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HOW TO USE THESE NOTES

These notes on the Old Testament are divided into units. Each unit begins with a statement of its OBJECTIVE. This statement will give the basic idea with which the unit will deal. It is important, in studying each unit, to keep this central idea in mind. It will provide a focus for all that is treated in any given unit.

After the Objective is stated, there will be a list of significant vocabulary that will be developed in the unit. The definitions of each of the vocabulary words will be given in the course of the unit. Normally, when the word is introduced and its meaning is defined, it will appear in all capital letters. The vocabulary list will consist of key words and ideas which are important for understanding the content of the unit.

The notes themselves will present background for portions of the Old Testament text. This background will consist of historical notes, describing what was happening in Israel when the part of the Old Testament under consideration was taking shape. The notes will also discuss the stages the text went through to get into its final form. In addition, there will be a discussion of the main literary themes to be encountered in the text and, at times, some commentary on specific passages.

These notes also include some translations of selected stories. These translations are literal, attempts to stay as close to the Hebrew original as possible in order to demonstrate the artful techniques of the Old Testament storytellers. The translations which are included represent examples of stories displaying the main themes of whatever unit of the larger text is being considered, as well as examples of specific types of stories which are being presented.

To make the most of our study of the Old Testament, it will be useful to become familiar with the OBJECTIVE of each unit. In preparation for discussing specific biblical texts it will be helpful to read through the notes, paying attention to historical background, significant vocabulary, and special themes which the biblical texts will develop. An understanding of the historical background and specific literary themes will help us to read the Bible intelligently and to more fully appreciate the faith statements the biblical texts try to impart.

In short, these notes are meant to be an aid to our study of the Old Testament and its themes. They are meant to direct our attention to special features of the text and help us to appreciate the artful expressions of the biblical writers. No notes, however, no matter how complete and thorough, can substitute for reading and interacting with the biblical text itself. These notes are intended to help us read and interact with the text. They are not meant to be a substitute for such a reading and study of the Bible. Nothing we read about the Bible can substitute for reading the Bible itself.

In the end, our study of the Bible must begin and end with the biblical text. But we can't read that text in a vacuum. We bring to our study of the text our lives, our backgrounds,
our educations, everything that goes into making us who we are. And we approach the biblical text not as individuals only, but as members of a believing community, a community of faith which has spent much time and effort in reading and taking in the message of the Bible. These notes, then, are an attempt to pull together some of the things the believing community has discovered about the text to help us keep away from interpretations which are too individualistic and to check our understandings of the text against the insights of the current work of biblical scholars.
**Objective:**
There are three major divisions in the Old Testament, the **LAW**, the **PROPHETS**, and the **WRITINGS**. Each section is united around a central theme and each section is related to the other two. The goal of this unit is to become familiar with the basic divisions of the Old Testament and the themes which are central to each division.

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The word **BIBLE** is a Greek word which simply means **THE BOOKS**. Our Bible is a collection of the Sacred Writings which have been used by Jews and Christians for centuries. Our faith tells us that the Bible is the Word of God, the revelation of his will for us.

Everything that is written has a **THEME**. The **THEME** of a piece of writing is simply a statement of the basic idea with which the writing deals. **EVERYTHING** in the Bible can be said to answer two questions:

**Who are we?**

**What are we to do?**

Those questions are the basic **THEME** of all biblical writing. The stories, poems, essays, and sermons which make up the Bible are **STATEMENTS OF OUR FAITH**. They are pictures of **WHO WE ARE** as God's people and examples of the kinds of actions and behaviors which we, as God's people, should follow.

We do not find history or biography in the Bible. Instead, we find expressions of belief - the faith which the biblical writers had which gave meaning to important events and people in the story of God's dealings with his people. Inspired by their faith in God, the biblical writers used words to paint pictures of people and events which shed light on us, on who we are, or should be, and how we should act because of our faith.

The **OLD TESTAMENT** refers to the Hebrew Scriptures. The writings of the Old Testament were the sacred writings of God's chosen people before the coming of Christ. What the writers of the Old Testament believed about **WHO WE ARE** and **WHAT WE SHOULD DO** was given shape by means of two traditions or two world views. A
**WORLD VIEW** is the basic way we look at ourselves, the way we look at life and the world around us. For the biblical writers of the Old Testament, each of the two world views or traditions, the two different ways of looking at life, involved a man as a model of who we can be, an idea of God's covenant with his chosen people as a guide for what we should do, and a mountain as a symbol of God's relationship with his people.

**One of the Old Testament World Views involved**
1. David  
2. Mt. Zion  
3. the covenant of promise.

**The other Old Testament World View involved**
1. Moses  
2. Mt. Sinai  
3. the conditional covenant.

**Note:**
A COVENANT simply means a formal agreement or treaty between two parties.

? The COVENANT OF PROMISE was a pledge of what one party promised to another party.

? The CONDITIONAL COVENANT was a mutual pledge in which both parties took on obligations.

The first World View, the David-Zion World View, expresses the faith in God's goodness, his love for his people no matter what they do, his willingness to forgive and begin again. The second World View, the Moses-Sinai World View, stresses human responsibility, the need to follow God's teachings and the reality of punishment for sin.

In telling their stories, in giving expression to their faith, the Old Testament writers drew on one or other of these two traditions or world views - depending on whether they thought it was important to stress God's grace and love or our need to be responsible and faithful in keeping God's commandments.

Now, the books of the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures, can be divided into three major parts:

**THE TORAH**  
**THE PROPHETS**  
**THE WRITINGS**

**THE TORAH** is made up of stories and legal writings. It tells the story of God's people from the beginning of creation until the people are on the verge of gaining the Promised Land.
The biblical books which make up the Torah are:

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

These five books are also called the PENTATEUCH, which simply means 'five books.' The word TORAH is sometimes translated as 'law,' referring to the Law of Moses and the tradition that Moses was the author of the books. However, the basic meaning of TORAH is 'teaching' or 'instruction.' The five books of the Torah are united around a single theme. That theme is that GOD'S PROMISES ARE PARTLY FULFILLED.

God promises his chosen people three things:

- **descendants** - that they would be a great people
- a special **relationship** between God and his Chosen People
- the **Promised Land**.

These promises are partly fulfilled in the stories which the Pentateuch tells:

- **Genesis 1 - Exodus 18** tell the story of God's people growing in size, becoming a great people.
- **Exodus 19-40, all of Leviticus, and Numbers 1-10** tell the story of God making a special relationship with his people by giving them the TORAH (the Law or teachings) at Mt. Sinai.
- **Numbers 11-36 and all of Deuteronomy** tell the story of Israel's move to the very edge of the Promised Land and the instructions Moses gives the people before they gain possession of that land.

By the end of the TORAH, then, each of the three promises is partly fulfilled. The people are on the way to becoming a great nation; they are on the way to having the land; they have the teachings of God to guide their relationship with him and are ready to start living according to God's teachings as they become a great nation and gain a homeland. By ending their story with God's promises only partly fulfilled, the writers of the TORAH make an important point about WHO WE ARE as God's people. As God's people we are PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE WAY. We live under God's promises, but only partly. Our lives have meaning because we can grow day by day to experience God's promises more. God's grace and love are part of our lives now, but we are ON THE WAY to the fullness of his grace and love when we reach our home in heaven.

The second major section of the Old Testament is THE PROPHETS. This section of the Old Testament tells the story of Israel's life in the land. The theme of these books, then, is WHAT ISRAEL DOES WITH THE GIFTS GOD OFFERS THEM. If the major focus of the Pentateuch was WHO WE ARE, the major focus of the Prophets is WHAT WE SHOULD DO.
There are two parts to the **PROPHETS**:

**THE FORMER PROPHETS**  
**THE LATTER PROPHETS**

**THE FORMER PROPHETS** are the **HISTORICAL BOOKS**. The **HISTORICAL BOOKS** tell the story of God's people from the taking of the land, through the time of kingship in Israel, until the loss of the land and kingdom in the Babylonian Exile. These books try to teach today's readers how to use the gifts God gives us and to warn us about what can happen if we, like the people of Israel long ago, misuse our gifts. The **HISTORICAL BOOKS** are called the **FORMER PROPHETS** because they include stories about Israel's prophets and the warnings they gave to the people when the people sinned and misused God's gifts.

