

TORAH THE LAW OF MOSES



The first five books of the Bible are known as the “Torah” or “the Law of Moses” or the “Pentateuch.” “Torah” means “law” or “instruction.” But these books are not merely a collection of legal codes. They are a fascinating collection of stories, lists, sermons, laws, and songs. Altogether they account for the basic religious traditions of the people of Israel.

Thus the Pentateuch is the most important part of the Hebrew Bible. These books trace the historical roots of the Jewish people back to the slaves whom Moses rescued from Egypt. They were the great-great-grand-children of the ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Leah and Rachel. They, in turn, were chosen to be God’s elect people in the world.

LITERARY SOURCES

There is little doubt that the books of Moses were in fact not written by a single author at a single time. For centuries different traditions were collected and edited by Hebrew writers, and several different sources were woven together to form the books now in the Bible. Biblical scholars have tried to sort out the different strands. Although they do not agree on the details, they generally agree that they can recognize at least these four sources.

- **“J”** stands for the Jahwist Source, because it usually refers to God by his name “Yahweh” (or Jehovah). It was written in the 9th or 10th century BCE in the southern Kingdom of Judah. The J source pictures Yahweh in quite realistic terms as the one who acts in human history in order to save his people. During the time when the nation was holding its own among its neighboring states, the J source accented the theme “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”

- **“E”** refers to the Elohist Strand, because it refers to God with the general Hebrew term “Elohim.” This source pictures a more distant God in the heavens, the powerful deity who demands that his people behave themselves. The E source was fixed around 750 BCE in the northern Kingdom of Israel. At a time when the nation was closely allied with Phoenicia and in danger of accommodating its religion to the worship of Baal, the E source stressed “the fear of God.”

- **“D”** is the Deuteronomic Law, which originated before 600 BCE in Judah. This source spells out that Yahweh must be worshiped correctly at his shrine in Jerusalem. And it insists that his people must be grateful, obedient, and faithful. After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, D’s call to “repent” was helpful in addressing the issues of the guilt and renewal among the Exiles.

- **“P”** signifies the Priestly Writing, which was assembled around 500 BCE during and after the Jews’ humiliating exile in Babylonia. This is the source of the overly formal and schematized arrangement of religious regulations. P’s theme “be fruitful and multiply” was appropriate for those who had returned to the national homeland. As they rebuilt their society they needed encouragement to reform their worship and reestablish their presence.

POETRY AND PROSE

The Pentateuch contains dozens of different types of literary forms. For example, there are *POETIC FORMS* such as secular **songs**, **hymns** for use in worship, **blessings and curses**, ancient tribal **sayings**, a few prophetic **oracles**, and the like.

There are also numerous *PROSE FORMS*. These include the **legal codes**, both the apodictic or “thou shalt not” type and the newer casuistic or courtroom style which goes “if so-and-so does such-and-such then this-and-that shall happen.”

LISTS are abundant; they include genealogical tables, census tabulations, and records of cities and territories. Several *SERMONS* are included also.

But mostly there are all kinds of *NARRATIVES* or stories: **myths** which tell about the activities of the gods, or of God; **legends** which tell how different traditions originated; and **sagas** which rehearse the stories about the nation's heroes.

ORDERING LIFE AND HISTORY

All the different literary forms and traditions were preserved through the centuries by the Israelites in their religious life, especially through their cultic worship forms, in order to understand their history and order their society. The Torah became the touchstone around which the Jewish community was to be centered.

At the center of these traditions is the divine initiative which promised posterity, a covenant relationship, and a land to the descendants of the Patriarchs. For a nation on the border between Exile and Restoration, the promise of God stood behind them and the Promised Land before them.

Modern readers may not appreciate the complex regulations and rules in these books, but we can identify with the stories which probe the depths of the human situation. Running throughout these accounts is the conviction that the Lord God will remain faithful to the promises he made to his people through our ancestors. Such an accent on the unconditional promise of God can continue to inform the outlook of contemporary men and women like ourselves

A NATION'S CONSTITUTION

The Pentateuch became the founding document upon which the Jewish people built their state and shaped their national identity.

Are any of these legal precedents evident in the Constitution of the United States or in the American judicial codes?

