vv. 1, 4)
- By **accusing God of holding out on them** in terms of blessing them and bringing them joy (3:5)
- By **tempting them to a ‘good’ thing** (the desire to ‘gain’).

B. How did Eve respond?

- She **listened**
- She **embellished** what God had said (3:3)
- She **rejected God’s words** (3:6)
- She **questioned God’s authority to rule** over them (vv. 1, 4)
- She **believed** Satan (3:6- that it was ‘for gaining wisdom’)
- She **engaged in emotional thinking** (‘saw’ the fruit was good for food)

C. How did Adam respond?

- He **did absolutely nothing!**
  - Where was Adam? (3:6)
- He **became passive** leaving Eve vulnerable so that she made the decision on her own

D. What should Adam and Eve have done?

- They should have stood together on God’s word
- They should have honored God’s authority and should have sought to maintain God’s order, beauty and purpose in creation
Adam should have remembered God’s Word (Genesis 1:27 uses the word ‘zakar’ for ‘male’. “The Remembering One”) and should have spoken into the chaos and darkness of the situation.

E. The Dramatic Effects of Sin

- A complete breakdown in the flow of life
- No more peaceful fellowship- with God, self, others, creation
- Guilt and shame became a dominant theme
- Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden Land
- Things are no longer the way they were meant to be
- Curses are pronounced on man and woman, their seed, Satan and the land

F. What Happened Next?

- Adam and Eve realized something had changed inside of them
- Adam and Eve felt unusually vulnerable (realizing they were ‘naked’- ‘uncovered’)
- Adam and Eve tried to ‘cover’ their own sense of guilt with clothing (the first attempt at man-made religion: ‘The Church of the Holy Fig Leaf’)
- Unable to remove guilt and shame, Adam and Eve try to hide from God (showing fellowship has been broken)
- Adam and Eve start pointing fingers at one another (marital problem begin-so that they are no longer ‘one flesh’- being ‘like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose’ (cf. Phil. 2:2).

F. What Did God Do Next?

- God graciously acted on their behalf
- He removed the clothing they had fashioned, killed animals, and placed the bloody skins over them (presumably laying the foundation for the teaching that sin must be atoned for through bloody sacrifice).
  
  The bloody clothing foreshadows God’s provision of a righteous sin-covering through Jesus. By wearing clothing, we are reminding one another of our need for a spiritual covering (to cover our spiritual nakedness).

- Though the text is not clear on this, it implies that God must have instructed Adam and Eve in how to approach him when there has been sin (Abel’s offering
must be based in an earlier revelation teaching the first family about what God desires when there has been sin—see 4:4).

Genesis is concerned not only with the beginning of sin and its effects in Adam’s and Eve’s lives, but also with its ongoing expression thorough their descendents. Thus, the accounts that follow the Fall document every imaginable sin, from lies and deception (27:36) to murder (4:8), violence (6:11), and gross immorality (19:4-5). There is not a single ‘modern’ sin not recorded here.

It seems that following God’s judgment upon the original sin (3:14-19), things went from bad to worse. First, Cain murdered his brother. This was motivated by jealousy (an issue that plagues God’s people throughout Genesis). God shows grace to Cain and does not destroy him but strangely protects him (by ‘marking’ him) from anyone who may want to kill him for his action.

Lamech’s sin follows Cain’s sin, a sin that is ‘seventy seven times greater’ than Cain’s sin. The world deteriorates to the lowest point imaginable. Finally, Scripture says of all humanity: “...Every inclination of the thoughts of [their hearts are] evil all the time.” (6:5). God ‘grieves’ that he ever created people in the first place (6:6), and so he brings judgment on all of the earth. Noah and the Flood, one of the great stories of the Bible, follows this serious moral assessment. Yet, God is gracious and chooses to give grace to Noah and his children. Notice that God’s grace always comes by way of a ‘covenant.’ (There will be more on making ‘covenants’ below).

Before we turn from the issue of human sin, we need to see how the story of Noah and the Flood parallels God’s original story of creation. Genesis 1:2 speaks of God calling forth life out of the darkness of ‘waters.’ Though the flood is a judgment ‘through the waters,’ God again recreates the land following his judgment. Noah now parallels Adam in many ways. A new creation stands before Noah and he is invited into fellowship with God through covenant. Also paralleling Adam, Noah falls into disgrace (he is drunk, exposes his nakedness, goes on to pronounce curses upon his descendents). And so, just as there was tension between the sons of Adam, there will also be tension between Noah’s sons.

The story of the Tower of Babel is also an interesting theme that will be repeated throughout Scripture. Interestingly, it was Cain the murderer who built the first city (4:17). In Genesis 11, the people of Babel attempt to make their name great by building a tower that leads to the gods. This action demonstrates how pagan their religion had become and how their hearts were filled with human pride. God, who ‘stoops down’ to see this tower, also sees their pride and then brings judgment on the people by confusing all human language. Babel (Babylon) now becomes identified with the judgment of God. Throughout the rest of Scripture, Babylon is depicted as a metaphor recalling to mind the evil inherent in any fallen human system that stands against God’s purposes.
Interestingly, when Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden, they were
-driven out of the Garden to the east (3:24). This is toward the region that will later
be called ‘Babel’ or ‘Babylon.’

XII. The History of Salvation and the Covenant

Genesis not only records the beginning of sin, but also the beginning of
salvation. The rest of the Bible then fills in the outline given by Moses and develops
the salvation theme through to its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

A. Salvation promised

God’s curse upon Satan in the Garden (3:15) is sometimes called the
‘protoevangelium,’ a Latin term meaning ‘the first declaration of the gospel.’ It is a
statement of God’s intention to send the Messiah, one who would suffer and die for
sin (Satan will ‘strike his heel’) and, in so doing, put the axe to the root of satanic
influence (Christ will ‘crush [Satan’s] head’).

B. Salvation pictured

God not only states the doctrine of salvation in abstract terms, but also gives us pictures of salvation that are easier to grasp. Each of these prefigures Jesus
Christ’s redemptive work, of which they are ‘types’ (pictures foretelling a coming
reality):

- God covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness (3:21).
  There is an innocent victim (the animal), substitution, and the shedding
  of blood to atone for guilt.
- Abel’s sacrifice (see Hebrews 11:4)
  Genesis 4:3-4 describes the elements of Abel’s acceptable sacrifice. We
  see the death of an innocent victim—on this occasion a ‘firstborn’ lamb.
  Its blood was shed in substitution for the guilty party, atoning for sin.
- Noah’s Ark
  The account of Noah’s ark is found in Genesis 6:9-9:17. It is a picture of
  the safety which salvation provides against the judgment of God on a
  sinful world. Noah’s passing through the Flood portrays Christian
  baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22). His being in the ark also pictures our being
  ‘in Christ’ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

  These pictures point towards the provision of salvation through sacrifice
  and what follows in the Bible builds upon these pictures.

- Abraham sacrificing Isaac
This takes place on the very mountain where God would one day offer his own son. Abraham is led to act out a drama depicting what God himself would one day do to his ‘only Son’ on our behalf.

- The Passover (found in the Book of Exodus)
- The Tabernacle Worship (found in Exodus)
- The Ark of the Covenant and the Role of the High Priest (found in both Exodus and Leviticus)

C. Salvation panorama

The last thirteen chapters of Genesis present us with a panoramic view of salvation through the life of Joseph. His biography is one of the most complete Old Testament pictures of Christ and his redemptive work.

The story of Joseph ends with the whole world coming to ask him for bread. We see Joseph as the ruling prince, the savior of the people, resolving all of the world’s problems, as well as ministering reconciliation to his brothers.

Here is a beautiful picture of Christ’s mission and ministry to this lost and spiritually starving world (50:19-21). There are many allusions to Christ’s life and sacrifice in the story of Joseph.

‘The life of Joseph runs in three periods. We see him first as the beloved son, supreme in the regard of his father; then as the suffering servant, rejected by his brethren; and finally as the exalted saviour, lifted high over all in princely splendour and administrative authority. Thus, in this triple way, Joseph becomes the most complete single type of Christ anywhere in the Bible.’
J. S. Baxter, Explore the Book (Zondervan, 1966) p. 60

XIII. Abrahamic Covenant

[In this section on ‘Covenant’, I am indebted to David Matthew and his notes for a course developed for Covenant College. Used by the permission of Goos Vedder, Executive Director.]

A covenant is an agreement, an arrangement between two parties, by which they are bound to certain responsibilities - with agreed penalties for defaulting - and are given access to certain privileges.

The Bible's emphasis is on the covenants in which one of the parties is God himself. It begins with the covenantal relationship between God and Adam. As the history of revelation unfolds, this small stream is swelled by tributary-streams in a series of further covenants with such prominent characters as Noah, Abraham, and David. The stream becomes a river in God's covenant with the nation of Israel, to
emerge into the sea of his worldwide purpose as the great new covenant in Christ Jesus.

It is true to say that all of God's dealings with his people, in every generation, have been on the basis of covenant (O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants: God's Way with his People* (Great Commission Publications, 1987), p. 11).

What exactly is a covenant? No single English word is an adequate equivalent. 'Agreement' and 'special arrangement' point in the right direction but fall far short of its full meaning. 'Contract', 'bond', and 'guarantee' also touch some aspects of covenant but again fail to express the whole.

A covenant is a *gracious relationship of love* between God and humanity, where God takes the initiative by creating the world to be the place where this relationship can be realized, then creating human beings to live in it. God binds us to himself, giving us the right and responsibility to live in his love and to serve and glorify him in gratitude.

Throughout Scripture, God entered into covenants with man. In all of these covenants there is a single theme: 'I will be your God and you will be my people.' (Jeremiah 7:23) In other words, covenant is all about relationship, primarily the *relationship between God and man*, and then interpersonal relationships at a human level - the latter finding their foundation in the former. Palmer Robertson sums it up in the words: "The heart of the covenant is the declaration that "God is with us"." (The Christ of the Covenants (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1980) p. 46)

The unifying theme of all the covenants, then, is that God will be with us and we will be his people. Thus the essence of God's covenant with Abraham was to be his God (Genesis 17:7). God reaffirmed the same to the Israelites in Egypt: 'I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.' (Exodus 6:7)

He brought them out of Egypt because he remembered his covenant (Exodus 6:5). This theme is consistent throughout Scripture, from the beginnings in Genesis to the consummation in Revelation: 'I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."' (Revelation 21:3)

The Hebrew term for covenant is *berit*. It is worth noting the origin of the English word 'covenant'. The word comes from two Latin words, *con*, meaning 'together', and *venire*, 'come'. On this basis, covenant means a coming together, in solemn agreement, of two parties.

We need to understand that *berit* is not restricted to vertical covenant (between God and man); it is also used in connection with horizontal covenants (between one person and another). However, when covenants are formed between God and man, Scripture employs a particular structure of the word that signifies that God is entering into the relationship as the superior and man as the inferior party.

The phrase *karat berit le* means 'to make a covenant to' and indicates that a superior is condescending to make a covenant with an inferior. This is the phrase used to describe God's covenant with man. By contrast, the phrase *karat berit im* means 'to make a covenant with' and indicates the establishing of a covenant between equals.
Once again we are reminded that God does not enter into a covenant with us as equals. As the superior party, he defines the terms. We are allowed only to accept or reject those terms, not to alter them. If we accept them, we are expected to be faithful. If we reject them, we are expected to bear the curses of the covenant.

Covenant is essentially a bond in blood. The very words used for making a covenant involve the idea of blood. The Hebrew expression usually translated 'make a covenant' is literally 'cut a covenant' (karat berit).

The first use of this expression is in connection with God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:18), where God is said to 'cut' a covenant with him. The cutting refers to the sacrifice of blood at the covenant's inauguration. Abraham had sacrificed a heifer, a goat and a ram, cutting them in half (Genesis 15:9-10).

David Matthew writes: "When two men made a covenant they would commonly cut up animals and walk between the two pieces (for example, Jeremiah 34:18-20). By their action they were saying, 'If I don't abide by the conditions of this agreement, may I likewise be cut in half. And just as the blood of these creatures has been shed, may mine also be shed if I fail to honor my promise." (The Covenant Meal (Harvestime, 1988) p. 30)

In Abraham's case, however, it was not a question of a covenant between two equal parties; God himself was taking the initiative in sovereign grace. Only the Lord - not Abraham - passed between the pieces, in the form of 'a smoking firepot with a blazing torch' (Genesis 15:17). He took upon himself the obligations of both parties in the covenant.

The significance of the blood is far-reaching:

a. It represents life (Genesis 9:4; Lev 17:11) - and thus its pouring out is the giving of life.

b. It points to the need for forgiveness if man is to enter into covenant with God. This was to be highlighted centuries after Abraham in the words of institution at the Last Supper:

   'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' (Matthew 26:28)

c. It speaks of the sacredness of the bond formed, which was seen as the equivalent of family relationship. A blood-bond was seen to exist between members of a family, by which they were pledged to mutual support and loyalty. There was thus no need for natural brothers to make covenant together. That is why, after shedding his brother Abel's blood, Cain expected to experience the curse of the covenant-breaker, namely, capital punishment (4:11-14).

d. The shedding of blood points to the curses that will fall upon the one who violates the terms of the covenant. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and compared those who violated his covenant to the halves of the sacrificed animals: "The men who have violated my covenant and have not
fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two.” (Jeremiah 34:18)

Let us now summarize the implications of the word berit. Through covenant God enters into a sacred bond with man. This bond is formed through the shedding of blood. The bond is so sacred that violating it incurs death. Conversely, honoring it incurs all the blessings of life. Once covenant is formed between God and man, man is treated as one of God's family, with all the rights and responsibilities of a son.

Covenantal Procedures:

With the exchanging of covenantal vows, a relationship was elevated to a legal status where each party became pledged to certain attitudes and actions. Here are a few elements that occur sufficiently often to deserve mention:

1. Identification of the parties involved. Most prominent in Scripture are the divine covenants, in which God himself is the major party. But the other party is also clearly identified.

2. Clarification of the terms. The obligations of both parties are spelt out clearly. In addition, certain blessings are specified for adherence to the covenant and corresponding penalties for its neglect.

3. The shedding of blood. This was the equivalent of a modern-day signing of a document, binding the signatory to the terms agreed.

4. The sharing of a meal by the parties involved.

XIV. The Bible and Science.

History demonstrates that science has done more to confirm the Bible than to discredit it. Surely, some of what science has advocated in the past and currently espouses in some of its more popular views is bogus. However, to suggest that scientists in general are all working together in some grand conspiracy to discredit the Bible and Christianity simply is not true.

Christians must accept that the Bible is silent on many matters. Some questions can only be learned through scientific exploration (in Theology, this is called ‘General Revelation’- truths which are open to all people, even those without the light of God's Word). Some of our questions will always remain unanswered since they are beyond the scope of the Bible and beyond observable science. When science becomes zealous in its hope to find answers to all of Life's mysterious questions, it will either end up disappointed or will be tempted to practice bad science. Scientists, like many Christians, have a hard time accepting mysteries. Some answers are only found in the Word of God (God's self-revelation) but others remain a mystery even to those closest to God.
Christians must accept the fact that everything in the Bible we believe is ‘up for grabs’ as far as our present culture is concerned. This does not need to trouble us too deeply - it is certainly not a new experience for God or his people to face harsh criticism. God is doing just fine dealing with his critics. He can handle (and will humble) even the harshest of critics. Having said this, Christians serve our culture best by: 1) Becoming serious Bible students and theologians (demonstrating integrity and skill in our handling of the Bible); 2) Becoming credible scientists and thinkers (practicing ‘good science’); and 3) Becoming worshiping mystics (enjoying and celebrating the mysteries of Life and our mysterious God. God does not tell us everything he knows, but simply what he deems is necessary that we should know).

We must take care that we do not make the Book of Genesis an unnecessary obstacle to faith rather than the means to faith God intends for it to be (Romans 10:17). Here’s a simple rule: “Where God has spoken clearly, let us listen and seek to understand and receive. Then, let us faithfully proclaim what we’ve heard to one another and the world. But, where God has not spoken clearly, let us exercise humility and restraint. Let us leave these mysteries to God who is able to defend His own cause.”

The Bible presents the view that all present and past life forms- as well as all of the material stuff within the universe- came about through the direct creative work of a living, personal God. Many scientists today present a view of origins in opposition to what we find in the Bible by teaching that all living things- including human beings- have spontaneously generated from ‘non-living’ matter, and, these things exist in a cold, impersonal universe.

The notion that a ‘living thing’ can arise from ‘no-thing’ is not a matter of science (since this can in no way be demonstrated). This is a ‘belief’ based upon a particular philosophical world-view (see R.C. Sproul’s- "Cosmos or Chaos").

Neither the scientist nor the Believer has enough data to speak confidently regarding the ‘how’ of origins. But, Believers do have enough data to declare (by a ‘reasonable’ faith’) the ‘who’ and ‘why’ of Creation (Creation is the work of God and reflects his Glory- see Psalm 19 and Romans 1:19-20).

XV. Various Interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2

A. Creationism says that all creation was brought into being over a period of six 24-hour days. According to this view, the universe is very young (about 10,000 years old). Adherents of this view believe that the present condition of the earth-though it appears quite old- is the result of the destruction brought about by Noah’s flood.

Many bible interpreters see an inherent problem with this view. Our Western, scientific world view defines a ‘day’ as the time it takes for the earth to make one
full rotation on its axis while in orbit about the sun. How can 3 ‘days’ of creation occur before the sun is created on Day 4?

*The Astronomic Evidence* suggests earth is very old. First, as Christians debate the chronology of the creation and the age of the universe, scientists (especially astrophysicists) are constantly making new discoveries through Hubble’s eye. While not long ago, scientists believed the earth was about 15 billion years old, they have recently revised their figures arguing that the universe is somewhere in the area of 8 billion years old. These figures are based on what astrophysicists see as the rate at which the universe is expanding. The figure also assumes the relative accuracy of the Big Bang Theory.

Consider the evidence of the earth’s age from what we know about light. A light-year is the distance light traverses in a vacuum in one year at the speed of 299,792 km/sec. With 31,557,600 seconds in a year, the light-year equals a distance of 9.46 X 1 trillion km (5.87 X 1 trillion). Alpha Centauri, the nearest star to the Sun, stands out at a distance of 4.3 light-years. Many stars are multiple millions of light years away from Earth yet we see their light. How do we account for this light being visible to the observer on Earth if we believe the Earth is relatively young as some propose?