The **HISTORICAL BOOKS** or **FORMER PROPHETS INCLUDE**:

- The **Book of Joshua**
- The **Book of Judges**
- The Two Books of Samuel
- The Two Books of Kings

- **THE BOOK OF JOSHUA** tells a positive story about a faithful people, following the teachings of God and gaining possession of the Promised Land.
- **THE BOOK OF JUDGES** tells the story of a sinful people, struggling to hang on to the gifts God offers them.
- **THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL** tell a positive story of the rise of kingship in Israel as a way that the people try to change from their sinful ways.
- **THE BOOKS OF KINGS** tell the negative story of the people's continual sin which leads to the loss of God's gifts.

**THE LATTER PROPHETS** contain collections of the sermons which the prophets preached. These books are not stories, like the Historical Books, but words of warning, judgment and hope addressed to God's people when they stray from God's ways.

**THE LATTER PROPHETS** have two divisions

- **The Major Prophets**
- **The Minor Prophets**

The difference between the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets is primarily based on length. The three Major Prophets are

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel

These three Prophetic books are long. Ancient books were written on scrolls and each of these would have required an entire scroll. Each of the books follows a familiar pattern: The pattern is:
1. words of warning about the people's sinful ways
2. an announcement of judgment, the punishment that was sure to follow when the people failed to listen to the prophetic warnings
3. words of hope, the promise that punishment was not God's last word, but that he would restore his people and begin again.

**THE MINOR PROPHETS** are shorter collections of prophetic words. There are twelve of these shorter works which, together, take up one scroll. Each of these books also basically follows the three-part pattern of the Major Prophets, but the books are so arranged in the Minor Prophets (also called the Book of the Twelve) that the pattern repeats itself in the arrangement of the books themselves:

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

**TO SUM UP**, the Prophetic Books tell the story of what Israel does with God's gifts. The Former Prophets tell the story of Israel's rise to be a nation and a world power, the continued sinfulness of the people, and the final loss of land and kingdom. The stories in the Former Prophets tell a gloomy story of loss and try to explain why that loss happened. But the Former Prophets, because they include stories of prophets, point us beyond its pages to the Latter Prophets, to the collection of the words of the prophets which were aimed at Israel's sin. It is in the Latter Prophets that we find the message of hope, for the story does not end with loss, but with the promise that God would restore his people.

The last section of the Hebrew Bible, the **WRITINGS**, is made up of a variety of different materials. It includes prayers, wisdom writings, stories, and a major re-telling of Israel's history. The books which are included in the **WRITINGS** were added to the **TORAH** and the **PROPHETS** because they provided commentary or explanations about the meaning of the two earlier sections; they built on the earlier traditions and gave a fresh look at their contents. The **WRITINGS** include:

- **THE PSALMS** - a book of prayers of petition, thanksgiving and praise
- **THE WISDOM BOOKS**
1. Proverbs
2. Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)
3. Job

These poetic books were produced by a special class of scholars who struggled with problems like the existence of evil, the dignity of man, and the justice of God.

**LAMENTATIONS** - a series of poems, supposedly by the prophet Jeremiah, which meditate on the loss of land and kingship in the Babylonian Exile.

**STORIES**
1. Ruth
2. Esther
3. Daniel

The story of Ruth celebrates God’s love for all the people on earth, not just the Jews, while Esther and Daniel give encouragement to people suffering persecution.

**HISTORIES**
1. Ezra
2. Nehemiah
3. Chronicles

These three books, taken together, make up what is called the Chronicler's History. The purpose of this history was to re-interpret Israel's past traditions as a program for a new life in the land after the Babylonian Exile.

**THE SONG OF SOLOMON** - is a celebration of the physical love between a man and a woman as one of God's greatest gifts.

In addition to these books, modern English translations of the Bible also include several books which were not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but only in the Greek version of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint). These books include Baruch, Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Judith, and the two Books of Maccabees.

**IN SUM.** the most sacred core of the Hebrew Scriptures is the Torah. The stories and legal traditions which make up the TORAH tell us about WHO WE ARE as God's people, what God has to offer us, and what we can do with these gifts. The PROPHETS, then, tell the story of what Israel actually did with the gifts of God. The FORMER PROPHETS or the HISTORICAL BOOKS end up telling a gloomy story of how Israel misused God's gifts and suffered loss, but the LATTER PROPHETS, the written words of the prophets, point us beyond the loss to God's willingness to forgive and begin again. The WRITINGS draw on all of Israel's traditions, meditate on what can be learned from them, and offer fresh ways of looking at the lessons Israel's traditions have to teach.
THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Objective:
The goal of this unit is to present an understanding of the three basic phases in Israel's history which were of prime importance in the production of the Old Testament text. In a first phase, before the beginning of kingship, clans told stories about their ancestors and their God. In the next phase, during the time of the monarchy, these stories were written down and re-interpreted to shed light on who the people were and what they should do in their life in the land. In the final phase, in and after the Babylonian Exile, the Old Testament was put into its final form as scripture.

Vocabulary List:
- SEMITES
- MIGRANT SHEPHERDS
- YAHWEH
- ELDERS
- BABYLONIAN EXILE
- B.C.
- SEA PEOPLE
- PHILISTINES
- TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM
- ISRAEL
- JUDAH
- CYRUS

The books of the Old Testament were written at a particular time and place in history. To understand the Old Testament it is necessary to have some idea about the history of the people who produced the books. We need to understand the special events in the life of Israel which shaped the nation and colored the people's world-view.

The history of the people of ancient Israel can be divided into three broad areas:

1. The story of the people before kingship.
2. The story of the people under its kings.
3. The story of the people after kingship.

In studying history, dates are important. In the Christian world, dates are given with reference to the Birth of Christ. Anything which happened before Christ is labelled B.C., which stands for 'BEFORE CHRIST.' All events which occurred after Christ's birth are designated by A.D., which stands for 'Anno Domini,' a Latin phrase which means "In the year of Our Lord." Sometimes, because not all our brothers and sisters are Christian, the two phases are labelled B.C.E. and C.E., which stand for "Before the Common
Era” and "The Common Era."

Civilization and city living began in the Early Bronze age, about 4000 to 2200 B.C. During this time, people began to change from being hunters and food gathers to being farmers and shepherds. Farming methods improved and large communities began to grow up on the fertile plains near rivers. In the ancient world, the two major areas where civilization began to take root were in Egypt along the Nile River and in Mesopotamia along the Tigris and Euphrates. The cities which developed had formal political organizations, with laws to regulate life and protect the rights of the citizens.

The major contributions of these early civilizations was the invention of writing. With writing, we enter the era of history. Although the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cities had entered the era of history in this period, which simply means that they had developed a means of writing and had begun to keep records of significant events, the land of Israel, during this time remained largely "pre-historic."

As a geographical region, Israel lies between the two great ancient centers of civilization and for most of this period it was controlled either by Egypt or by Mesopotamia. Some small, independent cities - Canaanite cities - developed in the land, but the primary source of water for the country is the Jordan river and this river was not large enough to support large populations. Instead of taking up a settled way of life, most of the people
living in Israel in this early period lived as extended families who made their living by being **MIGRANT SHEPHERDS**.

In the later stages of the Bronze Age, from about 1550 to 1200 B.C., we begin to find evidence of the presence of Israelites in the land, or at least of those people who would eventually unite to become the nation of Israel. Little is known about these people, but it does seem likely that a group of **SEMITES**, a race of people which probably originated in Mesopotamia, escaped from slavery in Egypt and met up with other groups of SEMITES in the land of Canaan. For about 200 years (from 1200 to 1000 B.C.), before the people would unite under a king, these groups of Semites moved about the land of Canaan and lived as Migrant Shepherds. These groups of people were loosely connected by race, common traditions (common stories about ancestors or forefathers), and a shared faith in a God named Yahweh. As **MIGRANT SHEPHERDS**, these people lived on the fringes of society. They were not a part of the cities or city-states of the day, but lived independently and supported themselves by shepherding sheep and goats. These groups moved about primarily in the central hill country of Canaan. It was these people who would eventually band together to become the nation of Israel.

At this time, the people were organized into families and clans. Each clan enjoyed complete independence. If several clans needed to unite for some project, decisions were made democratically by the elders of the clans. **ELDERS** were the heads of the most respected families in a clan. There was no central government, no taxes to be paid, no being drafted into military service.
Two factors worked together to radically change the people's way of life. The first was the growth of the population. As the number of people grew, the living derived from shepherding in the central hill country was no longer able to support the people. They needed to establish a more settled way of life and take up farming to sustain the life of the clans. This settled way of life demanded a more formal organization, including formal laws to govern the relationships between people and protect their rights. Secondly, as the people were expanding into a more settled life in the fertile regions west of the central hill country, they were challenged for possession of this land by the Sea Peoples. The SEA PEOPLES were the PHILISTINES of the Bible. They were an extremely war-like people who had moved into Palestine (Canaan) from areas around Greece. If Israel was to survive in the face of these people and establish themselves in the land, they had to have a standing army, an army which only kingship could maintain.

