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With Notes by KENT DOBSON
TITLE
The first phrase in the Hebrew text of 1:1 is *bereshith* ("In [the] beginning"), which is also the Hebrew title of the book (books in ancient times customarily were named after their first word or two). The English title, Genesis, is Greek in origin and comes from the word *geneseos*, which appears in the pre-Christian Greek translation (Septuagint) of 2:4; 5:1. Depending on its context, the word can mean “birth,” “genealogy” or “history of origin.” In both its Hebrew and Greek forms, then, the traditional title of Genesis appropriately describes its content, since it is primarily a book of beginnings.

BACKGROUND
Chapters 1 – 38 reflect a great deal of what we know from other sources about ancient Mesopotamian life and culture. Creation, genealogies, destructive floods, geography and mapmaking, construction techniques, migrations of peoples, sale and purchase of land, legal customs and procedures, sheep-herding and cattle-raising — all these subjects and many others were matters of vital concern to the peoples of Mesopotamia during this time. They were also of interest to the individuals, families and tribes whom we read about in the first 38 chapters of Genesis. The author appears to locate Eden, humankind’s first home, in or near Mesopotamia; the tower of Babel was built there; Abram was born there; Isaac took a wife from there; and Jacob lived there for 20 years. Although these patriarchs settled in Canaan, their original homeland was Mesopotamia.
The closest ancient literary parallels to Ge 1 – 38 also come from Mesopotamia. Enuma elish, the story of the god Marduk’s rise to supremacy in the Babylonian pantheon, is similar in some respects (though thoroughly mythical and polytheistic) to the Ge 1 creation account. Some of the features of certain king lists from Sumer bear striking resemblance to the genealogy in Ge 5. The 11th tablet of the Gilgamesh epic is quite similar in outline to the flood narrative in Ge 6 – 8. Several of the major events of Ge 1 – 8 are narrated in the same order as similar events in the Atrahasis epic. In fact, the latter features the same basic motif of creation-alieneation-flood as the Biblical account. Clay tablets found in 1974 at the ancient (c. 2500 – 2300 BC) site of Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh) in northern Syria may also contain some intriguing parallels (see chart, page xxviii).

Two other important sets of documents demonstrate the refection of Mesopotamia in the first 38 chapters of Genesis. From the Mari tablets (see chart, page xxix), dating from the patriarchal period, we learn that the names of the patriarchs (including especially Abram, Jacob and Job) were typical of that time. The letters also clearly illustrate the freedom of travel that was possible between various parts of the Amorite world in which the patriarchs lived. The Nuzi tablets (see chart, page xxx), though a few centuries later than the patriarchal period, shed light on patriarchal customs, which tended to survive virtually intact for many centuries. The inheritance right of an adopted household member or slave (see 15:1 – 4), the obligation of a barren wife to furnish her husband with sons through a servant girl (see 16:2 – 4), strictures against expelling such a servant girl and her son (see 21:10 – 11), the authority of oral statements in ancient Near Eastern law, such as the deathbed bequest (see 27:1 – 4, 22 – 23, 33; 49:28 – 33) — these and other legal customs, social contracts and provisions are graphically illustrated in Mesopotamian documents.

As Ge 1 – 38 is Mesopotamian in character and background, so chapters 39 – 50 reflect Egyptian influence — though in not quite so direct a way. Examples of such influence are: Egyptian grape cultivation (40:9 – 11), the riverside scene (ch. 41), Egypt as Canaan’s breadbasket (ch. 42), Canaan as the source of numerous products for Egyptian consumption (ch. 43), Egyptian religious and social customs (the end of chs. 43; 46), Egyptian administrative procedures (ch. 47), Egyptian funerary practices (ch. 50) and several Egyptian words and names used throughout these chapters. The closest specific literary parallel from Egypt is the Tale of Two Brothers, which bears some resemblance to the story of Joseph and Potipher’s wife (ch. 39). Egyptian autobiographical narratives (such as the Story of Sinuhe and the Report of Wenamun) and certain historical legends offer more general literary parallels.

AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITING
Historically, Jews and Christians alike have held that Moses was the author/compiler of the first five books of the Old Testament (see chs. 1–11, 14, 15, 17), known also as the Pentateuch (meaning “five-volumed book”), were referred to in Jewish tradition as the five fingers of the Law (of Moses). The Bible seems to suggest Mosaic authorship of Genesis since Ac 15:1 refers to circumcision as “the custom taught by Moses,” an allusion to Ge 17. If Moses was indeed the author of Genesis, or parts of Genesis, there are a few indications the book was edited at a later date (see Ge 14:14; 36:31; 47:11). The historical period during which Moses lived seems to be fixed with a fair degree of accuracy by 1 Kings. We are told that “the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel” was the same as “the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt” (1Ki 6:1). Since the former was c. 966 BC, the latter — and thus the date of the exodus — was c. 1446 BC (assuming that the 480 in 1Ki 6:1 is to be taken literally; see Introduction to Judges: Background). The 40-year period of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness, which lasted from c. 1446 to c. 1406, would have been the most likely time for Moses to write the bulk of what is today known as the Pentateuch.

During the last three centuries many interpreters have claimed to find in the Pentateuch four underlying sources. The presumed documents, allegedly dating from the tenth to the fifth centuries BC, are called J (for Jahweh/Yahweh, the personal Old Testament name for God), E (for Elohim, a generic name for God), D (for Deuteronomic) and P (for Priestly). Each of these documents is claimed to have its own literary characteristics and its own theology. The Pentateuch is thus depicted as a patchwork of stories, poems and laws. Such a theory seems to require the work of a master editor or redactor who compiled the material into a document that still maintains a great deal of literary uniformity despite its apparent diversity. This view continues to be challenged, however, by ongoing literary research, and the debate is far from settled as to how exactly the Torah came into its final form. The oldest Hebrew copies of Genesis were discovered in the caves of Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