*The Paleontological Evidence* also suggests an old earth. Geologists argue that strata in the earth’s surface (layers such as those we see in the Grand Canyon) are best explained by many years of time. Within the strata, we find a detailed fossil record. By the way, this fossil record has done more to confirm the claims of the Bible than to discredit them. For example, we find no record of any single species giving birth to another species.

Many creationists point out that a number of the irregular placements of fossils (e.g. marine fossils from the ocean are found on the upper slopes of the Himalayas as well as Mt. Washington, N.H.) may best be explained by the Bible’s claim that a cataclysmic flood occurred in history past (see Genesis 6).

*The Evidence From Earth Temperature, Salting of the Seas and Radioactivity* suggests an old earth. *The Big Bang Theory* (advocated by many scientists in our day- though it has its critics) proposes that the earth was at one time part of the sun and that the earth has cooled to its present temperature from that of the temperature of the sun. (By the way, if the Big Bang is in part true, there is no reason God could not have caused such a ‘bang’.) Scientists also point out that, since the cooling of the earth is barely measurable to us today, such a cooling would require millions of years.

When water does not steadily flow, chemicals eventually accumulate. Scientists point out that it takes great lengths of time for salts to become present in natural bodies of water. If we were to take all of the salt of the ocean and heap it up on the visible land, salt would be piled up 100 feet deep. Scientists say that this salt
(presumably from in land rivers and rocks) took about 4 billion years to accumulate.

All evidence suggests that it takes a great number of years for dissipation in the form of radioactive lead to occur.

**B. The Creation In Situ Theory** is similar to Creationism’s position; however, this position argues that God has created the Earth with the appearance of age. This position takes a strict view of Genesis’ genealogies as representing ‘direct’ descendants—placing creation at c. B.C. 4004 (this is called ‘Usher’s date.’) According to traditional Judaism, it is now the year 5,764.

Are biblical genealogies an accurate indicator as to the age of the Earth? Even if we were to embrace Creationism or the Creation in Situ Theory, the genealogies should not be thought of as chronologies in the strictest sense. Sailhamer writes: “Over a hundred years ago one of America’s greatest evangelical theologians, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, argued that large gaps were to be assumed in those genealogies and some two thousand years measuring the interval between creation and the birth of Abraham, two hundred generations, and something like twenty thousand years, or even two thousand generations and something like two hundred thousand years may have intervened.” (Genesis Unbound, p. 31)

There exists plenty of evidence that ancient genealogies often skipped over the names of those who were of lesser significance. It was not uncommon for ancient writers to skip a few generations saying of a great, great, great grandson, ‘So-n-so is the son of….” Jesus himself is often called ‘The Son of David.’

Let’s go back to this idea that the earth may have been created with ‘appearances of age.’ Isn’t this possible? Yes, but it is not necessary to advocate this view in order to preserve the Bible’s integrity. Sailhamer points out that in the Hebrew, Genesis 1:5 does not have the word ‘first.’ Most English translators have supplied the word ‘first.’ By using the phrase ‘first day,’ the translators imply that no day preceded this one. This may have been the first day of some special week God has in mind, but not necessarily the first day of creation. (p. 31)

It is very possible that God created ‘radioactive’ lead, just as it is possible that God created ‘salted’ oceans and that he created the ‘earth separately from the sun’ (and at a ‘much cooler temperature’ without the Big Bang).

Having said this, Young Earth theories assume that certain natural processes and standards we see at work today were accelerated at creation and that the Earth was created with ‘appearances of age’ (as noted above, stars must have been created with light ‘on the move’ in order that their light might be seen by us today). The fossil record becomes very difficult to address with a Young Earth position— even a cataclysmic flood cannot explain everything in the Earth’s crust. Some extremists
argue that the Earth was created with fossils in place. That seems very unlikely to me. What purpose would this serve? This would be a cruel joke.

It is very interesting that most of the evidence presented from various scientific fields tend to agree that the earth is about 4-6 billion years old. I personally advocate a position that allows for a very old earth. My position does not require that I make science my enemy.

It has been my observation that those Christians who insist on Young Earth positions as the only legitimate interpretation of Genesis 1-2:3 often end up doing very poor science. Believers who are not well-versed in the scientific disciplines are easily manipulated by the ideas proposed by so-called ‘Christian scientific experts.’ Such ‘experts’ overwhelm them readers with technical information. This information (which most people cannot possibly understand) is enthusiastically received since it appears to confirm what they already believe to be the case. In the end, such ‘Christian’ scientists do the very same thing they accuse the evolutionists of doing—pressing the facts into their theories to prove what they already believe to be true.

Let’s deal with a few more questions that arise when we are thinking of the ‘days’ of creation in the strictest sense—as 24-hour days.

First, was Day 6 just a really long day? It would seem that the sun would have had to ‘stand still’ to accomplish all that is recorded on the 6th Day:

1) Adam is put “in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (2:15).
2) Adam is given a tour of the Garden where God explains that he is to refrain from eating from a certain tree in the middle of the Garden (2:16-17).
3) Adam discovers there is “no suitable helper” for him (presumably he is lonely for a sexual counterpart—2:18).
4) Adam names all the animals while observing an animal parade orchestrated by God Himself (2:19-20).
5) Adam is made to take a nap as God creates Eve out of the material of his own body (2:21).
6) Boy meets girl and there’s a garden wedding (2:22-25).

Second, was the seventh day really a ‘day’ as we think of it? By comparing Hebrews 4:3-11, we see that God’s ‘rest’ (the seventh Day) continues well beyond 24 hours into eternity. In fact, when we come to receive Jesus Christ as God’s sacrificial lamb offered for our sins, the writer of Hebrews describes this experience as ‘entering’ God’s ‘rest’ (cf. Hebrew 4).

Third, when were the angels created if all things were created in six 24-hour days? Genesis says nothing directly about the creation of the angels. The Young Earth views, in order to be consistent, must see the creation of angelic hosts as occurring within the six days. This has led some to claim that when the text says, “He separated the light from the darkness” (1:4) the author is referring to good and
evil heavenly hosts. No room is now left for what the rest of Scripture implies was a kind of warfare in heaven with the eventual fall of Satan.

Finally, when did the dinosaurs roam the earth? Young Earth theories have no alternatives here. In their view, dinosaurs had to have been created on the sixth day and would have shared the earth with Adam and Eve. Some go so far as to suggest that Noah's flood was the cause bringing about the extinction of all dinosaurs. Of course, if this is true, then we must assume that Noah did not bring pairs of dinosaurs on the ark with him. Some Young Earth proponents claim he most certainly did.

Old Earth theories, especially The Framework Hypothesis and Sailhamer’s The Genesis Unbound Theory (see below), do not directly answer the question of dinosaurs, however, they do provide for enough time allowing there to be an ancient world where dinosaurs roamed and a season where angels were created and were obedient before the creation of humankind.

What about the natural processes of the earth? Meredith Kline points out that Genesis 2:4-6 takes for granted that God did not create things without first creating the natural circumstances that need to exist to allow for what we call the ‘natural growth’ of those things (e.g. there were ‘no shrubs’ and ‘no plants’ because it ‘had not yet rained’ and because there was ‘no man to work the ground.’ The statement ‘no man to work the ground’ answers the question- "Why not just use irrigation to support the plants?" Since irrigation was common in the ancient world, this might have been a question on the minds of the first readers). For a further study, see Kline's article: "Because It Had Not Rained." (Westminster Theological Journal- May 1958).

Let us now turn to some of the Old Earth theories.

C. **The Gap Theory** sees not one but two creations. In this view, Genesis 1:1 represents an earlier creation. The theory says that it was during this time that God creation the angelic hosts. The Gap Theory was developed to address the question of how a good God could create a world of ‘chaos,’ to account for the origin of Satan, and to maintain the strictest interpretation of the ‘day’ language. The theory argues that the ‘chaos’ of Genesis 1:2 was not the original creation of the world but the result of a wholesale destruction of creation by Satan. The theory teaches that after Satan ruined creation God undertook a seven-day process of setting it aright again.

D. **The Indefinite Age Theory** believes that the word ‘day’ is used figuratively in the text in reference to geologic eras. This position points out that, though the words ‘day,’ ‘morning’, and ‘evening’ seem to suggest days as we experience them (from sunrise to sunset to sunrise), this is not the point of using these words. Adherents suggest that the Hebrew word ‘yom’ (‘day’) must not be narrowly defined to a 24-hour period. This language, they say, is simply used to suggest a ‘season of
time’ (e.g. we are said to live in ‘the Day of the Lord’). The words ‘morning’ and ‘evening’ are used as literary devices to convey the ideas of ‘opening’ and ‘closure’ (just as a poet might speak of the morning or evening of a person’s life).

The benefit of this position is that it leaves room for those who believe God created all things over a long period of time (even using a kind of modified evolutionary process). Critics of this position say that it clouds the historical nature of the story. They ask, “Why not now see Adam and Eve as figurative as well?”

Those who embrace The Indefinite Age Theory argue that the Genesis creation account—though not Hebrew poetry in the purest sense—is ‘poetry-like’. They describe it as a kind of ‘poetic history.’ One of the problems with this position is that it would make the Genesis account a unique literary genre.

E. The Day-Age Theory (sometimes called The Concordistic Theory) shares some similarities with the Indefinite Age theory. The difference is that this position maintains that long geological ages in the Earth’s history are to be identified with the six days of Genesis (each day representing a geological age). Some who hold to this view see a 24-hour period to introduce vegetation, for example, then millennia for development before the next day.

F. The Revelatory Day Theory suggests that the seven days were seven days in which God revealed His work to Moses. This view is often combined with elements of The Gap Theory. God embraced a work-rest pattern in his presentation to Moses simply to form a basis for the Sabbath commands God would require in the covenant. The strength of this position is that it takes the work-sabbath pattern very seriously.

G. Progressive Creationists and Theistic Evolutionists embrace and ultimately merge the latest scientific theories with the Genesis account of creation. Critics of this position argue that, in the end, the biblical text is generally made to be a servant to scientific theory. Critics also say that those who hold to this view must take a very low view of the integrity of Genesis as an historical account.

Did humankind evolve from lesser states over time? There certainly have been changes in human stature throughout recorded history. Having said this, Genesis clearly suggests that an historical couple were created in two singular, decisive acts of God— the man God named ‘Adam’ and the woman Adam named ‘Eve’. All of Scripture, including Jesus and Paul, assumes the historicity of this original couple. From a Biblical standpoint, we have no reason to question that they were actual historical figures. There is nothing in the text that indicates these people were mythical.
H. The Framework Hypothesis, as developed by scholar Meredith Kline, argues that the author of Genesis is not particularly interested in answering all of our scientific questions about how God created the world. Kline says that Moses has a different goal in mind and the organization of his account in chapter 1 supports those goals.

According to Kline, the Genesis creation account aims to make the point that God has sovereignly created and ordered all ‘realms’ (‘kingdoms’) and has filled these ‘realms’ with ‘rulers’ (‘kings’). Humanity is commanded to ‘fill and subdue the earth’ and to ‘reign over all its creatures’ (1:28). In this way, God’s authority has been delegated to humanity that it might have ‘dominion’ (‘sovereignty’) over the earth.

The Framework Hypothesis Of Genesis 1:1-2:3

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<tr>
<th>Kingdoms/Realms</th>
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<td>Day 1 Light &amp; Dark</td>
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<td>Day 2 Waters Above &amp; Below</td>
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<td>Day 3 Land &amp; Vegetation</td>
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<td>Day 4 Sun, Moon &amp; Stars</td>
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<td>Day 5 Birds &amp; Fish</td>
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<td>Day 6 Land Creatures &amp; Humans</td>
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<td>Day 7 God Rests</td>
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*Developed by Meredith Kline Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

We see, then, that Humanity was originally commissioned- on God’s behalf- to serve as God’s ‘representative ruler’ (a viceroy). Our ‘rulership’ comes with various duties and responsibilities- making it clear that Humanity was originally created
morally accountable to God. Genesis 1:31 makes the point that the original creation—the order and design of God’s creative purposes in their primal condition—beautifully displayed God’s perfect glory, wisdom, power, majesty and sovereignty over all.

According to the Framework Hypothesis of Genesis, the point of the author’s rhythmic presentation is to lay down a pattern for us to follow: 6 days of work to be followed by 1 Sabbath Day’s rest. If this is true, then, the Book of Genesis doesn’t help us answer the questions: “How old is the Earth?,” or, “How long did it take God to create all things?” The theory says that the writer of Genesis is less interested in teaching us about the chronology of Creation (what came first or second with respect to time) but is far more interested in having us see the beauty and orderliness of Creation as a reflection of God’s own glory. This theory also flows well with the ‘Kingdom of God’ theme found throughout Scripture.

I. The ‘Genesis Unbound’ Theory is articulated in John Sailhamer’s book by that very name. According to Sailhamer, Genesis 1:1 describes the creation of the universe during an indeterminate amount of time, a time covered by the Hebrew word ‘Beginning.’ This word (reshit) speaks of ‘an indeterminate time, an extended time, time before time’ (p. 38). Genesis 1:2-2:4a, says Sailhamer, describes the preparation of the ‘land’ (the Garden of Eden/ Promised Land) over six literal days.

Sailhamer sees a distinction between the Hebrew word ‘create’ (1:1) and the idea of ‘making’ used in the verses to follow. ‘To make,’ says Sailhamer, is to work with what has already been created- like ‘making one’s bed’ (see p. 224). Genesis 1:2- 2:4a describes God’s preparation (making- getting it ready) of the ‘land.’ This, of course, is something that is of particular interest to Moses’ audience. Genesis 2:4b-25 then tells the story of God’s preparation of the Garden of Eden within the land.

Additionally, Sailhamer dislikes the translation ‘formless and void.’ He says that this translation has been influenced by a Greek cosmology through the translation of the LXX. Sailhamer prefers the translation: ‘the land was desolate and uninhabited (wilderness).’

I personally like much of what Sailhamer has written. His view especially retains the distinctly Jewish flavor of Genesis and also ties in the strong theme of ‘land’ throughout the Pentateuch. I also like what I see of Kline’s emphasis on the ‘kings’ and ‘kingdoms’ with man serving as God’s appointed ‘viceroy.’ Both views find no conflict with what I see as the strong scientific evidence for an old earth. I therefore would describe my own position as something of a combination of The Framework Hypothesis and Sailhamer’s Genesis Unbound Theory.

XVI. Is God’s Glory Diminished By Taking An Old Earth View?
Some argue that it diminishes the glory of God as Creator if he created the stuff of the earth over a longer period of time. But, the thought that God may not have created ‘all things’ in six 24-hour days should not trouble Believers. What God might do in 6 days, he might just as easily have done in a single moment. Similarly, creating the world over a longer period of time requires no less miraculous power and sovereign control than it does to create it in six 24-hour days.

Again, according to Genesis 2:4-6, the author appears to take for granted that God did not create all things without first creating the natural circumstances which need to exist to allow for what we call the ‘natural growth’ of those things (e.g. there were ‘no shrubs’ and ‘plants’ because it ‘had not yet rained’).

A final word: Though belief in the historic creation account is consistent with human reason, it has always been primarily a matter of faith:

‘By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.’

(Hebrews 11:3)

R. L. Boyd wrote: “The mystery of being, still unsolved, by all our science and philosophy, fills me with breathless wonder.”

XVII. Genesis and Other Near Eastern Creation and Flood Stories

There are a number of ancient creation stories that are at least as old as Genesis. Some scholars believe that biblical writers drew from these stories and their literary materials that were part of the larger ancient Middle Eastern cultural environment when they wrote the Israelite accounts of creation. Here are a few short summaries of some of the surviving ancient stories.

A. Enuma Elish

The Enuma Elish is the best-known Babylonian creation account. It existed in various versions and copies, the oldest dating to at least 1700 BC. According to this account, before heaven and earth were formed there were two vast bodies of water. The male freshwater ocean was called Apsu and the female saltwater ocean was called Tiamat. Through the fusion of their waters successive generations of gods came into being.

As in Genesis 1, water is the primeval element, but here it is identified with the gods, who have unmistakable gender. Younger gods were created through sexual union. These younger, noisy gods disturbed the tranquility of Apsu, so Apsu devised a plan to dispose of them. The wisest younger god, Ea, found out about the plan and killed Apsu. To avenge her husband Tiamat decided to do away with the younger gods with the help of her henchman Kingu.
When the younger gods heard about this, they found a champion in the god Marduk. He agreed to defend them only if they would make him king. After they tested his powers, they enthroned him. When finally they met on the field of battle, Tiamat opened her considerable mouth as if to swallow Marduk and plunge him into the immeasurable deeps. Marduk rallied by casting one of the winds into her body, expanding her like a balloon. He then took his bow and shot an arrow into her belly, splitting her in half. Marduk cut her in two like a clam, and out of her carcass he made the heavens. The ‘clamshell’ of heaven became a barrier to keep the waters from escaping, a parallel to the Genesis notion of a barrier or firmament. Marduk also fixed the constellations in the heavens. They, along with the moon, established the course of day and night as well as the seasons.

Then Marduk devised a plan to relieve the drudgery of the gods. They were tired of laboring to meet their daily needs, so he created humanity out of the blood of Kingu to be the servants of the gods. In appreciation for their deliverance, the gods built Marduk a palace in Babylon, called Esagila, meaning "house with its head in heaven." There Marduk sat enthroned.

B. The Atrahasis Epic

The Atrahasis Epic, named after its human hero, is a story from Mesopotamia that includes both a creation and a flood account. Some see the name Atrahasis as the Babylonian name for Noah. It was composed as early as the nineteenth century BC. In its cosmology, heaven is ruled by the god Anu, earth by Enlil, and the freshwater ocean by Enki. Enlil set the lesser gods to work farming the land and maintaining the irrigation canals.

After forty years they refused to work any longer. Enki, also the wise counselor to the gods, proposed that humans be created to assume the work. The goddess Mami made humans by shaping clay mixed with saliva and the blood of the under-god We, who was slain for this purpose.

The human population worked and grew, but so did the noise they made. Because it disturbed Enlil's sleep, he decided to destroy the human race. First he sent a plague, and then a famine followed by a drought, and lastly a flood. Each time Enki forewarned Atrahasis, enabling him to survive the disaster. He gave Atrahasis seven days warning of the flood and told him to build a boat. Atrahasis loaded it with animals and birds and his own possessions. Though the rest of humanity perished, he survived. When the gods realized they had destroyed the labor force that had produced food for their offerings they regretted their actions. The story breaks off at this point, so we learn nothing of the boat's landing or the later Atrahasis.
The account has similarities to Genesis, including the creation of humans out of clay, a flood, and boat-building hero.