In about the year 1000 B.C. the people united under a king – first Saul and then David. Under David, the people defeated those who challenged them for the fertile lands west of the central hill country and became a powerful nation. David was able to extend the power of Israel and under him and his son, Solomon, Israel, for a time, was a world power - an empire. David's genius was that he was able to forge a unity between two groups of clans or tribes which formed the nation of Israel. He was from the southern group and had their loyalty, but he needed to secure the loyalty of the northern groups. To do this he conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. This was a master-stroke since the city had not belonged to the territory of either group, so he could not be accused of playing favorites. Next, he brought the Ark of the Covenant, a special religious object for the northern group, to Jerusalem and made it the center of the national religion. In this way he won the approval of the northern group.
David's son, Solomon, was noted for his massive building projects. Most important, he built the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Temple became a symbol for Yahweh's relationship with his people and the key focus of the Jewish religion throughout the biblical period. This period extended from the beginning of kingship in 1000 B.C., through the life-time of Jesus Christ, until the destruction of Jerusalem and its re-built Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Unfortunately, Solomon's success as a builder and in maintaining the empire established by David depended on heavy taxation and forced labor. He abused his powers as king and this was particularly difficult for people who were used to enjoying so much independence. After Solomon's death, a large part of his kingdom in the north rebelled and became a separate nation. The new, northern Kingdom was called Israel, while the kingdom in the south, which continued to be ruled by kings from the family of David, was called Judah.

The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah existed side by side for about 200 years, from about 920 to 721 B.C. Neither kingdom would ever regain world power as an empire and both were forced to be lesser kingdoms in the empires which rose and fell throughout their histories. Both kingdoms, too, would eventually be destroyed when they tried to resist the power of the current world leader. The northern kingdom fell first to the power of the Assyrian empire in 721 B.C. The kingdom was destroyed and its people led off into slavery in Assyria. This kingdom would never be rebuilt. The land of the northern kingdom was resettled by the Assyrians with people from other conquered lands. These people combined with the remnant left from the Jewish population and became the ancestors of the Samaritans. The southern kingdom of Judah escaped destruction at the hands of the Assyrians and survived until 587 B.C. When Assyria fell to the Babylonians, Judah tried to rebel against its new masters and the kingdom was destroyed. The Temple was burned to the ground and the best of the people were taken into Exile in Babylon.

The Babylonian Exile was a critical time in the life of the people. Deprived of homeland, king and temple, the people feared they would lose their identity. In this situation, the traditions of the Old Testament, the stories, legal traditions, poems, and prayers which had been taking shape throughout the 500 years of Israel's kingship, were re-edited and given their final form. They became the Scriptures of the Jewish People.

After fifty years of captivity, the Babylonians fell to the Persians. Cyrus, the Persian Emperor allowed all the captives to return to their homelands. A remnant of Jews returned to Judah and rebuilt the country. They rebuilt the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, however, kingship was never to revive. The people had some independence in internal affairs, but were governed by administrators from whatever nation was currently the world-power - first the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Other people chose to remain in Babylon or to settle in other parts of the Mediterranean world. These people became known as the Jews of the Diaspora or Dispersion. For them, as for the people who had returned to their homeland, the Scriptures, the sacred writings of the people, became a guide to living their lives as God's people wherever they
were. The Jewish faith was beginning to spread world-wide and this situation was to provide the environment in which early Christianity would spread out from Jerusalem and reach the ends of the earth.
A TIME LINE OF JEWISH HISTORY

1200-1000 BC
The coming together of the tribes which would become Israel and the settlement of the land, along with a movement from shepherding to a more settled way of life.

1050 BC
The Philistine Crisis

1025-1006 BC
The Reign of King Saul

1006-968 BC
The Reign of David. The unification of the tribes and the establishment of David's empire. The establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the nation and the center of a national religion. The beginning of the writing of the stories of the Bible. (The YAHWIST source)

968-920 BC
The Reign of Solomon. The establishment of an elaborate court administrative system, massive building projects - including the Jerusalem Temple. The beginning of the collections of legal sayings and wisdom sayings which would form the backbone for Israel's legal and wisdom traditions in the Bible.

920 BC
The division of the Kingdom after Solomon's death. For the establishment of two Jewish Kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This is the age of CLASSICAL PROPHECY - the prophets who preached to warn the people to be faithful to their God. (The ELOHIST source in the north)

721 BC
The destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians. The beginning of the DEUTERONOMIC MOVEMENT in the south - an attempt to combine the best insights of the YAHWISTS and ELOHISTS in order to teach the people to avoid the calamity which had befallen their brothers in the north.

587 BC
The BABYLONIAN EXILE. The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple and the deportation of the best of the population of the southern kingdom. The completion of the Historical Books (the Former Prophets or Deuteronomic History), the collection of the sermons of the WRITING PROPHETS, and the work of the PRIESTLY WRITER.

539 BC
The fall of Babylon to Persia and the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return home. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and its Temple and the basic collection of the Old Testament materials.
STAGES IN THE WRITING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Objective:
The material in the Old Testament took shape over a 500 year span of time. There were four separate editions and re-workings of the material in the Pentateuch, and each of these stages, along with the production of Prophetic and wisdom writings, responds to critical events in the course of Israel's history. The goal of this unit is to relate the stages in the production of the Old Testament to those critical events in Israel's history.

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<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>PATRIARCHS</th>
<th>ELOHIST</th>
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<td>GOD OF HISTORY</td>
<td>GODS OF NATURE</td>
<td>DEUTERONOMIC MOVEMENT</td>
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<td>GODS OF NATURE</td>
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<td>DEUTERONOMIST</td>
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<td>FERTILITY RITES</td>
<td>YAHWIST</td>
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Before the rise of kingship, when the people lived as migrant shepherds in the central hill country, they were united by common stories - stories about their great ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These ancestors were known as the PATRIARCHS, and were considered to be the fathers of Israel's faith. They also told stories about how God freed slaves from Egypt and led them to a homeland, how he entered into a relationship with those people at Mt. Sinai and cared for them on their long journey to their new home. These stories expressed the faith of the people. They believed that just as God had led their forefathers from slavery into a new homeland and cared for them on the way, so God would lead them from one pasture land to another and care for them on their journey. That is, they believed in a GOD OF HISTORY, a God who led his people into an unknowable future.

This faith made the people of Israel different from all their neighbors. The people who lived in cities and led settled lives which depended on farming had a different image of God. They believed in gods of Nature. THE GODS OF NATURE were believed to die in winter and rise again in the spring. Because the people in settled cities depended on good weather, they thought that they had to please their gods to assure good weather so that their crops would not fail. Where Israel saw its God as a caring God who led them, Israel's neighbors saw their gods as hostile and they tried to win the gods' favor by fertility rites. FERTILITY RITES were practices which imitated the 'actions of the gods' to try and assure the fertility of the land - to assure that it would produce an abundant harvest. These rites were hardly more than superstitions and often involved unspeakable acts such as religious prostitution, the practice of religious leaders sleeping first with a young girl when she married, and strange sacrifices, sometimes even human sacrifices.

With the rise of kingship, the people of Israel radically changed the kind of life they lived. They became settled and the individual clans lost most of their independence.
They began to live a life-style similar to their neighbors, dependent on the changes in the seasons. To give permanence to the belief that this new way of life under David was what God now willed for his people, writers in the court of David began to collect the old stories of the people and to re-tell them in such a way that showed that the new way of life was God's plan for his people, the way he was leading them now. These writers put together what is called the **Yahwist Source** of the Pentateuch. These writers lived in a time when there was peace and wealth and power for the kingdom of David. They believed that God had led them to this. They believed that the good things that were happening for the people were the result of God's promises to their forefathers, but they also believed that those promises were given for a purpose. **They believed that the people of Israel experienced God's blessing so that they could share it with all the people of the earth.** Because of this faith, the way they re-told Israel's stories also served as a warning to those in power. David and the kings of his line did not have power for its own sake, but so that they could lead all others to experience God's blessings. That is, they protested against a wrong use of power.

**THE THEME OF THE YAHWIST IS THAT IN ISRAEL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH ARE TO FIND BLESSING**

Early Israelite Wisdom, such as is seen in the core material of the Book of Proverbs, also shares this faith view of the Yahwist. Wisdom sayings began to be collected at this time in court circles. These collections were used to educate people in the right use of God's blessings by means of the lessons that can be learned from just observing how things are and how they work.