THEOLOGICAL THEME AND MESSAGE
Genesis speaks of beginnings — of the heavens and the earth, of light and darkness, of seas and skies, of land and vegetation, of sun and moon and stars, of sea and air and land animals, of human beings (made in God’s own image, the climax of his creative activity), of marriage and family, of society and civilization, of sin and redemption. The list could go on and on. A key word in Genesis is “account,” which also serves to divide the book into its ten major parts (see Literary Features and Literary Outline) and which includes such concepts as birth, genealogy and history. The book of Genesis is foundational to the understanding of the rest of the Bible. Its message is rich and complex, and listing its main elements gives a succinct outline of the Biblical message as a whole. It is supremely a book that speaks about relationships, highlighting those between God and his creation, between God and humanity, and between human beings. It is thoroughly monothestic, taking for granted that there is only one God worthy of the name and opposing the ideas that there are many gods (polytheism). It clearly teaches that the one true God is sovereign over all that exists (that is, his entire creation), and that he often exercises his unlimited freedom to overturn human customs, traditions and plans. It introduces us to the way in which God initiates and makes covenants with his chosen people, pledging his love and faithfulness to them and calling them to promise theirs to him. It establishes sacrifice as the substitution of life for life (ch. 22). It gives us the first hint of God’s provision for redemption from the forces of evil (compare 3:15 with Ro 16:17 – 20) and contains the oldest and most profound statement concerning the significance of faith (see Ge 15:6 and notes there). More than half of Heb 11 — a New Testament list of the faithful — refers to characters in Genesis.

LITERARY FEATURES
The message of a book is often enhanced by its literary structure and characteristics. Genesis is divided into ten main sections, each identified by the word “account” (see 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 — repeated for emphasis at 36:9 — and 37:2). The first five sections can be grouped together and, along with the introduction to the book as a whole (1:1 — 2:3), can be appropriately called “primeval history” (1:1 — 11:26). This introduction to the main story sketches the period from Adam to Abraham and tells about the ways of God with the human race as a whole. The last five sections constitute a much longer (but equally unified) account and relate the story of God’s dealings with the ancestors of his chosen people Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and their families) — a section often called “patriarchal history” (11:27 — 50:26). This section is in turn composed of three narrative cycles (Abraham-Isaac, 11:27 — 25:11;

The narrative frequently concentrates on the life of a later son in preference to the firstborn: Seth over Cain, Shem over Japheth (but see NIV text note on 10:21), Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over their brothers, and Ephraim over Manasseh. Such emphasis on divinely chosen men and their families is perhaps the most obvious literary and theological characteristic of the book of Genesis as a whole. It strikingly underscores the fact that the people of God are not the product of natural human developments but are the result of God’s sovereign and gracious intrusion in human history. He brings out of the fallen human race a new humanity consecrated to himself, called and destined to be the people of his kingdom and the channel of his blessing to the whole earth.

Numbers with symbolic significance figure prominently in Genesis. The number ten, in addition to being the number of sections into which Genesis is divided, is also the number of names appearing in the genealogies of chapters 5 and 11 (see note on 5:4 – 32). The number seven also occurs frequently. The Hebrew text of 1:1 consists of exactly seven words and that of 1:2 of exactly 14 (twice seven). There are seven days of creation, seven names in the genealogy of chapter 4 (see 4:15, 17 – 18, 24; 5:31), various sevens in the flood story, 70 descendants of Noah’s sons (ch. 10), a sevenfold promise to Abram (12:2 – 3), seven years of abundance and then seven of famine in Egypt (ch. 41), and 70 descendants of Jacob (ch. 46). Other significant numbers, such as 12 and 40, are used with similar frequency. The book of Genesis is basically prose narrative, punctuated here and there by brief poems (the longest is the so-called Blessing of Jacob in 49:2 – 27). Much of the prose has a lyrical quality and uses the full range of figures of speech and other devices that characterize the world’s finest epic literature. Vertical and horizontal parallelism between the two sets of three days in the creation account (see first note on 1:1); the ebb and flow of sin and judgment in chapter 3 (the serpent, woman and man sin successively; God questions them in reverse order; then he judges them in the original order); the powerful monotony of “and then he died” at the end of paragraphs in chapter 5; the climactic hinge effect of the phrase “But God remembered Noah” (8:1) at the midpoint of the flood story; the hourglass structure of the account of the tower of Babel in 11:1 – 9 (narrative in vv. 1 – 2, 8 – 9; discourse in vv. 3 – 4, 6 – 7; v. 5 acting as transition); the macabre pun in 40:19 (see 40:13); the alternation between brief accounts about firstborn sons and lengthy accounts about younger sons — these and numerous other literary devices add interest to the narrative and provide interpretive signals to which the reader should pay close attention. The various literary devices reveal the human skill and care involved in creating such a masterpiece within the Hebrew language and culture of the ancient world. This in no way diminishes the notion of divine inspiration, but rather locates it in specific cultural context. We can only marvel at the mysterious work of the Spirit (see 2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 1:21).

OUTLINES

Literary Outline:

I. Introduction (1:1 — 2:3)
   A. “The account of the heavens and the earth” (2:4 — 4:26)
   B. “The written account of Adam’s family line” (5:1 — 6:8)
   C. “The account of Noah” (6:9 — 9:29)
   D. “The account of Shem, Ham and Japheth” (10:1 – 11:9)
   E. “The account of Shem’s family line” (11:10 – 26)
   F. “The account of Thar’s family line” (11:27 — 25:11)
   G. “The account of the family line of Abraham’s son Ishmael” (25:12 – 18)
   H. “The account of the family line of Abraham’s son Isaac” (25:19 — 35:29)
   I. “The account of the family line of Esau” (36:1 — 37:1)
   J. “The account of Jacob’s family line” (37:2 — 50:26)

II. Body (2:4 — 50:26)
   A. “The account of the family line of Esau” (36:1 — 37:1)
   B. “The written account of Adam’s family line” (5:1 — 6:8)
   C. “The account of Noah” (6:9 — 9:29)
   D. “The account of Shem, Ham and Japheth” (10:1 – 11:9)
   E. “The account of Shem’s family line” (11:10 – 26)
   F. “The account of Thar’s family line” (11:27 — 25:11)
   G. “The account of the family line of Abraham’s son Ishmael” (25:12 – 18)
   H. “The account of the family line of Abraham’s son Isaac” (25:19 — 35:29)
   I. “The account of the family line of Esau” (36:1 — 37:1)
   J. “The account of Jacob’s family line” (37:2 — 50:26)

Thematic Outline:

