

The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Have you ever wondered what the scriptures teach about the origin of the universe? What about the patriarchs, who were they, and why are they important? What relevance does the account of the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt have for Christian growth? What can the seemingly tedious ceremonial laws of Leviticus as well as the long list of names in Numbers teach us about godly living? How should a believer read and reflect on the five books of Moses collectively called the Pentateuch (or Torah)? How do these five books “fit in” to the over-arching story of scripture? These questions and more will be explored as we seek to understand this section of God’s Word.

The objective of this class is: to gain an overview of the first five books of the Bible (otherwise known as the Pentateuch), and understand the relation between these foundational books to Christ and Christian living.

Prosperity, Problems & A Prophet Deuteronomy 13-34: This week we conclude our journey through the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch by looking at the last section of the book of Deuteronomy. The text before us can be divided into three main headings: The blessing of covenantal obedience; the curse of disobedience, and the coming of a Prophet. The section referenced above includes an extensive reminder of the commandments and law of God, so that the new generation of the exodus community will be without excuse as they move forward in possession of the land that the Lord God of their fathers promised to give them. This restating of the commandments is critical, for the complete possession of the land depends upon the faithfulness of the people of God. Deuteronomy 19:8-9a states, *“And if the Lord your God enlarges your territory as he has sworn to your fathers, and gives you all the land that he promised to give to your fathers, provided you are careful to keep all this commandments, which I command you today...”* This passage is a reminder to the covenant community that possession of the land is contingent upon their faithfulness to the covenant. He then instructs Israel to commemorate the blessing of the covenant by assigning them into one of two groups: one group for blessing, and the other group for cursing the covenant community upon entering the land of promise. These blessings and curses were naturally seen as consequences to the response of God’s covenant people towards the terms of the covenant outlined by God through Moses. Understanding what they entail sheds light on the rest of Holy Scripture.

Part One: Prosperity – The entrance into the land of promise was to be commemorated by the erection of a pillar upon which the laws of God are to be written (27:1-8). A series of curses are pronounced thereafter which entail both worship of foreign gods as well as unacceptable human interaction. The first verse of chapter twenty-eight states, *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessing shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.”* He then proceeds to enumerate the extent of the blessings: *“...blessed in the city, and in the field (societal blessing), blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle (fertility among man and beast), blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl (technology) blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out...the Lord will cause the enemies who rise against you to be defeated. These blessings, which can be divided into the four major categories: 1) societal blessing; 2) fertility; 3) technology, and 4) defense, are all ways in which God will make the covenant people a blessing to the people of all the earth. Verses 9-10 state, “The Lord will establish you as a people holy unto himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways. And all*

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the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and shall be afraid of you.” It is by means of covenant faithfulness that the people of God will become the blessing promised in God’s covenant to Abraham.

The other side of the covenantal faithfulness is the scenario in which Israel is not faithful and bring upon themselves (By virtue of their relationship with the Holy), the curses associated with apostasy. Verse 20 reads, *“The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds because you have forsaken me.”* Poverty, famine, exile are all among the many curses that will be brought on the community if the people do not worship the God of their redemption.

Part Two: Problems – It is an undeniable fact that more curses are mentioned in our text than blessings; why (one might ask), is this the case? We take for granted that the various areas of life specifically addressed by the curses pronounced against covenant breakers are covenantally neutral. However, this is not the case. Rather, all the areas of life specifically cursed for disobedience are in their own right blessings. For instance the ability to inhabit the land, the ability to toil the soil and reap a harvest, physical health – all these are things that do not require an additional blessing, they are already blessed pursuant to the act of creation. What is blessed under obedience to the covenant is the ability of the area in question to function at its God-intended capacity. For example, health is part of the state in which we (mankind) were created. Due to the effects of the fall, humanity has been plagued with sickness and death. Even though “good health” is not a blessing mentioned specifically in chapter 28, it is something cursed. Verse 22 states, *“The Lord shall strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heart, and with drought and with blight and with mildew...”* Thus, human sickness as well as agricultural sickness are mentioned as elements of the curse.

The conclusion that can be indirectly reached from the account of the blessings and curses of the covenant, is that both are all-pervasive. There is no aspect of an unbeliever’s life that is not touched by sin, and there is no aspect of a believer’s life that is not likewise touched by mercy. The blessings and curses of the covenant remind God’s people that they belong to him.

