

THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS: A CRASH COURSE IN THE STORYLINE OF THE TORAH

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Our Approach: “Big Story – Little Story”

The Torah is a collection of lots of little stories whose individual meaning is determined by the big story in which they are located. Jesus saw the big story as pointing to himself (Luke 24:36-49).

Big Story Part 1: Yahweh and the entire world [Genesis 1-11]

Genesis 1-11 provides the basic plot conflict underlying the entire Bible:

1. Genesis 1-2: God makes a world of order and beauty out of chaos and darkness.
2. Genesis 1:26-28: God rules his world through his image bearing creatures.
3. Genesis 3: The image bearers foolishly rebel > Genesis 4-11 the downward spiral of human sin.

Big Story Part 2: Yahweh and the family of Abraham [Genesis 12-Exodus 15]

1. Yahweh’s mission is to rescue creation through the covenant story with Israel
 - A. Genesis 12 > Blessing to the nations through Abraham’s family.

“The whole Bible can be portrayed as a very long answer to a very simple question: What can God do about the sin and rebellion of the human race? Genesis 12-Revelation 22 is God’s answer to the problem posed by the bleak narratives of Genesis 3-11. Or . . . Genesis 3-11 sets the problem that the mission of God addresses from Genesis 12 onward. Genesis 1-11 poses a cosmic problem to which God must provide a cosmic answer. The problems so graphically spread before the reader in Gen 1-11 will not be solved just by finding a way to get human beings to heaven when they die. The love and power of the Creator must address not only the sin of individuals, but also the strife and hostility of nations; not only the needs of humans, but also the suffering on animals and the curse on the ground... The call of Abram is the beginning of God’s answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations, and the groaning brokenness of his whole creation.” — Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, 195.

- B. Yahweh ratifies his promises by a covenant with Abraham: Genesis 15 and 17.
 - C. Abraham's family is a comedy of errors (and deception, i.e. "Jacob") of putting the covenant into jeopardy.
 - D. Genesis 50:20 sums up the entire book.
2. Yahweh keeps his promise to Abraham by redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt.
- A. Egypt represents the archetypal 'bad guy' in the Bible: Exodus 1-5.
 - B. Israel's Redemption (Exodus 6:6 and 15:13) takes place through...
 - 1. Divine justice on Pharaoh and Egypt (10 plagues): Exodus 6-11.
 - 2. The substitution of the Passover Lamb: Exodus 12-13.
 - 3. Passing through the waters: Exodus 14-15.
 - C. Israel "grumbles" immediately after being redeemed: Exodus 15:22-16 [tuck this theme away for later].

Big Story Part 3: Israel, the Torah, and the Sinai Covenant [Exodus 16-40-Leviticus-Numbers 36]

- 1. Yahweh calls Israel into a covenant relationship with himself on behalf of the nations.
 - A. Obedience to the Torah is part of being a light to the nations: Exodus 19-20.
 - 1. They are to be a holy people: Leviticus 19:1-2.
 - 2. They are to be people of justice and wisdom: Deuteronomy 4:5-8.
 - B. Yahweh comes to dwell among his people in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:22; 29:42-46) to recreate the intimacy of the garden of Eden.
- 2. Israel is consistently disobedient and unable to keep the Torah.
 - A. Right after they agree to the covenant (Exodus 24) we read the Golden Calf story (Exodus 32-34).
 - B. Law > Rebellion/Grumbling Narrative Pattern in Exodus 16 – Numbers 36: The laws keep increasing the more Israel disobeys the Torah.
- 3. Israel's sin conflicts with Yahweh's holiness and is resolved by sacrifice.
 - A. Even Moses cannot enter the tent of Yahweh's presence (Exodus 40:34-35: See Leviticus 1:1 and Numbers 1:1).
 - B. Leviticus 16-17: sacrifice as substitute (Leviticus 17:10-12 explains the meaning of sacrifice).

Big Story #4 Israel and the need for a New Covenant [Deuteronomy]

1. Moses knows Israel will abandon Yahweh in the promised land and disobey the Torah.
 - A. He calls them to obey (Deuteronomy 8) but knows they're unable (Deuteronomy 28).
 - B. Moses knows only Yahweh can heal Israel's sinful heart: Deuteronomy 30:1-6.
 - C. Moses' hope for a new covenant is elaborated by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:24-29).
2. Two future figures are anticipated in the Torah:
 - A. A coming messiah who will destroy evil (Genesis 3:15), fulfill God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 22:17), and come from the line of Judah to rule over the nations (Genesis 49:8-11).
 - B. A coming prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:14-15) who will perform signs and wonders and rescue the people (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).