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BIBLE REVIEW

Genesis‑Numbers

Instructions: This is an open Bible, open note review. Complete what you can from memory, and the rest with your Bible and notes. Essays that lack substance must be rewritten. Include biblical references. The objective of this review is to create a learning experience.

Agree/Disagree Express your agreement ("A") or disagreement ("D") with the following statements:

1.\_A\_\_The expression "unformed and unfilled" (Gen. 1:2) serves as the literary key to the first chapter of Genesis.

2.\_A\_\_Genesis 3:15 is the first direct expression of the Gospel in the Bible and marks the beginning of God's program to redeem man.

3.\_D\_\_Because of his indiscretion regarding his father’s drunken condition, God brought a curse on Noah’s son, Ham.

4.\_D\_\_The fulfillment of a "covenant" or divine promise always depends upon certain conditions being met.

5.\_A\_\_A "type" is an Old Testament illustration which has its place and purpose in biblical history but is also divinely appointed to foreshadow a New Testament truth.

6.\_A\_\_1876 B.C. marks the date of Jacob's descent into Egypt and the beginning of the 430 year Egyptian sojourn.

7.\_D\_\_The suzerain‑vassal treaty forms the historical setting of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1‑3).

8.\_A\_\_In the suzerain‑vassal treaty, the basic stipulations present a concise statement of the suzerain's will for his people.

9.\_D\_\_Leviticus teaches that the root meaning of holiness is that of moral purity.

10. \_D\_\_ The main idea behind the Hebrew word “atonement” is that sin is covered.

11. \_A\_\_ The “holy convocations” Israel were intended to remind the people of their covenant relationship with God.

12. \_D\_\_ The wrath of God is given less prominence in Scripture than such attributes as His love and grace.

13. \_A\_\_ The refusal of Israel to enter the land resulted in the judgment of 37 ½ years of fruitless wanderings in the Sinai desert.

14. \_D\_\_ The Balaam oracles highlight the theme of God’s dealings with Israel through the Mosaic Covenant.

State and provide brief evidence of the theological themes of the following books:

 Genesis: Sovereignty of God over His Creation. In Chapter 7 we clearly see God’s sovereignty over His creation when He decided to wipe out all creatures except His chosen ones, i.e. Noah and his family. Also from 50:20, we know even though Joseph’s brother meant to harm Joseph, God used this misdeed to fulfill His will.

 Exodus: Salvation of Yahweh. In Exodus 15:2, Moses and the Israelites praised Yahweh and called Him their “salvation”. Time and again God hardened Pharaoh’s heart in order to show His Power in saving Israel.

 Leviticus: Holiness of Yahweh. The word holiness appears 90 times in the book of Leviticus. Basically Ch 1-17 talks about sacrificial means of approaching God because Yahweh is holy while Ch 18-27 talks about the separation of the people of God in their ways of life because Yahweh is holy.

 Numbers: Wrath of Yahweh. Ch 11 mentions the wrath of God expressed through fire and pestilence. Ch 12 tells of the anger of God burning against Aaron and Miriam and He departed. Ch 14 mentions the wrath of God because the people refused to enter Canaan. Ch 16 mentions God was angry and He told Moses to leave the people because He was going to kill them all. Ch 21 tells of how God was angry and sent fiery snakes among the people.

Short Answer:

1. How does the suzerain‑vassal treaty background contribute to our understanding of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19‑24).

Between the 15th and 13th B.C. there was in use an international treaty form which outlined the relationship between a lord (suzerain) and his people (vassals). Such a treaty usually included the following elements: historical preparation, preamble, historical prologue, basic stipulations and detailed stipulations, provisions for deposit and reading, witnesses, cursings and blessings, and ratification of the covenant.

This suzerain-vassal treaty background helps us understand why the Mosaic Covenant was presented in the order as listed in Exodus 19-24. (1) we can identify the historical preparation: Exod. 19:1 gave the date (3 months after leaving Egypt) and 19:2 the location (in the front of Mount Sinai), and 19:3-25 described how Moses served as a mediator to bring massages from the suzerain to the vassals. (2) we can identify the preamble: 20:1 identified God as the author of the covenant. (3) we can see the historical prologue: 20:2 briefly described how Yahweh delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. (4) we can locate clearly the basic stipulations: 20:3-17 listed the basic obligations (10 commandments) expected of Israelites the vassals of Yahweh. (5) we can also identify the detailed stipulations: 20: 18 - 23:33 elaborated on the basic demands with examples and applications. (6) we see the provisions for deposit: 25: 16, 21 let us know that the covenant was kept in the ark. (7) we can identify some cursings and blessings: 23:24-33 included cursings and blessings depending on their responses to His commands. (8) there is the ratification of the covenant: Ch24 showed the validation of the covenant by the acceptance of the people, the sacrifice and sprinkling of blood and even the nobles’ eating and drinking of the covenant meal.