C. *The Gilgamesh Epic*

It was in 1872 that George Smith, a curator in the British Museum, discovered the first close parallel to Genesis 1-11. Translating a cuneiform tablet found in the Assyrian library of Ashurbanipal (seventh century BC) at Nineveh, Smith realized he had a flood account that had several similarities to the Genesis account. This flood story contains what has come to be known as *The Gilgamesh Epic*. It is the single most important work from ancient Mesopotamia and dates back to about 1700 BC.

The *Gilgamesh Epic* was a widely known Mesopotamian epic about Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk. It is a tale of how the great king dropped out of his royal role to travel the world in a quest for immortality.

One episode of this lengthy epic contains an account of a flood. After losing his best friend and thereby confronting the issue of human mortality, Gilgamesh went to Utnapishtim to learn the secret of eternal life. Utnapishtim was a pre-flood hero who survived the flood and was granted eternal life by the gods.

The following is Utnapishtim's recollection of what the gods advised him to do to survive the coming flood:

Tear down (this) house, build a ship!
Give up possessions, seek thou life.
Forswear (worldly) goods and keep the soul alive!
Aboard the ship take thou the seed of all living things. Six days and [six] nights Blows the flood wind, as the south-storm sweeps the land. When the seventh day arrived,
The flood (-carrying) south-storm subsided in the battle,
Which it had fought like an army.
The sea grew quiet, the tempest was still, the flood ceased. When the seventh day arrived,
I sent forth and set free a dove.
The dove went forth, but came back;
Then I sent forth and set free a raven.
The raven went forth and, seeing that the waters had diminished, He eats, circles, caws, and turns not round.
Then I let out (all) to the four winds and offered a sacrifice. The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer.
The Gilgamesh Epic has notable parallels to the biblical flood story, from the water that came over the land, to the boat, to the birds Utnapishtim sent out the window to look for dry land. And as with Noah, Utnapishtim sacrificed to the deity after he abandoned the boat.

The Epic may be based on the flood story found in the Atrahasis Epic. The version quoted above dates to around 650 BC.

Did Genesis also borrow from one of these ancient stories? Some of the similarities are quite remarkable. But what about the differences?

First, as John Sailhamer writes: “Ancient myths were, as far as we know, always poetic. Poetry was the defining characteristic of ancient mythology.” (Genesis Unbound, p. 230) Though some have said the Genesis creation account is poetic in nature, Hebrew poetry generally has both meter and parallelism. This is not evidenced in Genesis 1 and 2. And though the flood story has some interesting literary features, it is not poetry.

Second, the presence of ancient creation myths and flood myths should not be a surprise to us. Every culture has had its own creation story. (For many in our culture, variations of the General Theory of Evolution comprise their ‘Creation Myth.’) The most striking similarity between Genesis and Enuma Elish is the struggle between order and chaos. Yet, Genesis 1 presents God as a God of power and order who only has to speak and it happens. This is quite unlike Enuma Elish where the gods fight to achieve supremacy over each other and creation. There are many more dramatic differences that could be highlighted between these stories.

Finally, if the biblical account of the flood is true, then we would expect the story to be told in many different ways through the generations. Curiously, many cultures, including the Chinese, have flood stories like that of The Gilgamesh Epic and The Atrahasis Epic. Liberal scholars generally assume that Genesis adapted and reworked ancient Babylonian stories rather than the other way around.

Hill and Walton write: “The Bible affirms the Mesopotamian roots of the Israelites, and the fact that God chose to use human authors to write the Bible should lead us to expect that there will be some similarities to other literature of the same period.” (p. 66) Having said this, the differences in the details and in the nature of the deity described are dramatic.
INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS: "The Exit"

I. Introductory Comments

Exodus is the second of the five books attributed to Moses. It takes its name from the Greek and translates ‘The Exit’ or ‘The Leaving’. This is a fitting title for the book that focuses on how God delivered his people out of slavery and bondage to Egypt and into a deeper covenant-love relationship with himself. The book spans the entirety of Moses’ life. Exodus begins in Egypt and ends with the Israelites in the Wilderness standing at the very door of the Promised Land and about to go in.

Exodus a very important book for what follows in Scripture. Ancient Hebrew people viewed the events recorded in this book as even more significant than creation. Where Genesis lays the groundwork for understanding ourselves within the universe as creations of a personal God, Exodus lays the groundwork for understanding our salvation as God’s mighty work undertaken to win the freedom of His people.

II. Exodus and Christian Theology

We cannot minimize the importance of Exodus in developing a healthy biblical theology. Biblical writers continually return to the time of the Exodus to recall stories, lessons, and instructions God revealed to the ancient Israelites. The New Testament authors were especially interested in how the great event of The Exodus from Egypt provides a pattern for understanding the ministry and work of Jesus. For example, we cannot possibly understand the meaning of the work of Jesus Christ as the ‘Lamb of God’ and the ‘Deliverer’ of God’s people without the Book of Exodus.

III. Timeline and Story Flow

Exodus follows Genesis chronologically by picking up the story of God’s covenant people some 430 years after Israel’s settlement in the Land of Goshen among the Egyptians. In terms of God’s special self-revelation, these years represent
430 years of silence. (Just to give some sense of perspective, this length of time is more than the time of silence between the writings of the Old and New Testaments).

We do not know exactly how the Israelites went from the friendly refugee status they enjoyed during Joseph’s life to experiencing the ruthless oppression of the Egyptian taskmasters. However, as Exodus opens, we find that the Israelites living in horrible conditions under great oppression from their Egyptian overlords.

The opening chapters of Exodus introduce us to Moses, one of the two main characters of the book (the other is God). The first half of the book gives us a short biography of Moses and explains how he met God, confronted the evil Pharaoh, and delivered Abraham’s descendents out of Pharaoh’s hands and into the Wilderness. The rest of Exodus chronicles the events that took place during the 40 years in the Wilderness, a season that might aptly be called: “Time in the Desert School of the Holy Spirit.”

While in the Wilderness, the LORD, who reveals his ‘name’ in chapter 3, now reveals himself in deeper ways to Moses and the Israelites as he begins unfolding his plan to shape them into a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:6).

IV. Abraham’s Posterity- Amazing Birthrate

We left Genesis knowing that God had promised to Abraham and his descendents that he would make them a mighty nation of people (as numerous as the stars of heaven) and give them a special land. And yet, Genesis ends with God’s people living as squatters in Egypt and only 70 people in number- Jacob, his sons, his daughter and their families. Then, Exodus opens with an amazing surprise. After 430 years in Egypt, Israel’s numbers have grown from a relatively small clan to a mighty nation comprised of 12 tribes. Some believe that upwards of 2 million people (cf. 12:37) were living among the Egyptians. (This is not as remarkable as it may seem at first considering that over 20 generations of Israelites have been born in the land. Remember, Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter. These people “were fruitful and multiplied” during this season (1:7). It is no accident that these words conjure up a memory of God’s command to Adam and Eve in the Garden).

According to the text, the Egyptians realized that the birthrate among the Israelites was extraordinary by comparison to their own (the Israelites multiplied like rabbits- cf. 1:9-10). To the Jews, this kind of growth was evidence of God’s blessing and his faithfulness in keeping his promise- (i.e. this was at least part of his promise to them; the other part was the ‘Promised Land’).

As a note of interest, some scholars argue that the growth of the Israelites was at least in part due to the fact that Israeliite men were circumcised. In the ancient world, men often suffered from a number of fertility-related diseases due to poor hygiene which weakened their ability to reproduce. Another point of interest has to
do with archaeology. Though we are accustomed to seeing ancient Egyptians depicted as well-proportioned and lovely in physical form, recent studies on Egyptian mummies reveal that the ancient Egyptians were a very affluent and self-indulgent. We now know that many of them were obese and had bad tooth decay. The presence of tooth decay indicates that the Egyptians consumed an unhealthy diet. So, by contrast of these two cultures, the both the rapid birthrate and the physical strength of Israelites must have been alarming to the Egyptians.

The Israelites had become so great in number that Egyptian officials began to see them as posing a potential threat to national security. Remember, 20 generations have come and gone since Joseph’s fame was known throughout the land. Now, the Pharaoh we meet in Exodus is not like the Pharaoh Joseph served. This Pharaoh thinks nothing of exploiting the Israelites to keep his political machinery resourced.

Some wonder how Joseph’s influence could have been completely forgotten. Consider for a moment how few of our own government officials are remembered beyond their own lifetime (Joseph’s role might have been compared to a Secretary of State). The passing of 430 years had erased this fact from the Egyptian memory.

V. Outline: Two Major Sections 1-19 and 20-40

Approximately half of the book of Exodus is dedicated to an historical report of Israel’s deliverance from slavery. The sheer weight given to this story of deliverance suggests two things. First, Israel saw *The Exodus* as a truly great work of deliverance and a direct intervention by God confirming the continuance of his covenant promise to Abraham. Secondly, God himself, the ultimate author of Scripture, views this important ‘deliverance’ as illustrative for all of the salvation history to follow.

The remaining portion of the book outlines a God-given system of law- in the form of a covenant- by which God sought to shape former slaves into a strong and holy nation. The second half of Exodus records a number of foundational lessons revealing God’s own character as well as his plan to make a people to call his very own.

Exodus can be divided into two main sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters 1-19</th>
<th>The Exodus</th>
<th>The provision of deliverance</th>
<th>Let my people go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 20-40</td>
<td>Design for a Holy Community</td>
<td>The purpose of deliverance</td>
<td>that they may worship me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. The Exodus: Great Deliverance (1-19)

A. Moses, the Man of God (1-4)
B. God’s Mighty Acts (5-12)
   a. The Ten Plagues (5-11)
   b. The Passover (12)
C. Journey to Sinai (13-18)
   a. Crossing the Red Sea (13-15)
   b. Moving Across the Wilderness (15-18)
D. Making the Covenant of Law (19)

II. The Design For A Holy Community (20-40)
   A. The Ten Commandments (20)
   B. Case Law Illustrations (21-24)
   C. Tabernacle Design (25-27)
   D. Establishing The Priesthood (28-31)
   E. Interlude: The Golden Calf (32-34)
   F. The Tabernacle Is Constructed (35-40)

VI. More About The Man Moses

   We do not know much about young Moses beyond his sensational birth story and the fact that he was brought up as an Egyptian prince due to the wishes of Pharaoh’s daughter. The miraculous birth story and Moses’ sensational divine call demonstrate the sovereign intent of God to not only bring about the salvation of his people but also to make a great name for himself. “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’” (Exodus 6:6-8)

   As Moses grew from childhood to a young man, he began to identify more and more with the Hebrew people. Young Moses longed to see his people freed from slavery and violently took matters into his own hands by killing one of the Egyptian oppressors. He apparently had some pretty high ideals for the brotherhood among the enslaved and expected that his defense of the Hebrew people would be well-received. (Moses is surprised to discover that his actions are known to others and that this killing of the oppressor was not looked upon favorably by the Hebrews- 2:14).

   In fear, Moses fled Egypt. He was now 40 years of age and traveled to Midian where he found refuge, a wife, and a career as a shepherd among a group of nomadic Midianites. Moses lived the next 40 years of his life in the land of the Midianites, a broad place with undefined borders. The land of the Midianites included Mount Sinai and much of the vast desert regions Moses would later traverse when leading the
people of Israel for the last 40 years of his life. Notice how God was preparing Moses during this middle season of his life. Moses was given a firsthand knowledge of how to survive in the wilderness.

At the age of 80, after Moses had long abandoned his dream of freeing the Hebrews, God spoke to Moses and announced His plan to use Moses to set the Hebrew people free. Moses is now a reluctant leader who has been humbled by Life’s many unpredictable turns and disappointments (cf. 3:11).

In the final 40 years of his life, Moses gave himself to God and his people. Under constant pressure, facing unceasing opposition from both without and within Israel, Moses’ faith burned bright like the flaming bush from which God originally called him. Though many times he was discouraged, more often, Moses is a model of faithfulness (cf. Hebrews 3:2). We see in this man a picture of what it means to forsake the pleasures of this world and accept mistreatment (cf. Hebrews 11:24-25) in order to faithfully follow the voice of God and enjoy fellowship with Him. Moses ends his life standing at the door of the ‘land’ God had promised his people long ago, but, sadly, Moses is not allowed to enter the land because of his sin. Another man will be raised up to lead Abraham’s ‘seed’ into their ‘land of blessing.’

VII. The Actual Date of The Exodus

Bible critics point out that it is very difficult to connect biblical events with the known chronologies of Egypt or other ancient empires up until the time of Solomon (c. 970 B.C.) Recent archaeological discoveries in Hazor, Israel, now confirm the biblical dating of David’s kingdom. A stone found in 3,200 year old Canaanite ruins bears the inscription: “King of Israel, House of David.” For a long time, skeptics saw the stories of David as myths claiming there was no evidence such a man ever lived. There may be more evidence yet to be unearthed.

It is not surprising that a record of this divine deliverance does not exist among the Egyptians. Ancient monarchs rarely recorded defeats. When monarchs did suffer defeat, they usually remained silent as the victorious nation bragged about it. History also proves that most ancient monarchs recorded events in a way that reflects their own strength and glory beyond what was actually the case. Notice for example how ancient Egyptian art depicts Egyptian officials as physically slender and attractive. As was mentioned earlier, archaeology has shown that this was not the case.

Historically, a culture’s artwork and records tend to portray things better than they really were. Consider how we present our own nation to people around the world. If they believe what they see on television, they’ll have a very distorted picture of America. Consider also the way white settlers portrayed themselves as virtuous and their Native American counterparts as ruthless savages. It is easy to forget which group invaded the other if you simply read the white man’s history.
Surely the prideful Egyptians would not have broadcasted the loss of their chariot army while pursuing runaway slaves!

Two dates are most frequently advanced for the actual exit from Egypt— a late date of c. 1290 B.C. and an early date of c. 1450 B.C. The late date suggests that Israel left Egypt during the reign of Rameses II and was in the land of Canaan by 1220 B.C. when the Hebrews are mentioned in an inscription on ‘The Merneptah’s Stele’. (A stele is an engraved, stone pillar or post that was commonly used by ancient monarchs for record-keeping purposes).

Early date proponents argue that a date of c. 1450 B.C. fits well with the known history of Egypt and Canaan. They also point to a number of Old and New Testament references that they argue clearly confirm this date. Exodus 12:40-41 says that Israel was in Egypt 430 years “to the very day.” In Genesis 15:13, God said to Abraham, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years.” Acts 7:6-7 also gives 400 years as the time in the land of bondage. 1 Kings 6:1 claims that the Temple was constructed 480 years after the Exodus (c.966 B.C.).

VIII. The Name of God

Four Hebrew consonants -YHWH- form the name revealed to Moses (3:14). Most scholars believe the name should be pronounced ‘Yahweh’ or ‘Jehovah.’ Since vowels were not written in ancient Hebrew, we are not exactly certain how the name was originally pronounced. What is most important about this name is not its pronunciation but its meaning.

Taken from a form of the verb ‘to be,’ the name is usually translated ‘I AM.’ Unfortunately, this translation misses the impact of the original. For centuries, God had revealed himself to Israel as ‘the one who spoke’ to Israel’s forefathers ‘in the past’. Or, as the God who would act on behalf of his covenant people ‘in the future’. Now, God says, ‘I am the one who is always present.’

After his self-revelation to Moses, God’s people would now come to experience his presence through mighty acts of deliverance, daily provisions in the wilderness, and the fiery cloud of his presence in their midst. The Spirit of ‘I AM’ would go out ahead of his people, guiding them through the Wilderness to a special place promised from long age. Ultimately, in the Tabernacle (God’s ‘tent’), ‘The Name’ would ‘camp’ in the midst of his people to further reveal his ‘Name’ and his redeeming work, and to shape Israel into a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

The Book of Exodus, which begins in slavery, ends as the glory of God fills the Tabernacle. The slaves, who previously had only known God through century old traditions that were passed on to them by previous generations, now know him in an
unmistakable and experiential way. They know God by ‘name’ and they experience his powerful and holy presence.

IX. Jesus Christ in Exodus

Exodus does not contain any direct messianic prophecies. However, the book is full of ‘types’ and portraits of Jesus Christ. Here are seven:

1. Moses: In dozens of ways, Moses is a type of Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy 18:15 says, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This language sounds like God’s words to Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration: “This is My Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!”

Both Moses and Jesus were prophets, priests, and kings (Moses clearly ruled Israel). Both Moses and Jesus are ‘kinsman-redeemers.’ A kinsman-redeemer is someone who graciously ‘stoops down’ to identify with the needy. Both Moses and Jesus gave up a place of privilege to relieve the suffering of others (cf. Hebrews 11:24-25 and 2 Corinthians 8:9). Both Moses and Jesus are deliverers, lawgivers and mediators.

2. The Passover: John 1:29, 36 and 1 Corinthians 5:7 state that Jesus is our Passover Lamb slain by God himself for our sins. This language would not be understood without first understanding the meaning of the Passover Lamb from Exodus. (The same can also be said of the Christian celebration of the Lord’s Supper that is clearly grounded in the events of Passover in Exodus 12).

3. The Seven Feasts: Each of the seven feasts presented in Exodus portrays some aspect of Jesus Christ’s ministry on our behalf. Though we cannot get into the details of these feasts here, they are worth studying and provide valuable insights into our Lord’s work on our behalf.

4. The Exodus: Paul relates Christian baptism to the Exodus from Egypt because baptism symbolizes deliverance from the old and identification with the new (See Romans 6:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

5. The Manna and Water From the Rock: These are applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament- where it is even suggested that ‘Christ’ traveled with the Israelites (See 1 Corinthians 10:3-4; also ‘Bread of Heaven’- John 6:31-35 and 48-63).

6. The Tabernacle: In its materials, colors, furniture and arrangement, the Tabernacle itself clearly speaks of the work of Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the Cross and in the Heavens. Most of the precious metals used in the construction of the Tabernacle furnishings and utensils were carried out of Egypt with them (see Exodus 3:22). They did not know it at the time, but God was providing the materials for the
Tabernacle by allowing them to plunder the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt. The Tabernacle is theology depicted in a visual form. Much of the Book of Hebrews is dedicated to showing this is the case.

7. The High Priest: According to Hebrews, Jesus is our High Priest. We first meet the High Priest in Exodus where Aaron, Moses’ brother, serves as the first one. A more thorough discussion of the Old Testament high priest, the sacrificial system, and the worship of the Tabernacle will be included in our coming study of Leviticus.