I. Creation (1:1 — 2:3)
II. Primeval History (2:4 — 11:26)
   A. Adam and Eve in Eden (2:4 — 25)
   B. The Fall and Its Consequences (ch. 3)
   C. Sin’s Progression (4:1 – 16)
   D. The Genealogy of Cain (4:17 – 26)
   E. The Genealogy of Seth (ch. 5)
   F. God’s Response to Human Depravity (6:1 – 8)
   G. The Great Flood (6:9 — 9:29)
      1. Preparing for the flood (6:9 — 7:10)
      2. Judgment and redemption (7:11 — 8:19)
         a. The rising of the waters (7:11 — 24)
         b. The receding of the waters (8:1 — 19)
      3. The flood’s aftermath (8:20 — 9:29)
         a. A new promise (8:20 – 22)
         b. Renewed benediction and new ordinances (9:1 – 7)
         c. A new relationship (9:8 – 17)
         d. A new temptation (9:18 – 23)
      e. A final word (9:24 – 29)
   H. The Spread of the Nations (10:1 — 11:26)
      1. The diffusion of nations (ch. 10)
      2. The confusion of languages (11:1 – 9)
      3. The first Semitic genealogy (11:10 – 26)
III. Patriarchal History (11:27 — 50:26)
   A. The Life of Abraham (11:27 — 25:11)
      1. Abraham’s background (11:27 – 32)
      2. Abraham’s call and response (chs. 12 – 14)
      3. Abraham’s faith and God’s covenant (chs. 15 – 22)
      4. Abraham’s final acts (23:1 — 25:11)
   B. The Descendants of Ishmael (25:12 – 18)
   C. The Life of Jacob (25:19 — 35:29)
      1. Jacob at home (25:19 — 27:46)
      2. Jacob abroad (chs. 28 – 30)
      3. Jacob at home again (chs. 31 – 35)
   D. The Descendants of Esau (36:1 — 37:1)
   E. The Life of Joseph (37:2 — 50:26)
      1. Joseph’s career (37:2 — 41:57)
      2. Jacob’s migration (chs. 42 – 47)
      3. Jacob’s final days (48:1 — 50:14)
      4. Joseph’s final days (50:15 – 26)
1:1 Sacred seven. In Hebrew, there are seven words in the opening sentence, foreshadowing the seven days of creation. Poetically, the entire creation unfolds and is completed in the first sentence. The rest of the chapter reveals how the heavens and the earth came into being. The poetic elements of the text help to communicate what is essentially beyond human understanding, pointing to one sovereign Creator who created a good universe.

Each day of the week has a corresponding day of full consummation, as if what God begins, he later completes. The light of Day 1 is completed on Day 4 with the sun, moon, and stars. The skies and waters of Day 2 are completed on Day 5 with the fish and birds. The dry land and vegetation of Day 3 are completed on Day 6 with the animals first and then human beings, the highest form of life in the Biblical mindset.

1:1 What was before creation? Because Ge 1:1 can also read “When God began to create,” ancient interpreters wondered if the heavens and the earth were the first of God’s handiwork. But where did angels come from or God’s throne or wisdom? Proverbs became an interpretive springboard: “The Lord brought me [wisdom] forth as the first of his works... I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be” (Ps 82:2–23; see note on 1:1). Philo wrote, “Wisdom is older than the creation.” Later, rabbis went even further, insisting the Torah, God’s word and wisdom, came before the cosmos: “God looked into the Torah and created it” (Rabbinic). The text begs the question, “What is God’s true name?”

1:26–27 God and who else? Remarkably, the text switches to plural: “Let us make.” Was the one God consulting with someone as he created humanity (Hebrew adam)? Was this plural usage like the “royal ‘we’” in English? Was God perhaps holding a heavenly court, as in the beginning of Job? The unusual wording sparked a wealth of early Christian interpretation: “The Father commanded with His voice; it was the Son who carried out the work.” From a Jewish point of view, 2 Enoch 30:8 reads: “And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom to create man.”

1:26 The image. In the ancient world, kings were thought to be the image of their god on earth. But in Genesis 1, it is being, or being a reflection of the divine, who is infinite and has infinite worth. This can also be read in light of the Ten Commandments, which forbids the making of any image of God. Tertullian went the furthest in seeking an explanation: “But there was One in whose image He made man, that is to say, Christ’s image.”

1:28 Subdue? The commandment to “be fruitful and increase in number” is given twice (v. 22–23), applying first to animals and then specifically to humanity. At the same time, God instructed human beings to “rule” and “subdue” the earth. It seems to be a mistake to think humanity has a God-given right to do whatever it wants with God’s creation. Might humanity be responsible for ensuring that all living things are able to be fruitful and increase in number? Working with and caring for God’s creation, as a king might care for his subjects, seems to be the meaning behind the verbs “rule” and “subdue.”

2 Adam and Eve

5 Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 6 The Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. 7 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he put the man he had formed. 8 In the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 9 A river ran out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided into four streams. 10 The name of the first is the Pishon, which runs to Havilah, where there is gold. 11 The gold of that land is good, and there is bdellium and the onyx stone. 12 The name of the second river is the Gihon, which runs to the east of Jerusalem; and there the entire land of Egypt is watered, except the land of Egypt that lies to the south of the river.”

3 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

4 This combination for God’s name also appears in Ex 9:3 but is rare in the rest of the Old Testament. Compare “God” (Hebrew elohim) in Ge 1:1.

5 Or land; also in verse 6

6 Or mist

Lord God

YHWH elohim

This for combination of God’s name also appears in Ex 9:3 but is rare in the rest of the Old Testament. Compare “God” (Hebrew elohim) in Ge 1:1.

6 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.
God formed a man* from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

9 A river watered the garden from Eden; there it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” 18 The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and the wild animals.

But for Adam there was no suitable helper who was like him. 21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and when he had fallen asleep, he took one of his ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

2:10 One river, one Eden. There is much mystery regarding Eden, both its location and purpose. Philo understood Eden in metaphorical terms:* “Eden” is a symbolic name for right and divine reason. Only one river flowed from Eden, feeding the ancient rivers that watered the entire Fertile Crescent. The known world at the time flowed from Eden, feeding the ancient rivers that watered the known world.

10 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they had been naked, and they felt ashamed and sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

11 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 12 But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

13 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” 14 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

15 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—the woman you gave me from the tree, and I ate it.” 16 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

17 The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

18 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 19 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” 20 She said, “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 21 For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

22 The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 23 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

24 The serpent then said to the woman, “See, the tree is good for food, and its fruit is pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom.”

11 Alternatively, some see that transgressing the command of God was an evil act! Did Adam and Eve have some moral awareness before the fall? The knowledge of “good and evil” (Hebrew te‘ev) is used later in the Torah to express the realization of moral consciousness in children (see Deut 1:39). Is the story only meant to explain the original transgression? Or does it also describe the universal awakening of moral consciousness?

