

Lecture 7- Setting the Stage: Israel's Early History (I)

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1*

Key Terms

Beginning, "primary history," "secondary history," Pentateuch, grace principle, great promise, theme vs. plot

Lecture Objectives

- Describe different ways of identifying the "beginning" of Israel's history and recognize the assumption of each way.
- Explain the place of grace in Israel's early history and the importance of "the great promise" for understanding the OT historical books.
- Identify the significance of Israel's history for understanding our own place in history.

Preliminary Questions

- In what way does the history of your local church impact your own self-understanding in your relation to your community? How does it impact your neighbor's understanding of you?
- How does your personal history impact your church's self-understanding in relation to its community? How does it impact your neighbor's understanding of your church?
- How do these principles help you understand your personal relationship to Israel's history? How does Israel's history impact your self-understanding? How might Israel's history impact your self-understanding? How might it impact the self-understanding of a Chinese believer?

Setting the Stage: Israel's Early History (I)

I. Where Does OT History Begin?

A. Depends on what one means by history

1. Some say only nations have a history – begin with the exodus, or begin with entry into Canaan, or begin with beginning of monarchy
2. Some say that there is no history – only fictional account
3. Dr. Long's view: Personal history which affects a nation is part of that national history. Thus, begin with Genesis 12 - Call of Abraham
4. Ernst Troelstch – caused by natural forces or personal forces.
Yet if one recognizes the actions of God as a personal agent, history begins where the Bible begins.

Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Long's assessment of personal history? Why?

II. The Concept of the "Primary History" (Genesis-Kings)

Secondary History- 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah

A. Recognizes that the OT (and the whole Bible) tells one continuous story which is history.

Historiography can be non-literal (e.g., difference between prose and poetic account of Deborah and Barak in Judges).

B. Recognizes a large degree of inter-textuality – the way in which one text alludes to or reflects another text.

1. Judges 19-Levite and his concubine: Gen. 19 - Lot

C. Makes room for God as a personal agent.

III. Israel's Beginnings: A Brief Look at the Pentateuch

A. The broad structure of the Pentateuch

1. Genesis- “beginning” – there are many beginnings recorded in Genesis:
 - a. Universe, time and space, humankind (creation)
 - b. Nations, political
 - c. Sin (the fall)
 - d. Covenants
 - e. Human experience of a relationship with God
 - f. Marriage
 - g. Redemption
 - h. Genesis 1-11-Primeval prologue (creation, fall, flood, Tower of Babel)
 - i. Genesis 12-Election and promise with Abraham
2. Exodus- “exit” – exit from slavery – a book of deliverance and covenant
3. Leviticus- laws regulating the sacrificial system and worship – a book about the Holiness of God
4. Numbers- a time of testing and training in the wilderness
5. Deuteronomy- begins with the people of Israel east of the Jordan on the plains of Moab
 - a. Moses is delivering his final word to Israel

B. The grace principle

Themes:

1. Creative work of God
2. Fall of man
3. God’s judgment on sin
4. The evidence of God’s grace
 - a. God’s provision of clothing for Adam and Eve
 - b. God’s unwillingness to pronounce immediately the physical aspect of death
 - c. God’s graciousness towards Cain
 - d. God’s gracious preservation of Noah and his family
 - e. God’s promise never to destroy the earth again by flood. Gen. 8:21-even though people were still sinful
 - f. A pattern of sin - judgment - grace
5. Exception: the Tower of Babel
 - a. Gerhard von Rad, “There is no word of grace...Is God’s gracious forbearance now exhausted? Has God rejected the nations in wrath forever?”
 - b. Yet, the narrator repeats one part of a previous genealogy.
 - c. Derek Kidner, “The history of redemption like that of creation begins with God speaking.”

Trace this grace principle through the OT historical books. Can you identify it in your own life as well?

C. The great promise

Key to understanding the history of Israel: Gen. 12:1-3

1. The time of God’s call
 - a. NIV “The Lord had said to Abram”
 - b. Stephen makes this explicit in Acts 7
 - c. Kidner believes Abram moved slowly in completely obeying God.

How would you explain Genesis 12:1-3 as the key to the history of Israel?

2. The content of God's call
 - a. God asks one thing of Abram: "Leave"—ultimately "trust"
 - b. God gives a seven fold promise: several components
 - 1) Land
 - 2) Offspring (seed)
 - 3) Blessing
 - c. The NT shows that nations will be blessed through Abram.
Notice the faith of Abram.

Is this Messianic? "Messianic" has to do with the anointed one. This promise is beginning to point us in the direction of the messianic expectation.

Is the command to leave a condition? The relationship of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

D. The developmental theme of the Pentateuch

1. Theme v. plot
 - a. David Clines distinguishes between theme and plot
plot = storyline of events relating to one another, usually resolution of some tension
theme = the purpose for the recounting
Clines = "a conceptualization of plot" central or dominating idea

What is the theme of the Pentateuch?