X. Moses and Jesus

In many ways, Moses’ life and Jesus’ life parallel one another. Here are just a few of the parallels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOSES</th>
<th>JESUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At his birth, Hebrew children are</td>
<td>Children are killed because of His birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being killed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent 40 years in the wilderness</td>
<td>Spent 40 days in the wilderness alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God audibly called Moses into His</td>
<td>The Father audibly called Jesus into service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses came to a resistant people</td>
<td>Jesus came to a resistant people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses performed miraculous signs</td>
<td>Jesus performed miraculous sight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Moses, Pharaoh is defeated</td>
<td>Through Jesus, Satan is defeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; God’s people are delivered from</td>
<td>&amp; God’s people are delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slavery</td>
<td>from slavery to Satan &amp; sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Moses, God revealed the</td>
<td>In Jesus, God reveals grace and forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses led the people through the</td>
<td>Jesus leads us through baptism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Sea and to the Promised Land</td>
<td>and to the Father Who is our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promised Land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

XI. The Ten Plagues: A Full Judgment on ‘the gods’ of This World
One of the major themes of Exodus is ‘the superiority of Israel’s God over all the other gods of this world.’ This is explicitly stated in the first two commands of the Decalogue (another name for the Ten Commandments). But, the Ten Plagues brought upon Egypt also illustrate this truth.

The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh can only be understood in the light of Egypt’s religion. The Egyptians served a myriad of ‘gods’ depicted in the form of idols. The Ten Plagues were clearly designed as a judgment upon these false gods.

For example, the Nile River was seen as a god (it was turned to blood). The Egyptians worshipped Heka, depicted by the image of a Frog (at Moses’ command, frogs swarmed out of the Nile and filled the Egyptian’s houses). The Bull was the Egyptian’s chief god. It was a terrible blow when the plague struck the livestock and all of the Egyptian cattle died. Ra’ was the Egyptian Sun-God (the Plague of Darkness was direct assault on this god). The Plague of Locusts was one of the worst plagues. They came in like clouds and ate every green thing. It is curious that the Israelites came to Egypt in a time of great plenty and left the country in ruin.

The full administration of the Ten Plagues gave absolute proof of the superiority of the God of Israel over the gods of Egypt. To the Egyptian people, this series of plagues came as a full, frontal assault on all that they loved and worshipped. So intense was this assault that in order to carry out the full measure of it, the Lord had to “harden Pharaoh’s heart.” If God had not hardened Pharaoh’s heart, surely Pharaoh would have let the Israelites go much earlier and Israel never would have seen this full witness of God’s superiority over the gods of Egypt. This is why the construction of the Golden Calf (which honored one of the many gods of Egypt) was such a slap in God’s holy face.

XII. The Law

The Hebrew word for law- ‘Torah’ - has several meanings. In the Old Testament, it usually refers to the whole of the Scriptures or to the five books of Moses. It is also used of the Old Testament codes that guided Hebrew Life. By the time of Jesus, the word ‘law’ included most of the human traditions that had developed in order to explain the Old Testament. The simplest rendering of the word ‘Torah’ is ‘instruction.’ This word is also used to refer to a parent’s ‘instruction’ of a child (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20).

Old Testament law is codified in several major passages. These are (a) The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20); (b) The Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23); (c) The Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26); (d) The Code of Holiness (Leviticus 17-27); and (e) The Priestly Code (Leviticus 27).

A. The Ten Commandments are brief statements of basic principles that lay the foundation of a holy community and help us to grasp the significance of our
personal relationships. They reveal God’s own moral character and they embody the values and priorities He seeks to produce in us. They can be viewed under two headings (cf. Matt. 22:35-40) as follows:

I. Relationship with God
   
   A. No gods before Me
   B. No idols
   C. Do not take My name in vain
   D. Keep the Sabbath holy

II. Relationship With Others

   A. Honor father & mother
   B. Do not murder
   C. Do not commit adultery
   D. Do not steal
   E. Do not give false testimony
   F. Do not covet

B. Case Law Illustrations (sometime called The Covenant Code) are found in chapters 21-24 immediately following the Ten Commandments. This is a collection of incidents given to both illustrate and serve as precedents for applying the basic principles found in the Ten Commandments. The Code anticipates life in the land God would soon provide and shows the Israelites how to order their entire lives around God- their social, political, economic and religious lives. These ‘illustrations’ place a high priority on the value of persons over property. This emphasis is in sharp contrast to other law codes of that time.

XII. A Proposed Chronology From Abraham to Judges

The Patriarchs

Abraham
   born c. 2166
   Entered Canaan c. 2091
Isaac born c. 2066
 Jacob born c. 2006
Joseph born c. 1915
   sold to Egypt c. 1898 Sensusert II
  made an official c. 1885
Family comes to Egypt c. 1859 Sensusert III

In Egypt
Israelites made slaves  c. 1730  
Hyksos rule is established  c. 1730

*Exodus Era*

Moses born  c. 1526  Thutmose I
Goes to Midian  c. 1486  Thutmose III
The Exodus  c. 1446  Amenhotep II
The Conquest of Canaan  c. 1406-1399
Judges Period Begins  c. 1390

(This chart developed by Lawrence O. Richardson follows an early dating theory).

**XIII. The Tabernacle**

The following diagram shows the layout of the wilderness Tabernacle, the placement of its special furniture and objects as well as way the Israelites would camp around the Holy Place. The Levites would pitch their tents between the Tabernacle (God’s tent) and the tents of the various tribes. This symbolized their mediatiorial role and also provided a kind of ‘spiritual insulation’ between the Tabernacle (where God’s holy presence resided) and the people.
INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS: "The Priests’ Book"

I. Introductory Comments

Leviticus is the third of the five books attributed to Moses. The book derives its name from the Septuagint and simply means: ‘Pertaining to the Levites.’ Leviticus is a book often overlooked by Christians. One of the reasons for this may be that it is a rather technical priestly work. This is probably why the Jewish Mishnah refers to Leviticus as ‘the priest’s book.’

We have already seen how important the Promised Land has been throughout Genesis and Exodus. Leviticus contains God’s special covenantal instructions for the Levitical priests who were appointed as God’s ministering agents to equip the people in knowing how to keep God central to every aspect of their common life in the land. To this end, it was of critical importance that God’s chosen people understood exactly how to approach his presence in worship, how to maintain a clean and holy life in God’s midst, and how to carry out his holy desires within the Land. There was no guarantee that God’s blessing would continue in the midst of the people should the Levites fail in their commission.

The many instructions found in Leviticus generally have to do with Israel’s moral, religious, and civil life. These instructions include: required sacrifices and offerings; the annual religious calendar; priestly procedures when handling the ‘holy things of God’ (i.e. sacrifices, offerings, and holy objects); the special feast days; procedures for ritual cleansing; food laws; rituals associated with worship; high priestly laws of order; and more.

SPECIAL NOTES:

*The Septuagint* is the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament. The work is designated by the Roman numerals ‘LXX’ because of the tradition that it was the work of 70 translators. The translation was made from the Hebrew Bible by Hellenistic Jews during the period 275-100 BC at Alexandria. The Septuagint
was widely used by Greek-speaking Jews, but its adoption by the Christians, who used it in preference to the Hebrew original, aroused hostility among the Jews, who ceased to use it after about AD 70.

Between 400 BC and the beginning of the Christian Era, biblical laws were intensively studied, applied to new situations, and supplemented by traditions of popular observance and by precedents established by prominent leaders. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the Jewish scholars and teachers continued to elaborate and systematize the Oral Torah. About AD 200, Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi helped to advance a collection of the most reliable traditions. The Mishnah became the official text out of which further Jewish legal development occurred. The Mishnah, then, is the name given to the oldest post-biblical codification of Jewish Oral Law. The Mishnah and Gemara (later commentaries on the Mishnah), form what Jews call the Talmud.

II. The Relevance of Levitical for Today

Of what relevance is this book for those of us living in an age of grace? Actually, it has much more relevance than one might initially believe. First, one cannot understand the nature of Old Testament worship without reading Leviticus.

Secondly, Leviticus provides remarkable insights into the character of God. The book reveals that God is holy, just, merciful, passionate and tenderhearted toward the needy and oppressed. Though God welcomes our approach, Leviticus warns us to take care that we come humbly by way of grace and mercy following God’s revealed ways and not our own.

Thirdly, Leviticus emphasizes the importance of having a good relationship with God. The ancient Hebrews were told to be holy as God is holy. This required a close relationship of living by faith and obedience.

Finally, like no other book in the Old Testament, Leviticus lays a foundation for understanding the key Biblical and theological concepts of holiness, sacrifice, and atonement. The word ‘holy’ is used 87 times in Leviticus; ‘sacrifice’ and its synonyms occur over 300 times in the 27 chapters; ‘atonement’ over 49 times. As Christians study Leviticus under the tutelage of the Spirit, discovering how these critical themes functioned within the worship system of ancient Israel, they come to better understand the heart of our Holy God as well as the deeper significance of the atoning (saving) work of Jesus Christ.

In many ways, Leviticus is to the Old Testament what Romans is to the New. It serves as its theological heart as it reveals what exactly it means to call God ‘holy,’ to have a share in His gracious offer of forgiveness and life in him, and to look for God’s promised provision.
R. K. Harrison says of Leviticus: “...It is a work of towering spiritually, which through the various sacrificial rituals points the reader unerringly to the atoning death of Jesus, our great High Priest. An eminent nineteenth-century writer once described Leviticus quite correctly as the seed-bed of New Testament theology, for in this book is to be found the basis of Christian faith and doctrine.” R. K. Harrison, Leviticus (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Intervarsity Press, 1980), p. 9.

III. Outline

Leviticus functions, at least in part, like a procedural manual or a legal handbook. It contains very little narrative. Leviticus lends itself nicely to this simple outline:

Leviticus can be divided into two main sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters 1 - 16</th>
<th>The way into fellowship with God</th>
<th>SACRIFICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 17-27</td>
<td>The walk of fellowship with God</td>
<td>SEPARATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is a more detailed outline:

I. Offerings (1-10)
   A. Offerings to Be Made By the People (1-6)
   B. Instructions for the Priests (6-10)

II. Ritual Cleansing (11-15)
   A. Various Regulations (11-12)
   B. Instructions For The Priests (13-14)
   C. Additional Regulations (15)

III. The Day of Atonement (16-17)
   A. Instructions for the Priests (16)
   B. Instructions for The People (17)

IV. Holiness (18-22)
   A. Instructions for the People (18-20)
   B. Instructions for the Priests (21-22)
IV. Authorship and Date

Leviticus makes the claim that its instructions were given directly to Moses on Mt. Sinai while leading the Israelites through their forty-year sojourn in the Wilderness. We encounter the phrase “And the LORD called to Moses” twenty-five times within the book (at least once in every chapter except chapters 2, 3, 9, 10, and 26). Hill and Walton conclude the following: “When all available evidence is taken into account, there are no compelling reasons for denying the antiquity and authenticity of the book of Leviticus.” (Ibid. p. 101)

Again, two dates are most frequently advanced for the actual exit from Egypt—a late date of C. 1290 B.C. and an early date of C. 1450 B.C. As indicated above, this study goes by the earlier date.

The book itself reveals that many of the revelations recorded in Leviticus were given to Moses following the Exodus while communing with God in “the Tent of Meeting” (1:1) and on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:1, 40:17; Num. 10:11). (See earlier discussions on Pentateuchal authorship above). Though we might date the origin of the material in Leviticus to sometime immediately following the Exodus, we will never know whether Moses himself wrote down and compiled this material or simply dictated these revelations to scribes.

V. The Priests and Levites

The Israelites gathered to eat the first Passover meal on the eve of the Exodus. The blood of Passover lambs marked the doorposts of their homes as the Angel of Death moved throughout Egypt taking all the firstborn of the land. On that very night, God also claimed the firstborn of all of Israel to be his very own. Then God declared, “I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine” (Num. 3:12; 8:18).

The Levites came into prominence in connection with Moses and Aaron who themselves were Levites (Exod. 2:1-10; 4:14; 6:16-27). After the events surrounding the Golden Calf (Exod. 32:25ff), it was the Levites who rallied to Moses standing with him against the open rebellion. Strapping on their swords, the sons of Levi avenged the Lord’s honor by following Moses’ command to slay 3,000 of their brothers who had led the rebellion. This display of faithfulness may partially account for the significant role given to the Levites.
In the Pentateuch, a distinction should be made between the Priests and the Levites. Only those who were direct descendants of Aaron qualified to serve as ‘priests.’ This was a privileged reserved for them alone on penalty of death (Num. 3:10). All other Levites were to be dedicated to an auxiliary ministry on behalf of the priests. They were to focus on caring for the Tabernacle and attending to its upkeep and ongoing work (Num. 3:5ff). Whenever the people were called upon to advance through the Wilderness, the Levites were “to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD” as well as the other articles of the Tabernacle (Deu. 10:8). Then, when the people encamped, the Levites were to “stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name” (10:8).

This notion of the Levites ‘belonging to God’ is reinforced by the fact that, when the people would finally enter the land of promise, the Levites would be given no land to call their own. Their inheritance would be “the priestly service of the LORD” (Josh. 18:7). They would remain as God’s special agents ministering to the LORD and helping God’s people stay in a right relationship with him by maintaining an atmosphere conducive to worship.

God would not leave the Levites without practical provisions. This is why the Israelites were instructed to give to the Levites “all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting” (Num. 18:21). Theirs was a holy calling, not only “doing the work at the Tent of Meeting” (the Tabernacle), but also bearing “the responsibility for offences against it” (Num. 18:23).

The priests, then, were special Levites. Still, not all those who were born to the Levitical house of Aaron would become priests. Only those who were free from all physical defects could share in this privilege (Lev. 21:16-23). In order to provide for the families of the Levites, God instructed Moses to "command the Israelites to give the Levites towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And give them pasture-lands around the towns" (Num. 35:2).

One of the special provisions of God to the Levites and their families was the privilege in eating from the sacrifices “made to the LORD by fire” (Deu. 18:1). In other words, they sat down every day to eat from God’s table. Another special provision given to the Levites were some of the very valuable skins of the sacrificial animals. Through the tithes of the people, the meals given to God and the animal skins, God more than provided for these set apart servants of God. (For more background on God’s selection of the Levites as His priestly tribe, see Num. 17 and 18).

VI. Old Testament Law

Mosaic Law can be categorized into four divisions:
A. Moral Laws

These are timeless laws that regulate human relationships enhancing the lives of people living together- encouraging a more loving society. Six of the Ten Commandments fall into this category (5-10): *Honor father and mother; Do not murder; Do not commit adultery; Do not steal; Do not give false witness; and Do not covet.*

B. Religious Laws

These are also timeless laws that were given to regulate the relationship between God’s people and Himself. Four of the Ten Commandments fall under this heading (1-4): *No other gods; No idols; Do not take the Lord’s name in vain; and Keep the Sabbath.*

C. Ceremonial/Ritual Laws

These laws constitute the largest block of Old Testament laws and are mostly liturgical regulations for the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system that it was to administer. These instructions include a number of dietary regulations regarding Israel’s foods and their preparation as well as various regulations aimed at keeping Israel separate (‘set apart/holy’) from the other nations. God sought to keep Israel separate for a season in order to use Israel to eventually touch all nations by giving a pure revelation of himself to Israel.

In his book, *The Unity of The Bible* (Zondervan, 1992), Daniel Fuller makes a convincing case that some of the ceremonial laws we find quite strange today- e.g. the food laws; ritual washings; circumcision rites; commands which expressly forbid Israelites from mingling their blood with other nations- served very effectively to ‘separate’ Israel from her surrounding neighbors. Fuller argues that this separation was by God’s design: *isolate in order to concentrate*- to concentrate upon making Israel’s experience a ‘lesson book for the nations’ (see Fuller, chapters 20-22).

The New Testament is clear that the *ceremonial laws* were removed with the coming of Jesus Christ. There are two reasons for this. First, Jesus put an end to the ceremonial law by fulfilling or completing the intent of the laws (see Mt. 5:17). The book of Hebrews is expressly given to demonstrate that Jesus and his work provide the very substance ceremonial law was given to ‘foreshadow.’ Secondly, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is ‘good news’ for all the nations as God seeks to include the Gentiles among his people making one people out of many.
D. Civil Laws

These are laws had to do with Israel’s life under a Theocracy (a government set up by God Himself to be directly accountable to God’s will). Civil laws specify penalties for various crimes (major and minor) for which people might be arrested and tried in Israel. Ancient civil laws applied only to citizens of ancient Israel and are no longer to be directly observed in our day. (Still, History has proven that all good government is wise to be directed by the principles underlying many of these laws).

VII. Which Laws Are For Believer’s Today?

Here is a general principle for answering this question: “The contemporary Believer must obey all of the laws which were not intended solely for the special circumstances of the Old Covenant.”

Consider the following important differences between the Old and New Covenants:

1. The purpose of many Old Covenant laws (especially Ceremonial/Ritual laws) looked forward to their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For example, all laws related to the sacrificial system and Tabernacle worship (see Heb. 10:1, 4, 8-9). Even the dietary-food laws and laws related to ‘special days’ also looked forward to Christ. Paul says in Colossians 2:16-17, “These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Though some Believers may choose to observe specific dietary restrictions or special days in recognition of their heritage (as Messianic Believers often do), they must never think of the observance of these laws as being mandatory for all followers of Jesus. The observances of these laws should never be allowed to hinder one’s ability to present the Gospel to lost people nor should the keeping of these create any spiritual elite group. Rather, any commitment to observe these laws should be solely based on a personal devotion grounded in a clear understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of all ceremonial law and every Old Testament holy day (Cf. Rom 14:14).

2. The Old Covenant involved a physical, external kingdom; the New Covenant involves an internal, spiritual kingdom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE OLD COVENANT- MOSES</th>
<th>THE NEW COVENANT- JESUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required an elaborate Tabernacle or Temple where God is said to dwell</td>
<td>The people are the dwelling place of God; they are Living Stones- 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required ritual washings for</td>
<td>Brought a cleansed heart for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
external purity  
inward purity - Mat. 23:25-28

Forbid marrying foreigners not of physical Hebrew descent
No marrying unbelievers who are not of same spiritual descent - 1 Cor. 7:39

Lays out a list of unclean foods
An inner focus on unclean thoughts and words becomes the emphasis - Mat. 15:11; Mk. 7:19

3. The Ancient Church (God’s People) and the State were ruled by the same government under the Old Covenant (a ‘Theocracy’). This is no longer the case under the New Covenant, since physical descent is no longer the emphasis under the New Covenant, the State should not try to enforce laws that primarily regulate human relationships to God. Terrible evils were brought about by the Crusaders primarily from a failure to understand the fundamental differences between life under the Old Covenant and life under the New. (Of course, there were also a few politicians and church leaders who sought to use religion for their own personal gain—something we commonly see among politicians in our own day).