3:1 A talking serpent! Ancient interpreters felt the need to explain a talking serpent. Josephus claimed: “At that time, all living things spoke the same language.” But this does not explain why a serpent would want to tempt Eve in the first place. Around the first century BC, the serpent began to be identified as Satan. Rev 12:9 combines the serpent, the devil, Satan and the dragon. And Justin Martyr followed suit: “The devil . . . who Moses calls the serpent.” In rabbinic literature on the other hand, the serpent is more metaphoric and can represent the evil inclination of the human heart.

3:2–3 Eat or touch! The woman did not hear God directly. Instead, it was a woman relationship. The narrator interjects an aside, asking the question that he expects the reader to answer, “I was afraid . . . so I hid”? These questions did not go unnoticed by the ancient interpreters.

3:6–7 God is asking a more perennial and timeless question: What are you going to do now? How are you going to handle the reality you have chosen? Are you going to remain hidden in shame or step out into the open to face the truth? These are the questions behind the question that keep the story alive in our time. God begins his relationship with fallen humanity not first with rules and condemnation but with a question. He seeks out those who are hiding among the trees in shame, who have patched together clothing of their own making, who are afraid of God. He walks among the garden seeking to restore relationship. He is not distant, somewhere in heaven, with his arms folded. He is present and seeking: “Where are you?”

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*Philos, Questions and Answers in Genesis, 1:45, quoted in Kugel, Traditions, 127.

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 99:3, quoted in Kugel, Traditions, 128.
4 Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering of fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

5 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 15 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

6 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

7 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

8 Cain said, “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

9 The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

10 Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. 13 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

11 But the Lord said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 15 So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

12 Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. 14 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methuselah, and Methuselah was the father of Lamech.

13 Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 14 Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock.

4:12 – 13 Wandering and trembling. God’s punishment that Cain was to be a restless wanderer comes out of the physical content of the sacrificial offering. Cain was expelled for a reason that highlights the physical nature of sacrifice. He was cursed to be a restless wanderer, and the Lord would punish anyone who killed him seven times over.

4:14 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methuselah, and Methuselah was the father of Lamech.

5:4 – 52 Sacred ten. There are ten generations between Adam and Noah, ten from Noah to Abraham, and ten from Perez to David. Genealogies serve the theological purpose of insisting that history is meaningful, that it’s going somewhere, that generations matter. Little wonder why there are Ten Commandments.
had other sons and daughters. 24 Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. 7 Altogether, he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters.

8 Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. 10 Altogether, he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Altogether, Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. 13 Altogether, he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Altogether, Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died.

15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. 16 Altogether, he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Altogether, Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. 19 Altogether, he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 Altogether, he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and then he died.

WICKEDNESS IN THE WORLD

6 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ‘the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. 7 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortals; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

8 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

9 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 10 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 11 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”

6:9 With God he walked. In the Hebrew, God is mentioned first, changing the word order found in Ge 5:24.

6:11 — 9:17 The Flood: Re-creation. The flood amounts to a “re-creation” of the earth. The story is full of sexual parallels to the story of creation in Ge 1.

Key Parallels
The deep waters (1:2; 7:11)
The Spirit/wind of God (1:2; 8:1)
Dry ground (1:9; 8:13–14)

WORD STUDY • GENESIS 6:9

RIGHTEOUS

tsaddik פֶּטֶדְקָא

This is the first mention of righteousness. The word has legal or justice nuances. In later times, tsaddik was the word used for alms giving, which had a slightly different connotation than the notion of Christian charity (see Ex 23:7; Dt 25:1; Pr 17:15).

WORD STUDY • GENESIS 6:9

BLAMELESS
tammim תַּמְמִים

“Without defect” (Ex 12:5; Lev 1:3; 22:19; see Ps 101:6).

WORD STUDY • GENESIS 6:11

VIOLENCE

chamas חַמָּס

It is human violence that evokes God’s justice. God’s justice rectifies human violence by establishing a legal code for murder at the end of the story (see 9:5–6). Human beings are to take responsibility for punishing murder and violence.

6 Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

7 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

8 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. 9 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 10 So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

11 Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 12 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. 13 Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. 14 Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 15 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 16 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. 17 You are to bring into the ark two of every kind of bird, every kind of animal and every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 18 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

20 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.
7:6 – 24 Waters of baptism. The important role of water in the rituals and practices of temple worship and second temple Judaism led ancient readers to see the waters of Noah in symbolic terms. Peter saw the story as foreshadowing Christ’s baptism: “In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also” (1Pe 3:20 – 21). Philo saw the earth as being “purged of its unmentionable ill deeds . . . its uncleanness washed away in the manner of a sacred purification.” 2 This way of reading the Noah story may be faintly alluded to in the baptism of Jesus, where the Spirit of God descends as a dove as Jesus rises up out of the water (see Mt 3:16).

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. 9 Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days, the waters had gone down, and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 10 The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible. After forty days, Noah opened a window he had made in the ark, and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. 10 The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. 11 Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you every green plant.

21 Or humans, for
covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood
to destroy all life. 20Whenever the rainbow appears in
the clouds, I will see it and I remember the everlasting
covenant between God and all living creatures of every
kind on the earth.”
17So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant
I have established between me and all life on the
earth.”