GENESIS

WHERE IT ALL BEGINS



Some of the material in Genesis may go back to the time of Moses or even to the Patriarchs. Nevertheless, the book in its present form was not completed until after the Jewish people returned from the Exile, that is, after 450 BCE. It was compiled largely from the J, E, and P sources. Furthermore, many of its themes and stories have close parallels in the literature of the ancient Canaanites, Mesopotamians, and Egyptians.

A NATION'S TRADITIONS

The many traditions enshrined in Genesis cluster around two ideas: God's good purpose in creating the universe, and the redemptive role Israel should play in restoring the nations which have fallen away from God. Thus the promises of God are intended not only for the chosen people, but are also for the entire world. The separate traditions all contribute to these larger themes.

The Creation account (1:1-2:3) affirms, in nearly poetic lines, the goodness of the universe and human-kind's privileged place in it.

The Fall from Paradise (2:4-4:26) accounts for the origin of evil in the world.

The Flood myth (6:5-9:29) pictures the destruction of wickedness and a new beginning for the world.

The Tower of Babel legend (11:1-9) closes the primeval history and introduces the story of the Hebrew people.

The Abraham saga (11:27-25:11) pictures the founding patriarch of the Israelite nation as a man who responded to the covenant promises of God with a mixture of doubt and faith.

The Jacob saga (25:19-35:29) pictures the father of the twelve tribes of Israel in realistic human terms, as a clever man who did not always respond positively to the covenant of God.

The Joseph epic (37:1-50:26), which tells how the Israelites came to live in Egypt, pictures him as an ideal patriarch whose trust and obedience to God seldom wavered.

The genealogies, which connect the various segments of the narrative, serve to legitimize the religious history and traditions of the people.

ORIENTATION IN MYTHIC PROPORTIONS

Modern men and women tend to discount the factuality of the quaint stories which stand at the beginning of the biblical narrative. But properly understood the mythical nature of these stories still has the capacity to orient us to our world in a helpful way.

If we understand myths as the stories which shape our understanding of who we are and where we fit into the world, then the Genesis myths affirm that people like us are part of the good order of creation, that evil is the result of humanity's pretentiousness, and that men and women can still rely on the promises of God to integrate human society in a wholesome interdependence.

LITERARY TERMS

Myth, legend, saga, epic
—these are technical
literary terms.

Do you think they should
be used to describe
passages in the biblical
record?

The Beginnings: The Creation of the World (1:1-2:3)

- A. *The Generations of Heaven and Earth*
 - 1. *Adam and Eve in Paradise (2:4-25)*
 - 2. *Trouble in the Garden (3:1-24)*
 - 3. *Cain and Abel (4:1-26)*
 - B. *The Generations of Adam (5:1-6:8)*
 - C. *The Generations of Noah*
 - [*Introduction: Violence in the Earth (6:5-8)*]
 - 1. *God's Decision to Send a Flood (6:9-7:10)*
 - 2. *Noah's Family in the Ark (7:11-8:14)*
 - 3. *God's Decision to Renew the Earth (8:15-9:19)*
 - Conclusion: Noah's Drunkenness (9:20-28)*
 - D. *The Generations of the Sons of Noah (10:1-11:9)*
 - 1. *The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)*
 - E. *The Generations of Shem (11:10-26)*
 - F. *The Generations of Terah*
 - 1. *Abram and Sarai Settle in Canaan (11:27-13:18)*
 - 2. *Abram, Five Kings, and Melchizedek (14:1-24)*
 - 3. *Abram and Hagar's Son Ishmael (15:1-16:16)*
 - 4. *Abraham and Sarah's Son Isaac (17:1-22:24)*
 - 5. *Sarah's and Abraham's Deaths; Isaac's Wife (23:1-25:11)*
 - G. *The Generations of Ishmael (25:12-18)*
 - H. *The Generations of Isaac*
 - 1. *Isaac's Sons; Settlement in Beersheeba (25:19-26:33)*
 - 2. *Jacob's Blessing and Flight to Haran (26:34-28:22)*
 - 3. *Jacob and Laban; Leah and Rachel (29:1-30:43)*
 - 4. *Jacob's Return to Succoth (31:1-33:20)*
 - 5. *The Rape of Dinah; Stories of Jacob (34:1-35:29)*
 - I. *The Generations of Esau (36:1-43)*
 - J. *The Generations of Jacob's Family*
 - 1. *The Boyhood of Joseph (37:1-36)*
 - 2. *Judah and Tamar (38:1-30)*
 - 3. *Joseph's Rise to Power in Egypt (39:1-41:57)*
 - 4. *Joseph's Brothers Rescued from Famine (42:1-45:28)*
 - 5. *Israel's Family Moved to Egypt (46:1-47:27)*
 - 6. *The Death of Jacob (47:28-50:26)*
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**CREATION versus
EVOLUTION**