Unfortunately, Solomon did not learn the lessons that the Yahwists and early Wisdom writers had to offer. He abused his power and got rich for himself and not for the good of others. He even began to allow the sacrifices and fertility rites of Israel's neighbors to be practiced in the Holy City of Jerusalem and its Temple. When the people in the northern part of the kingdom rebelled and set up their own kingdom after Solomon's death, they faced a problem. If, as the Yahwists had taught, God had willed for his people to enter into a settled way of life under the kings of the line of David, they needed to explain that the new kingdom in the north was also part of God's plan. Writers in the north took on this task. These writers produced the **Elohist Source** of the Pentateuch. They stressed that the kings of the south had broken faith with God by their abuse of kingly power. They shifted world views from the David-Zion model to an older Moses-Sinai model. Their model stressed the conditional covenant, a covenant in which human obedience to the will of God was the key to success. **The Elohists, then, protested against a false use of human initiative, in which people relied more on themselves than on God and his will for them.**

**THE THEME OF THE ELOHIST WAS THE FEAR OF YAHWEH**

That theme did not mean being frightened, but awed or in reverence of God. It called for people to give to God his due, to act faithfully and responsibly in carrying out God's will.
It was at this time, too, that the classical prophets began their ministry. **The prophets were men chosen by God to warn the people and its kings of the dangers of power and wealth, and especially the dangers of idolatry into which the people were falling by mixing their faith in Yahweh with the religious practices of their neighbors.**

When the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C., some refugees from the north fled to the southern kingdom of Judah. These people believed that the northern kingdom had fallen because its kings and people had not learned the lessons of the Elohists nor had they heeded the warnings of the prophets. In coming south, they brought with them the writings of the Elohists and the collections of prophetic words. Soon these writings began to be honored in the south and became the basis for a reform movement. This movement was called the **Deuteronomic Movement**. **The movement was an attempt to reform the way of life in the southern kingdom so that it would reflect faithfulness to Yahweh. The writers associated with this movement, the Deuteronomists, were responsible for re-telling the teachings of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy as a plan for reforming the practices of the southern kingdom. These writers were responsible for putting together the Historical Books and for editing the books of the written prophets.** At first, they worked to change the people in the south so that they could escape the fate of their brothers to the north. However, when the people of the south failed to respond to the call for reform and the kingdom of Judah suffered the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians that Israel had suffered at the hands of the Assyrians, **the Deuteronomists continued their work during the exile. In this they offered the people a message of hope - that it was possible to return to God, to repent, and to return to the land and begin to live again as God's people.**

**THE THEME OF THE DEUTERONOMISTS IS REPENT AND RETURN**

Also during the Babylonian Exile, another group became active. These were the **priestly writers** who supply the **Priestly Source** of the Pentateuch. Like the Deuteronomists, the purpose of the Priestly Writers was to give hope to the people. Those who had relied on God's promises and believed that he had chosen David's line as kings forever and had chosen Jerusalem as the Holy City where he would live with his people saw the loss of land, temple, and kingship as a sign that God had finally abandoned his people, that he had given up on them. **The Priestly Writers stressed that God's promises were still good and that the people were ON THE WAY to living into them. The Priestly Writers were responsible for giving the Pentateuch its final shape.**

**THE THEME OF THE PRIESTLY WRITERS IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND HIS PROMISES ENDURE**

The point of view of the Priestly writers is also expressed in the late prophecy of this time, especially Second Isaiah and the Book of Ezekiel.
After the exile, those who returned to Judah rebuilt the temple (though on a much smaller scale than Solomon's original) and set up the system of worship again. The kingship, however, was never to return. With the loss of kingship, prophecy also passed away. By this time, the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, and the prophetic writings had received their final shape and began to be the Holy Scriptures of the people. Other works which were thought to be important were added to these core books, the books which make up the WRITINGS. A few additional works were added later, during the Greek Period.

It was the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. which put an end to the worship system of the Jerusalem Temple for all time. The Romans denied Jews access to the Holy City and the Jewish people changed from being a people of the temple and its sacrifices to being A PEOPLE OF THE BOOK. For all the bad press they get in the New Testament, it was the Pharisees who were responsible for the survival of Judaism to this day. The Pharisees were the successors of the wise men from Ancient Israel and the forefathers of today's Rabbis.
ON READING OLD TESTAMENT STORIES

Objective:
The writers of the stories of the Old Testament were real authors who used their creative talents to produce memorable stories. The stories they told follow the pattern of Folk Stories which are common to all people. The aim of this unit is to present the basic plot outline used in most Old Testament stories, the special features of story telling in the Bible, and to define some special classes of stories which are met often in the Old Testament. Paying attention to the special features of ancient stories and how stories were told will aid in understanding the lessons the biblical writers wanted to teach.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>NARRATOR</th>
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Much of the material in the Old Testament is NARRATIVE; it is composed of STORY.

**STORY** refers to "what" a narrative is about.

**RHETORIC** refers to "how" a story is told.

Paying attention to "HOW" a story is told gives important clues to "WHAT" a story is about.

RHETORIC refers to special features writers use to give meaning. By paying attention to the following elements of rhetoric we get a path into what a story is trying to say, into what the biblical writers are trying to teach us.

1. **THE NARRATOR:**
   
   **The NARRATOR is the VOICE we hear telling the story.** Biblical narrators or storytellers are all-knowing (omniscient). That is, they know everything about the story - even what is in the secret thoughts of the characters and of God. Most often the storyteller does not make his or her presence felt, so it is important to pay attention to 'asides' (those times when the narrator speaks directly to us). In understanding the voice of the narrator, we have to ask

   - How does the narrator present the story?
   - How does the narrator present the characters?
   - What values does the narrator hold?

2. **POINT OF VIEW:**
   
   Each character in the story has a point of view - A WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS. These are revealed in what the characters do and say. A point of view
may be sympathetic or judgmental, approving or disapproving, friendly or hostile, or the like. In understanding point of view, we have to ask

? How does a character look at God's actions and plans? At Moses or Abraham, etc.? At the people of Israel? At the events in the story?

? How does the narrator look at the characters in the story? At what is happening in the story?

3. **STYLE:**
   **STYLE refers to the feeling or tone conveyed by the story.** In understanding style we have to ask

? Is the way of telling the story descriptive or suggestive? What effect does this have?

? Are there frequent scene changes? What effect does this have?

? Is the story fast-paced or slow-paced? Does the pace vary? What effect does this have?

4. **NARRATIVE PATTERNS:**
   **NARRATIVE PATTERNS refer to the way a narrative is arranged.** Narratives include the following:

? **Repetition** of words, phrases, even episodes gives clues to what is important to the storyteller.

? **Speech** or dialogue slows the story down and points out what is important. In biblical writing, speech is an indication of an important point within the story. In understanding speech we have to ask

   A. How do the people in the story speak? (foolishly, with authority, with anger, or the like?)
   B. What does their speech reveal about them?
   C. How does their speech compare or contrast them with other characters in the story?

? **Irony** consists in presenting something from one point of view and evaluating it from another point of view. (For example, in the Gospels, the Roman soldiers call Jesus "King of the Jews" in order to mock him; but from the story's point of view, what they say is true and they are revealing their blindness in what they say). In understanding irony we have to ask

   A. Is irony present?
   B. If it is, at whose expense is it used?
   C. How does it contribute to our understanding of the people and events in the story?

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Old Testament Notes
4. SETTINGS AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT:
SETTINGS AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT give flavor and texture to a story. In understanding settings we have to ask

? What difference does it make that something happens in a given setting, in a given time and place?
? Does the setting recall other stories?
? Does recalling other stories with similar settings help us understand the present story better?

A STORY is made up of CHARACTERS and PLOT. PLOT refers to what happens in a story and the CHARACTERS are those who experience and take part in what happens.

There are three types of CHARACTERS in biblical stories:

? FULL CHARACTERS who either show change or development in the course of the story, or, while remaining consistent, display a full range of emotional responses and motivations.
? FLAT CHARACTERS are representatives of a class of people – the good, the bad, fools, sinners, or the like.
? FOILS are people necessary for the plot. They are not so much important in themselves as in the role they fill.