MAJOR Covenants in the Old Testament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVENANT</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOAHIC</td>
<td>Ge 9:8–17</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with righteous (6:9) Noah (and his descendants and every living thing on earth—all life that is subject to human jurisdiction)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe, the covenant “sign” (9:13,17) being the rainbow in the storm cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABRAMHIC</td>
<td>Ge 15:9–21</td>
<td>Royal (land) Grant</td>
<td>Made with “righteous” (his faith was “credited” to him as righteousness); v. 6 Abram (and his descendants, v. 16)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to fulfill the grant of the land; a self-maledictory oath symbolically enacted it (v. 17; see note there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABRAMHIC</td>
<td>Ge 17</td>
<td>Suzerain-vassal</td>
<td>Made with Abraham as patriarchal head of his household</td>
<td>A conditional divine pledge to be Abraham’s God and the God of his descendants (compare “as for me,” v. 4; “as for you,” v. 9); the condition: total consecration to the Lord as symbolized by circumcision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINAITIC</td>
<td>Ex 19–24</td>
<td>Suzerain-vassal</td>
<td>Made with Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and as the people the Lord had redeemed from bondage to an earthly power</td>
<td>A conditional divine pledge to be Israel’s God (as the protector and the guarantor of Israel’s blessed destiny); the condition: Israel’s total consecration to the Lord as his people (his kingdom) who live by his rule and serve his purposes in history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHINEHAS</td>
<td>Nu 25:10–13</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with the zealous priest Phinehas</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to maintain the family of Phinehas in a “lasting priesthood” (v. 12); implicitly a pledge to Israel to provide it forever with a faithful priesthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVIDIC</td>
<td>2Sa 7:5–16</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with faithful King David after his devotion to God as Israel’s king and the Lord’s anointed vassal, who had come to special expression (v. 2)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel (implicitly a pledge to Israel) to provide the nation forever with a godly king like David and through that dynasty to do what he had done through David—bring Israel into rest in the promised land (1K 4:20–21, 5:3–4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW</td>
<td>Jer 31:31–34</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Promised to rebellious Israel as the people are about to be expelled from the promised land in actualization of the most severe covenant curse (Lev 26:27–39;Dt 28:36–37, 45–48)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to unfaithful Israel to forgive the people’s sins and establish his relationship with his people on a new basis by writing his law “on their hearts” (v. 33)—a covenant of pure grace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAJOR TYPES OF ROYAL COVENANTS/TREATIES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROYAL GRANT (UNCONDITIONAL)</th>
<th>PARITY</th>
<th>SUCZERAIN-VASSAL (CONDITIONAL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A king’s grant (of land or some other benefit) to a royal servant for faithful or exceptional service.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grant was normally perpetual and unconditional, but the servant’s heirs benefited from it only as they continued his father’s loyality and service. (Compare 1Sa 8:14;22:7;27:6; Est 8:1.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant between equals, binding them to mutual friendship or at least to mutual respect for each other’s spheres and interests. Participants called each other “brother.” (Compare Ge 21:27; 26:31; 31:44–54; 1K 5:12; 15:19; 28:32–34; Am 1:9.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant regulating the relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings. The great king claimed absolute right of sovereignty, demanded total loyalty and service (the vassal must “love” his suzerain) and pledged protection of the subject’s realm and dynasty, conditional on the vassal’s faithfulness and loyalty to him. The vassal pledged absolute loyalty to his suzerain—whatever service his suzerain demanded—and exclusive reliance on the suzerain’s protection. Participants called each other “lord” and “servant” or “father” and “son.” (Compare Jos 5:6; Ez 17:13–18; Hos 12:1.)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9:20—25 What did Ham do? Was it fair to curse Ham for seeing his father’s nakedness or for telling his brothers? And why did Noah curse his grandson Canaan? One late rabbinic source blames Canaan: “Canaan entered and saw and went out and told his father. Then Ham went in and discovered his father’s nakedness and did not take to mind the commandment to honor one’s father, but went out and told his brothers in the street as one who mocks his father.” 25 It is also possible that Ham committed a far more offensive act. Some ancient commentators have suggested Ham committed a homosexual act or even castrated his father. 25

10:1–32 Seventy Nations. The table of nations explained to the Israelite people who their neighbors and enemies were. Many of the names are not personal but point to tribes or places. It is not a straightforward family history. In the Biblical mind, the known world revolved around Canaan in a kind of geographic theology. And the number of nations adds up to 70, which is a rhetorical symbol of God’s providence (see Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22).

10:8–12 Nimrod. Rabbinic commentators argued that Nimrod had led the world astray, oppressing the weak in his quest for power. 26 This interpretation helps explain how sin increased in the world and led to God’s judgment of Babel.

The Japhethites

2The sons of Japheth:
Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras.
3The sons of Gomer:
Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.
4The sons of Javan:
Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittites and the Rodanites. (From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

The Hamites

6The sons of Ham:
Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.
7The sons of Cush:
Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteka.
8The sons of Raamah:
Sheba and Dedan.
9Cush was the father” of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.” 20 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar. 21 From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah 22 and Resen,

10 The table of nations (Ge 10:1–32; see also the maps on pages 240–241) explains to the Israelite people who their neighbors and enemies were. Many of the names are not personal but point to tribes or places. It is not a straightforward family history. In the Biblical mind, the known world revolved around Canaan in a kind of geographical theology. And the number of nations adds up to 70, which is a rhetorical symbol of God’s providence (see Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22).

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which is between Nineveh and Calah — which is the great city.

13 Egypt was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathruvites, Kasluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

15 Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn, 16 and of the Hittites, 17 Jebusites, Amorites, Girgasites, 18 Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 19 Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites. Later the Canaanite clans scattered 20 and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Geraz as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrha, Admah and Zeboiam, as far as Lasha.

21 These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

The Semites
22 Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was 23 Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

TABLE OF NATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPETH</th>
<th>PUT</th>
<th>TUBAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PUT</td>
<td>TUBAL</td>
<td>Descendants of Japheth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUT</td>
<td>TUBAL</td>
<td>Descendants of Ham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUT</td>
<td>TUBAL</td>
<td>Descendants of Shem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11:1 One language. Augustine wrote, “For it is written that there was at first one language to all people, and that language is called Hebrew.” 22 The Book of Jubilees suggests that years later God had to teach Abram Hebrew after the languages had been confused (see Jubilees 12:25–26).

11:13 Make a name. The types of human sin have been unfolding in the Torah: Adam, Eve, Cain, Enosh, Ham, Canaan, Nimrod and now a collective desire for immortality. Towers in the Bible usually are associated with human arrogance (see Isa 2:12–17; Ezr 26:4–9). Much scholarship has focused on the architectural and theological parallels between the tower of Babel and Mesopotamian ziggurats (brick structures that were thought to provide a place for the gods to descend). But ancient commentators focused on the state of human sin. The rabbis said about the construction of the tower, “If a man fell down and died, no attention was paid to him, but if one brick fell down, they would sit and weep and say: woe to us, when will another one be hauled up in its place?” 23
The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2 ‘I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and I will curse him who curses you and whoever curses you I will curse; and if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today, then I will put the blessing on you and not the curse, and I will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. 3 ‘I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today, then I will put the blessing on you and not the curse, and I will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. 4 ‘So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy years old when he set out from Ur of the Chaldeans. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. 6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel.

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Shepherding culture was intimately woven into Biblical life from Abel through the birth of Jesus. The promised land, the “land flowing with milk and honey,” was a land where the shepherd and the farmer were in a carefully orchestrated, and sometimes tenuous, cooperative relationship. The cultivated areas of Israel needed to be fertilized with manure, but they could only be grazed after the harvest. Much of the year the shepherd was confined to the vast deserts of Israel.