VIII. Love and Protection Revealed In Strange Laws

God’s goodness and care for Israel was revealed in some of the strangest laws. Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart make an important observation concerning many of the food laws, such as the prohibition against eating pork (Leviticus 11:7). The authors write:

“...[These] are not intended by God to represent arbitrary and capricious restrictions on Israelite tastes. Rather, they have a serious protective purpose. The vast majority of the foods prohibited are those which (1) are more likely to carry disease in the arid climate of the Sinai desert and/or the land of Canaan; or (2) are foolishly uneconomical to raise as food in the particular agrarian context of the Sinai desert and/or the land of Canaan; or (3) are foods favored for religious sacrifice by groups whose practices the Israelites were not to copy. Moreover, in light of the fact that medical research has now indicated that food allergies vary according to ethnic populations, the food laws undoubtedly kept Israel away from certain allergies.” (How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth (Zondervan, 1982), p. 137. It would be well worth your time to read all of chapter 9 of this book: “The Law(s)- Covenant Stipulations For Israel.”)

The more unusual prohibitions often require some further cultural background information. One example of this is found in Deuteronomy 14:21. It says: “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” Again, I quote Fee and Stuart:
“‘What’s wrong with that?’ you may ask. And why are this and other laws like “Do not mate different kinds of animals,” “Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed,” “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material” (Leviticus 19:19) in the Old Testament law?” The answer is that these and other prohibitions were designed to forbid the Israelites to engage in the fertility cult practices of the Canaanites. The Canaanites believed in what is called sympathetic magic, the idea that symbolic actions can influence the gods and nature. They thought that boiling a goat kid in its mother’s milk would magically insure the continuing fertility of the flock. Mixing animal breeds, seeds, or materials was thought to “marry” them so as magically to produce “offspring,” that is, agricultural bounty in the future. God could not and would not bless His people if they practiced such nonsense.” (Ibid. p. 146)

We consider God’s laws and his plans, we must never forget that God’s wisdom exceeds our own (Job 12:13; Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Rom. 11:33-36; I Cor. 1:24, 30).

IX. Hebrew Law and the Laws of Its Neighbors

The laws of the Hebrews differed greatly from those of their neighbors in some very fundamental ways. First, among Israel’s neighbors, kings were usually treated as the ultimate authority for all moral, civil and religious laws. Ancient records reveal that in Babylon and other Mesopotamian civilizations, kings were thought to be above the law. Pentateuch presents Moses, not a final authority for the people, but a ‘Mediator’ of God’s covenant- a divinely appointed spokesperson for God. God was Israel’s Lawgiver and King. (Again, theologians use the word ‘Theocracy’ to describe this system of government. God gave His laws for the people and then appointed human judges and charismatic leaders to administer His laws).

Moses’ mediatorial role as administrator of God’s law is clearly affirmed by God in Numbers 12:4-9. God confronts Aaron and Miriam for their resistance toward their brother saying of Moses, “Listen to my words: ‘When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?’”

As might be expected, when earthly kings are considered the authority behind national laws, such laws are likely to change whenever there is a shift in kingly leadership. Since the laws we find recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy all came from God himself, these laws were to be honored and persevered in Israel even after Moses’ death. This is why when Moses passed the leadership baton to the younger Joshua, Joshua understood that he was to ‘keep’ the King’s Law. The King of Heaven himself made this crystal clear to Joshua following Moses’ death. When commissioning Joshua to succeed Moses, the LORD said, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so
that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Josh. 1:8).

By the way, never forget that we’re talking about a time before Israel cried out for an earthly king of her own (during the days of Samuel- see 1 Sam. 8). The reason God took offense with Israel’s request for a king is that this request was symptomatic of her rejection of God as King and her rejection of his laws. Israel’s request implied that a human king might serve Israel better than God himself. From Israel’s first king, Saul, to the last of Israel’s and Judah’s kings, we see a constant movement back and forth with respect to God’s laws: most of the kings moved God’s people further away from the laws of God (to laws based in their own authority); other kings brought spiritual renewal, a return to God’s law, and, in David’s and Solomon’s reign, a deeper revelation of God’s law.

There is another fundamental difference between the laws of the Hebrews and those of their neighbors. For example, the main concern of ancient Babylonian law was to protect property belonging to the elite of society and those living in the king’s good graces. The main concern of Hebrew law was the sanctity of all human life- the protection of the individual- no matter what his or her status in society may have been. This, of course, was grounded in God’s revelation that Humanity has been made ‘in the image of God.’

X. Uncleanness in Leviticus

One of the many duties of the Levitical priests was to ‘distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the clean and the unclean’ (10:10). This concept of ‘cleanness’ is foreign and confusing to us. Cleanliness is not the same as cleanness. It actually has little to do with hygiene, but more to do with ‘fitness.’ A thing is ‘fit for worship’ or ‘appropriate for worship’ if it is ‘clean.’ God desires ‘cleanness.’ Something or someone that is ‘unclean’ may not enter God’s presence in worship. God used this concept of the clean and unclean to help the Israelites understand His holiness and what it means to be right before Him.

Leviticus 10 shares a strange story about two priests who approached God offering ‘unauthorized fire.’ According to the text, this act was a direct violation of God’s revealed will for priests. By engaging in such actions, Nadab and Abihu stood before God in an ‘unclean’ manner. Both priests immediately died in God’s presence. They were to be thought of as ‘unclean’ because they had not followed God’s exact prescription for approaching him; these priests had not done what was ‘fitting’ for worship (cf. Exod. 19:21; 28:35; 30:20-21; Lev. 8:35; 10:7; 16:2, 13).

So what makes eagles, lizards, menstruation, and mildew ‘unclean,’ whereas locusts, goats, and baldness are not? It seems that all ‘things’ that are deemed ‘unclean’ tend to share one of two characteristics: one having to do with blood and other having to do with deterioration in general (as in the case of ‘mildew’). Simply
put, there seems to be a principle at work that ‘clean’ things affirm life itself. ‘Unclean’ things in some way affirm death or bring about the deterioration of living things or vital relationships. Consider how this plays out with clean and unclean animals, uncleanness during menses and childbirth, and the uncleanness of sickness, disease and fungus:

A. Clean and Unclean Animals

Leviticus introduces two types of animals: clean and unclean. Only clean animals were acceptable (‘fit’) for food and, in some cases, for specified sacrifices. Generally speaking, those animals considered ‘clean’ were herbivores and those considered ‘unclean’ were carnivorous.

Why this distinction? The distinction reinforces three Biblical concepts:

1. Blood Symbolizes Life (it is a Biblical metaphor for Life itself)
   a. “Life is in the blood” (17:11; 19:26)

2. Life Must Be Valued and Protected Against All Costs
   a. “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal” (Gen. 9:5; 9:6; Exod. 21:28-29)

3. There Must Be No Shedding of Innocent Life
   a. “You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you” (Deut. 19:13; 21:9; cf. Exod. 20:13; Num. 35:12).

Gordon Wenham writes:

“Sheep, goats, cattle and birds were the main sacrificial animals for ancient Israel, so that creatures that resembled their habits, particularly their herbivorous eating habits, were judged to be clean and therefore fit for human consumption. Thus various birds, which seem to be birds of prey (11:13-19), are pronounced unclean and therefore unfit for human consumption, let alone sacrifice. The definition of clean animals is drawn rather more tightly: like cattle and sheep, they must have cloven hooves and chew the cud. This rules out such creatures as camels, pigs and hares, which only partially fit these criteria (11:2-8).” (Ibid. p. 92)
A full explanation and examples listing clean and unclean creatures can be found in Leviticus chapter 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21. Here is a simple summary:

### Clean For Food:
- cattle
- sheep
- goats
- chickens
- elk
- deer, antelope
- water creatures that have fins and scales

### Unclean For Food:
- snakes, lizards
- camels, horses
- weasels, rabbits
- pigs
- vultures, ravens, crows, owls
- bats, rats, flies
- water creatures that do not have fins and scales

#### B. Uncleanness During Times of Menses and Childbirth

Why did bloody discharges during menses and childbirth make a woman unclean so that she may not enter the sanctuary of the tabernacle until she has been purified (12:4)? Again, to the Israelites, this loss of blood suggests that this woman is no longer enjoying the fullness of life and perfect health; she appears to be losing life rather than gaining life and therefore must be cleansed before God who is the author and sustainer of all life.

#### C. The Uncleanness of Sickness, Disease and Fungus

It seems a bit harsh to us that God should forbid certain people who are sick and diseased from enjoying the full privileges others enjoy when approaching God in worship (chap. 13). Why should they be considered unclean?

The diseases in question appear to be those involving peeling, raw skin. In other words, a condition that does not reflect healthy life. Similarly, fungus (mildew) rotting away a fabric or plaster in a house is suggestive of death and therefore is considered unclean. The Levites, who were tasked with addressing these matters of uncleanness, in many ways served as health inspectors among the Israelites. In this way, God was providing a special kind of grace in the form of a protection from the spread of unhealthy physical conditions among His people.

Once again, the principle being affirmed is that of wholeness of life and well-being. The Hebrews had a word for ‘well-being’ and the peace that accompanies it- ‘Shalom.’ All of this foreshadowed the promise of God that in His presence there is perfected life and wonderful health.
D. All Things Are Clean in Christ

Is there value for the New Covenant Believer in studying the concept of cleanness in the Pentateuch? Yes, there is great value in this study.

First, it should be acknowledged that Christ has now declared all foods to be ‘clean.’ Daniel Fuller rightly observes the following:

“When Mark interpreted Jesus’ teaching that people were not defiled by what they ate to mean that he declared all food ‘clean’ (Mk. 7:19), he was not contradicting Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:17-19: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.... Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be great in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus was well aware of the Old Testament law’s implication that the ceremonial law was valid only during the time Israel was to be kept separate from the nations. Therefore when he made all foods clean, he was not breaking the law but simply annulling commands that, if kept, would have made it virtually impossible for other nations to accept the gospel.” (Unity of the Bible, pp. 363-4).

The Apostle Paul himself faced challenge after challenge on this very subject. Since Paul believed that Jesus had declared all things clean, that is what he taught (cf. Rom. 14:14). Paul even clashed with Peter and other major Jewish leaders over this issue (see Gal. 2:11-21; Acts 15:19). The idea that some foods and people were patently ‘unclean’ was very deeply entrenched in the thinking of men like the disciple Peter. In order to reinforce the fact that Christ has made all things clean, God commanded Peter three times to “kill and eat” animals that were formerly considered unclean (see Acts 10:9-23). All of this was a prelude to securing Peter’s obedience in presenting the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile- someone most Jews would have considered ‘unclean’ under the old system.

Because Jesus himself brings life and healing to his people, he overrides the uncleanness regulations of Leviticus that relate to touching the dead or those suffering from skin diseases or discharges. That is why Jesus was free to touch dead and diseased people (cf. Mat. 8:2-4; 9:18-31), and why his actions shocked his contemporaries.

As noted earlier, the dietary restrictions regarding Israel’s food and its preparation as well as various other regulations were primarily aimed at keeping Israel separate (‘set apart/holy’) from the other nations in order that God might give a pure revelation of himself to Israel. These actions were initiated with the long view of Israel becoming a ‘light to the nations’ through
Jesus Christ (something Israel refused to do—see Romans 11). Jesus is God’s ultimate revelation of himself and the promised Lamb of God, “a righteousness from God, apart from the law” (Rom. 3:21). Now that Christ has come and has himself ‘fulfilled’ all the righteous requirements of the Law (cf. Mat. 3:15; Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:1-4), it is no longer necessary for God to keep his people physically separated from the nations. Instead, we are to evangelize the nations with the good news of Jesus inviting them into God’s Kingdom.

The New Testament continues to encourage all of God’s New Covenant people to maintain the principle of ‘spiritual cleanness’ by seeking to offer to God what is ‘fit for worship,’ and by embracing all that is ‘life-affirming and of God.’ We are still called upon to remain separate from the peoples’ of the world in terms of our values, our deepest desires, and our heart’s condition. This is what the New Testament means when it says, “Come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17) and “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).

**CLEANNESS RULES** (Taken from Gordon Wenham’s *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*, p. 92)

![Diagram of Clean vs. Unclean Categories](image-url)
XI. Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple Sacrifices

Fine meal, meat, grain, and wine were components of almost every sacrifice (Num. 15:1-10). The animal sacrifice was like serving an excellent meal to a guest. God’s presence was symbolized both by the altar as well as the fire that was upon it. By burning (or cooking) the animal and the bread and throwing the wine on the side of the altar, worshipers were showing generous hospitality to God their heavenly guest.

Through these sacrifices, God provided food for the servants of the Tabernacle and their families (the Levitical priests). Meat, bread and wine became the staples of the priestly diet.

A. Making Sense of Animal Sacrifices

It is difficult for modern readers to make sense of the ancient Israelite sacrificial system. Many people are generally disgusted by the thought of sacrificing animals. Others find this a very strange form of worship. How can we best understand this unusual activity?

The Israelites were not alone in their practice of animal sacrifices. Many Canaanite religions also included ‘peace offerings’ and ‘whole’ or ‘burnt offerings’ similar to the Hebrews. There were, however, some distinctive differences with respect to the meaning of these sacrifices and their function within their various belief systems.

Other ancient cultures believed that the gods actually lived off of peoples’ sacrifices. They thought of themselves as ‘feeding’ their gods. The Israelites did not view the sacrifices in this way. God revealed in Exodus that he could not be fed at the hands of human beings (cf. Ps. 50:12-13). The sacrifices we see in the Old Testament sacrificial system are more often intended to be substitutionary or representative in nature. The ‘Sin Offering’ is one such example (see chart below). The worshiper was instructed to lay his or her hands on the animal’s head confessing his or her sin. Then, the animal was slaughtered. What is being implied here is that the animal is being offered as a substitute of the worshiper. The killing of the animal and the pouring out of its lifeblood symbolized the death the offerer actually deserved for sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23).

Hill and Walton list a number of additional differences between the Israelite belief system and the prevailing Canaanite culture (ibid. p. 103). These include:
● The Hebrew belief in direct revelation from Yahweh and His appearance in theophanies
● The Hebrew belief in strict monotheism
● Their belief about the origin and impact of sin on humanity
● The highly ethical and moral nature of Hebrew faith as contrasted with Canaanite fertility cults
● The convictions regarding Yahweh’s holy and righteous character as contrasted with pagan deities
● Yahweh’s firm prohibition against any form of human sacrifice

When thinking about the matter of sacrifice, it is helpful for modern readers to remember that most Hebrew people would have barely scraped out a living. Some, like Abraham, obtained great fortunes, but the majority of the people were relatively poor by our standards. Any sacrifice might be very costly, especially the sacrifice of one’s Best- whether from one’s animals or from one’s grain. Even in our own day, animals often represent a poor person’s long-term savings. In such cases, the sacrificing of one’s animal to God was an act of great generosity and personal devotion. This is why sacrifices were often described as a “pleasing aroma to the LORD” (1:9, 13, 17). Actions like these called for faith in God and required a commitment to his purposes.

A. Acceptable Animal Sacrifices

   *All sacrificial animals had to be both clean and domesticated.* A deer, for example, was not acceptable for sacrifice even though it is not carnivorous. Why is this? Deer could be found in abundance in the wild but all domesticated animals were part of the Israelites’ livelihood. A worshiper had a personal investment in the sacrifice when he or she raised the animal or purchased it. David said, “I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24).

Second, *all sacrificial animal offerings had to be ‘without blemish.’* What this did was that it insured that people would not offer their sickly creatures providing some measure of quality control. The restriction also reinforced the principle that offerings should embody that which is most prized to us, our personal best. Do not forget, the Levites and the worshipers sometimes consumed certain designated parts of these offerings. This restriction insured that the meat was of a good quality.

The chart that follows lays out the different types of offerings worshippers might present to the LORD. It also includes the various elements required for each offering, the procedures followed by both priests and worshipers, and the significance of each sacrifice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF OFFERING</th>
<th>THE ELEMENTS</th>
<th>THE PROCEDURE</th>
<th>THE SIGNIFICANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Burnt Offering</td>
<td>Bull, ram, he-goat, dove or young pigeon (for the poor) without defect</td>
<td>Worshiper laid hands on animal’s head and it was killed on the north side of the altar. The sacrifice was cut and washed. The priest poured blood at side of altar and burned the whole animal. Priest received animal skin.</td>
<td>This was a voluntary offering signifying the worshiper’s complete surrender to God. With the fellowship offering, it signified devotion and commitment (2 Chron. 29:31-35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grain Offering</td>
<td>Fine flour, baked bread, or crushed grain made with olive oil and salt (never with any yeast, honey, or incense)</td>
<td>The food was prepared by the worshiper and was brought to altar. Priest burned a memorial portion (a handful) and kept the rest for his food.</td>
<td>This was a voluntary offering which accompanied most burnt offerings and fellowship offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fellowship/Peace Offering</td>
<td>Any animal without defect from the herd or flock; a variety of breads</td>
<td>Worshiper laid hands on head of sacrifice and killed it at the door to the outer Tabernacle or Temple court. Priest collected blood in bowls and threw it against the altar. Choice parts were burned. Part of the animal was given to the priest. The worshiper and his family ate the rest as a communal meal.</td>
<td>The communal meal symbolized fellowship with God. The voluntary offering could be made to give thanks for a special blessing bestowed, as a ritual expression of a vow, or as a free will offering brought to one of the three required religious festival gatherings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sin Offering</td>
<td>A suitable animal without defect. A young bull for the high priest and the congregation. A male goat for a leader. A female goat or lamb for the common person. A tenth of an ephah of fine flour for the very poor.</td>
<td>Worshiper laid hands on the animal’s head, killed it on the north side of the altar. Priest poured blood on the horns of the altar and its base. The priests received what was edible (except in the case of a bull offered on the Day of Atonement).</td>
<td>This was a mandatory offering made by a person who sinned unintentionally or was ritually unclean. The worshiper identified himself with the sacrifice before it was killed for his atonement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guilt Offering</td>
<td>Ram or lamb without defect and of proper value</td>
<td>Worshiper first made restoration plus 1/5th, then laid hands on the animal’s head and killed it on the north side of the altar. Priest poured blood on the ground around the altar Choice parts were burned. The priests received what was edible.</td>
<td>This was a mandatory offering made when a person deprived another of his rights (a trespass), as by theft or leprosy. In the latter case, God required this since He had been deprived of the leper’s worship while the leper was unclean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For two excellent integrations of this study on the sacrificial system, the matter of cleanness and how they relate to the holiness of God, consider reading both R.C. Sproul’s *The Holiness of God* (Tyndale, 1998) and Daniel Fuller’s *The Unity of the Bible* (Zondervan 1992).