The opening chapters of the Bible picture the creation of the world and the universe by God's almighty word.

Scientists generally use the theory of evolution to account for the origins of the universe and the development of life.

Are these two world views inevitably opposed to each other?

Can they be harmonized? Should they be?

ABUSE OF WOMEN

These ancient records reflect life in patriarchal times, when women's secondary place in society was often determined by their relationship to the men in their lives.

Genesis includes stories of women who were capable and strong, as well as tales of some who were used and abused.

Do these narratives reflect the way women are treated in modern societies?

How should we address the pain of those who suffer domestic abuse, or those who must cope with sexual harassment?

EXODUS

THE GREAT ESCAPE



LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Exodus tells the story of the liberation of an enslaved people. That story has become a model for depressed peoples today, especially in the developing “third-world” countries of Central and South America.

If the Israelites symbolize repressed peoples today, whom do Pharaoh and the Egyptians represent?”

How do these powerful images enable disenfranchised people and landless peasants in their struggle for a better life?

Is it right to use biblical stories for promoting political and social agendas? Or must our religion be content to deal with “spiritual” matters?

The book of Exodus, composed sometime after 450 BCE, contains historical, legal, prophetic and cultic materials taken primarily from the J, E, and P sources. Many of these materials were shaped and preserved through repetition at the Israelites’ religious festivals.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

The book of Exodus recounts the basic experiences of the Hebrew people which led to their formation as a confederation of tribes united in their worship of Yahweh: their deliverance from Egypt around 1280 BCE, the establishment of a covenant with Yahweh, and the beginnings of their cultic institutions.

The liberation stories connected with Moses had served to account for the establishment of the confederacy of nomadic peasant tribes which replaced the Canaanite city-states in the 12th century BCE. This theological history became especially important to the Jewish people again at the time after the Exile when they were trying to reestablish their national and religious institutions.

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- A. *The Deliverance of Israel from Egypt*
 - 1. *The Preparation of Moses (1:1-6:1)*
 - 2. *The Plagues on the Egyptians (6:2-11:10)*
 - 3. *The Passover and the Exodus (12:1-15:21)*
 - 4. *Events on the Journey to Sinai (15:22-17:16)*
 - 5. *The Meeting with Jethro (18:1-27)*
 - B. *The Covenant at Mount Sinai*
 - 1. *The Theophany at Sinai and the Decalogue (19:1-20:20)*
 - 2. *The Book of the Covenant (20:21-24:11)*
 - C. *Instructions for Establishing the Cult*
 - 1. *Moses on the Mountain (24:12-18)*
 - 2. *Instructions for the Tabernacle (25:1-30:10)*
 - 3. *Further Instructions for the Tabernacle (30:11-31:17)*
 - D. *The Break and Renewal of the Covenant*
 - 1. *The Golden Calf Incident (32:1-35)*
 - 2. *Yahweh’s Presence with the People (33:1-32)*
 - 3. *The Renewal of the Covenant (34:1-35)*
 - E. *The Construction of the Tabernacle*
 - 1. *The Free-Will Offering (35:1-36:7)*
 - 2. *The Construction of the Tabernacle (36:8-38:31)*
 - 3. *The Making of the Priests’ Garments (39:1-43)*
 - 4. *The Dedication of the Tabernacle (40:1-38)*
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FORMATIVE TRADITIONS

Several core concepts and traditions in Exodus were crucial in influencing the development of later Jewish religious beliefs.