The Egyptians had a particularly negative view of shepherds, who were clearly of a lower social order than farmers (see Ge 46:34). In spite of this, shepherding culture influenced the Biblical images of the ideal leader, king and Messiah — even that of God.\(^1\)

Abraham was probably a seminomadic herdsman, settling near towns or villages, rather than a purely nomadic one. Most shepherding in the Bible was intimately connected to the healthy economy and survival of the village. Some shepherds raised sheep for fellow villagers as well as tended their own flocks. Shepherds needed to be skilled in raising and protecting sheep and goats (see 1Sa 17:34 – 36), finding water and pasture, milking and cheese-making, shearing sheep for wool (see 1Sa 25:2), gathering flocks in pens for the night and negotiating with other shepherds over territory along the bottom of wadis (Arabic for “canyons”) or on overlooked hillsides was a full-time job for the shepherd as the months of the dry season wore on.

The midbar (Hebrew) was the least harsh desert mentioned in the Bible and is sometimes translated as “wilderness.” It could support herding more easily than other types of deserts (see 1Sa 17:28). Midbar conditions changed from year to year and month to month, with the midbar typically receiving 4 – 14 inches of winter rains in a given year.\(^3\) During a rainy winter, the deserts of the Negev, Judea and Samaria were covered with green vegetation. In periods of drought, northern- and western-facing hillsides received enough moisture from the moist Mediterranean winds for a light covering of vegetation. In search of pasture, shepherds sometimes ventured into the harsher deserts of the Rift Valley or south of the Negev into the Sinai peninsula. Finding seasonal floods formed pools; however, the floods of the desert could also wipe out an entire flock (see Ps 124:1 – 5).

Shepherds often dug cisterns and reservoirs to trap seasonal flood waters that could then be used during the dry months (see 2Ch 26:10). Finding safe and sustaining waters was constantly on the mind of an ancient shepherd.

\(^1\)For example, see Nu 27:17; 1Ki 22:17; Ps 23; 78:52 – 55,70 – 72; 80:1; Isa 40:11; Eze 34; Mic 5.2 – 5; Zec 11:4 – 17; Mt 10:6; 18:12 – 14; Jn 10:1 – 30; Heb 13:20.

\(^2\)Matthews and Benjamin, Social World of Ancient Israel, 57.

\(^3\)Hareuveni, Desert and Shepherd, 49 – 50.
INTRODUCTION

DEUTERONOMY

TITLE

The Hebrew name of the book is ‘eloh haddevarim (“These are the words”) or, more simply, devarim (“words”; see note on 1:1). The word “Deuteronomy” (meaning “repetition of the law”) arose from a mistranslation in the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Latin Vulgate of a phrase in Dt 17:18, which in Hebrew means “copy of this law.” The error is not serious, however, since Deuteronomy is, in a certain sense, a “repetition of the law” (see Structure and Outline).

AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITING

The book itself ascribes most of its content to Moses (see 1:1,5; 31:24). For that reason, the Old Testament elsewhere ascribes the bulk of Deuteronomy and other Pentateuchal legislation to Moses (see, for example, Jos 1:7 – 8; 23:6; 1Ki 2:3; 8:53; 2Ki 14:6; Mal 4:4). The New Testament writers seem to attribute the authorship of Deuteronomy to Moses (see Mt 19:7 – 8; Mk 10:3 – 5; Ac 3:22 – 23; 7:37 – 38; Ro 10:19). It’s also possible that the phrase “law of Moses” was more a shorthand title for the Torah than a definitive description of sole authorship. At the same time, it seems clear that the narrative framework within which the Mosaic material is placed (for example, the preamble [1:1 – 5] and the conclusion [ch. 34]; see also 5:1; 27:1,9,11; 29:1 – 2; 31:17,9 – 10,14 – 25,30; 32:44 – 46,48 – 52; 33:1 – 2) comes from another — and unknown — hand. See Introduction to Genesis: Author and Date of Writing.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Deuteronomy locates Moses and the Israelites in the territory of Moab in the area where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea (see 1:5). As his final act at this important time of transferring leadership to Joshua, Moses delivered his farewell addresses to prepare the people for their entrance into Canaan. In them, Moses emphasized the laws that were especially needed at such a time, and he presented them in a way appropriate to the situation. In contrast to the matter-of-fact narratives of Leviticus and Numbers, here the words of Moses come to us from his heart as this servant of the Lord presses God’s claims on his people Israel.

SPECIAL FUNCTION IN THE BIBLE

The trajectory of the story that unfolds in Genesis – Numbers seems to call for an account of the conquest of Canaan as found in Joshua to bring closure to the movement from promise to fulfillment (see Introduction to Joshua: Title and Theological Theme). But Deuteronomy intervenes as a massive interruption. Here there is very little forward movement. At the end of Numbers, Israel is “on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho” (Nu 36:13); at the end of Deuteronomy, the people are still there (see Dt 34:8), waiting to cross the Jordan (see Jos 1:2). All that has happened is the transition from the ministry of Moses as God’s spokesman and official representative to that of Joshua in his place (see Dt 34:9; Jos 1:1 – 2). But Moses’ final acts as the Lord’s appointed servant for dealing with Israel are so momentous that Deuteronomy’s account of them marks the conclusion to the Pentateuch, while the book of Joshua, which narrates the initial fulfillment of the promises made to the patriarchs and the conclusion to the mission on which Moses had been sent (see Nu 17:15 – 23; Jos 21:43 – 45), serves as the introduction to the Former Prophets.

Deuteronomy creates a pause on the threshold of the promised land. In this pause there is a renewal of the Sinaitic covenant. Moses reminded Israel at length of what the Lord required of them as his people if they were to cross the Jordan, take possession of the promised land and there enjoy the promised “rest” in fellowship with him. It was a word that Israel needed to hear over and over again. The book was particularly important to future generations, especially when the Israelites returned from captivity after failing to remain faithful to the covenant. It is likely that the book of Deuteronomy was the book discovered and read aloud to the people during the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Ne 8). Some scholars have suggested it was during this period that the book of Deuteronomy came into its final form. Upon reading Deuteronomy, Israel was brought ever anew to the threshold of the promised land and its promised “rest” to hear again this final word from God through his servant Moses (see also Ps 95:7b – 22). For this reason, all the history of Israel in Canaan as narrated in the Former Prophets is brought under the judgment of this word.