Matching the Mosaic covenant with the contemporary international treaty format helps us understand that the dealing between God and the Israelites was not a fairy tale. It was a serious and solid experience for the Israelites and those nations around her. Now Israelites were people of a great lord, Yahweh who had already shown His great power in delivering her from the Egyptians. Of course they would have Yahweh’s protection as long as they fulfilled their obligations. At the same time, however, it also meant that they were not free to make another treaty with another suzerain. Yahweh was their only Lord. They already had completed every part of the covenant making process and now the covenant was officially in force.

2. Discuss the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant. Was this an unconditional or conditional promise? Show how this promise serves as the foundation for God's covenant program.

The provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant are recorded in Gen. 12:1-2. It is obviously a unilateral (promissory) covenant instead of a bilateral (obligatory) covenant. God simply said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you.” (12:1, 7) It is clear that it does not take the form of “If you so and so, I will so and so”, meaning the promise is unconditional. It is like God is telling Abram that He will give him the land and now all he needs to do is to go take it. It is like somebody has given him a voucher to claim a gift from a shop. All he needs to do is to believe that the voucher is for real and go claim the gift from the shop. We don’t call it a conditional gift. It is an unconditional free gift.

This unconditional covenant does not only consist of a land, but also a nation. “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.” (12:2) In order for him to become a great nation, he will need to have many descendants of his own which God has promised him. (13:14-17) Other than land and nation promises, God has also promised blessing. “And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (v.3)

Because of this unconditional unilateral everlasting promise to Abraham, God starts His covenant program. God also tells him exactly how his nation will begin (his descendants will stay in another nation for 400 years before He will lead them back to the promised land to form a nation). (Gen. 15: 13-16) When God reconfirmed this promise, He walked through (in the form of smoking pot and flaming torch) the halves of the carcasses alone, indicating that he alone will be responsible for bringing it to pass. (15;17-18)

God honors His covenant with Abraham and brings Israelites out of Egypt. He formally makes them His covenant people through the Mosaic Covenant enacted in Mt Sinai. He then brings them to the promise land. God reconfirms His land promise to the descendants of Abraham through the Palestinian Covenant. (Deut. 30) The land is for them. They may fail to fulfill their obligation and be driven out of the land, but the land is for them as promised and God will bring them back.

Through twists and turns God’s promise of making Abraham’s descendants a great nation is preliminarily fulfilled in King David’s dynasty. God reconfirms his promise to Abraham through the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7). God plans that the Kingdom of David will last forever. Some of his descendants may fail to keep their loyalty to God and be disciplined but David’s throne will continue forever.

Because of the weaknesses of the Israelites, the Israelites go through exiles and losses of independence. However God honors His promise to Abraham and preserves remnants of Israel to eventually bring the Abrahamic Covenant to pass. Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, finally enacts the New Covenant (Jer. 31, Luke 22;20) with the believing Israelites and all those who believe in Him. Through the New Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant (the foundation and backbone of God’s covenant program) is now drawing close to final consummation. The nation of Israel (the Kingdom of David, the Kingdom of God), with Jesus Christ as the King and believing Israelites and Christians as the redeemed holy people, will stay forever in the promise land. The descendants of Abraham have been a blessing to nations and will continue to be a blessing to nations through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Explain the role of the law as given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Was the law intended to be a means of salvation? If not, what was its purpose?

It is very important to understand that the law **was not given** to Israel at Mount Sinai to **merit grace or earn salvation** (not even salvation from slavery in Egypt). Yahweh saved Israel from the Egyptian hands because of His unilateral promise made to Abraham. (Gen. 12:1-3)They were delivered from Egypt because God promised Abraham and because they were willing to follow Moses, God’s representative. So when they came to the front of Mt Sinai, God had already started some kind of gracious dealings with the Israelites. In other words, they had already received grace and physical salvation from God before they were formally given the law.

In order to formalize the special relationship between God and the Israelites, God chose to establish a covenant with them which took the form of a contemporary cultural institution, suzerain-vassals treaty. (Exod. 19-24) The law functioned as the stipulations in the treaty (covenant). Since God would not in any case break His covenant with Abraham, we therefore know that the law was given with a practical implication that the appropriation of blessing by a generation or an individual required individual obedience to the law (Gen. 23:25-33, Lev. 26:1-13, Deut. 28:1-14).