The divine name Yahweh assumed crucial importance as the identity of the god who rescued the Israelites and formed them into a united people. Whether the name actually meant “I am who I am” or “I am with you” or “I will be and do what I will” or some other nuance, it signaled the uniqueness of Yahweh who fought for and acted in history to save his people. Thus Yahweh stood in contrast to the settled agricultural and fertility gods and goddesses who controlled the cyclical processes of nature.

The exodus event, the escape from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea, became paradigmatic for Israel's self-understanding as a chosen and rescued people. It was a constant reminder not only of their special standing as an elect nation but also of their utter dependence on Yahweh, the God who had rescued them.

The covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel may have been patterned on the treaty forms used by lords and vassals in ancient Canaan, which included elements such as these:

- preamble and lordly title,
- historical prologue,
- stipulations of the vassal's obligations,
- provisions for reading,
- lists of witnesses,
- curses and blessings,
- oaths of obedience,
- ceremonial ratification, and
- sanctions against rebels.

The legal codes were an integral part of the covenant. They were to be viewed not as prerequisites for entering the covenant but as the result and condition for living out the covenant Yahweh had made with his people. The mixture of instructions both for correct worship and for life in the community formed a unified whole and were designed to promote the common good.

A VISION OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

The legends surrounding the birth of the Israelite nation may seem somewhat removed or academic for most modern readers who do not enjoy a Jewish heritage. Even members of Christian communities are not accustomed to thinking of the Exodus event as part of their formative tradition.

Yet men and women today may still react to the pattern of divine mercy and forgiveness which is shared in a worshiping community. Faithful living, informed by a carefully crafted code of laws, is still needed as a response to the experience of salvation.

Furthermore, especially for people living in closed and restricted societies, the stories of liberation from bondage strike a special response. The God who calls people to freedom still inspires men and women to overthrow oppression and strive for equality, justice and peace.

THE TEN (?) COMMANDMENTS

Over a dozen imperatives or commands are listed in Exodus 20:

- Have no other gods
- Do not make idols
- Do not bow down to them
- Do not misuse the Lord's name
- Remember the Sabbath
- Do not work on that day
- Honor your parents
 - Do not murder
- Do not commit adultery
 - Do not steal
 - Do not bear false witness
- Do not covet another's house
- Do not covet another's spouse, etc.

How does your religious tradition number these commandments?

How easy would it be to obey these laws?

Are they still relevant for us in today's world?



MEDICAL CARE

Many of the ancient Levitical regulations deal with matters that now would be considered medical issues.

What priorities should modern medical science establish?

How effective are today's systems for delivering medical care?

Does the Affordable Care Act help us reach our goal of providing medical services to all our citizen?

Are doctors, nurses, and other medical providers properly compensated?

Do people need to take more responsibility for their personal health?

LEVITICUS

LAWS YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE

Leviticus was composed sometime after 450 BCE, largely as a response to the destruction of the Israelite kingdoms. The laws of the people were collected in order to preserve the traditions of their past as well as to provide a foundation for rebuilding their life as a reconstituted nation after their return from the Exile in Babylon.

The several sections of ritual regulations, which give order both to the cult and to the community, are intermixed with a few narratives which illustrate how the laws originated and what happens when they are disobeyed. All the material comes from the P source, which naturally exalts the role of the priests.

A. *Laws Regulating Sacrifices*

1. *Burnt, Cereal, and Peace Offerings (1:1-3:17)*
2. *Sin and Guilt Offerings (4:1-6:7)*
3. *Priestly procedures for sacrifices (6:8-7:38)*

B. *The Initiation of Priestly Sacrifices*

1. *The Ordination of Aaron and his sons (8:1-36; Ex 29)*
2. *The first sacrifices (9:1-24)*
3. *The first sacrificial aberrations (10:1-20)*

C. *Laws Regulating Uncleaness*

1. *Animals for food (11:1-46)*
2. *Childbirth (12:1-8)*
3. *Skin diseases (13:1-59, 14:1-32, 14:33-57)*
4. *Genital discharges (15:1-33)*

D. *The Rituals of Atonement through Blood*

1. *Yom Kippur: the Priests' Day of Atonement (16:1-34)*
2. *Prohibitions against eating blood (17:1-16)*