A view similar to what Moses would have had looking from Mount Nebo into the promised land

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THEOLOGICAL TEACHING AND PURPOSE

The book of Deuteronomy was cast in the form of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty-vassal treaties of the second millennium BC. It contained the Great King’s pledge to be Israel’s suzerain and protector if they would be faithful to him as their covenant Lord and obedient to the covenant stipulations as the vassal people of his kingdom. There would be blessings for such obedience but curses for disobedience (see Chs. 27 – 30). Deuteronomy’s purpose was to prepare the new generation of the Lord’s chosen people to be his kingdom representatives in the land he had unconditionally promised them in the Abrahamic covenant (see Structure and Outline).

The love relationship of the Lord to his people, and that of the people to the Lord as their sovereign God, pervade the whole book. Deuteronomy’s spiritual emphasis and its call to total commitment to the Lord in worship and obedience inspired references to its message throughout the rest of Scripture. Some scholars suggest Deuteronomy is part of a literary whole called the Deuteronomistic History. In particular, the division of the Hebrew Bible called the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) is thoroughly imbued with the style, themes and motifs of Deuteronomy. Among the Latter Prophets, Jeremiah also reflects strong influence from this book.

STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

Deuteronomy’s literary structure supports its historical setting. By its interpretive, repetitious, reminiscent and somewhat irregular style it shows that it is a series of more or less contemporaneous addresses, sometimes describing events in nonchronological order. But it also bears in its structure clear reflections of the suzerain-vassal treaties (see chart, page 16) of the preceding generation of the Lord’s chosen people to be his kingdom representatives in the land he had unconditionally promised them in the Abrahamic covenant. The book of Deuteronomy was cast in the form of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty-vassal treaties.

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Then the Lord said to me, “You have made your way around this hill country long enough; now turn north. Give the people these orders: ‘You are about to pass through the territory of your relatives the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own. You are to pay them in silver for the food you eat and the water you drink.’”

The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

So we went past our relatives the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. We turned from the Arabah road, which comes up from Elath and Ezion Geber, and traveled along the desert road of Moab.

Then the Lord said to me, “Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.”

(The Emites used to live there—a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites. Like the Anakites, they too were considered Rephaimites, but the Moabites called them Emites. Horites used to live in Seir, but the descendants of Esau drove them out. They destroyed the Horites from before them and settled in their place, just as Israel did in the land the Lord gave them as their possession.)

And the Lord said, “Now get up and cross the Zered Valley.” So we crossed the valley.

Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished.
32 Now when the last of these fighting men among the people had died, 33 ‘the Lord said to me, ‘Today you are to pass by the region of Moab at Ar. 34 When you come to the Ammonites, do not harm them or provoke them to war, for I will not give you possession of any land belonging to the Ammonites. I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot.’

35 That too was considered a land of the Rephaisites, who used to live there; but the Ammonites called them Zamzummunites. 36 They were a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites. The Lord destroyed them from before the Ammonites, who drove them out and settled in their place. 37 The Lord had done the same for the descendants of Esau, who lived in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites from before them. They drove them out and have lived in their place to this day. 38 And as for the Avmites who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorites coming out from Caphtor destroyed them and settled in their place.

DEFEAT OF SIHON KING OF HEBSON

39 Set out now and cross the Arnon Gorge. See, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his country. Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle. 40 This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heav-en. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you.

41 From the Desert of Kedemoth I sent messengers to Sihon king of Heshbon offering peace and saying, 42 ‘Let us pass through your country. We will stay on the main road; we will not turn aside to the right or to the left. 43 Sell us food to eat and water to drink for your price in silver. Only let us pass through on foot — 44 as the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir, and the Moabites, who live in Ar, did for us — until we cross the Jordan into the land the Lord our God is giving us.’ 45 But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the Lord your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he had now done.

46 The Lord said to me, ‘See, I have begun to deliver Sihon and his country over to you. Now begin to con quer and possess his land.’

47 When Sihon and all his army came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz, 48 the Lord our God delivered him over to us and we struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army. 49 At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them — men, women and children. We left no survivors. 50 But the livestock and the plunder from the towns we had captured we carried off for ourselves. 51 From Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the gorge, even as far as Gilead, not one town was too strong for us. The Lord our God gave us all of them. 52 But in accordance with the command of the Lord our God, you did not encroach on any of the land of the Ammonites, neither the land along the course of the Jabbok nor that around the towns in the hills.

2:15 Deuteronomy 2:15 | 233

Jair, a descendant of Manasses, took the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maakathites; it was named after him, so that to this day Bashan is called Harvoth Jair. 16 I gave Gilead to Makir. 17 But to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory extending from Gilead down to the Arnon Gorge (the middle of the gorge being the border) and out to the Jabbok River, which is the border of the Ammonites. 18 Its western border was the Jordan in the Arabah, from Kinnereth to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea), below the slopes of Pisgah.

19 I commanded you at that time: ‘The Lord your God has given you this land to take possession of it. But all your able-bodied men, armed for battle, must cross over ahead of the other Israelites. 20 However, your wives, your children and your livestock (I know you have much livestock) may stay in the towns I have given you, 21 until the Lord gives rest to your fellow Israelites as he has to you, and they too have taken over the land that the Lord your God is giving them across the Jordan. After that, each of you may go back to the possession I have given you.’

MOSES FORBIDDEN TO CROSS THE JORDAN

22 At that time I commanded Joshua: ‘You have seen with your own eyes all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings. The Lord will do the same to all the kings over whom you are going. Do not be afraid of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you.’

23 At that time I pleaded with the Lord: ‘Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? 24 Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan — that fine hill country and Lebanon. 25 But because of you the Lord was angry with me and would not listen to me. “That is enough,” the Lord said, “Do not speak to me anymore about this matter. 26 Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. 27 But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land that you will see.’” 28 So we stayed in the valley near Beth Peor.

OBEEDIENCE COMMANDED

4 Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. 2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

3 You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor. The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, 4 but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today.

5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” 7 What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

8 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

9 Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me, that I may tell them the decrees and laws I am setting before you today, 10 that they may learn them and observe all the decrees and laws, that they may live by them and not turn aside from them to the worship of other gods.” 11 You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. 12 Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.

3:27 Or called the settlements of Jair.