In general, the PLOTS of biblical stories are simple:

1. THE PROBLEM is what injects tension into a story. It causes a disturbance in a stable situation which needs to be resolved.
2. THE COMPLICATION is the 'stuff' of the story, what happens in moving from the problem to its resolution.
3. THE RESOLUTION is the point at which the problem is solved. Identifying the point of resolution often gives an important clue as to what the whole story is about.
4. THE DENOUEMENT or WRAP-UP ties up all loose ends and returns things to a stable situation.

Sometimes a story will also include an EVALUATION, an indication of how we are to view the action of the story, or an ABSTRACT, which is a kind of summary statement telling what the story is to deal with.

This general plot outline fits just about all of the small, independent stories in the Bible. The basic outline also unifies larger cycles of stories, such as the Abraham cycle in the Old Testament and even the Gospels in the New Testament.

In the end, after looking at how a story is told in the Bible and how it moves, we should be able to define the story's SUBJECT and THEME.
The SUBJECT refers to a simple statement saying what the story is about.
The THEME describes what the story has to say about its subject.

Once we have defined a story's subject and theme, we are in a position to determine what it is that the biblical storyteller wants us to learn from his story, to see what he wants us to understand about WHO WE ARE and WHAT WE SHOULD DO.

There are generally three types of narratives or stories found in the Old Testament:

? **MYTH** - a story which brings together opposites. (God creates a good world, but there is evil. The creation stories in Genesis are myths which bring together these opposites and explain why there is evil in God's good world).

? **LEGEND** - a story which tries to get us to imitate some virtue or trait. (Stories about Abraham focus on his faith as an example we can imitate.)

? **TALE** - a simple, folk-style story which explores the ups and downs of being human.

**MYTH, LEGEND, and TALE** refer to the purpose of the story, what it tries to accomplish.

These individual types of stories are often combined into larger wholes:

? **CYCLES OF STORIES.** Many times individual, independent stories are arranged in a cycle - as is the case with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the stories in Judges - and the cycle itself is arranged according to the basic elements of a single story. That is, a cycle may deal with a basic PROBLEM. The COMPLICATING FACTORS will be the stories which move the cycle from the problem to its resolution. The RESOLUTION will be narrated, and the cycle will wind down to a stable situation.

? **SAGA** generally refers to a cycle of tales in which the hero's birth is noted in unusual circumstances; at first the hero is identified with the enemy, but comes to join his own people and takes up their cause; and his death - sometimes in mysterious or unusual circumstances - is narrated. (The story of Moses and the story of Samson are both clear examples of SAGAS in the Bible).

? **NOVELLA** refers to a single, sustained story, longer than a short story, but with only a limited number of characters. It is shorter than a novel and has less character development than is seen in novels. The Joseph and Esther stories are examples of Novellas, while Jonah and Ruth are short stories.

If Myth, Legend, and Tale describe biblical stories according to their purposes, there are also **PLOT STRUCTURES** which are often repeated in biblical stories and allow us to group stories together by plot, by what regularly happens. The fact that these stories repeat basic plot elements sets up expectations in us as readers and when the narrator varies the plot structure our expectations are shattered, but we get an important glimpse into what is important for the story teller.
DECEPTION STORIES explore the theme of human initiative and suggest that God helps those who help themselves, while at the same time recognizing limitations on human initiative. The regular pattern of Deception stories is:

A. A person or group faces a problem - usually a life-or-death situation at the hands of someone powerful and evil.
B. That person or group uses a deception against the evil, more powerful person causing the problem.
C. The deception is successful and lives are saved.

MIRACLE STORIES deal with the opposite theme of deception stories. In these stories, humans are powerless, the problem situation is beyond human control. Miracle stories deal with the theme or trust in God in seemingly hopeless situations. The typical miracle story has the following elements:

A. People face some - usually life threatening - problem.
B. They bring it to the attention of one who can help (a figure like Moses or one of the prophets, or in the New Testament to Jesus)
C. The one who can help turns to God and gets instructions about what to do (except in the New Testament - Jesus merely acts directly and the story teller uses this to make a statement about who he really is).
D. The instructions are carried out and the problem is solved.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT STORIES deal with human initiative gone wrong. These stories typically focus on human willfulness and sin, but always end with a statement about God's mercy. Crime and Punishment stories include these elements:

A. People sin and place themselves in a life-threatening situation.
B. God confronts the guilty to pronounce a judgment - most often in absolute terms.
C. The people are led to confront their own guilt and either
   1. accept the judgment and admit guilt
   2. turn to a leader to pray to God for them (here the pattern can blend with the miracle story pattern - the problem is God's judgment and the miracle is its removal).
D. God imposes a judgment, but significantly less that what is merited. In the end, the stories say that sin always has consequences, but that the mercy of God is the final word.

Finally, there are some biblical stories which can be called TYPE SCENES. These stories display an exact or nearly exact arrangement of plot elements. The story teller's basic point is often revealed in how he varies these elements.

THE WIFE-SISTER SCENE (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18, 26:1-14)
A. There is famine in the Land of Canaan  
B. The Patriarch and his wife travel to a foreign land  
C. The Patriarch lies about his wife, presenting her as his sister (a deception used in the face of a perceived danger - whether the danger is real or not)  
D. The wife is taken into the royal harem  
E. God gets involved to save her  
F. The foreign king demands an explanation (usually showing him to be a good man who would not have taken the woman had he known she was married)  
G. Riches are given to the Patriarch and his wife and they go home.

A. The favored wife is barren (can't have children)  
B. The husband has another wife who is a rival and can have children  
C. The rival wife gives birth to a son  
D. The rival wife belittles the favored wife, bringing on conflict

A. The wife is barren  
B. A messenger from God appears to the woman  
C. The Messenger promises a son  
D. The event is confirmed by a sign in spite of human doubt  
E. The promised son is born and given a significant name.

The RIVAL WIFE SCENE and THE ANNUNCIATION SCENE both involve a barren woman. The stories are used to symbolize the situation in the life of the people. In a lifeless situation, it is God who brings life.

? **THE BETROTHAL SCENE** (Gen 24:10-61, 29:1-19, Ex 2:15-21, I Sam 9, Jn 4:4-42)  
A. The hero (or his agent) travels to a foreign land  
B. He meets one or more young girls at a well  
C. Somebody draws water  
D. There is rushing back and forth between the well and the girl's house  
E. The hero is invited to share a meal and/or spend the night  
F. He accepts and a marriage is arranged

THE BETROTHAL SCENE is always used to show two things: 1) that the hero is a significant person at a critical turning point in his life; and 2) that he has some important part to play in God's plan for his people (represented by some detail in the story).
THE PENTATEUCH

**Objective:**

The theme of the Pentateuch is that God's promises to the Patriarchs are partly fulfilled. The five books of the Pentateuch form the most sacred core of the Hebrew Scriptures. The aim in studying the stories and legal traditions of the Pentateuch is to discover what these books, with their special theme have to say to us today, what light they shed on WHO WE ARE and WHAT WE SHOULD DO.

The first five books of the Bible are called the **PENTATEUCH (which means 'five books')** or the Torah. Torah is composed of story and legal material and this material makes up the most basic and sacred core of the Old Testament. The basic meaning of **TORAH** is "Teachings" or "Instruction." The Torah is held together by a single THEME:

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**The Promises to the Patriarchs are partly fulfilled.**

The promises to the Patriarchs include three things:

- **The promise of many descendants (becoming a great nation)**
- **The promise of a special relationship with God.**
- **The promise of the land.**

By the end of the Pentateuch, each of these promises is partly fulfilled, so there is a future fulfillment for the people to experience, to live into. There is more to the story, our story.

The final editing of the Torah took place in and shortly after the Babylonian Exile, so the idea of the promises being partly fulfilled and partly not fulfilled gave a message of hope to people who had seen their nation fall apart, their kingdom destroyed, and their holy temple ruined.
For all later readers of the Bible, this theme says that we, as God's people, ARE ON THE WAY, that we live in God's promises now, but that there is a future fulfillment to be given. Our lives are a journey of moving more and more into God's promises.

For today's readers of the Bible, then, the three promises still have meaning. The promise of becoming a great people represents God's will that we have people in our lives who give us a sense of belonging. The promise of a homeland represents God's will that we be safe and secure. And the promise of a special relationship with God represents God's will that we, today, have a special relationship with him. We experience all of these things, but we are on the way to living more deeply into them.

