

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

GENESIS

Formation of the Book

The Book of Genesis is the story of the pre-history of Israel. It is a consolidation of traditions from the tribes that identified themselves as a nation with a covenant with God. They realized that even before the time of the Exodus, God was at work within them.

Israel began to view its own history in the context of world history, and joined to the story of its origins the story of the beginnings of the universe and the history of humanity in the primeval period. This process took centuries, through which stories were told and retold, adapted and reinterpreted. They were given a new context and acquired new meaning until they found their way into the larger story of Israel's relationship to God.

Careful analysis of Genesis has led scholars to conclude that there were at least four different authors (also known as sources or traditions) who contributed to the formation of the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible):

- Yahwist (J)
- Elohism (E)
- Priestly (P)
- Deuteronomism (D)

YAHWIST (J)

Is so called because it uses the name Yahweh for the Deity. It is the earliest of the sources, originating in the tenth century B.C.E., the age of David and Solomon. Their stories are characterized by a vivid folk-tale style and a colorful portrayal of characters, and rarely pass moral judgment on behavior. The Yahwist gives a very personal character to the Deity, and to the Yahwist, God is actively involved in the history of humanity, in particular, Israel.

ELOHIST (E)

Uses the name Elohim for Israel's God until Exodus 3:14. This source is generally dated in the ninth century B.C.E. and is believed to have originated in the northern kingdom. The Elohist source has been so intertwined with the Yahwist that it is difficult to separate the two sources in every instance. The Elohist source has been subordinated to the Yahwist; therefore what remains is often incomplete. The Elohist resorts to dreams and angels as means of divine communication. They are most noted for their moral sensitivity, which is evident in their attempt to justify, explain, or gloss over the misdeeds of Israel's ancestors. Their stories are found for the first time in Gen 20.

PRIESTLY (P)

This source also prefers the name Elohim for the Deity until the time of Moses. Most of the priestly writings can be dated during the period of the Babylonian Exile (550 B.C.E.), although the sources used by the authors of Genesis comes from earlier writings. This style tends to be repetitive, and rigidly structured, giving a very solemn tone to the

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

writing. It is generally held that the priestly author is responsible for the final editing of Genesis.

Forms

The primary literary classification would be a narrative in the form of a saga. Sagas are stories that have a basis in fact, but as the stories are transmitted, they are expanded and enhanced by non-factual elements. They originate at an oral level combining tradition and imagination.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Structure

Primeval Histories 1:1 – 11:27

The first eleven chapters are designated primeval history because they treat of the history of humanity and not specifically of the history of Israel.

Priestly Creation Account 1:1 – 2:4a

The Book opens with a highly structured, hymn like account of creation by the Priestly author. There are similarities between this account of creation and the *Enuma Elish* (Babylonian account of creation), but the author has rewritten and reinterpreted the myth to reflect Israel's distinctive theology. We are informed in a carefully ordered sequence, that God creates the world solely by the power of his divine word.

God is the main actor, and creation is the result of his action. The fact that prior to God's creative act the world was a formless mass in a watery chaos is consistent with ancient Near East mythology. Notice that darkness already exists – it is not created by God.

The priestly account is characterized by repetition (1:1-25) using a framework that remains more or less constant for each day of creation. It moves forward at a rhythmic pace giving it a hymn like quality:

1. Announcement: *And God said*
2. Command: *Let there be*
3. Report: *And it was so*
4. Evaluation: *And God saw that it was good*
5. Temporal framework: *It was evening/it was morning*

In addition to this structural pattern, the author correlates the acts of creation of the last three days with those of the first three days:

- Day 1 *Light*/Day 4 *Heavenly lights*
Day 2 *Sky, separating upper & lower waters*/Day 5 *Birds and fish*
Day 3 *Earth & vegetation*/Day 6 *Land animals & humanity*

This highly schematized picture accentuates the orderliness of creation. Nothing is left to chance. God's naming of all that he creates is a sign that God has power and authority over everything. The fact that evening comes before morning reflects Israel's manner of keeping time – the day began at sunset.

This whole account of creation has been leading up to the creation of humanity (1:26-31). Since this act is the last in a series of creation and the one which the author describes in greatest detail, the author is indicating that humanity is the high point of all creation. This is underscored by the fact that only humanity is described as being created in the "image and likeness" of God.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

The hallowing of the Sabbath is associated with the rest of God on the seventh day. However, in six days there were eight separate acts of creation. The author placed two acts of creation on the third and sixth day in order to maintain a six-day structure and underscore the significance of the Sabbath. In this way, the author binds the commandment of the Sabbath with the created order.

