

Knowing the Old Testament I

Part 2

How does the Pentateuch fit in with the broader purpose/narrative of the Bible?

“The unifying center of all God’s activity is to glorify himself by establishing a universal rule of righteous sovereignty over his whole creation and a peculiar relationship of righteous fellowship with his elect.” (Mark Snoeberger)

I. Creation

a. Genesis 1:26–28

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

“In this passage the vice-regency of mankind over the whole of God’s creation is established. This then anticipates the progressive unfolding of the theocratic kingdom.” (Robert McCabe)

II. What Went Wrong

a. Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:16-17)

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

- i. The command demonstrates that man’s dominion was not ultimate—he was under God’s rule
- ii. The tree represents moral autonomy. It is the judgment of good and evil.

b. The Temptation (Gen 3:1-7)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” ⁴ The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! ⁵ For God knows that in the

day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

- i. Twisting God’s command
 - 1. God emphasized the freedom, while the serpent exaggerates the limitation
 - 2. Eve’s answer corrects but also exaggerates
- ii. Denying God’s word
 - 1. God is lying to you. He does not want what is best for you
- iii. Usurping God’s authority
 - 1. Eve takes the role of seeing what is good
 - 2. Adam, rather than leading Eve away from temptation, follows her into it
- iv. Losing innocence
 - 1. Eyes were opened (Satan does provide some truth)
 - 2. Realized they were naked—they now had shame and guilt
 - 3. Attempted to cover it themselves, but there is no going back
- c. The Results of the Fall
 - i. Immediate
 - 1. Broken relationships
 - a. With God
 - b. With each other
 - 2. God’s judgment
 - “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’ To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’ To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”’ Gen 3:15-19
 - a. Earth is cursed

- b. Labor is draining
- c. Childbearing is painful
- d. Marital challenges
 - i. Cf. 4:7; woman will now want to control the man, and perhaps the man will now domineer rather than lovingly lead
- e. Serpent
 - i. Multi-generational enmity
 - ii. Ultimate defeat of the serpent through the offspring
 - 1. Heel crushing hurts, but head crushing is fatal

Commented [BE1]: The very thing that would bring salvation would come with suffering

“In this passage we find that the vice-regency of Adam was sullied by the Fall. Though it would continue, it would not continue as initially proposed in the pleasant terms of the dominion mandate. Instead, we find a promise that God’s kingdom program would be advanced in a way heretofore unanticipated by man.” (Robert McCabe)

ii. Ongoing

1. Judgment on Adam’s family—Abel. Gen 4
2. Seth’s line seems promising, but always ends in death. Gen 5
3. Judgment on the world because of man’s wickedness Gen 6-9
 - a. Yet man’s offspring survives by God’s grace
 - b. God promises never again to destroy mankind like this in a flood
 - c. God provides for human government
 - d. Yet even Noah’s sons begin to go astray
4. Judgment on man for trying to make his own name Gen 10-11
5. Glimmer of hope—Shem (name) to the one that God will give a name

III. God’s Unconditional Agreement

While the author has covered thousands of years in the first 11 chapters, he zooms in beginning in chapter 12 to cover about 25 years in 13 chapters. You cannot understand the Bible without understanding Abraham and God’s covenant with him.

“It is widely agreed that Genesis 12:1–3 is programmatic for the whole of the remainder of the Pentateuch. In it we find three promises to Abram that in turn serve as theological motifs that develop over the rest of the Pentateuch” (Robert McCabe):

A. Abrahamic Covenant

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’... ⁷The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’” Genesis 12:1–3, 7

- a. **Posterity**—this is implied in great nation in v. 2; see also v. 7.
 - i. Most mentioned
 - ii. Continued emphasis on offspring
 - iii. Seems to be both collective/plural and singular/individual (Issac, not Ishmael, Jacob, not Esau)
 - iv. Will include kings
 1. This promise first occurs in Genesis 17:6, where Abraham is told “kings shall come from you.” Later, God states concerning Sarah, “kings of peoples shall come from her.” Unlike some of the other promises, at the time of Moses’ writing the fulfillment of this promise may have still appeared to be a remote possibility. However, the rest of the Old Testament indicates this promise did come to pass. This promise may be linked to the prophecy concerning a ruler coming from Judah in Genesis 49:10.
- b. **Land**—God directs Abram to a land in v. 1, and in v. 7 God identifies the land and promises it to Abram’s offspring.
 - i. Second most mentioned
 - ii. 12:7 made explicit
 - iii. Boundaries given in 15:8
 - iv. Given permanently in 13:15
- c. **Blessing**—vv. 2, 3. “This term carries with it the idea of *enrichment*. God would enrich Abram with the result that the world would be enriched. The concept is very broad. In light of Genesis 17 and following revelation, especially the book of Exodus, it obviously includes temporal blessings. But in view of Paul’s use of Genesis 12:3 in Galatians 3 it would seem that this “enrichment” extends beyond the temporal enrichment of local tribes and people groups.” (Robert McCabe)
 - i. This is the reversal of the curse!