E. *Laws Regulating "Holiness"*

1. *Sexual relationships in the family (18:1-30)*
2. *Broader relationships in society (19:1-37)*
3. *Punishments for infractions (20:1-27)*
4. *Priestly taboos and sacrificial regulations (21:1-22:33) 24:1-9*
5. *Calendar of appointed feasts; lamp oil and show bread (23:1-44, /*
6. *A case of blasphemy (24:10-23)*
7. *Sabbatical and Jubilee Years: owning land and people (25:1-6:2)*
8. *Concluding exhortations (26:3-46)*

Appendix: Commutation of vows and tithes (27:1-34)

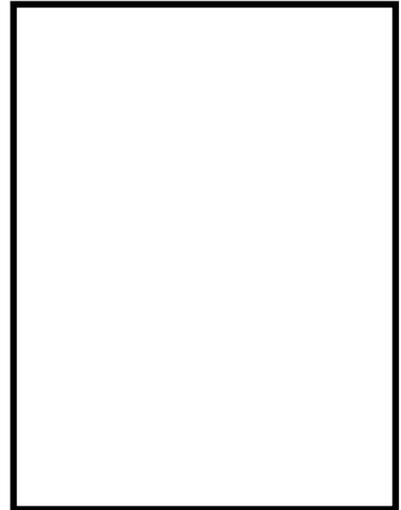
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HOLINESS

All these laws, which were purportedly given through Moses at Mount Sinai, make up a "priest's manual" which details the authority of the descendants of Aaron to regulate the cultic purity of the people of Israel. No rationalizations, such as didactic technique or better health or ethical principles, are given to justify these laws. They come directly from the will of God and are intended to serve as perpetual statutes.

Both the placement of Leviticus within the canon and its internal summaries (such as 18:1-5, 20:22-26, 22: 31-33, 26:3-45) stress the proper motivation for keeping these regulations. Because Yahweh had separated the Israelites as his people at the Exodus and made a covenant with them, they were to avoid forfeiting that holiness by becoming contaminated with uncleanness.

HOLINESS TODAY

For men and women today “cleanliness” is primarily a matter of personal hygiene, but for ancient Israelites it was a matter of ritual defilement, which could exclude them from their place in the worshiping community. The Levitical regulations can still help us assess our attitudes, customs and practices which define who is “in” or “out” of our social circles.



NUMBERS

THE END OF THE TRIP



TAXES

Numbers details the tithes and offerings the people had to pay for the upkeep of their state. Today our taxes serve much the same purpose.

Are our modern tax systems fair and equitable?

Should everyone pay taxes at the same rate?

Or should wealthier people pay at a higher rate than poorer citizens?

Numbers was composed sometime after 450 BCE, but it includes many older traditions. It contains a mixture of legal materials, primarily from the P source, and narratives, many from the J and E sources, which are not always juxtaposed clearly and logically.

JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

In the Pentateuchal narrative the book of Numbers recounts the stories of the Israelites from their encampment at Mount Sinai until the point when they were ready to enter the Promised Land. In particular, it tells why the entrance into Canaan was delayed by a 40-year period of wanderings in the wilderness.

Its purpose was not only to account for the origin of later legal and cultic traditions, but also to demonstrate that Israelite society was grounded in history. That history showed how Yahweh kept them as his people in spite of their repeated apostasies. Such a reminder was especially valuable when the Jewish people had returned from their exile in Babylon and were ready to reestablish their presence in their homeland.