It is also important to understand that even at the time of Abraham, God required His chosen ones to “keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen. 18:19). From this perspective, we can say that the law was given to Israel as a clearly written down contractual obligation when the covenant was enacted at Mount Sinai. It was so clearly written down because it was supposed to be used to teach/instruct the “people” to fulfill their obligation so as to receive all the physical blessings for themselves. If they failed, the blessings for other Abraham’s obedient descendants were still guaranteed.

The law could also be viewed as the constitution (governing regulations) of the nation of Israel for the sake of securing a healthy relationship with their suzerain and enjoying the blessing of abundant life. Part of the law was about holy conduct and is still making sense to us today but part of law was directed against the particular needs of ancient Israel which would be irrelevant to us today.

When it comes to the relationship between the law and our eternal salvation, it is important to understand that the law was never intended to be a means of eternal salvation of our souls. We do not find any language in the Pentateuch that clearly stated that ones would have eternal life by following the law. It is equally not true saying that the Israelites were absolutely unable to follow the law.(Deut. 3:11) We clearly see evidence that some individuals or generations enjoyed the blessings by obeying the law. (Psalm 1) It doesn’t mean that they could manage to live a sinless life. On the contrary, because they tried hard to follow the law, they realized even more that they were sinful and they appreciated the provisions for them to atone for their sins and continue their relationship with God here on earth.

Therefore we can see that one of the purposes of the law was to show the Israelites that they were unable to live a holy life and that the all the ritual cleansing procedures were not eternal solutions. (Rom. 3:28, Gal. 3:2-3) In other words, one of the purposes of the law was to prepare the Israelites to receive Christ as the eternal sacrifice and the source of strength for a holy life (the New Covenant). Some parts of the old covenant were types to the anti-type (Christ). Therefore Christ was said to be the end (goal and termination) of the law (Romans 10:4). Only Christ was intended to be a means of eternal salvation for our souls.

4. What evidence does the Pentateuch provide to demonstrate that God is more concerned for issues of the heart rather then mere external conformity to ritual (cf. Leviticus 10, Numbers 15)?

There are many pieces of evidence the Pentateuch provides to demonstrate that God is more concerned for issues of the heart rather than mere external conformity to ritual. I will list two strong pieces of evidence to support my position:

In Leviticus 10: 16-20, it is recorded that obviously Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons didn’t follow exactly what Moses commanded them. It seemed to be a ritual that if the blood of the sin offering was not taken into the Holy Place, the priest(s) should eat the goat in the sanctuary so as to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them. Moses was angry at first. However, after hearing Aaron’s explanation of their intent of not eating the goat, Moses was satisfied, meaning he didn’t insist that they had done wrong. Since the explanation was focused on the motivation behind their not following the ritual, i.e. not wanting to do something the Lord was not pleased with (on this particular day Aaron’s two other sons were killed due to their offering unauthorized fire). As Moses was okay with this explanation and God didn’t say anything, we can safely conclude that God was more concerned for the intent of the heart than mere external conformity to ritual.

The most significant part of this story is that it just happened after a tragic incident in which Aaron’s two other sons were killed by the Lord for doing something that didn’t appear to be too bad by human standards. They took their censers, put fire in them and added incense to offer fire before the Lord. Unfortunately the whole action was not authorized by the Lord. An average reader would question, “Why were they so severely punished? They seemed to be doing something with a good intention though they didn’t exactly follow the ritual.” However, as the Bible does not mention their intention, we should not assume that they did it with a good intent or out of ignorance. The story of Eleazar and Ithamar that happened right after this one would encourage us to think that probably these two priests offered the unauthorized fire with a reproachable attitude.

In Numbers 15, the text talks clearly about the issues of the heart when it comes to sinning. God distinguishes unintentional sin (vv. 22-29) from sin of the high hand (vv. 30-31). God gave provision for unintentional sin but insisted that defiant sin would not go without a punishment. The story of the wood gatherer (vv.32-36) that happened right after this text of unintentional and intentional sin clearly illustrated that God was concerned for the intent of the heart rather than the external conformity to ritual. According to the ritualistic details, building a fire on the Sabbath was prohibited (Exod. 35:3), not the gathering of sticks. Why did Moses need to bring the case to the Lord and why did God sentence the person to death? The answer is: Moses believed the person gathered the sticks with the intent of making a fire though he knew it was forbidden and the judgment of the Lord confirmed that he was right. Therefore, God is more concerned for the issues of heart rather than ritualistic adherence.