B. Narrative

- a. Seed is threatened when Pharaoh takes Sarah as his wife (12)
- b. Land is threatened by dispute between Abraham and Lot, but Lot does not choose the land of Canaan (13)
- c. God makes a covenant with Abraham Gen 15
 - i. Abraham thinks the seed might be his servant, Eliezer, but God says it will be Abraham’s son

Commented [BE2]: a.The value of faith is its object
i.Abraham believed God (though at times battled with unbelief)
b.God makes his own agreements
i.Not someone whose job is to forgive
ii.Not unattached Deism
iii.Not a god to barter with (Acts 17)
1.What can you offer God?
c.God wants a people
i.I will be your God, and you will be my people

- ii. Abraham believes God's promise and is counted righteous. Because he is counted righteous he is now able to enter this covenant relationship
- iii. The account of the ratification of the covenant, found in 15:7-21, has been the subject of voluminous writing. Verse 7 shifts the focus from the promise of the seed to the promise of the land. Again Abraham responds with a question. This time the issue is an assurance that the promise will come true. God enters into a covenant with Abraham in order to give him the assurance that he requests. The method of ratification appears to be an ancient one that Abraham already knew and understood. Although God simply tells him to take the animals, he proceeds to cut them in half and to lay them opposite each other. The two parties making the covenant are expected to walk between the pieces of the animal. This solemn ceremony constituted a pledge by those who passed through to keep their part of the covenant. The sacrificed animals signified what should happen to them if they broke the covenant. The idea that walking through the animals was a pledge to death seems to be confirmed by Jeremiah 34:17-20. After preparing for this ceremony, Abraham falls into a deep sleep. God speaks to Abraham and introduces new information concerning his seed and the land. The descendants of Abraham will spend four hundred years in another land before coming back to the land of Canaan. The reason for this sojourn is that the Amorite's sin has not yet reached its pinnacle that would bring God's judgment of removal from the land.
- iv. After once again promising both seed and land to Abraham, God appears as "a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" (15:17) and passes through the pieces alone. This indicates that He was binding Himself to the covenant, so that if it were possible for Him to fail or to die, He would be torn in pieces. Verse 18 makes it clear that God's passing through the animals constitutes the ratification of the covenant. The specific emphasis of this covenant between God and Abraham is the land, including a description of the boundaries of the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (15:18).
- d. Abraham thinks he can help God by sleeping with Hagar, but God assures him his promised heir will come from Sarah. (16)
- e. God confirms and ratifies the covenant, giving the sign of circumcision (17)
- f. Sarah doubts, but God affirms again (18)
- g. Threatened again when Abimelech takes Sarah (20)
- h. God gives a son (21)

Commented [BE3]: Emphasizes the truth that Abimelech did not sleep with her

- i. God tests Abraham (22)
 - i. There were religions in this time that included child sacrifice
 - ii. God was seeing if Abraham loved him more than his son
 - iii. God is showing that no sacrifice, even that of one's own child, could be enough. However, God is the one who gives what is necessary for the sacrifice
 - iv. God solemnly promises to fulfill his covenant
- IV. The Exodus
- a. The growth of God's people
 - i. Isaac
 - 1. Need for offspring sparks search for wife
 - 2. Follows in his father's steps in lying about his wife to protect himself
 - ii. Jacob
 - 1. Jacob favored by God, though he is a deceiver (Gen 25:23)
 - a. Tricks his brother into birthright; lies to his father to get a blessing; gets cheated by his father-in-law so that he marries two sisters; favors his 11th son
 - 2. Schemer whose name is changed to Israel ("prevails with God")
 - iii. Joseph
 - 1. Has dreams of dominion
 - 2. Continual cycle of falling and rising
 - a. Sold into slavery, but becomes second in Potiphar's house
 - b. Falsely accused and thrown into prison, but rises to servant in the prison
 - c. Forgotten by cupbearer, but then made second in command in Egypt
 - 3. Recognizes God's hand in all that happened (Gen 45:5; 50:19-20)
 - iv. Judah
 - 1. Negative beginnings
 - a. Wants to sell Joseph into slavery rather than kill him (37:26)
 - b. Ignores the need to raise up offspring for his family, but through immoral choices ends up raising up offspring through his daughter-in-law (38)
 - 2. But begins to show signs of promise
 - a. Offers himself as pledge for Benjamin (43:8-9)
 - b. Willing to stay as a slave in order to protect Benjamin and his father (44:33)
 - 3. Jacob blesses Judah with the promise of a king, to whom the nations will give obedience (Gen 49:10)

b. The Exodus of God's People

i. Slavery in Egypt

1. God remembers his people Exodus 2:23-25

ii. Moses

1. Seems like a good candidate to help his people, but ends up messing things up by killing an Egyptian and flees for 40 years
2. God reveals Himself to Moses as I am who I am (Ex 3:14)
 - a. God will reveal Himself through His works
 - b. There is no one else who can determine what God is like

iii. Plagues

1. Pharaoh stands against God, perhaps more blatantly than anyone before Him (Ex 5:2; 7:13)
2. But God knew and intended for this to happen to reveal Himself (Ex 3:19-20; 7:3-5)