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- A. *Organization: at Mount Sinai*
 - 1. *The Census, Order of the Camp, and Duties of the Levites /* (1:1-4:49)
 - 2. *Laws: Lepers, Restitution, Adulteresses, Nazarite Vows, Aaron's Blessing* (5:1-6:27)
 - 3. *Offerings for the Tabernacle, the Lampstands, Separation of the Levites, the Passover* (7:1-9:14)
 - B. *Journeys: in the Wilderness of Paran*
 - 1. *The beginnings of the journey* (9:15-10:36)
 - 2. *Moses established as prophetic leader* (11:1-12:16)
 - 3. *Failure to enter the Land of Canaan* (13:1-14:45)
 - 4. *Laws: Offerings, the Sabbath, Tassels* (15:1-41)
 - 5. *Aaron established as priestly leader* (16:1-17:11)
 - 6. *Laws: Levies, Tithes, Cleanliness* (17:12-19:22)
 - 7. *Events during the 40-years wandering* (20:1-21:35)
 - C. *Arrival: on the Plain of Moab*
 - 1. *Balaam's Blessings* (22:1-24:25)
 - 2. *Apostasy at Shittim* (25:1-18)
 - 3. *Events near the end of the journey* (26:1-27:23)
 - 4. *Laws: Calendar of Offerings, Women's Vows* (28:1-30:16)
 - 5. *Victory in Transjordan* (31:1-32:42)
 - D. *Appendices*
 - 1. *Summary of Journeys* (33:1-49)
 - 2. *Laws: Conquest, Boundaries, Allotments, Levitical Cities, Cities of Refuge* (33:50-35:34)
 - 3. *Women's Inheritances* (36:1-13)
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SPECIAL AND UNCONTAMINATED

These accounts of Israel's origins are marked by tensions between “description” and “prescription.” That is, it is not entirely clear whether they describe the way things actually were for the early Israelite community or whether they prescribe how things ought to be for the later Jewish people. These chapters explore how a nation becomes “separated to God” as it prepares for its journey.

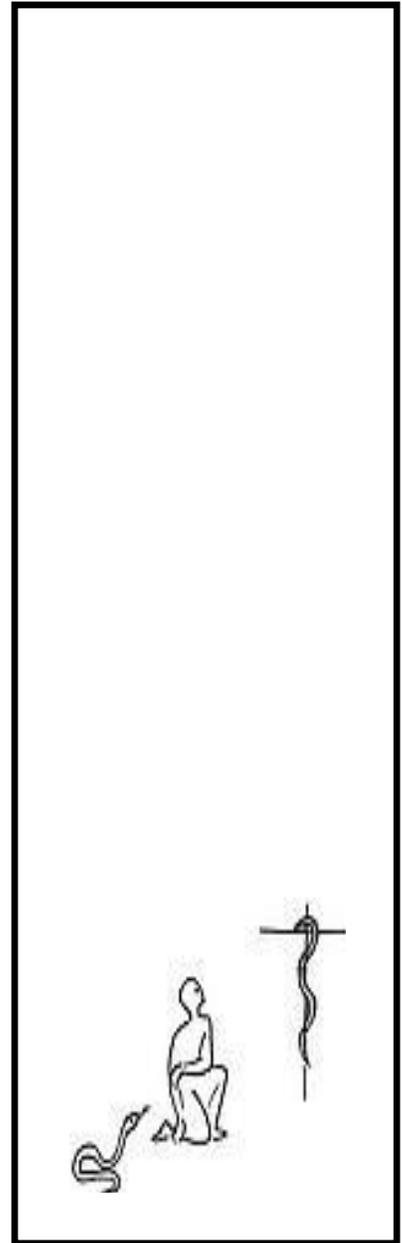
Numbers also shows the destructive effects of contamination when God's special people succumb to that which is unholy. Both the laws of impurities and the laws of holiness spell out in detail the distinctions between what is holy and clean *versus* what is common and unclean. Although holiness cannot be attained—it is a gift from God—it can be forfeited.

The idea that the people are “separated to God” not only determines their relationship to God and the integrity of their worship, it also affects the way they relate to each other and to other people. Both ethics and cult are grounded in God's overriding demand, which is intended to be valid for every subsequent age.

PUSHING TOWARD PERFECTION

Throughout history men and women of a religious bent have had a peculiar fascination with the idea of finding perfection by withdrawing from the world or by refusing to compromise with imperfect standards. While modern readers may well conclude that the restrictive laws in Numbers do not remain valid into the 21st century, we can still debate whether it is better to remain separate and unaffected by evil or to become involved and interact with a less than perfect world.

The wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness between their former slavery in Egypt and their ultimate residence in the Promised Land have often served as a paradigm for the pilgrimage of the people of God during our earthly careers on our way to ultimate salvation. We, too, can be challenged to decide whether such a journeying, pilgrimage concept is still a helpful model for our own age.