XII. The Salvation of Old Testament Saints

On what basis were Believers saved under the Old Covenant? It is obvious that the sacrificial system highlighted the serious nature of sin’s guilt as well as the fact that sin must be brought to God so that God Himself might deal with it. Imagine showing a friend a photograph of a person you hope to introduce to them in the future. You might say, “This is John.” Of course, it is not ‘John,’ it is a picture of ‘John.’ The photo simply points to John. The sacrificial system is like a photograph; Christ is the reality the photograph points to. In other words, every time someone sacrificed a lamb, a ram, a turtledove or a pigeon, every time they sacrificed any animal, it was a picture of Christ’s coming sacrificial death for their sins.

The New Testament is crystal clear that everyone who has ever been saved will have been saved through Jesus Christ. He died for the sins of the world—past, present and future. For Old Testament saints, Christ’s death was a future promise. For us, it is something we look to in the past that touches us in the present. But salvation is always through Christ. Only his death and his sacrifice can atoned for the sins—whether those of the Old Testament saints or New Testament saints.

What about the means for salvation? The means for salvation has always been the same: Faith (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). At any given point in the unfolding revelation of the Word of God, salvation came through faith, believing God. “What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” (Rom. 4:3; cf. Gen. 15:6, 22; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23).

So, what exactly did Abraham believe? He believed as much as God had revealed to him (Heb. 11:8-13). Remember, even by Abraham’s day, God had revealed that Abraham was sinner, the only savior was God, and that God would one day pay the penalty for his sin (cf. Gen. 22:8). We know that Abraham could not possibly have understood all there was to know about the life and work of Jesus Christ. However, Abraham did realize that he was a sinner, that sin needed to be covered by a ‘bloody sacrifice’, and that the LORD himself would one day “provide” for his sin. You’ll recall that God’s made this promise to Abraham following his ‘faith test’ on the mountain (see Genesis 22:14). In short, through a covenant-love relationship with the LORD, Abraham had been brought to an understanding that “it is by grace we are saved through faith.” Years later, Jesus says of Abraham’s faith: “Our father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was
glad” (Jn. 8:56). We might say that the essence of Old Testament faith is “a looking forward in a trust relationship with God as our grace-provider.”

So why did God require animal sacrifices and acts of ceremonial obedience when these never earned any merit toward salvation? What we are saying is that we must understand that sacrificial and ceremonial acts served two purposes. First, they were instructional in nature. Second, they provided opportunities to display inward faith and confidence in God’s future promise.

Take a moment to recall a few points that were highlighted in our study of Genesis. There we saw that the first promise of a future deliverer (the proto-evangelium) came immediately following Adam and Eve’s sin (Genesis 3:15). We also saw that the first ‘bloody sacrifice’ came right on the very heals of this future promise (Genesis 3:21). Clearly this suggests that the first sacrifice was in some way instructional in nature. Amazingly, it was God himself who performed this first sacrifice. Then, curiously, God’s stripped the pelts off the animals and slung the bloody clothing over the bodies of Adam and Eve. Even here, God is saying, “You cannot provide for yourselves. I alone can provide a life-giving covering for your sin.” Surely this is an instructive act. Though words are not audible, this act shouts through living drama: “The wages of sin is death; but life is the gift of God.”

We must not fail to see that God’s redemptive goal has always been to bring his people into a living faith that anticipates the fulfillment of his promise of grace. Though the Old Testament believers never knew who Christ was, or when and how God would act, they were still called upon to trust in God as their ‘redeemer’ and to demonstrate this trust through dramatic acts of faith obedience. Hebrews 11:26 says of Moses that he “was looking forward to his reward.”

Though the Old Testament does not explain the basis upon which a holy God can overlook sin and yet remain true to His righteousness nature, ancient prophets would soon envisioned a day when a ‘Servant of the Lord’ would come and serve as a ‘sacrificial lamb’ to bear the punishment for Israel’s sin (see Isa. 53). Paul explains how the atoning work of Jesus has now vindicated God’s righteous character: “God presented Him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24-26).

XIII. Jesus’ Role As High Priest Foreshadowed In The Levitical Laws

A study of Leviticus sheds light on the deeper work of Jesus Christ as the Believer’s mediator before God (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; cf. also Tit. 2:5). The following chart contrasts the High Priest of the Old Covenant and Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant:
THE INFERIOR OLD TESTAMENT
HIGH PRIEST

Sin was remembered year after year (Heb. 9:6; 10:1, 3)

The priests stood since they had to continually offer sacrifices day after day (Heb. 10:11)

The priests made sacrifices in an earthly, man-made sanctuary they set up, a copy of the true one (Heb. 8:2; 9:1, 24)

The priests offered the blood of animals (Heb. 9:7, 13; 10:1)

The sacrifices made by priests could not make perfect or clear the conscience of the worshiper but could only make people outwardly clean (Heb. 9:9, 13; 10:1)

The priests were themselves sinners who had to offer sacrifices for their own sins (Heb. 5:2-3; 7:27)

High Priests died, preventing them from continuing in office, so they had to be replaced over and over (Heb. 7:23, 28)

The Father gave no oath to establish the Old Covenant and its priesthood (Heb. 7:20)

High Priests fearfully entered through a physical curtain, once a year, into a mere copy of the Most Holy Place (Heb. 9:3, 24)

High Priests were unworthy to stand as our representatives behind the veil of the Most Holy Place (Heb. 7:27-28)

THE SUPERIOR NEW TESTAMENT
HIGH PRIEST

Jesus obtained for us eternal redemption once for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:12)

Jesus, after offering his once-for-all sacrifice, was seated, awaiting the final victory it would accomplish (Heb. 10:12-14)

Jesus brought his sacrifice into heaven itself, the true sanctuary, set up by the Lord (Heb. 8:2, 9:24)

Jesus offered his own blood (Heb. 9:14)

Jesus' sacrifice makes us perfect forever, setting us free from sins so that we may serve the living God and draw near to worship him (Heb. 9:14-15; 10:1, 14)

Jesus faced suffering, is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Heb. 2:10; 4:15; 7:26)

Jesus lives forever as a permanent High Priest and always lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25, 28)

The covenant and priesthood Jesus has established are better and are guaranteed since they are founded upon the Father’s oath (Heb. 6:17-20; 7:21-22)

Jesus has made a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, his body, through which we may all confidently enter, approaching the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22)

Jesus was more than worthy (Heb. 3:3; 6:19-20; Rev. 5:1-14)
XIV. Leviticus, A Clear Revelation Of God’s Holiness

There is no greater revelation of the holiness of God in the Old Testament than in the book of Leviticus. The entirety of the book aims to develop an understanding of the truth that God is holy in his character and nature, and that his desire is to create a holy people for himself: “I am the LORD your God: consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy” (11:44-45). With respect to God’s holiness, it was essential that the Israelites learned how to properly approach God if they desired to live in his midst and enjoy all the benefits he was able to provide. In other words, holy worship and holy living are vital for enjoying full and unhindered fellowship with a Holy God.

The Hebrew word translated ‘holy’ simply means ‘separate,’ ‘other’ or ‘set apart.’ The opposite of ‘holy’ is the word ‘common’ or ‘ordinary.’ To call God ‘holy’ is to say that he is ‘one of a kind,’ ‘uncommon,’ ‘there is no other god like God.’ Simply put, God is in a class all his own.

Like God, the Israelites are also to be in a class all their own. They are to be an uncommon people. This is precisely why God chose them. He chose them to be a people like himself that they might know him. Through the Levitical laws, God tutors Israel in holiness- teaching them how to discern between the common and the uncommon, between the unholy and the holy- so that they might live lives that are pleasing to him and can enjoy the blessing of walking with God. They must therefore learn what it means to worship and live as ‘set apart ones’ (‘saints,’ ‘ones made holy’) for God’s purposes.

XV. Leviticus, A Revelation Of The Law of Love

Many people, unfamiliar with the content of books like Leviticus, believe that Jesus revealed a kinder, gentler God than the God revealed in the Old Testament. It is a common misunderstanding of many who remain biblically illiterate that the God of the Old Testament was a ‘stern, demanding Judge,’ unlike the New Testament God characterized by love and grace. However, God’s holiness and His gracious love are not in any way opposed to one another. These exist in the same God.

It is true that Jesus’ life and message powerfully revealed the love and grace of God. However, consider the following conversation Jesus had with an “expert in the law” (Matthew 22:36-40):

Lawyer: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the
second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Where did Jesus get such wonderful words of wisdom? Surely it was not from the God of the Old Testament, was it? Ah, but it was! Jesus took his words straight from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength?” (Deu. 6:5).

Leviticus reveals a loving, compassionate God who expected His people to show similar love and compassion not only to one another but also to strangers (“aliens”) in need. Consider the following passages:

“Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (19:10).

“The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (19:34).

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (23:22).

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you” (25:35).

XVI. The Grace of the Jubilee

One of the great and gracious principles God gave to his people was the principle of ‘Jubilee’ (meaning ‘the horn of the ram’). The Jubilee came every seventh year as a kind of special Sabbath of God (25:28; cf. Num. 36:4). During the Jubilees, there was to be an abundance of grace given to both people and land signified by the blowing of the ram’s horn (thus, the name). According to 25:9, a loud trumpet should proclaim liberty throughout the land every seven years. All real property would automatically revert to its original owner (25:10; compare 25:13), and those who, compelled by poverty, had sold themselves as slaves to their brothers, would regain their liberty (25:10; cf. 25:39).

The Jubilee provided a special Sabbath rest for all the people. Jubilee regulations kept the people of God from exploiting the poor and from treating one another as they were treated in Egypt. The Jubilee affirms the basic value of the
individual and every person’s right to a good and healthy life as well as opportunities to better themselves.

In addition to the seven year Jubilees, every seven jubilees there was a Jubilee Year. During the Jubilee Year (the fiftieth year), there was to be no sowing nor reaping nor pruning of vines, and everybody was expected to live on what the fields and the vineyards produced ‘of themselves.’ No attempt was to be made at storing up the products of the land (25:11 ff.). Thus there were three distinct factors constituting the essential features of the Jubilee Year: personal liberty, restitution of property, and what we might call ‘the simple life.’ All of this served to remind the people of God that he had a destiny for them in His Sabbath rest where true life, a full provision and spiritual liberty belong to all of God’s people.

XVII. The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was to be the holiest day of the year for the Israelites. It falls on the tenth day of the seventh month (early October). The focus of this high day was on the cleansing of the Tabernacle from the pollution caused by uncovered sin and general uncleanness. Since it is impossible for God’s special presence to dwell in a ‘defiled’ place (15:31; cf. 16:16, 19), the Tabernacle itself and all of its objects were to be utterly cleansed through the sprinkling of the blood of special sacrifices offered on this most holy day (this included the high priest himself).

There were three major elements to the Day of Atonement ceremony:

First, there were special sin offerings made by the high priest for himself and for the people (described in chap. 4). The usual practice during sacrifices was to smear the sacrificial blood on the main altar in the courtyard or on the incense altar in the holy place. On this special day, the blood was taken right into the Most Holy place where the Ark was kept (16:11-19). This cleansed the Most Holy Place from all of sin’s pollution. This was also a very dangerous ceremony. If things were not done just right, the High Priest would risk most certain death (16:2-4, 12-13).

Secondly, there was the ‘scapegoat’ ceremony. The peoples’ sins were confessed over two special goats with the laying on of the High Priest’s hands. The laying on of hands along with confession symbolized the transference of guilt to the animals. One goat was then used as the people’s sin offering and the other was sent away into the wilderness- symbolically carrying the sins and impurities of the nation far away from the people (16:20-26).

The third element of the Day of Atonement ceremony was that of a strict day of public fasting from all water, food and work. This practice served to stir up the longings of people to be forgiven as well as to heighten the sense of their own personal need to be forgiven.
For a much deeper discussion of how the Day Atonement and the sacrificial activities of the Tabernacle foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross as our High Priest, see Vern Poythress’ The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses (Puritan and Reformed Books, 1991).

XVIII. Israel’s Annual Religious Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>SPECIAL FESTIVAL DUTIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>April (Nisan)</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>Passover</td>
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<td>15th-21st</td>
<td>Feast of Unleavened Bread</td>
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<td>May (Iyyar)</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)</td>
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<td>June (Sivan)</td>
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<td>August (Ab)</td>
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<td>Feast of Trumpets</td>
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<td>September (Elul)</td>
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<td>October (Tishri)</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Day of Atonement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15th-21st</td>
<td>Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Booths)</td>
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<td>November (Heshvan)</td>
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<td>December (Kislev)</td>
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<td>January (Tabeth)</td>
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<td>February (Shebat)</td>
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<td>March (Adar)</td>
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XIX. The Influence of Old Testament Law On Western Legal Systems

Through the spread of Christianity, Hebrew law came to exert a great influence on Roman law, especially during the years beginning with Constantine when Rome was said to have been ‘Christianized.’ After the disintegration of the Roman Empire, the Roman Church retained its strength and began to spread its influence throughout the Western world. Virtually every system of law in Western Europe was eventually touched by Moses’ writings.

From Europe, the influence of Old Testament law spread to the Americas. Laws that sprang up in local communities became known as ‘common law.’ Even common law was generally based upon the biblical beliefs of people who were seeking to keep God’s Law. In America, many of our legal buildings and courtrooms display
beautiful and elaborate paintings and carvings recalling the events of Moses’ life and
the Law God revealed to Israel. These include our Supreme Court building and the
National Cathedral.

Because of a lack of appreciation for History and a lack of general knowledge
about the Bible, many people are not aware of the amazing influence of the Bible on
the good laws we enjoy in our society. Tragically, the Bible’s influence appears to be
lessening in this day of moral relativism and widespread spiritual apathy.

It is no doubt because of its wisdom that the Bible has exerted a greater
influence on the world than any other single book (cf. James 3:16). The unveiling of
sound moral law to humankind is one of the many common graces God has extended
to the nations through his Word. Civil leaders prove themselves wise when they turn
to the LORD, and say with Solomon, “Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead
this people, for who is able to govern this great people of Yours” (2 Chronicles 1:10).
AN INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS: “The Wilderness Wanderings”

I. Introductory Comments

The book of Numbers takes its name from chapters 1 and 26 where we learn that Moses was commanded to ‘number’ (i.e. to count) the people of God. The book’s Hebrew title- ‘In the Wilderness’- gives us a better idea of its content and historical context. Many of the book’s wilderness stories center on the wrongful attitudes of the Israelites in the face of God’s great love and provision. We meet a grumbling and rebellious people in the Wilderness and are left standing in awe of the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises. Though Israel is unfaithful, God remains true to his word and finds a way to fulfill all that he has promised to past generations. Though the promise must be delayed until the people are prepared and unbelief is vanquished, God will bring his people into the Land.

One month after completing the Tent of Meeting (also called ‘the Tabernacle’), God commanded Moses to take a census in order to determine how many able bodied men could be gathered together to serve in Israel’s army. The first census (chap. 1) identified 603,550 capable men twenty years old and older. This number gives us an idea of the shape and breadth of the multitude Moses actually led out of Egypt. Conservative scholars estimate that the total Israelite community was probably between 2 and 2.5 million people and that their resting encampment may have covered an area twelve miles wide. Other scholars argue that this number is greatly exaggerated or corrupted. It is noteworthy that this same number is given several times in the Old Testament (see Exod. 12:37; Num. 1:46; 2:32; 11:21; and 26:51).

It is impossible to develop a clear understanding of the sequence of events described in Numbers since the account is loosely chronological. It is also difficult to be certain as to how the events of Numbers chronologically fit together with the events recorded in Exodus and Leviticus. Like Exodus and Leviticus, the book contains a good deal of narrative material. Like Leviticus, there are also a number of laws, several of which pertain specifically to the Levites.

Numbers recounts many dramatic stories and highlights of the Israelite’s community life during the years between the Exodus from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land. The book’s author was very selective about the events he included in Numbers. For example, very little is actually told about the thirty-eight years Israel spent in their wilderness wanderings. What becomes apparent to the reader is that much of the material included in the book aims to address key questions future generations would likely ask about this curious season in Israel’s life:

“Why did our ancestors have to spend forty years in the Wilderness before entering the Promised Land?”

“Why were some forbidden to enter and others were not?”
The answer of Numbers is clear: “God was gracious and faithful but the Israelites were stubborn and unfaithful. Faithlessness and fear kept the people from entering the land. So, having taken God’s covenant love for granted, the LORD began a program of purging and preparing the people for the Land.”

In the early chapters of Numbers, we sense that Israel might have gone into the Promised Land in a few short weeks after leaving Egypt. It was not God who closed the door to the Promised Land, but the people themselves through unbelief. This is the point of the important story of Caleb and the Twelve Spies (chap. 13). Suffering from the sin of unbelief, the Israelite spies lacked faith in God’s ability to protect them and to provide for them. Seeing the strength of the people who were occupying their promised inheritance, the men were full of fear. This disheartened the people who were always ready to turn tail and head back to Egypt. Of the reconnaissance team instructed to scope out the Land, only Caleb and Joshua possessed the faith that God would go with the Israelites and bring them success in taking the Land. And so, only Caleb and Joshua would be among the men who would eventually enter the Land promised to Abraham’s descendents (14:6; cf. Deut. 1:36). All others would die in the harsh circumstances and judgments of the Wilderness.

From where we sit, we are surprised that the people did not trust God more than they did. Especially in the face of the awesome power God had already displayed made known to them. God had delivered them from Egypt through a flood of miraculous events. He had led them miraculously by the glory cloud and the pillar of fire. Israel’s unbelief was a serious offense—no less grievous than the unbelief of Adam and Eve or even Pharaoh.

The consequences of unbelief for the Israelites were two-fold:

First, there would be a long season of wandering in the wilderness—‘through many dangers, toils and snares.’

Second, the generation who refused to trust in God would all die out in the Wilderness.

The forbidding of the earlier generation from entering the Land highlights the point that only an obedient, faith-filled people can inhabit the land God promised to Abraham. Before Israel could again stand at the door of the Promised Land, God would require thirty-eight years in The Holy Spirit’s Wilderness School of Faith-Building. God’s people must move from fear and great frustration to faith. They must learn how to maintain a relationship with God and overcome unbelief.