In summary, this account of creation is a theological reflection on the world that the author has experienced. It is a world where God is seen as a powerful being with the ability to create by merely speaking. God transcends the created order and humanity is seen as the highpoint of all creation. God has organized the world in which humanity lives, but as God's representative on earth, humanity is sovereign over the world.

Yahwist Creation Account and Sin/Priestly Genealogy of Adam 2:4b – 5:32

This is actually the earlier account of creation. There is no repetition or delineated structure. Creation is formed by Yahweh and not called into existence by his divine word. The focus of this account is the relationship of man and woman to each other and to the world. What exists prior to creation is a desert and not a watery chaos, and water is seen as an aid to creation. This is apparently the experience of a farmer, for whom water and tilling the soil are necessary in order to bring forth vegetation.

The human creature (*'adam*) is made from the ground (*'adamah*) and therefore have a special relationship to each other. Yahweh breathes life into the human and so it becomes a living being. All living creatures breathe, but Yahweh speaks only to the human and that is the distinction between one and the other. Additionally, the human creature names the animals, thereby signifying humanity's control over the animal world. Whereas in the priestly account, the dwelling place for humanity was created prior to humanity itself, the Yahwist first creates humanity and then their dwelling.

The author speaks of four rivers (2:10-14), however, these contribute nothing to the story per se, but appear to be inserted in order to link the garden of Eden with a specific geographical area in an attempt to historicize the story.

God gives humanity the command to cultivate and take care of the garden and places certain limits upon humanity by prohibiting them to eat from the tree of knowledge (2:15-17). No explanation is given for this prohibition

In verse 2:18-24, Yahweh creates woman. This has often been interpreted as a reference to the social nature of humanity, however the author really intends to account for the marriage relationship between man and woman. This story tells us why men and women are drawn to each other sexually and marry. The terms "leave" and "cleave" are covenant terms and suggest that marriage is here viewed as a covenantal relationship.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

The Sin of Adam and Eve 2:25 – 3:7

A new character is introduced into the story – the serpent. It must be noted that nowhere in this text is the serpent identified as the devil; this identification does not come about until the first century B.C.E. (Wis 2:24; Enoch 69:6). What then, does the serpent represent? In Canaan the serpent was associated with fertility cults, which were a great and constant source of temptation to Israel. By using the serpent, the author is in effect telling the reader to not get involved with fertility cults.

The story does not provide a motive for temptation. The source of evil is left a mystery, but it does tell the reader that the presence of evil in the world is due to humanity's decision to oppose God's command. It must be noted that the man is present with the woman during the temptation as is referenced in verse 6: She eats the fruit and gives it to the man "who is with her". The reason the woman is presented first is a literary device that keeps the story moving. The serpent is introduced first, then the woman, then the man. When God comes to the garden, the man is addressed first, then the woman, then the serpent. God punished first the serpent, then the woman, then the man. There is no other significance beyond this.

The most immediate consequence of the sin of man and woman is their nakedness, which they seek to remedy by sewing loincloths of fig leaves. The ensuing dialogue between God and the man shows the futility of this action. Instead of answering Yahweh's question "Where are you?," the man gives the reason why he hid. The man says he was naked but that's not true as he is clothed with a loincloth. However, in relationship to Yahweh, he is naked – his relationship to Yahweh has been disrupted. Humanity cannot cover up its own guilt and shame and restore its relationship to Yahweh. Yahweh alone can remove humanity's guilt and shame. This is symbolized at the end of the story when Yahweh makes garments for the man and woman. Yahweh's care for humanity does not stop because of sin, but rather continues in spite of it.

The purpose of the interrogation of the man and the woman (3:8-24) is to have them admit their sin. The man, however, blames the woman (and even God); the woman blames the serpent. None take responsibility for their actions. The consequences of their sin (punishments) seem to reflect the world in which the author lives (pain, suffering, etc.)

Sin Continues

The story of Cain and Abel follows the story of the sin of humanity and represents further alienation from Yahweh. Cain is a farmer; Abel a shepherd. The story goes quickly into the actual murder of Abel and Yahweh's judgment on Cain. Details that would interest the modern reader are ignored. We do not know why Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable, nor how Cain discovers that his sacrifice did not please God. Instead, the story focuses on Cain's reaction and God's judgment.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Here, sin is presented as something that can be overcome. Cain could have overcome sin by doing well (verse 7), but does not and therefore must be accountable for his sin. When interrogated by Yahweh, Cain lies and asks God a sarcastic question (verse 9). His sin is worse than the first, who sought merely to shift the blame.