Commented [BE4]: Real threat to the offspring—Pharaoh is actively wiping them out
Yet the means of destruction (the Nile) is also the means of salvation for Moses

V. The Theme of the Pentateuch

“The Pentateuch is written to reveal the opening stages of God’s kingdom program wherein he establishes and begins to fulfill his promises, to mankind generally and to the patriarchs specifically, by establishing a covenant people, Israel, as “a microcosm of the kingdom of God and the vehicle through which the messianic king would come to reign over all creation” (Merrill, “Theology,” p. 30).” (Robert McCabe)

Commented [BE5]: a.Implications
i.God uses sinful people to accomplish His purposes
ii.God will ensure that His promises will come to pass
iii.God sometimes works in ways that are hard to discern
iv.God is supreme over all other gods
v.God offers redemption so that we can be His slaves

VI. Dispensations (the following notes are from Mark Snoeberger)

a. Innocence (non-mediated accountability)

In the dispensation of innocence, focus is entirely upon non-redemptive concerns. The whole creation is designed to bring glory directly and immediately to God, and man was given a vice-regency over creation for God’s glory (note the civic, regal language in Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:5–6): man was, in Erich Sauer’s words, the “king of the earth.” This rule was in a husband-led and wife-subordinate, but complementary, family configuration. Successfully implemented, it would have resulted in perpetual and perfect fellowship with God on the earth.

Commented [MS6]: It couldn’t be otherwise. Man didn’t need to be redeemed. The only other alternative is that this era existed as a foil for what would follow—what we will be redeemed to.

Commented [MAS7]: A responsibility which, if fulfilled in all righteousness, would have resulted in perfect fellowship.

Commented [MS8]: Adam was crowned and ruled over all the works of God’s hands.

Commented [MS9]: Note the earth-centered focus of this dispensation.

Commented [MS10]: Note the language here. He did not curse us in order to restore us (a capricious idea), but to improve something that was already there—fellowship. Redemption is the means to a greater end.

b. Conscience

In the inscrutable wisdom and sovereignty of God he introduced sin into his universe so that he could have richer fellowship with his image-bearers and receive greater glory. Nothing new is implemented in this dispensation relative to civic structures (except that the curse made it increasingly difficult for man to execute his civic responsibilities). Led by his conscience, each person was to fulfill the dominion mandate as God’s vice-regent on earth and thus glorify him.

Commented [MAS11]: In some way God receives greater glory by the introduction of sin and God’s salvation of man from it. In no way can this be regarded as an unwanted interpolation into God’s perfect plan (Prov 16:4, Acts 2:23, 4:27–28, Lam 3:37–38). Sin was a part of God’s good pleasure (Eph 1:11; Isa 46:10–11).

Peace with God, however, eluded mankind, so provision for reconciliation and fellowship was instituted in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. By faith in this promise a person could be “commended as a righteous man” (Heb 11:4), and thus fall under God’s benevolent favor.

c. Human Government

In a stark reversal of the pattern in the previous dispensation, the dispensation of human government offers nothing new by way of redemptive truth. An enormous change, however, occurred in the civic realm. In Genesis 9:1–7 God introduces the idea of organized civil government (rather than individual and family structures) as the mediating form of God’s vice-regency on earth. *Collective* man was now the agent of God’s civic rule. Together, and armed with the God-given responsibility and blessing of capital punishment, mankind would be more effective in preventing man from destroying himself through a wanton disregard for human life (Gen 9:5–6).

d. Promise

The dispensation of promise is perhaps the most difficult dispensation to fit into this schema. As noted above, the world was not to be governed by Abram—national distinctions were to continue (Gen 24:4; 26:34–35; 27:46; 28:1–4). However, the whole world, severally governed in their respective civic arrangements, were to honor Abram as the special conduit of redemptive blessing. No provision is made at this time for proselyte inclusion in Abram’s growing family: one could remain a faithful believer apart from any civic allegiance to Abram. Nonetheless, it became clear at this time that God had set apart Abram’s family as a microcosm in which the civic and spiritual realms would eventually be merged.

Commented [MS12]: The enormity of this change is stark when one ponders the fact that for at least 2000 years, there were no civic structures at all. Now there are.

Commented [MS13]: Of all the things that God could have given mankind as an effective tool of self-rule, this was selected as the best possible gift.

Commented [MS14]: Like I said earlier, if there is any “dispensation” that I would consider dropping from the standard list of seven, it would be this one. There are no new structures, per se, only further revelation and greater anticipation of what God was going to do next. I could warm to the idea of the patriarchal era as a transition between dispensations.