When the Priestly Writers gave the material in the Pentateuch its final shape, they gave the stories of the first five books of the Bible an elaborate concentric structure. A concentric structure (also called a chiasm) is a pattern of repetition in which the first element is repeated or mirrored in the last element, the second in the second to the last, and so on. Everything builds to and falls away from the central element. That central point is the key focus of the pattern. **In the Pentateuch, the key, central focus is found in the events which take place at Mount Sinai.** There, the people of Israel meet with God and enter into a special and formal relationship with him, a relationship which makes Israel God's special people.
The concentric structure which the Priestly Writers gave to the Pentateuch can be outlined as follows:

A. **Genesis and Exodus 1-15.** The formation of the people of Israel before the Covenant.

B. **Exodus 16-18.** The Wilderness Traditions - stories about God's leadership and care for his people along with stories about the people's grumbling and rebellion in the wilderness. Wilderness stories surround the critical events at Sinai. (Note: Genesis and Exodus 1-18 develop the idea of God's promise that the people would become a great nation. In this section of the Pentateuch, the people grows large and wins its freedom from slavery in Egypt).

C. **Exodus 19-40, Leviticus, and Numbers 1-11.** This section of the Pentateuch involves all that happens while the people are camped at Mount Sinai. Here, they receive the Law and enter into a special covenant relationship with Yahweh. But note that even here, at the heart of the Pentateuch, the people fail by making the Golden Calf.

B. **Numbers 12-36.** The Wilderness Traditions - stories about God's leadership and care for his people along with stories about the people's grumbling and rebellion in the wilderness. Again note that the wilderness stories surround the critical events at Sinai.

A. **Deuteronomy.** Deuteronomy consists of a series of sermons by Moses which summarize all the preceding material and lays down a pattern for the people's future life in the land. (Note that Numbers 12-36 and Deuteronomy develop the theme of the land. In Numbers 12-36 the people are on the march to the edge of the land and in Deuteronomy, the speeches of Moses present instructions for how to live as God's people once the land is taken.)
1. The Book of Genesis

Objective:
The book of Genesis is about roots, about where we come from and what God has intended for us from the very beginning. The aim in studying the book of Genesis is to understand that we have a place in God's plan, that he has chosen us. But more than this, Genesis teaches us that God chooses us and gives us his gifts for a reason - we are to bring his blessings to all other people. This idea of being chosen to bring blessings to others is the theme of Genesis.

Vocabulary List: GENESIS PRIMEVAL HISTORY

ABRAHAM CYCLE JACOB CYCLE
JOSEPH STORY GENEALOGY

The book of GENESIS is the first book of the Bible, the first book of the Torah. Genesis is a Greek word which translates the first words of the book in Hebrew, "In the beginning..." The book itself has four major sections:

? THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY.
THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY is found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. It tells the story of creation and the fall. The individual stories which make up this section of Genesis are, for the most part, MYTHS, stories which are intended to bring together opposites. These stories try to explain why, in God's good world, there is suffering, pain, division and sin.

? THE ABRAHAM CYCLE.
THE ABRAHAM CYCLE is made up mostly of LEGENDS. Abraham is the first of the Israelite Patriarchs, the first of the fathers of the Jewish nation and faith. In choosing one people to have a special relationship with him, God is trying to undo what went wrong in the Primeval History and bring his blessings to all other people. As a legend, the story of Abraham says something about who we can be. Abraham is THE MODEL OF FAITH. It is the faith of Abraham which is held up to us as the virtue we can imitate. The Abraham cycle is found in Genesis 12-25.

? THE JACOB CYCLE.
THE JACOB CYCLE is composed mostly of TALES, stories which explore the realities of being human. The stories in the Jacob Cycle are pictures of human life, with its problems and successes, with its hardships and reconciliations. The Jacob Cycle is found in Genesis 26-36.

? THE JOSEPH STORY.
THE JOSEPH STORY is a NOVELLA, a longer, single, sustained story rather than a cycle of shorter stories woven together into a whole. This story is an exploration of the trials of a single man's life, his struggle to grow up, and his need to make peace. The Joseph Novella is found in Genesis 37-50.
There is a progression in Genesis. As we move through the book, God begins to slip more and more into the background, while the human characters move more center stage. We move from an idealized past where people walked and talked with God, to the real world, OUR WORLD, where we experience God behind the scenes, in invisible and mysterious ways.

The whole book of Genesis is given a structure by means of GENEALOGIES. A GENEALOGY is a family tree, a listing of family relationships. These genealogies bridge large spans of time and move the story along. At significant points, the story teller stops to dwell on stories and episodes which he thinks are important. In a summary way, then, the genealogies do basically the same thing as the stories. They tell - in a rapid fashion - the unfolding of God's plan for his creation.

The genealogies serve two purposes in structuring the book. First, there is a step-by-step narrowing of focus. The book begins by considering ALL CREATION, then narrows to focus on human beings. Within the human race, the focus narrows to focus on the Semitic people and, finally, on the family of Abraham within the race of Semites. In this way, the book highlights the idea of Israel's CHOSENNESS. God's special people are chosen out of all the world to receive his promises. But secondly, the genealogies also list side-line peoples, such as the descendants of Lot (a cousin of Israel), Ishmael (a half-brother) and Esau (a twin brother). In this, the book stresses that the people of Israel must understand themselves IN RELATION TO ALL OTHER PEOPLES.

The structuring of the Book of Genesis by means of genealogies was the special contribution made by the Priestly Writer at the time of the Babylonian Exile. However, most of the stories in Genesis come from the Yahwist source. This source was composed during the high times of the empire of David and Solomon. The THEME of the Yahwist source was that ISRAEL WAS CHOSEN TO BRING BLESSING TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH. For the Yahwist, this theme provided the answer to the question, "Why are we God's chosen people?" The Priestly Writers built on this theme by showing, in the genealogies, that Israel was CHOSEN FROM ALL THE WORLD and had a SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP TO ALL OTHER PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.
The structure of Genesis by means of genealogies can be outlined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God creates the world and everything in it (Gen 1:1-2:3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The story of humankind + a genealogy (Gen 2:4-5:32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story of Noah, the father of the Semites, and the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genealogy of the Semites (Gen 6:1-11:26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus narrows to one family among the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semites and then to one man, Abraham,</td>
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<tr>
<td>who will be the father of Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Gen 11:27-50:26)</td>
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Along with the narrowing focus from all creation to the family of Abraham, Genesis includes side-line genealogies, for example that of Lot, the father of Ammon and Moab, traditional enemies of Israel, that of Ishmael, the half-brother of Isaac and the father of the Arabs, and that of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob and the father of the Edomites, another traditional enemy of Israel. These side-line genealogies stress over and over again that Israel is related to others - even enemies - and is chosen to bring God's blessing to those other people.

Each of the four main sections of Genesis helps to develop the theme that Israel is chosen to bring God's blessings to all the people of the earth.

? In the **PRIMEVAL HISTORY**, in chapters 1-11, the book begins with the story of how God created a good world, but how human beings failed to appreciate God's gifts, how they sinned. The end result is that God chooses Abraham to be the father of a special people who are to bring God's blessings to all the people of the world - to help all people get back on the right track.

? In the **ABRAHAM CYCLE**, chapters 12-25, two stories give examples of how Israel was (and now we are) to do this:

A. Following the example of Abraham who prayed for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, we are to pray for sinners.
B. Following the example of Isaac who entered into peaceful negotiations with others for water rights, we are to deal peacefully with others.

? In the **JACOB CYCLE**, chapters 26-36, Jacob is always associated with hard work and his work benefits others. We are to bring blessing to others by our hard work.

? In the **JOSEPH STORY**, chapters 37-50, Joseph wisely manages the good things of the earth and saves Egypt and Palestine in a time of famine. We are to bring blessings to others by our wise use of the world's goods.
A. The Primeval History

Objective:
The Primeval History tells the story of Creation and tries to explain some of the mysteries of human life. From the Primeval History we learn that those things which keep people apart are the result of sin, but that even though sin is a reality in God's good Creation, it is God's love and mercy for his people that can overcome division. As God's people we are called to work to return to the original order of things, to live life as God meant for us to from the beginning of Creation.

The introduction to the whole Pentateuch, with its theme of the partial fulfillment of God's promises, is to be found in the PRIMEVAL HISTORY in Genesis 1-11. The stories in these eleven chapters are independent narratives, complete in themselves. The stories comes from the YAWHIST SOURCE which was written during the time of David and Solomon. In this part of the story of the beginnings of Israel, the peaceful and orderly world created by God is shattered by human sin. In spite of God's continued attempts to get things moving back in the right direction, repeated sin and violence continue to grow. This suggests from the start that the independent stories which make up the Primeval History are united around a single theme. That theme is

**The Spread of Sin. The Spread of Grace.**

This is a key idea for the writers of the Primeval History. Though God created a good world, human sin and willfullness caused suffering and woe. But, even in the face of growing human sin, God does not abandon his people and his creation. The Faith of the biblical writers asserts that God's love, forgiveness and mercy is always the final word which God addresses to human sinfulness.