It must be noted that Yahweh maintains a lengthy dialogue with Cain, the sinner, yet no dialogue exists between Yahweh and Abel. Again, we see here, as in the first instance of sin, how Yahweh looks after his creation in spite of its sinfulness. For the Yahwist author, the story illustrates humanity's inclination to sin. From the first sin in the garden, onward, humanity continues to move away from Yahweh, becoming so hardened that Yahweh regrets ever having created the human race (6:6). According to the Yahwist, it is against the backdrop of the increasing sinfulness of humanity that a people is eventually chosen through whom all of humanity will be reconciled to God.

The Cainite Genealogy (4:17-26) and the Genealogy of Adam (5:1-32)

Behind both genealogies is the tradition of an antediluvian list of the kings of Mesopotamia. These lists provide a transition from the story of creation and the fall to the time of the great flood. It also brings fulfillment to God's command to fill the earth.

Throughout these first 5 chapters, a recurring theme begins to arise: God blesses and calls man – man rejects God's call and falls – God calls man to repentance and offers forgiveness and protection and man repents – man falls again.

This recurring theme will be found throughout the entire Bible and is not just isolated to the Old Testament (or Hebrew Scriptures).

Chapter 6 – Preparing for the Flood

The Genesis story of the flood is remarkably similar to Mesopotamian flood accounts, especially the Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic. Gilgamesh, the hero, embarks on a search for immortality that brings him to an ancient ancestor named Utnapishtim, who is immortal. As Utnapishtim recounts how he became immortal, we can recognize parallels to the Genesis flood story:

The council of the gods decides to destroy humanity. Ea, the god of wisdom, appears to Utnapishtim in a dream and warns him of the coming disaster. He instructs Utnapishtim to build a boat to save himself and his family. Utnapishtim brings his family, wild and tame animals, and artisans with him aboard the boat. The gods unleash a storm that quickly gets out of control, and the gods themselves cower in fear in the heavens. When the storm ends, the boat rests on a mountain and Utnapishtim sends birds from the boat to determine the extent to which the waters have receded. Upon leaving the boat, the survivors offer a sacrifice pleasing to the gods, who in turn bless Utnapishtim and his family with immortality.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Origin of the Nephilim 6:1-4

The exact purpose of this narrative is unclear, but serves a two-fold purpose:

1. It appears to be an introduction to the sequence of the great flood by letting the reader know that the sinfulness of the human race is continually increasing
2. It provides an explanation to the prehistoric giant race of the Philistines, which oppressed Israel for many years.

Warning of the Flood 6:5-13

The author presents God with feelings. “He regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was grieved”(6:6). Almighty God is affected by the wickedness of man and “feels” with his heart as his creation feels. The apparent hurt felt by God is expressed in verse 7a “I am sorry that I made them.” This is the only time in all of Scripture that God utters these words.

Yet in the midst of all this wickedness and God’s affliction, hope arises through one person - Noah. Noah found favor with the Lord (6:8). This begins another theme found throughout the Bible. Whenever disaster occurs that results in the destruction of a race or nation, a remnant always remains from which God creates again.

Noah was a good and blameless man in the eyes of God. God will use Noah to create a new world where sin hopefully will not rein.

Preparation for the Flood 6:14-22

This narrative is definitely a priestly account of the destruction of mankind and God’s new creation and first covenant. The instructions given by God to Noah are very structured and repetitive which is typical of the priestly tradition.

Noah and his family are the “remnant” in which God’s hope lies. Without questioning God’s motives, Noah obeys all of God’s instructions. This contrasts the disobedience of Adam.

The Great Flood Chapter 7 & 8

Again we see a strong priestly influence throughout the account of the flood. The repetitive storytelling of how the animals are loaded into the ark brings to light the first distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals (7:1-3;8) – something the priestly tradition upholds with zeal. This distinction between what is clean and unclean will be detailed later in Deuteronomy.

In verse 10 of Chapter 7, the writer begins a “play on numbers” that are very significant. The story of Noah is in effect a new creation by God. In the first story of creation the God creates in 6 days but rests on the 7th. Now the number 7 takes on a significant role.

