

## Additional Notes on the Pentateuch

These are some additional notes and questions which you might find helpful for further reflection or for discussion with your mentor.

**Genesis:** A very helpful commentary to Genesis is published in the Word Biblical Commentary series by Gordon Wenham. It has two volumes, chapters 1-15 and 16-50. It is a wealth of very helpful information on the book of Genesis.

### 1. Early History

- a. Pay attention to the often repeated phrase “this is the account of...”,  
Gen 2:4: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created”  
Gen 5:1: “This is the written account of Adam’s line.”  
Gen 6:9: “This is the account of Noah” etc.
  - i. How do these phrases structure the book and help with your outlining?
  - ii. Is 2:4 the conclusion of the first creation story or the beginning of the second?
- b. What do you think is the relationship between the two creation stories.
  - i. Note the differences in structure, emphasis and perspective.
  - ii. Pay close attention to how tightly chapters 2, 3, 4 are connected, similar in theme and tone especially compared to chapter 1-2:3.
- c. Do a bit of a study on what 1:6 means when it says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” How does this shape not only humanity’s status, but calling?
- d. Think about the relationship between the creation story (separating waters) and the flood story (allowing waters to once again merge).
- e. What is the story of the Tower of Babel really about?
  - i. How does it relate to God’s command in 1:28?
  - ii. What New Testament story is it often connected to and why?
- f. Reflect on the overall character of the work of God in chapters 1-11:26.
  - i. We very much see a condensed, global perspective on how God works and the status of humanity in the first 11 chapters. Suddenly the perspective changes when God chooses Abram with a rather shocking promise at the beginning of chapter 12.
  - ii. What is the overall picture of the status and nature of humanity portrayed in Genesis chapters 1-11:26? Does it ring true with your experience today?

### 2. Abraham

- a. What is the central conflict, struggle governing the story of Abraham?
  - i. How does that conflict reach its climax in chapter 22?
  - ii. How does the story of the search of a wife for Isaac fit into that conflict. (As you read the story, do you think Abraham is dead or alive when Isaac and Rebekah wed?)

- b. What is the role of “the blessing” in the story of Abraham?
- c. How does the story of Abraham in Genesis measure up to the celebration of Abraham in Hebrews 11? What does that teach?

### 3. Jacob

- a. What is the central conflict of the story of Jacob?
  - i. How does the blessing fuel the family conflict?
  - ii. What did Esau’s actions say with respect to how he viewed “the blessing”?
- b. Jacob’s story unfolds as a series of conflicts. These conflicts will be with different individuals: his twin and his uncle, but as we see in 32:22-32, Jacob’s conflict is of much greater importance.
  - i. Check out John Calvin’s treatment of Jacob’s fight with God at [http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm\\_vol02/htm/x.htm](http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol02/htm/x.htm)
- c. Pay attention to the flow of Jacob’s story and its’ wrap up with his return to Bethel.
- d. Why is chapter 34 in there. What is that foreshadowing?
- e. At the end of Jacob’s section, where stands “the blessing”?

### 4. Joseph and Judah

- a. Despite the blessing, how has Jacob’s sinfulness born bitter fruit?
- b. What is the story of Judah and Tamar really about? What was Judah’s role in Joseph being sold into slavery?
- c. What are the main threats to the progress of “the blessing”?
- d. During the scene about purchasing grain, how does the spot light really shift to Judah and who he will be?
- e. How do we see the blessing initially fulfilled through Joseph?
- f. How do we see the seeds of a greater fulfillment of the blessing seen through Judah?
- g. Do you see how Genesis sets up Exodus?

### 5. Summary Comments

- a. Meditate long and hard on how God works in the book of Genesis. He is patient, determined, often hidden, not frustrated or thwarted by the sinfulness of his servants and enemies but making steady progress throughout.
- b. Follow carefully the themes of promise and fulfilment. We see glimpses of fulfillment along the way but most occasions of fulfillment seem partial and a bit incomplete.
- c. See and be able to cast the vision of the fact that Genesis is our story, the story of our spiritual ancestors whose pattern, sometimes in faithfulness, often in faithlessness we follow.

**Exodus:** I've used Brevard Child's commentary on the book of Exodus in Westminster Press' Old Testament Library. I've found it somewhat beneficial as was Moshe Greenberg's Understanding Exodus which only treats the first part of the book. Both are "critical" works in that their primary orientation is towards the academic community, not necessarily the preacher working under the 7 day calendar to craft that sermon for their people.

### 1. Captivity

- a. Despite the shocking change of situation for the children of Israel we can see God's hidden hand at work in the multiplication of the people (See Gen 1:28 and Gen 12:1-3). God's blessing and promise is still very much at work, despite the captivity.
- b. Note that the Egyptian goal is not merely murder, but genocide in destroying patriarchal lines by only killing boy babies.
- c. Notice again the hidden hand of God behind the scenes with Moses' birth, salvation, upbringing and even his failures (forced into the desert).
- d. Note 2:24, 25 where God hears their groaning and remembers his covenant with Abraham, etc.
- e. Do a bit of research in commentaries, etc. on the name of God. What do you think it means?