The historical significance of Numbers is that we are able to see through stories and events the impact of God’s laws on Israel and the changes these laws brought about in the way God dealt with them. We also see how the people of God responded to God’s laws and His ongoing discipline. Numbers illustrates for us today the wisdom of walking in obedience to God and the tragic losses that are ours when we refuse to
move in faith toward the things of God. This is the very reason the New Testament frequently refers to the graphic and illustrious stories recounted in Numbers.

A final word for our reflection: Numbers teaches us that, when we refuse to believe God and instead surrender to unbelief, like the Israelites, we find ourselves caught between a rock and a hard place and simply going around in circles. Unbelief in a Believer’s life leads to a condition of spiritual wandering. For many people, their spiritual journey is fraught with detours, ditches and dead ends. How much better and wiser it is to joyfully obey the Living God without hesitation, without questioning His Word, His love, His goodness, and His ability to provide for all that we need!

II. Authorship

There is only one direct reference to Moses as the author of any portion of this material (33:2). The book informs us that priests were also recording and preserving the divine directives and regulations given to Moses, especially those related to the Tabernacle (cf. 5:23). Like the book of Leviticus, nearly every chapter records the direct interaction between God and Moses using the phrase “And the LORD spoke to Moses” (cf. 1:1; 2:1; 4:1; etc).

Hill and Walton argue that the many references to Moses using third person speech (e.g. 12:3; 15:22-23) and the “sporadic editorial insertions designed to update a later audience (e.g., 13:11, 22; 27:14; 31:53) suggest that the book took its final form sometime after Moses’ death.” (Ibid. P. 115) Traditional Jewish scholars have always attributed the book to Moses, the Hebrew lawgiver.

III. Outline

The material we find in Numbers commences shortly after the Exodus and culminates at the close of the forty years of wandering between Egypt and the Promised Land. Approximately thirty of the forty years of wilderness wandering occur between chapters 15 and 26. Most of the historical material in chapters 1-14 takes place before this thirty-eight year period. The historical material found in chapter 27-36 takes place shortly before entering the Promised Land.

When reading in Numbers, it is helpful to remember the laws and events found in Leviticus (‘The Priest’s Book’) were delivered to the people during the same time frame as many of the events recorded here. The people also were practicing most of these laws and procedures during their time in the Wilderness. As we move through the book, the ministry of the Levites and the elaborate activities surrounding the Tent of Meeting were in full gear.
Numbers can be roughly divided into three sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters 1-10</th>
<th>The Old Generation</th>
<th>The last few days at Sinai</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chapters 11-21</td>
<td>The Transition Era</td>
<td>The years of desert wandering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapters 22-36</td>
<td>The New Generation</td>
<td>The few months at Moab on the threshold of Canaan</td>
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In a more detailed outline offered by Gordon Wenham (taken from the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Numbers*), you’ll notice that the major divisions of his outline are *time and place-related*:

I. Gathering at Sinai (1-9)
   A. Numbering and Organizing the People (1-4)
   B. Cleansing the Camp (5-6)
   C. Offering for the Altar (7)
   D. Dedicating the Levites (8)
   E. The Second Passover (9)
   F. The Silver Trumpets (10:1-10)

II. From Sinai To Kadesh (10-12:16)
   A. Departure in Battle Order (10:11-36)
   B. A Complaining People- *Three Complaints* (11-12:16)

III. Years Near Kadesh (13:1-19:22)
   A. The Rebellion of the Spies- *They Might Have Gone In* (13-14)
   B. More Laws on Offerings (15)
   C. More About the Priests (16-18)
   D. Laws on Cleansing (19)

IV. From Kadesh To The Plains Of Moab (20-22:1)

V. Israel in The Plains Of Moab (22:2-36)
   A. Balaam and Balak (22-24)
   B. The Whole Nation Turns Away (25)
   C. Numbering the People Again (26)
   D. Laws About the Land, Offerings and Vows (27-30)
   E. The Defeat of Midian and Settlement in the Transjordan (31-32)
   F. A List of Camp Sites (33:1-49)
G. More Laws About the Land (33:50-56)

IV. The Land of Canaan- The Land of Promise

V. Israel, A Lesson Book For The Nations.

As we worked our way through Exodus and Leviticus, we saw that Israel is in many ways a ‘Lesson Book for The Nations.’ This means that, as we observe God’s relationship with Israel, we see what living faith and willful disobedience will bring to our lives.

There are several important lessons for the Church of Jesus Christ unveiled in the book of Numbers:

A. We see the importance of living, active faith.

   It is required of us if we are to enter into all that God has for us—His Promised Land. It is the only thing that will overcome our fear of man—The ‘Giants’ in the Land.

Key New Testament Truths:

   “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).
   “For nothing is impossible with God” (Lk. 1:37).

B. There are consequences to pay when we choose a way that rejects faith in God.

   The breaking of faith led to a closing of the door to the Promised Land for Miriam, Aaron and even Moses. God said to Moses just before he was ‘gathered to his people’: “This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites” (Deut. 32:51).

C. Having gratitude for God’s provisions is better than it is to grumbling.

   The grumbling of the Israelites led to being disciplined by God’s hand (especially see Numbers 14 and 16). Notice that God viewed a complaining spirit among His people almost the way we might view a plague (as something to be taken very seriously and to be gotten rid of altogether). It should not surprise us that it was by the plague that God cleansed the camp of the grumblers.

   Paul gave the following warnings to Christians: “Do not grumble, as some of them did (Paul is referring to the Israelites)—and were killed by the
destroying angel” (1 Cor. 10:10); “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation” (Phil. 2:14-15).

D. It is important that we speak blessings over God’s people rather than curses.

In Numbers 6:22-27, we learn a very important thing about speaking a blessing over people: God honors words of blessing. The priests were told to go out among the people and bless them ‘in the name of the LORD.’ The LORD said that wherever He saw that His name had been placed, He would bless the people.

The strange story of Balak and Balaam illustrates God’s protection from the curses that might be brought upon His people from evil spirits. Paul said Jesus breaks all curses in the believer’s life: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). We can be confident that no modern day Balaam can touch us when Jesus is speaking His blessing over our lives. By the way, the strange story of Balaam is referred to in many New Testament passages. 2 Peter 2:15 warns against the way of Balaam (seeking wealth through religion); Jude 11 warns against the error of Balaam (choosing profit over obedience); and Revelation 2:14 warns against the doctrine of Balaam (the sanctioning of immorality by religion. We’ve seen a great deal of this in our day- especially in the areas of abortion and homosexuality).

Since we are a royal priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Exod. 19:5-6), we ought to seek to bless one another as well. James says of the tongue: “No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise (blessings) and cursing. My brothers, this should not be” (James 3:8-10). Paul says, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14).

E. It is important that all of our life and worship revolves around God.

It was not without purpose that the LORD taught the Israelites to set up their encampment with the Tabernacle at the center of the community. You’ll recall that the first thing set up was the Tabernacle. The Levites then encircled the Tabernacle putting up their mobile dwellings. These priests seem to serve as a sort of insulation of grace between God and the Tabernacle. Remember, the Tabernacle embodied God’s way of experiencing grace and his presence. Finally, God gave order to his people by requiring each tribe of
families to be given a precise area where they encamped beyond the Levites- 3 tribes on the North, 3 on the South, 3 on the East and 3 on the West.

All of this was done to show that God and his Presence should be the focus of everything in the lives of His people- from our life of worship to our home and to our community life and affairs. Set up your encampment around the LORD. This ‘set up’ also reminds us that everything in our lives- as individuals and as his people- should be God-centered.

F. God is our spiritual provider and nothing is impossible for Him.

Water from a rock? No problem. This is God. A quail dinner in a wilderness? No problem. This is God. Ridding the land of Giants? Healing people of venomous snakebites? ‘Nothing is too hard for Him.’

God will provide everything we need for life if we will seek Him and keep our eyes upon Him. Why, God can even keep our shoes from wearing out “Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years” (Deut. 8:4). Jesus said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt. 6:33-34).

VI. Images of Jesus And The Spirit In Numbers

A. Some Images of Jesus:

The water from the ‘rock’ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-5)

The bronze serpent on the pole (21:1-9; cf. Jn. 3:14-15)

The provision of food from heaven (cf. Jn 6:30-37)

(There are many other images of Christ in Numbers. See how many you can find).

B. Some Images of the Spirit:

The moving cloud and fire (the Holy Spirit is often referred to as ‘tongues of fire’- e.g. see Acts 1 and 2)

The ‘Glory’ in their midst (this is a picture of the manifest Presence of God in the midst of the Church).
As Israel was taught to keep their eyes upon the cloud and fiery pillar suspended over the Tabernacle, we must ‘watch’ the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. For them, when the cloud rose in the sky, Israel was to break camp and follow it. When the cloud settled, Israel was to set up camp. They were only to go where God leads, and only go when God led. Romans 8:14 says, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (cf. Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:1; Gal. 5:18).

VII. The Oracles of Balaam

The stories surrounding the oracles of Balaam are quite strange (22-24). Especially strange is the story of his talking donkey (proving that, if God can speak through a donkey, God can speak through anyone).

Balaam is a regional false prophet working along the Plains of Moab where the Israelites happened to be dwelling. We learn that kings and leaders often consulted Balaam. Gordon Wenham writes: “In 1967 parts of a text mentioning Balaam were found at Deir Alla, a place in Transjordan a little north of where the Israelites camped in the Plains of Moab. The text dates from about 800 BC, that is some 500 years after the exodus [Wenham takes the later date for the Exodus]. It is hard to interpret, so it does not shed any real light on the biblical story. However, in both the Bible and this text, Balaam appears to be a seer with whom the gods can communicate. He can avert divine wrath by his mediation. In both sets of texts he refers to God as El (God) and as Shadday (Almighty).” Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch, p. 115).

Though Balaam did not generally prophesy from the LORD, Balaam is conscripted by Yahweh to speak on His behalf and to reconfirm God’s promise of covenantal blessing. Balak, a regional king very concerned about the growing presence of the Israelites on the Plains of Moab, sought to employ Balaam’s services to call down a curse upon Israel. But God, who came to Balaam in dreams, through angels and by way of the wisdom of a donkey, commanded Balaam to only speak the precise words God would give to him. Instead of calling down a curse on God’s people, Yahweh intervenes by putting a blessing into Balaam’s mouth. Balaam recites the blessing and the promises formerly made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12; 15). This is quite amazing in light of the fact that Balaam usually operates as a false prophet dabbling in the demonic realms.

Even more amazing, while Balaam’s words are being proclaimed on the mountains overlooking the Plains of Moab, the Israelites are down below rebelliously turning after other gods. This demonstrates that the people have learned very little from their previous mistakes (since this event comes later in Israel’s Wilderness Wanderings).
VIII. The Anger of God.

Many readers of the Pentateuch are troubled by the many examples we see of the outpouring of God’s wrath upon sin. There appears to be a intensifying of God’s judgment upon various violations of His covenant as we progress through Numbers.

Lawrence O. Richards writes: “The Old Testament speaks often about God’s anger. There are 8 Hebrew words that express the anger of God. Some are descriptive, and picture heavy breathing or foaming lips. Others mean indignation, rage, burning, vexation, and pouring out of anger, or outbreaks of wrath. Both the emotion of anger and its expression are portrayed in these Old Testament terms.

“Many find it disturbing that words like these are used to describe God. But while human anger is often an unjustified reaction of the sin nature, God’s anger is always rooted in His holiness and His love. God is angry with His people Israel- when they forsake His covenant and break His laws. He is angry at nations that institutionalize wickedness, and war on others. But only because God cares so deeply for human beings is He disturbed when men are oppressed, or when sin leads them away from Him and the good He desires.

“We too need to see God’s anger, including the most drastic of the disciplines He brings on His people, from the perspective of Covenant love.” Lawrence O. Richards, The Complete Bible Handbook (Word, 1987) p. 110.

God will not permit His people to continue on in dangerous and wrong patterns of living anymore than a good and loving parent might overlook the behavior of his or her children. If God did not love us deeply, He would hardly care enough to be angry with us when we sin. Even the wrath of God testifies to how important God’s people are to him.

We must realize that the anger and discipline of God expressed in Numbers does not diminish the love and grace of God. God’s anger and discipline toward the Israelites should serve as a strong warning for all who refuse to believe God and walk in His ways.

Hebrews 3:15-4:2 says:

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

‘Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. (2) For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they
heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.’

Note: By ‘rest,’ the writer of Hebrews is speaking of the condition of living in God’s grace and the promise of a future in Heaven with Him.

### ADDITIONAL PARALLELS BETWEEN EXODUS AND NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Exodus</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The people sacrifice to false gods</td>
<td>32:6</td>
<td>25:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The killing of apostates commanded</td>
<td>32:27</td>
<td>25:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Levites’ status is enhanced (Phinehas’s)</td>
<td>32:28-29</td>
<td>25:6-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagues come down upon the people</td>
<td>32:35</td>
<td>25:9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[This chart is adapted from Gordon Wenham, Ibid., p. 116]
AN INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY: “The Renewal of the Covenant”

I. Introductory Comments.

Deuteronomy is basically a long, three-part sermon delivered to the Israelites in the last days of Moses’ life just before Joshua- Moses’ successor- led them into the Promised Land. The book serves the purpose of renewing and expanding upon the covenant relationship between God and Israel. The conditions stated in the covenant must be followed strictly if the Israelites are to enjoy the full presence and blessing of God in the Land.

The message of the book is straightforward: ‘This generation will be allowed to enter the Promised Land, not because of their own righteousness or the righteousness of their parents, but because of the LORD’s righteousness revealed in His faithfulness to keep the covenant promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ In order to insure that this is clearly understood, Moses recalls the mighty acts of God and many lessons taught when the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt to Jordan’s edge and back again after many years of wilderness wanderings:

‘The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt’ (7:7-8).

Deuteronomy introduces us to a ‘new generation’- a generation God invites to become a renewed ‘Covenant People.’ The previous generation was invited to enter the Land only a few days after leaving their captivity. They were perched at the edge of the Jordan by the eleventh day. Now, some forty years later, that faithless and fearful generation is all gone. ‘God was not pleased with most of them and their bodies were scattered over the desert’ (1 Cor. 10:5). Many among Moses’ audience in Deuteronomy were not even born when Caleb, Joshua and the other spies surveyed the Land (see chap. 13). Others were only small children in those days. With this in mind, we can understand why God leads Moses to rehearse the events of the past and renew the LORD’s covenant with Israel before going up to take their inheritance.

When Moses recounts the mighty works of God and words of the past, he also expands upon a few of them- Moses ‘sermonizes’ on a few matters. He also gives the Israelites some final instructions for life under the covenant, for taking the land and for life in their now home. Moses repeatedly warns the people about the temptations that await them in the Promised Land and the consequences of yielding to those temptations. Finally, Moses asks for a personal commitment from this new generation to receive and respond to the covenant-love of God. Unfortunately, God reveals to Moses that sometime in the future, even this generation will forsake the LORD to
follow after other gods. Moses leaves this world knowing there is much more yet to be written about God’s relationship with His covenant people.

How did Deuteronomy get its name? Since Moses repeats the Ten Commandments in chapter 5 of the book, the book was given the designation ‘Deutero- Nomos,’ which means ‘Second Law.’ Nearly 50% of the material found in Deuteronomy is material expanded upon but first introduced in Exodus.

After a review of what God has done for Israel (1-4), Deuteronomy presents an expanded law section (5-26) that includes the ‘Shema’ (6). [The ‘Shema’ is a Jewish designation for the powerful words of Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” A belief of this kind- ‘the One God’- was so unusual in the ancient world that it alone was enough to separate the Israelites from all other cultures and their religious systems.

By the time Jesus walked the earth, the Jews had come to use the Shema as a test of orthodoxy. They would ask, ‘What do you believe about God?’ An Israelite was expected to respond by repeating the Shema. By the way, it is this Jewish practice that lies behind James’ words: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (2:19).

After introducing the Shema, we read about two covenant ceremonies (27-30) followed by the final words and death of Moses (31-34). Many scholars believe that Deuteronomy is the ‘book of the law’ found in 2 Kings that inspired Josiah’s reform. The book was held in high regard by kings who reigned in Jerusalem because one important emphasis of Deuteronomy is that worship ought to be centralized in Jerusalem to avoid the mixing of religious practices.

The importance of this book is seen in the fact that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy more than any of the other books of Moses. He often returned to Deuteronomy to find a principle or an illustration to apply to his own life or his hearers.

In Deuteronomy we find that the motivation for obeying the law is not for the individual (or even the community) to remain holy, but to show an appropriate covenant-love response to God in view of God’s covenant-love for Israel. Though God appears somewhat harsh in many places throughout the book, we must recall all that God has done for the Israelites to bring them to this place. We must remember that he has already overlooked much sin and has poured out his grace and provision upon his people time and time again. We cannot forget the message of Numbers: ‘God has been gracious in the face of His peoples’ grumbling.’

A study of Deuteronomy can enrich our Christian experience. A number of the basic principles of life lived out in close relationship with God are revealed in the book. Even though our lives are no longer governed by the Old Covenant restrictions, there are many lessons here about Who God is, about our relationships with him and others, and about the need for full commitment to the Lord.
II. Outline.

The ‘covenant form’ of the book (as noted above) gives a clear and simple format to Deuteronomy. One additional feature should be mentioned here. Deuteronomy is basically a long, three-part sermon delivered by Moses to the Israelites in the last days of his life just before their entry into the Promised Land. It closes the Pentateuch since it also records the final days and the death of Moses.