DEUTERONOMY THREE PLUS SERMONS



In Deuteronomy traditional historical recollections, apodictic and casuistic laws based largely on the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23), and treaty-covenant materials have been reshaped in a distinctive way: in the form of sermons, specifically the farewell speeches of Moses.

Here Moses bequeaths to the people of Israel the legal codes which are to govern their life as they make the transition from a nomadic existence as herdsmen to a settled life as farmers in the Promised Land.

A HOMOGENEOUS HOMILETICAL STYLE

The rhetorical style of the sermons is marked by long complex sentences built up of stereotyped phrases. This gives the book a unified feeling in keeping with its unified message, which permeates the entire document:

**Yahweh is to be worshiped at only one sanctuary,
to the exclusion of other gods and shrines,
and his people are to be united in the land
and obey his laws.**

WELL-HONED TRADITIONS

Deuteronomy's diverse materials have been shaped by a long process of making treaties and reciting laws, perhaps at periodic "renewal of the covenant" ceremonies in Israel's cult. This process was affected by Levitical priests, critical prophets, and wise court officials, all of whom adapted Israel's traditions to apply them to times of political and religious reform.

The pre-Deuteronomic materials probably originated at the shrines of Shechem or Bethel in northern Israel, where priests preserved the nucleus of the Mosaic tradition as well as other "E" source traditions. These may have been modified under the influence of prophets like Amos and Hosea.

After the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE, these materials were transported to Jerusalem, where they served as the basis of King Hezekiah's reform around 715; there the book was rediscovered in the temple in connection with King Josiah's reform in 621 BCE.

Later the materials were expanded and used as the theological introduction to the Deuteronomic interpretation of Israel's history in Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. During the Exile "JE" and "P" fragments were added, and the book was relocated as the conclusion to the Pentateuch.

EDUCATION

Deuteronomy emphasizes the need for parents to teach the laws of the people to their own children. It recognizes that education is a necessary component of national life.

How important are our schools and colleges today? What makes for effective education?

Are our public, private and parochial schools serving the needs of all our children?

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- A. *Moses' First Sermon: Introduction to the Deuteronomic History*
1. *Introduction (1:1-5)*
 2. *Recital of Holy History (1:6-3:29)*
 3. *Exhortations to Obey God's Laws (4:1-40)*
 4. *Insertion: Cities of Refuge (4:41-43)*

- B. *Moses' Second Sermon: The Deuteronomic Laws*
 - 1. *Introduction (4:44-49)*
 - 2. *Exhortations to Obey God's Laws (5:1-11:32)*
 - 3. *Laws (12:1-26:16)*
 - 4. *Blessings and Curses (26:17-19, 28:1-68)*
 - 5. *Insertion: A Covenant Renewal Ceremony (27:1-26)*
- C. *Moses' Third Sermon: The Deuteronomic Covenant (29:1-30:20)*
- D. *Appendices: Moses' Last Days*
 - 1. *Joshua's Appointment and the Writing of the Law (31:1-29)*
 - 2. *The Song of Moses (31:30-32:47)*
 - 3. *The Blessing of Moses (32:48-33:29)*
 - 4. *The Death of Moses (34:1-12)*

OLD LAWS FOR NEW TIMES

Deuteronomy is part of the process by which ancient traditions and laws were adapted to a new age. Ostensibly Moses was reshaping the legal code of a nomadic people for settled life in an agrarian culture. In reality the Deuteronomist was reinterpreting the history of the people of Israel according to a pattern of grace-and-punishment.

This pattern helped them understand why their nation had been defeated—namely, because their ancestors had disobeyed the laws of Yahweh and thus failed to keep the covenant he had made with them—and this also gave them hope for the future.

The demand to be true to their God in every area of life not only determined how and where they would worship, but it also affected the ethical quality of their lives with their neighbors in their community.

Modern readers can still explore those twin issues: How far can we bend traditional legal and moral codes in order to accommodate and apply to new situations? And how does the shape of our national and religious institutions affect our moral and ethical relationships? Discussions around questions such as these may help us design the pattern of the social fabric which holds our culture together.

LEGALITIES

Every society is based on some sort of legal code.

Where are our laws enshrined?

In our federal and state constitutions?

In our state and local regulations?

In the accumulation of our judicial decisions?

In our cultural traditions and mores?