### 2. Conflict

- a. God told Moses right from the beginning what was about to happen with Pharaoh. Why did God want to have such a public fight with Pharaoh? How might the conflict with Pharaoh be seen as evangelism?
- b. Pay attention to the types of plagues set upon the Egyptians. Notice how Egypt has been a civilization continually respected, emulated and copied (note the Washington Memorial). What does public conflict with Pharaoh mean in terms of God's reputation?
- c. How did God target the religious beliefs of Egypt specifically? What point was he trying to make?
- d. Notice the change of the nature of the text when you hit the portion dealing with instructions for the Passover. Very quickly we note that this isn't simply story telling to pass the time before TV and radio came along. How does this passage reflect back on the story telling narrative in terms of its purpose for its intended audience and ourselves?
- e. The Red Sea showdown represents a climax and a transition. Notice how the conflict is brought to a fever pitch and how the participants are illuminated so that no one will be left with any confusion who this conflict is between. Also note how the Israelites respond when they are trapped by the army and under pressure, foreshadowing of things to come.

### 3. Journey to the Mountain

- a. God has the Israelites out of Egypt, now it is time to get Egypt out of the Israelites, and you will observe that this is much tougher work. Remember that when you are leading a church.
- b. Right away the children of Israel are to learn that they must trust what God tells them more than what they assume is right on their own. He stretches them, punishes them, entices them to trust him.
- c. By way of Jethro Moses needs to do some learning of his own. Now having law and order

judged by a host of judges, the need for a standard, the law is most acute. Everyone can't simply go to Moses to find out what to do, the law will guide them into righteousness.

4. The giving of the law
  - a. Pay close attention to the interplay between God's revelation on the mountain, the people's reaction, and Moses as intermediary.
  - b. Skim through the laws for now but don't forget the brief transitions that are interspersed throughout, especially 23:20 to the end of chapter 24.
  - c. Why the golden calf? What were the people looking for? This impulse will arise again and again not only in the desert, but after they are settled in the promised land.
  
5. Exodus summary
  - a. How does God's actions in Exodus seek to undo the fall? How does this harken all the way back to the garden where God and his vice-regent over his creation mingled and spoke together face to face?
  - b. What is the purpose of the law in terms of what you have learned so far? What is it hoping to attain?
  - c. What is the status of the promise given to Abraham? How much is so far fulfilled and what new seeds are now being planted here?
  - d. Notice once again how it is in the context of seeming failure (slavery, wandering in the desert) that God is making progress on his agenda.

**Numbers:** Gordon Wenham has a commentary on the book of Numbers in the Tyndale OT Commentary series that I have used. This series tends towards brevity and is geared more towards the layman who doesn't know Hebrew or a busy pastor who needs to read something fast. There is also an academic thesis called The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New by Dennis Olson which is technical but can be helpful.

1. God's School in the desert
  - a. In the book of Numbers things will really get serious in terms of God's agenda to mold Israel in to a nation of priests for the whole world, and we will see the limits towards which God is willing to go to pursue this goal.
  - b. In this book everyone will fall apart at one time or another. It is full of rebellion, failure and lessons learned. What in your own words was God really trying to accomplish out there in the desert?
  
2. The death of the old, and the birth of the new
  - a. Read chapter 14 at least twice, it is the key to the book of Numbers.
  - b. Notice that the rebellions and punishment continue. That old generation is their own worst enemy and will do to themselves what Pharaoh was unable to do.
  - c. Notice even Moses himself (per the prophesy in chapter 14) will not enter the land. What lessons can you draw from this?
  - d. Notice how the whole story of Balaam and Balak give us a much needed word of hope that God has not abandoned his promises made to Abraham. Yes, things look grim, but

don't for a minute imagine that God has been slowed or stopped by his rebellious people or the desert.

- e. Note the second census and the proclamation in 26:63-65.
- f. Notice how the remaining chapters begin setting everything up towards the fulfillment of taking the land. A new day has dawned and things are about to happen.

**Deuteronomy:** Peter Craigie has a helpful commentary on the book of Deuteronomy put out by Eerdmans publishers in their "New International Commentary on the Old Testament". These commentaries try to strike a balance of having some technical stuff in the footnotes but still being accessible for the non-Hebrew reader.

1. Moses Swan Song
  - a. We might anticipate storming in the land of Canaan at the end of the book of Numbers, but not so fast. Just like a final review at the end of a semester, Moses is about to give the final review at the end of 40 years of the LORD's school of the desert.
  - b. Remember that the generation Moses addresses is NOT the group that left Egypt, but rather their children. Note that often the language is communal, "God delivered US from Egypt". This new generation is a new generation, but the mighty acts of God done for their parents were also in a sense done for them, and they were (as we are) witnesses of those acts and told to remember and observe.
  - c. Pay attention to how Moses will now reflect upon what they have learned in their (communal sense again) sojourn and will draw important lessons learned from it.
  - d. When we take a look at the law we will see that the laws reflected here in Deuteronomy are often updated to reflect a different period (that of a people settled in a land, not just sojourning in the desert). The book of Deuteronomy in that sense was continually being updated to stay current to the needs of Israel long after they were in the land. Again, this is supposed to lead us into this trans-historical reality where God speaking to and living with his people wasn't simply some "glory days" from long ago, but a present, living reality for all of us today, complete with joys and demands.
2. The final transition: Notice the book ends with Moses death, and Joshua succeeding him.