Part Three: Renewal of the Covenant – The re-telling of God’s faithfulness to his people and of God’s covenantal commandments is a logical next step for those who have witnessed first-hand his faithfulness and mercy. In 29:1 we read, *“These are the words of the covenant that the Lord command Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he made with them at Horeb.”* The scope of the covenant is continued in 29:10-14, *“You are standing today all of you before the Lord your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel...so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.”* The renewal of the covenant that took place here on the doorsteps of the land of promise is comprehensive in scope. All present (including the descendants of the mixed multitude) as well as their children for future generations are witnessing the renewal of the covenant. Since any covenant is usually accompanied with the shedding of blood, this covenant renewal was no exception (note: it was not a new covenant, but a covenant renewal initiated by the mediator of the covenant (Moses) between God and his people). The shedding of blood, however, does not occur until later in the book of Joshua (Joshua 5:1-8) with a mass circumcision.

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Part Four: The Coming Prophet – Moses made an interesting statement in 29:4, he states, “*But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear...*” There seems to be a conscious awareness on the part of the prophet that God was continuing the redemptive historical work he had begun shortly after the fall (Genesis 3:15), but that work was not complete with the giving of the Torah. The work of God remained unfinished, and simply pointed to future redemptive acts. It is here in the book of Deuteronomy that Moses makes mention of the selection of a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) even though the Mosaic Law establishes a pure Theocracy in which God is king. Moses also makes a Messianic reference to the coming prophet, much like himself.

Chapter eighteen verses 15-19 speaks of the coming of a prophet, “*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen – just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not here again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’*” The apostle Peter made reference to this passage in his sermon in Acts 3:22-26. It is clear from Peter’s use of the passage that the one to whom Moses was ultimately referring here is Christ. So, within the Mosaic covenant itself, specifically as the covenant is being renewed on the eve of God’s people entering the land of promise, the proverbial gauntlet has been thrown and Christ the king is being foreshadowed as the hope of all God’s people both New Testament and Old.

Pentateuch Summary: As we conclude our time together this Fall, it is helpful to look back on the major themes of our class and attempt at tying them all together. This will aid in the successful completion of our objective stated above. We have explored the five books of the Pentateuch (or Torah) written by Moses, which collectively lay the foundation for the beginning of all things. We saw how the book of Genesis was written, probably while Moses was leading God’s people through the wilderness during their forty year detour, for the sake of familiarizing the covenant community with the God of creation who made all that would have been familiar to an agrarian society and sought out their forefather with the express purpose of initiating a relationship with them so that he might be their God, and they his people. Moses skillfully (and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) traces the line of God’s relational intent through the house of Abraham to Isaac, the promised seed, and Jacob and his twelve sons. The elements of this covenant, that God would 1) bless them, 2) give them a seed (a great nation that would in turn bless others), and 3) a land – the land of promise, became the source of longing for a nation enslaved in Egypt and the ultimate substance of their promise of redemption. God revealed himself to the exodus community through his mighty acts of deliverance and became known as YHVH, the God who redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage, though at a high price. This God is a holy God, and mankind is sinful. Therefore, the only way that man could know God is for God to condescend. This condescension, encased in the terms of the familiar covenant relationship, required a means of reconciliation; therefore, God cut a new covenant with Israel (the Mosaic covenant) and established terms of the covenant as well as ransom (the sacrificial system). He then set forth prescribed worship as evidenced by the book of Leviticus.

At the door steps of Canaan, the people of the Exodus rebelled against God, and God graciously judged them by requiring them to wander the wilderness of Zin until the generation (of twenty years of age and above) were dead. During that time, he continued to reveal himself to them so that they might know his

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ways. He protected them from outside forces (even the attempted curse of Balaam), but they invited a curse upon themselves through their sin and disobedience. He continued to dwell among them, and delivered the kingdoms of Sihon and Og into their hands. Finally, on the eve of conquest into the land promised to them and their fathers before them, the mediator of the covenant (Moses) commissions them to remain faithful to God so that they might take possession of the land. He then informs them of his imminent death, and of the assumption of authority on the part of Joshua. As a final act of awareness and commitment, he makes known to them the blessings and curses of the covenant to which they have subscribed. They are a witness against themselves so that they are inexcusable before God.

Within the Pentateuch there is a partial fulfilment (a growth towards fulfillment like a young sapling growing towards the light), of the major themes expressed throughout the five books: 1) a temple-city for God; 2) a promised seed; 3) a promised land, and 4) a promised blessing. By the end of Deuteronomy, the game is already in play. Israel has been chosen as a type of the promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed if they remain obedient and faithful to the covenant. The organization of their camp with the tabernacle of God playing a key and central role in their social structure, as well as a series of civil laws divinely given, make a temple-city for God seem a more likely reality. They have been made aware of the blessings that would accompany them if they remain faithful to the covenant, and they are strategically poised to take possession of the land. Now the stage is set for the continued unfolding of God's redemptive plan.