3:27 Go up to the top of Pisgah. This could be another name for Mount Nebo, but most believe this mountain is in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan — that fine hill country and Lebanon.

19 That is, Crete

40 Do not forget. This is an important refrain throughout the book. Forgetfulness was a major stumbling stone for the Israelites: they often forgot the lessons that they should have learned to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” 14 You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. 15 Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.

4:12 You heard the sound of words. The fact that the Israelites heard God speaking is alluded to in Exodus (see Ex 19:16; 20:1–19). But what exactly did they hear?
Deuteronomy makes it clear that the ten words, or Ten Commandments, were for the ears of the entire nation. This strengthens the idea that the Ten Commandments formed the core of the covenant made between God and the people of Israel. 

Deuteronomy 4:13

5:6 – 21 The Ten Commandments repeated. These verses are repeated for emphasis and to reinforce the importance of the commandments. The repetition highlights the continued relevance of the commandments and serves as a reminder of their enduring significance.

5:8 – 17 Historical echoes. These verses reflect on the historical context of the commandments, reminding the Israelites of their origins and the significance of the commandments in their history.

5:9 – 10 The scholar’s understanding. These verses discuss the interpretation of the commandments, emphasizing the need for a careful and thoughtful approach to understanding them.

5:11 – 14 Nature of the covenant. These verses explore the nature of the covenant, highlighting its significance and the responsibility it imposes on the Israelites.

5:15 Moses' blessing. This verse highlights the importance of the commandments in guiding the Israelites, emphasizing their role as a lamp to guide their path.

5:16 – 18 God’s blessing. These verses reflect on the blessings that come from obeying the commandments, emphasizing the positive outcomes for the Israelites.

5:19 – 21 Moses and Aaron. These verses mention the leadership roles of Moses and Aaron, emphasizing their importance in guiding the Israelites and administering the commandments.
4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

6 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,

7 so that you, your children and your children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live and prosper in the land you will possess.

Love the Lord your God

6:7 When you lie down and when you get up, the Israelites were commanded to “talk about” these words, and this was understood by the rabbis to mean the words should be recited. There was a lively rabbinic debate about the precise way the Shema (see note on Dt 11:13–21) was to be recited. “The School of Shammai say: In the evening all should recite when they recite [the Shema], but in the morning they should stand up … But the School of Hillel say: They may recite it every one in his own way … R. Tarfon said: I was once on a journey and I recited to recite [the Shema] in accordance with the words of Shammai, and so put myself in jeopardy by reason of robbers. They said to him: Thou hadst deserved aught that befell thee in that thou didst transgress the words of the School of Hillel.”

6:8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and on your foreheads. The precise meaning of the Shema, however, is somewhat ambiguous. Hebrew does not have the present tense “is,” so it must be supplied by the reader. The phrase can faithfully be translated “the Lord alone” or “the Lord is one.” In either case, the Shema expressed sole devotion to God and was perhaps another expression of monotheism (see note on Dt 4:35).

For the observant Jew, the Shema was the central teaching of the entire Torah. The rabbis taught that reciting the Shema was not a hollow ritual but a matter of the heart. “If a man was reading [the verses of the Shema] in the Law and the time came to recite the Shema, if he directed his heart he has fulfilled his obligation; otherwise he has not fulfilled his obligation.”

The Shema was one of the most important passages in the entire Torah and functioned as a kind of creed in Judaism. Observant Jews repeated the declaration twice daily (see note on Dt 6:7). It was a statement of loyalty to God alone. Rabbi Akiva, who was martyred in Caesarea by the Romans during the second Jewish revolt of AD 135, was killed while reciting the Shema.

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For the observant Jew, the Shema was the central teaching of the entire Torah. Yet because it was a commandment to “love,” it was unlike most of the other commandments. To “love” God and neighbor reveals the depth of the Biblical law (see notes on Lv 19:18; Mt 22:34–40; Mk 12:28). A law of love reads more like an invitation than a rule. The command to love God is an issue of the heart rather than one of external conformity.

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things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant — then when you eat and are satisfied, 13 be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

14Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. 15Do not follow other gods, the gods of peoples the Lord your God drives out before you. 16But the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. 17Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. 18The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. 19But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 20Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until the survivors who hide from you have perished. 21Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. 22The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. 23But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 24He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. 25The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. 26Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Regard it as vile and utterly detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.

DO NOT FORGET THE LORD

8Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on 5That is, wooden symbols of the goddess Asherah; here and elsewhere in Deuteronomy.

7:7 – 12 The chosen people. Israel’s chosen status had nothing to do with merit but had to do with the covenantal relationship that began with Abraham (see Ge 18:19). Dt 4:37–38). Chosen status came with great responsibility in the Biblical mind. The Israelites were to remain faithful in worship and in keeping the law. They were also the first to be punished for failure to reflect the covenantal relationship (see Dt 8:5; Am 3:2). The purpose of Israel’s chosen status was to reflect God in the world (see 2Ki 19:19).

7:7 The feasts of all peoples. God using the unlikeliest of people to spread his message about the Lord. For example, Abraham, Moses, Rahab and David were all unexpected heroes or leaders. Jesus echoed this reversal when he said, “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (Mt 20:16).

following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. 12This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles4 and burn their idols in the fire. 13For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the earth to be his treasured possession.

14The 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. 15But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors 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. 16Know therefore that the Lord your God is; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. 17But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

18Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.

19If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

20He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land — your grain, new wine and olive oil — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you. 21You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor will any of your livestock be without young. 22The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you know in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you. 23You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.

24You may say to yourselves, “These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?” 25But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. 26You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. 27Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. 28Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. 29The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. 30But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 31He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. 32The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. 33Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Regard it as vile and utterly detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.

DO NOT FORGET THE LORD
The extended family was the most important social structure in the Biblical world. Three generations might live together in the family compound or house. Overall authority over the family resided with the oldest male, typically the grandfather. Authority over how to run daily affairs and household management resided with the wife of the oldest male, typically the grandmother. The children and grandchildren were responsible for the daily routines and chores and for fulfilling their duties in the family business.

**Children**

“Be fruitful and increase in number” (Ge 1:28).

Children were highly valued in the Biblical world and were considered a fulfillment of God’s first command to humanity. Large families were considered a blessing from God (see Ps 127:3). The stories in the Bible of God intervening in the lives of barren women were particularly powerful to the ancient mind. Babies were weaned about the age of three or four, and there may have been a kind of family celebration when the child reached this milestone (see Ge 21:8).
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