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

7 days after Noah and his family enter the ark, the waters of the abyss and of the sky unite, in effect bringing chaos into the world, much like what existed before God began creation. (Refer to Genesis chapter 1) Continuing the “play” on the number 7, Noah sends out a dove and after it returns he waits 7 days before releasing the dove again. After returning to the ark a second time (and this time with an olive branch) Noah waits another 7 days before releasing the dove again. The dove does not return. The new creation is complete.

Despite the “wrath of God” which is evident in the flood, the writer still gives us a picture of a tender God who still cares about his creation. In verse 16b, the writer notes that after Noah and his family entered the ark, the Lord “shut him in”. This statement by the writer assures us that God continues to care for his creation. The tenderness of the scene – God closing the door behind Noah – is a sure sign that God has not abandoned Noah.

After the waters recede, Noah offers God a holocaust on the altar, which he builds upon leaving the ark. This is the first time the ritual of offering holocausts to God on an altar is described in scripture. This also prepares for the first covenant.

Covenant with Noah Chapter 9

Continuing on the theme of new creation, God blesses Noah and his sons. “Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth. Dread fear of you shall come upon all the animals of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon all the creatures that move about on the ground and all the fishes of the sea: into your power they are delivered”. (8:1-2) This verse echoes the command that God gave Adam in the first story of creation (1:28). Thus a new creation has come into existence and God again makes man the steward of his creation. God in essence is “blessing” mankind, however the recurring theme of blessing-sin-repentance-forgiveness-blessing will again come into the world.

Up to the time of the flood, man appears to have been a vegetarian. However, after the flood God gives mankind permission to eat the flesh of animals. The only limitation on this new food group is that it shall not contain its life giving blood. This is probably extracted from the Mosaic Law, which we find in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Hebrew people believed that the issue of blood was binding to all of mankind and not just to those of Jewish descent since this prohibition against blood was given to Noah – the new ancestor of all mankind – and not just to the chosen people.

God establishes his covenant with Noah and gives the sign of the covenant (8:11-12). This is the first of many covenants that God will establish with mankind. All of God’s covenants greatly favor mankind. God promises his fidelity to the covenant and provides mankind with greater benefit in the covenant than man could ever provide. Yet, mankind will not or cannot remain faithful to God. God’s covenant with Noah is that he will never again destroy the world with a flood (8:11) and the sign of this covenant is the rainbow (8:12).

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Noah and his Sons

Immediately after receiving God's blessing and the covenant, the writer describes scene between Noah and his sons, which seems to justify the later enslavement of the Canaanite people by the Israelites. Noah lay naked and drunk and his son Ham sees him in this condition. This in and of itself is not representative of a sinful act, however, the Ham's action of telling of two other brothers shows some apparent delight in the situation he has encountered. Because Ham is the ancestor of the Canaanites, who possessed the land, which was later given to the Israelites by God, he is cursed for his actions to become the slave of his brothers. Shem, the ancestor (father) of Abraham (father of Israel) is blessed for taking care of not seeing Noah's nakedness or drunkenness. When the Israelites conquer the promised land (the land of the Canaanites), they enslave the Canaanites.

Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel Chapter 10 – 11

Chapter 10 deals with the relationship that exists between all mankind and offers a transition into chapter 11. It shows the fulfillment of God's command to increase and multiply found in Gen 1:28, and reiterated to Noah in Gen 9:1. It also shows that Israel is one among many nations. The choice of Israel by Yahweh does not rest on any special achievement or quality that Israel possessed, but only on God's gracious intervention in its history.

Chapter 11 tells the story of the Tower of Babel. The story is based on traditions about the ziggurats of Babylonia, which are used here to illustrate the increasing wickedness of mankind and mankind's desire to move away from God. (The second fall) After the world had again been populated (the re-population of the world is detailed in Chapter 10), mankind desires to achieve glory and power – in essence man again desired to be as God. Their desire to make a name for themselves (verse 4) is an obvious desire to be independent of Yahweh. Additionally, in this same verse, the people desire to remain together and not be scattered. This desire to remain in one place goes contrary to Yahweh's command to fill the earth. This story also tries to give an explanation as to the different languages of the world

From Shem to Abraham

The second half of chapter 11 recounts the descendants from Shem to Abraham. This offers a transition from the sinful nature of mankind to the beginning of the Patriarchal Period. This period is still considered pre-history of Israel. However, by choosing Abraham, God will establish for himself a people through which he will eventually bless all nations and through which he will fulfill his salvation of mankind from the original sin of Adam. Again we see here the recurring theme of blessing-sin-repentance-forgiveness-blessing.