The following is a simple outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chapters 1:1 - 4:43</th>
<th>Moses First Speech</th>
<th>What God Has Accomplished For the Israelites</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chapters 4:44 - 28:68</td>
<td>Moses Second Speech</td>
<td>Life Under the Covenant of Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chapters 20-30:20</td>
<td>Moses Third Speech and Death</td>
<td>A Call to Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chapters 31:1-34:12</td>
<td>Commentary on Moses’ Life</td>
<td>Moses Final Days and Death</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Here is a bit more detail:

I. What God Has Accomplished For the Israelites (1:1-4:43)
   A. God’s Past Mighty Works Reviewed (1:1-3:29)
   B. Israel’s Future Allegiance Required (4:1-43)

II. Life Under the Covenant Of Law (4:44-28:68)
   A. Principles of Covenant Life (5:1-11:32)
   B. The Details of the Covenant (12:1-26:19)
   C. An Approval of the Covenant Required (27:1-26)
   D. Blessings and Cursings (28:1-68)

III. A Call to Commitment (29:1-30:20)
   A. An Exhortation to Maintain Commitment (29:1-15)
   B. Warnings to Be Heeded- That They Not Take This Lightly (29:16-28)
   C. Forgiveness Assured- If They Are Faithful (30:1-10)
   D. A Final Appeal to Choose God’s Offer of Life (30:11-20)

IV. Moses’ Final Days and Death (31:1-34:12)
III. Authorship and Date

We know that Deuteronomy is appropriately placed as the last of the five books of Moses because much of its content involves the last year of Moses’ life. Since the book records the actual death of Moses, we know that the author of the latter portions of Deuteronomy was not Moses himself. Some people believe that the Lord revealed to Moses the details of his coming death and led him to write the words that close the book. This seems highly unlikely since the final words of Deuteronomy appear to offer a kind of eulogy and tribute to Moses: “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel” (34:10-12). This kind of intense tribute sounds a bit out of character for a man like Moses (see also Numbers 12:3, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”)

Who wrote these comments? It seems likely that Joshua- the man who served as Moses’ personal aide and successor- probably penned these words along with a few of these other comments about Moses we find in the Pentateuch.

IV. A Brief Overview Of Moses’ Amazing Life

In our study of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, we have already covered most of the major events of Moses’ amazing one hundred and twenty years of life. In Deuteronomy, we learn of the final days of Moses’ leadership and his death. The following is a review of Moses’ life and leadership which neatly breaks down into three units of time each approximately forty years in length.

A. Moses’ Life Years 1 to 40

Born a Hebrew, Moses’ life was miraculously preserved from death when, as a baby, his mother placed him in the bulrushes along the Nile River. Moses was found by Pharaoh’s daughter and was given a lavish upbringing as her son in the courts of the Pharaoh of Egypt. These were important years of preparation for the future when God would call Moses to lead his people out of Egypt and to record the word of God for future generations.

B. Moses Life Years 40 to 80

At around the age of forty years of age, Moses appears to have had what looked like a ‘midlife crisis’ (though he still had a remarkable eighty years of life ahead of him). While witnessing the oppression of a Hebrew slave at the
hands of an Egyptian taskmaster, Moses murdered the Egyptian in a fit of rage. Fearing for his life, Moses then fled into the desert region of the Midianites where he spent the next forty years of his life as a shepherd. While in Midian, Moses married and began raising a family of his own. There he learned to live in the harshness of the desert with his father-in-law Jethro and Jethro’s clan. Nearing the age of eighty, the LORD revealed His name to Moses, speaking to him from a burning bush, calling Moses into His purposes.

C. Moses’ Life Years 80 to 120

Moses was about eighty years old when God began to use him in leadership. First, there was the dramatic deliverance from Egypt- the confrontation with Pharaoh involving the 10 plagues of Judgment upon the gods of Egypt; the eating of the Passover meal; the flight from Egypt under the cover of night; the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army. The Israelites might have entered the Promised Land just eleven days after leaving Egypt, but hardness of heart and unbelief caused them to turn their backs of God.

For the next forty years, the Israelites had to be tutored by the LORD in the Wilderness School of the Holy Spirit. During this time that God gave Moses the Law, the Tabernacle, and God’s plans for life in their new home, the Promised Land. The opening chapters of Deuteronomy give a good overview of those forty years. The closing chapters of Deuteronomy tell the strange story of Moses’ death after he was allowed to see the Promised Land from Mt. Nebo in the land of Moab. Moses’ life ends the way it began- separated from his people. After commissioning Joshua to lead the people into the inheritance they had long ago been promised, Moses mysteriously went off to be alone with God in Transjordan where he died and his body was never found. It appears that God had Moses die in this way in order that the people might not be tempted to build an idolatrous memorial to the memory of Moses.

V. The Covenant Form of the Book

Before we look at a basic outline of Deuteronomy, it is important that we learn a few things about ancient covenants. First, a ‘covenant’ (Hebrew word: ‘Ber-ith’) is a ‘special agreement, treaty, alliance or pact made between two parties.’

Second, Deuteronomy’s entire layout closely follows the pattern of a certain type of covenant common in the ancient times- the ‘Ruler-Subject Covenant.’

In the ancient world where the Israelite’s lived, there were several types of covenants.
There were the covenants made between people of equal standing. Here are a few examples of covenants/agreements peoples might make with one another:

“We won’t attack you if you won’t attack us.”
“We will help defend you when you are attacked if you will help defend us when we are attacked.”
“We will let your animals graze on our land if you will let our animals graze on your land.”

There were also covenants made between rulers and their subjects. Sometimes, agreements were made between kings themselves. These covenants would state that one king has agreed to recognize the superiority of the other king (the inferior was a ‘vassal’ king—receiving protection and the right to rule or to keep his life in return for his homage and allegiance to the other as his subordinate or dependent). A covenant of this kind might make an agreement like this:

“If you will serve me and be loyal to my kingship in a certain way, I will provide for you or treat you in a certain way.”

It was a common practice in the ancient world that these Ruler-Subject covenants were written out in detail (serving a similar purpose as a legal contract). In such covenants, the obligations of each party were spelled out in detail along with the blessings and curses which were expected to come to each of the parties ‘keeping’ (observing) or ‘breaking’ (violating) the agreement. Since most ancient covenants of this type were initiated through some sort of blood ceremony, and since ‘the blood of the covenant’ was acquired through some sort of ‘cutting’ activity (whether through the killing of an animal with a knife or the cutting of the hands and mixing of the bloods of the two parties—sometimes followed by a handshake), the Hebrews often spoke of ‘cutting a covenant’ (Karath) rather than ‘making a covenant’ (cf. Genesis 15:18 where the Hebrew text actually says, “On that day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram”).

Well-documented archaeological research has revealed that the format of the Ruler-Subject Covenant was fairly well defined during the days of Moses. By comparing Deuteronomy to other ancient Ruler-Subject covenants, we see a typical pattern is followed in Deuteronomy:

The Ruler-Subject Covenant Form

Historical Prologue- Introducing the relationship that the ruler has with his subjects

Basic Obligations- Stating general principles that are to govern behavior
Detailed Terms of Covenant- Explaining certain specific regulations to be followed

Document Clause- Requiring ratifications by the subjects

Blessings- Explaining the benefits to be provided under the agreement

Curses- Warning of punishments to come if the agreement is broken

Recap- Reviewing and summarizing the agreement

The importance of seeing this Ruler-Subject Covenant Form is that it helps us understand how Israel understood the nature of her relationship with God. Theirs was clearly a conditional agreement: ‘If you will be My people, I will be Your God and Kingly Protector and Provider. This is what it means to be My people...This is what it means for Me to be your King...And these are the blessings you may expect from Me as your King...If you break faith with Me, these are the curses which you can expect to come your way....’

VI. The Value Of The Repetitions Found in Deuteronomy

Much of the content of Deuteronomy parallels teaching found in other books of the Pentateuch. Several sections from Exodus are repeated in Deuteronomy. In general, Deuteronomy tends to expand upon material recorded earlier. What follows are several of the parallels between Deuteronomy and Exodus. Notice that the material found in Deuteronomy is more “sermonic” in nature (where Exodus makes simple statements rather than explanations):

Exodus 21:1-6 Deuteronomy 15:12-18
Exodus 22:29 Deuteronomy 15:19-23
Exodus 22:31 Deuteronomy 14:3-21
Exodus 23:2-8 Deuteronomy 16:18-20
Exodus 23:10f Deuteronomy 15:1-11
Exodus 23:14-17 Deuteronomy 16:1-17
Exodus 23:19a Deuteronomy 26:2-10

Some of the passages which are both found in Deuteronomy and in other books of the Pentateuch offer a new insight, application or reason for the specific law being highlighted. A good example of this can be seen by comparing Moses’ words regarding the Sabbath in both Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15:
A. Exodus 10:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

B. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

Notice that the Exodus passage focuses on God as the Creator and answers the question: “Why has the Lord chosen to bless and make the Sabbath Day holy?” The Deuteronomy passage fleshes out the command even further by answering the questions: “Why has the Lord commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath?” and “What should the Israelites think about as they rest from their labor?” Together, both passages give us a full understanding of what God had in view for His people when He gave them His Sabbath command.

VII. The Deuteronomy’s Sexual Laws Today

Many people who freely call themselves Christians are extremely weak in the matter of their personal sexual practices. There is wide spread promiscuity in many churches today suggesting that many Christians are not heeding the warnings of Deuteronomy. Many have ‘intermarried’ with the spirit of the age and have taken on the pagan practices of the prevailing culture. These people need to hear the words of Deuteronomy 11:16, “Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to (worship) them.” Let’s face reality here- the church does not have much to offer when we seek and practice the same things the pagans of the world seek and practice.
Most of the historic sexual mores accepted by Western Civilization find their origin in the laws Moses delivered to the Israelites in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Though Western Civilization has not always practiced capital punishment for violations of these mores (as the Israelites did under a Divine Theocracy), until recently, the Western World has generally looked upon any infraction of these behaviors as a willful perversion of God’s plan for human sexuality and a threat to civility. This is why legal consequences have generally been employed to punish those who follow them. The forbidden sexual practices listed in Deuteronomy are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transvestite Behavior</th>
<th>Deuteronomy 22:5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premarital Intercourse</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 22:20-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adultery</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 22:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 22:25-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incest</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 22:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 23:17-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bestiality</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 27:21</td>
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In light of Deuteronomy’s clear warning against premarital sexual intercourse and God’s command to respect the reproductive process (cf. Deuteronomy 23:1 and 10-11), there was no need to make an explicit statement against abortion. Any Israelite would have been horrified by the thought of a pregnant woman ever doing such a thing. Though there are other stronger texts addressing the matter of abortion to be found in the Old Testament, I believe a case against abortion can be made from the warning against shedding ‘innocent blood’ found in Deuteronomy 21:1-9.

Though homosexual behavior is not directly addressed in Deuteronomy, it was expressly forbidden in Leviticus 20:13 which says, ‘If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.’ Though we should not insist upon capital punishment for such behavior today, neither can we openly embrace homosexual behavior in the church today. Paul speaks directly against homosexual behavior in Romans 1:26-27 viewing such practices as evidence that men and women have ‘exchanged the truth of God for a lie’ (Romans 1:25).

What about sexual promiscuity in the church today? Hebrews 13:4 says, ‘Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.’ The Greek word that is translated ‘sexual immorality’ is ‘Pornea’- the word from which we get our English word ‘pornography.’ This word refers to any number of sexual behaviors, including: ‘sexual intercourse between unmarried partners, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, sexual intercourse with close relatives, and sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman outside of marriage.’
When the New Testament uses the words ‘sexual immorality,’ it is recalling the sexual behaviors repeatedly forbidden in the Old Testament law. Surely, none should call themselves Christians (followers of Christ) who encourage or follow these practices without deep repentance and godly sorrow.

We must also remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:28, which encourages us to make an honest assessment not only of our behavior, but also of the condition of our hearts: ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell’ (Matthew 5:27-29).

IIIIV. Moses’ Successor, Joshua

Genesis reveals that Abraham was always a sojourner and that, though God led him to the land of Canaan, Abraham never actually possessed the land but lived among Canaanites. Joshua and his contemporaries will be the first Abrahamic descendants to see God’s promises to Abraham fulfilled (Gen. 15:13-18; 17:8).

In our study of the Pentateuch thus far, we have discovered that the Israelites had a great deal to learn about faith in God, obedience to His instructions, the character of God and what it means to be ‘a kingdom of priests and holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6). It was essential that these lessons be learned before God settled them into their promised inheritance. Adam and Eve were forced out of Eden because of disobedience. The Land God was giving the Israelites would likewise spit them out if they did not learn these vital lessons.

The Book of Joshua chronologically follows the Pentateuch providing a bridge between life in the Wilderness and life in the Promised Land. After over 400 years of slavery in Egypt and forty years of Spirit-tutelage in the Wilderness, God was finally ready to take a new generation of His people into the Promised Land.

The book of Joshua is the story of ‘Conquest and Fulfillment’ for the people of God. Like Moses, Joshua was a man uniquely prepared and gifted to lead God’s people forward in this important season of salvation history that follows the Pentateuch. Joshua was a truly amazing man. He was a brilliant military strategist and a strong, stable, spiritual man. As a strategist, Joshua constructed a very successful military campaign. Before becoming too impressed by Joshua’s military acumen, we must not forget that Joshua was a man called, prepared, gifted and anointed by God. ‘Spirit of wisdom’ was upon him (Deut. 34:9) and the LORD promised He’d ‘be with’ Joshua wherever he went (Josh. 1:9).

Joshua, the Son of Nun (referred to as ‘Hoshea’ in Num. 13:8), was born of Joseph’s line and of the tribe of Ephraim. In many ways, Joshua was a Joseph-like
figure. As the LORD blessed Joseph with extraordinary administrative skills in his role as the right hand of Pharaoh, so the LORD blessed Joshua with extraordinary administrative and military skills enabling him to serve the LORD.

Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy reveal that much of what Joshua learned he learned from watching Moses while serving as Moses’ ‘young assistant’ (cf. Exod. 33:11). Remember, Joshua was up on the mountainside with Moses when Moses received the commandments of God (Exod. 23:17). While serving under Moses, Joshua was one of the few people allowed to enter the Tabernacle and experience the direct presence of the LORD. On one occasion, Moses left the Tabernacle to ‘return to the camp, but his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent’ (Exod. 33:11). Young Joshua possessed a great love for the LORD and enjoyed being in His presence.

Joshua especially gained a reputation for himself in the battle against the Amalekites where he served as the general on the field (Exod. 17:8-13). His courage and character were powerfully displayed before all of Israel in the first exploration of Canaan thirty-eight years before the battle of Jericho. Joshua represented the tribe of Ephraim as one of the twelve spies sent to scope out the land (Num. 13:8). Of the Twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb returned with a good report and the solid resolve of faith that it was possible- with the LORD- to take the land. Because of their courage and faith in God, only Caleb and Joshua were left alive to enter the Promised Land.

IX. Warfare In the Old Testament

The actual warfare encountered in the Pentateuch troubles many people. Even more troubling can be the warfare that follows as the Israelites enter the Promised Land. Gordon Wenham writes: ‘The imminent prospect of a fierce warfare against the Canaanites dominates the book of Deuteronomy.’ (Ibid. p. 137) Some would see the Pentateuch’s attitude toward the Canaanites as standing in stark contrast to the book’s affirmation of the value of human life.

Why would God command His people to utterly destroy their enemies? To answer this question, we must understand that the Israelites were actually serving as God’s mercenaries. God employed His people Israel for the purpose of fighting in ‘His warfare’- i.e. to serve as His ‘agents of judgment’ upon those who were living as enemies of God. This is why Israel secured its many victories through the miraculous power and will of God. In the end, much of the destruction brought about in war was actually accomplished by God Himself.

There is a clue in the Scriptures themselves that help us see that these battles were not principally between Israel and those living in the land, but between God and those living in the land. It is the Hebrew word ‘haram,’ translated ‘devoted thing’ (e.g. see Josh. 6:17-18). Traditionally, when a nation conquered another nation, the
victor owns the plunder. Plunder may include houses, lands, animals, weaponry and wealth, even the women and children who may be used as slaves. With respect to the Canaan Conquest, Joshua and the Israelites were forbidden to keep any of the things for themselves and were even disciplined for doing so (see Josh. 7; also cf. 22:20).

Earlier in our study of Numbers we saw that the Levites and all the firstborn of Israel were ‘devoted’ to the Lord (Num. 3:4-51) but this did not mean that they were summarily killed. The Levites were devoted for the purpose of serving the Lord; the people of Canaan were devoted for the purpose of destruction. Listen to a description given of the campaign at Jericho: “They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.” This language implies that God was judging the people of Jericho for their evil ways.

There is a second reason that the LORD demanded that His people destroy every aspect of their enemies- from their animals, to their religious symbols, to all their enemy’s cultural icons. God realized that the fertility religions and culture of the Canaanites would corrupt His people. Soon they would be entangled in the very things that had brought God’s judgment upon the evil Canaanites.

Leviticus and Deuteronomy declared many laws that expressly forbade the Israelites from behaving like the Canaanites. The testimony of both Scripture and archaeology reveal that the Canaanite nations were extremely corrupt. Canaanite families routinely sacrificed the children to local deities (demonic spirits worshipped as gods). Idolatry was everywhere. Most people practiced fertility rituals that involved great sexual immorality and witchcraft. Canaanite kings were filled with pride and often sought to prove their superiority over others by making a sport of war. These evil kings oppressed the poor, slaughtered the handicapped and tortured their enemies just for the sport of it.

Scripture shows several of the Canaanite kings openly defying the God of the Israelites. Written years after the Pentateuch, Psalm 2 considers these Canaanite kings when it asks:

‘Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’” (vv. 1-4).

What is God’s response to the arrogance of these Canaanites?

‘The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then, He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying, ‘I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill.’ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are My Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your
possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.’ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in our way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him’ (Psalms 2:1-12).

God was ready to pour out His wrath upon the remaining Canaanites as He had earlier poured out His wrath upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

X. A Summary Of The Road From Egypt To The Promised Land

Deuteronomy 8:3 says, ‘He humbled you [Israel], causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.’ This really is the great lesson of the Wilderness Wanderings-we must receive and follow the Word of the LORD. It is food for our souls. Without it, we starve and eventually die!

So, we have seen that the Israelites did not go directly to the Promised Land, but they traveled through the Sinai desert. For a time they stayed at Mount Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments and rebelled against God. The Israelites moved northward and sent out spies into the Promised Land. When the spies reported that there were powerful people in the Land, the Israelites refused to enter the Land. God declared that they would all die in the wilderness (all except Caleb and Joshua who had faith that God would deliver the Land into their hands as he had promised to their father Abraham).

The Israelites dwelt for a long period at an oasis known as Kadesh. They later migrated northward, remaining on the eastern side of the Jordan river. The wilderness wanderings concluded forty years after leaving their captivity in Egypt. The next generation of Israelites entered the Promised Land near Jericho under the leadership of Joshua. God prepared the Israelites for the coming Conquest of Canaan through a number of lesser skirmishes and victories over threatening enemies while still on the eastern side of the Jordan. These Pre-Canaan conquests not only strengthen the faith and resolve of God’s people, but also provided much needed provisions for the many battles to come.

And so, after naming Joshua as his successor, Moses dies on the mountain. The amazing story of God and his passion to make a way of salvation and blessing for his people continues through Joshua and a new generation of covenant people.