Five stories make up the Primeval History. These stories are woven together by means of genealogies which move us from the beginning of creation to the beginning of God's chosen people when God calls Abram and gives him his mission.
The Stories of the Primeval History are:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Story of the Seven Days of Creation</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Story of Adam and Eve</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Story of Cain and Abel</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Story of Noah and the Flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story of the Tower of Babel</td>
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</table>

The genealogies in the Primeval History provide a long, connected chain from Adam to Abraham. There are ten generations from Adam to Noah, when all the possibilities for the created world seem to be lost, and ten generations from Noah to Abraham, when God chooses a man to be the father of a great people through whom the blessings of creation can be given back to all the people of the world.

In chapter 1, Genesis begins with the idea that God created a good world, an orderly world, and that people, males AND females, created EQUALLY in the image of God, were to rule and master this world. The story in chapter 1 has a $3 + 3 + 1$ pattern. On the first three days, Yahweh maps out the areas of creation, while on the next three days he fills those areas. The high point falls on the sixth day with God's creation of humans. On the seventh day God rested and this shows his satisfaction and pleasure with what he has made.

**The Seven Days of Creation (Genesis 1)**

_In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and the earth was formless and empty and there was darkness over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was moving about over the face of the waters._

**Day One:**
And God said, "Let there by light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was GOOD, and God divided the light and the darkness. And God called the light "Day," and the darkness he called "Night." And it was evening and it was morning. The first day.

**Day Four:**
And God said, "Let here be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide between the day and the night and let them be signs and for seasons and for days and years; And let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And so it was. And God made two great lights, the bigger light for the dominion of the day and the smaller light for dominion of the night, and the stars. And God set them into the firmament of the heavens to give light to the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night and to divide the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was GOOD. And it was evening and it was morning. The Fourth day.
The Second Day:
And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the the waters and let there be a division between the waters." And God made the firmament and he divided between the waters which were below the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament. And so it was. And God called the firmament "The Heavens." And it was evening and it was morning. The second day.

The Fifth Day:
And God said, "Let the waters teem with life, teeming creatures, and let birds fly over the earth, over the face of the firmament of the heavens." And God created the great sea monsters and every living thing with which the waters teemed according to their kinds every bird of the wing according to its kind. And God saw that it was GOOD. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and become numerous on the earth." And it was evening and it was morning. The fifth day.

The Third Day:
And God said, "Let the waters be collected from under the heavens to one place and let there be dry ground." And so it was. And God called the dry land "Earth" and the collection of waters he called "Seas." And God saw that it was GOOD. And God said, "Let the earth sprout fresh, new grass, herbs forming seed and trees making fruit with its seed in it according to its kind. And God saw that it was GOOD. And it was evening and it was morning. The third day.

The Sixth Day:
And God said, "Let the earth bring forth a soul of life according to its kind, creeping things and the living things of the earth according to their kind. And so it was. And God made the living things of the earth according to their kind and and the beasts according to their kind and every creeping thing of the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was GOOD. And God said, "Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heaven and the beasts and over all the earth and over every creeping thing creeping on the earth." And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and become many; fill the earth and subject it and have dominion over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing creeping on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given to you every herb sowing seed which is on the face of all the earth and every tree in which there is the fruit of a tree sowing seed; to you they will be for food. And for every living thing of the earth and for every bird of the heavens and for every thing which creeps on the
The Seventh Day:

*And the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And God finished on the Seventh Day from his work which he had done. And God rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all the work which God had created to do.*

The story of the seven days of creation shows that God created an ordered and good world. In his world "There was a place for everything and everything was in its place." That is the whole of point of balancing the first three days with the next three. Humans were created as the high point of creation, the crown of all of God's work. The storyteller stresses the dignity of humans, both male and female, originally created equal in the eyes of God.

So, WHAT WENT WRONG? If God created a good and orderly world, why is there suffering, pain, and sin? The rest of the stories in the Primeval History address these questions. These stories are MYTHS, and Myths are stories which bring together complete opposites. The rest of the stories in the Primeval History are:

- The story of Adam and Eve.
- The story of Cain and Abel.
- The story of Noah and the Flood.
- The story of the Tower of Babel.

Each one of these stories has a special pattern. The stories are all CRIME AND PUNISHMENT STORIES. Every Crime and Punishment story has the same basic theme:

**Though Humans Sin and Deserve Punishment, God Chooses to Show Mercy.**

- The **PLOT OUTLINE** of Crime and Punishment Stories can be given as follows:
  
  - **PROBLEM** - People sin and place themselves in a life-threatening situation.
  
  - **COMPLICATION** - God confronts the guilty to pronounce a judgment - usually in absolute terms.
  
  - **RESOLUTION** - People are led to confront their own guilt and
    
    A. admit their guilt and accept the judgment, or
    
    B. turn to a leader (like Moses) to ask for forgiveness for them.
  
  - **WRAP-UP** - God imposes a judgment, but less that the absolute judgment that was first announced.
Crime and Punishment stories teach two important lessons:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sin always has consequences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>But, in the end, God is always willing to forgive and begin again.</td>
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The Story of Adam and Eve.

The book of Genesis opened with the story of the seven days of creation. The key idea behind the first chapter of the book is the faith statement that the world is good, created by God and well ordered, that human beings - male and female - are the image of God and the crowning glory of God's creative act.

Now reality sets in. There is pain and suffering in the world. People are torn apart. There are fear and hardships to endure. We seldom, if ever, experience the ideal as God originally intended it. As MYTHS, the rest of the stories in the Primeval try to bring together these opposites - the fact that God created a good and ordered world, but that is not the world in which we live.

The first example of such a MYTH is the story of Adam and Eve, found in Genesis 2:4-3:24. For the most part, the first section of the story (chapter 2) can be said to deal with the theme of Intimacy. Man (ha-adam in Hebrew) is related or connected to the ground (ha-adamah in Hebrew). He is connected to all other living things because they, too, are formed from the ground, but he has a superior relationship to them - he names them. As was the case in chapter 1, here again humans are the crowning glory of God's creation. But finally, the man is intimately related to the woman. She is built up from him, part of him and created to be his counterpart and equal, to fill up what is lacking.

The whole first section of the story of Adam and Eve is governed by the idea of lacks - of something missing. Everything God does in this part of the story is for the explicit purpose of removing those lacks (see Gen 2:4-6 - lack of vegetation, lack of water, lack of someone to work the ground), to make his creation complete. The major focus of this part of the story comes with God's words that "It is not good for man to be alone." The major idea, then, of this part of the story is that we, as human beings, are not meant to be alone, that we need each other in order to be complete.
The second part of the story is a Crime and Punishment story. Adam and Eve live in the garden and experience wide freedom, but also limits. They are not to eat from the fruit of the trees which grow in the center of the Garden - the **Tree of Life** and the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**. But they cross those limits and all the original closeness that was theirs is destroyed. They blame each other, destroying the closeness between them; they survive only through hard work - so the original connection between man and the ground which supports him has been damaged.

In the end, the Story of Adam and Eve is about sin and how sin destroys relationships, damages the trust that should and could exist between people, and inflicts pain and hardship on everyone involved. Yet, the story also is realistic enough to present a picture of the fact that all humans face limits and are still drawn to cross those limits, to find out what lies beyond.

*The Story of Cain and Abel.*

Now the man had intercourse with Eve, his wife, and she became pregnant and bore Cain. And she said, "I have gotten a man with God." And she went on to give birth to his brother, Abel. Now Abel was one shepherding flocks and Cain was one working the ground. And it was at the end of the days and Cain brought fruit from the ground as an offering to Yahweh. And Abel, also he, brought one of the first-born of his flock and its fat. Now Yahweh looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but he had no regard for Cain and his offering. And this angered Cain very much and his face fell.

Then Yahweh said to Cain, "Why has it angered you and why has your face fallen? Is there not dignity if you do well? **But if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door and its urge is upon you. But you must rule over it.**"

But Cain spoke to Abel, his brother; and it happened, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.

And Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" But he said, "I do not know. **Am I my brother’s keeper?**" And he said, "What have you done? The voice of the blood of your brother is crying out to me from the ground. And now, cursed are you from the ground which opened its mouth to take the blood of your brother from your hand. A roamer and an aimless wanderer will you now be in the land." But Cain said to Yahweh, "Too great is my wickedness for me to bear. Behold, you have driven me out today from the face of the ground and from your face I will hide and I will be a roamer and an aimless wanderer in the land, but it will be, should anyone find me, he will kill me." But Yahweh said to him, "Not so! Anyone who kills Cain will pay sevenfold." And Yahweh
set a mark on Cain so that no one finding him should kill him. And Cain went from the
presence of Yahweh and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The Story of Cain and Abel is another Crime and Punishment story. The story has a
somewhat long introduction which sets the scene for the major problem. It is within the
setting that God tries to teach Cain a lesson. Sin is a reality; temptation is always present.
But we must master our drives to sin. Cain is jealous of his brother and the favor his
brother finds with God. But that, in itself, is not a sin. We can't help how we feel. We
can help what we do about our feelings, and that is the point of what God had to say to
Cain. Feelings are not sins, but can lead to sin if we do not control our actions and our
drives to violence.

The rest of the story can be outlined after the pattern of a Crime and Punishment Story.

? **PROBLEM** - Cain does not learn the lesson God tries to teach him and sins by
killing his brother.

? **COMPLICATION** - Yahweh confronts Cain with his guilt and pronounces
punishment. Cain must wander the earth. But this means that he, as a killer, is subject
to being killed himself.

? **RESOLUTION** - Cain admits his guilt, but protests that the punishment is too hard.

? **WRAP-UP** - God softens the punishment. He makes sure that Cain's life will be
spared.

This story, like all Crime and Punishment Stories, shows that there is a price to pay for
sinning. Cain loses a brother and has to live with the fact that his violence has driven him
away from other people. He must be a wanderer. But again, as is always the case in
Crime and Punishment Stories, God's mercy is the final word. When we can admit our
guilt and be sorry, God is always willing to forgive and start his story with us all over
again.

In biblical stories, speech is always important. When someone speaks, the storyteller is
calling our attention to the fact that this is a significant point in the story. God's speech to
Cain about mastering sin is a good example of this. God's speech gives a pointed clue as
to what the storyteller wants us to learn from this story. Cain's words are also important.
When Cain asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the storyteller expects us to come up with
an answer of "Yes." What Cain's story teaches us is that no matter what we may feel
about another person, we are that person's keeper; **we have a responsibility for each
other.**
The Story of Noah and Flood.

In the story of Noah and the Flood, the biblical writers have taken an old narrative tradition, common in the ancient Near East, and molded it into a story about their beliefs in Yahweh. Recall that the earliest civilizations grew up on the banks of rivers. The water supply from rivers and the fertile river bottom lands were needed to support the farming on which early civilizations depended. One of the greatest fears of the people in the earliest cities was the fear of flooding. Parallels to the Noah story can be found in Enuma Elish and the Gilgamesh Epic, both stories which originated in the river based cities of ancient Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers - the Tigris and the Euphrates). In these stories, creation was destroyed by gods who were annoyed by the noise humans were making. These stories made sense to people who believed that their gods were gods of nature and that their lives were controlled by hard, unloving gods who acted any way they wanted just for the fun of it.

The Israelite story tellers took up this story, but changed it. They fit it into the pattern of a Crime and Punishment story. For them, then, the cause of the flood was rooted in the human abuse of freedom and in the increasing violence of people. Though the crossing of limits and sin merits punishment, the story of Noah again asserts the belief that God is a God of mercy, that, though humans may have to bear the consequences of their actions, God is always willing to forgive and begin again.

The story of Noah and the flood is another story with an elaborate concentric or chiastic structure.

A. Violence in God's Creation (Genesis 6:11-12)
B. First Divine Speech - God's decision to destroy (6:13-22)
C. Second Divine Speech - command to enter the ark (7:1-10)
D. Beginning of Flood (7:11-16)
E. Flood waters rise (7:17-24)
F. God Remembers Noah (8:1a)
E. Flood waters recede (8:1b-5)
D. The earth dries up (8:6-14)
C. Third Divine Speech - command to leave the ark (8:15-19)
B. God's resolution to preserve order (8:20-22)
A. Fourth Divine Speech - covenant blessing and peace (9:1-17)

In terms of basic plot elements, the story can be outlined as follows:

? **Problem** - Creation is filled with violence and corruption.
? **Complication** - God determines to destroy creation, but saves Noah and his family. That is, God plays fair; he does not punish the innocent along with the guilty.
? **Resolution** - God remembers Noah - the turning point of the story. For the sake of the good people in creation, God will never again destroy the whole of creation. The faith statement is that, for God, it is better to let the guilty go unpunished than to hurt the innocent in the process of punishing the guilty.
? **Wrap-up** - Creation begins again and God puts away his weapons - his bow - which he hangs in the sky as an everlasting reminder.

In the end, the Story of Noah and the Flood wants to teach us that God plays fair, but it also indicates that the evil which people do has effects on all other people. Noah is presented as a model of a good person. His goodness also has effects on others.

**The Tower of Babel**

The story of the Tower of Babel is marked out as a unit by the device of INCLUSION - beginning and ending a story with the same thing. In this case, the story is surrounded by genealogies and both of them deal with Shem, the father of the Semites. Note, too, that Shem in Hebrew means *name* and a major concern in the story of the Tower of Babel is the vain attempt on the part of humans to make a *name* for themselves.

The story of the Tower of Babel can be approached from two points of view - that of humans and that of God. Both human beings and God face a problem and only one of these problems can reach a satisfactory resolution. In terms of the basic plot structure of a biblical story, the story of the Tower of Babel can be outlined as follows:
The basic problem that the humans face is fear of being scattered - although everything so far in the Primeval History has suggested that God wants differences in his world and that he wants humans to spread out, fill and take care of creation. People plan to build a tower to the heavens, to reach up into the realms of God. They want to go beyond boundaries again so that they can take care of themselves. The city and the tower are symbols of all that civilization, science and technology have to offer us. While these are all good things, they can lead people to believe that they are self-sufficient, that they have no need for God.

The turning point of the whole story comes in v. 5, with the notice that "Yahweh came down." Men planned to build a towers to the heavens but God has to come down to even catch a glimpse of what their puny efforts are producing. God matches the plan of men with a plan of his own and his plan is successful. The people are scattered and diversity, differences become a fixed part of God's world.

Again, this story, another example of a Crime and Punishment story, has a concentric or chiastic structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human point of view</th>
<th>Divine point of view</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting:</strong> Gen 11:1-2</td>
<td><strong>Setting and Problem:</strong> Gen 11:1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Gen 11:3-4</td>
<td><strong>Complication:</strong> Gen 11:6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan - let us make bricks</td>
<td>A. he evaluated (v 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a city</td>
<td>B. he plans (v 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a tower</td>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complication:</strong> Gen 11:5-7 - enter Yahweh</td>
<td><strong>Wrap-up</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
<td>Gen 11:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is successful/humans are frustrated</td>
<td>God is successful/humans are frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wrap-up</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wrap-up</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen 11:9</td>
<td>Gen 11:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wind down with an implied evaluation</td>
<td>A wind down with an implied evaluation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A. **All the earth was of one tongue** (v 1)
B. They settled **there** (v 2)
C. a man to his neighbor (v 3)
D. Come, let us **make bricks** (v 3)
E. let us **build for ourselves** (v 4)
F. a city and a tower to heaven (v 4)
G. AND YAHWEH CAME DOWN TO SEE (v 5)
F. the city and the tower (v 5)
E. which the sons of man had built (v 5)
D. Come, let us confuse... (v 7)
C. a man could not hear the tongue of his neighbor (v 7)
B. from there (v 8)
A. the tongue of all the earth he confused (v 9)

Note, again, how the resolution of the problem of the story matches the turning point of the story's structure.

In the end, the story of the Tower of Babel is about human limitations. Cultural, artistic, and scientific achievements carry with them the temptation to believe that we are self-sufficient, that we have no need of God. The faith statement involved in this story says that God notices what we do and that he is involved. Only when confronted with our own limitations do we appreciate how much we really do need God.

With this story, the Primeval History draws to a close. The closing genealogy lists the descendants of Shem down to Abraham. In God's plan, as it will unfold in the next cycle of stories in Genesis, Abraham will be chosen to be the father of the people who are to reverse all that has gone wrong in creation, to bring all people back to God's blessings.
B. The Abraham Cycle

**Objective:**
The Abraham Cycle presents Abraham as a model of faith which we are to imitate. The aim of studying the stories of Abraham is to learn that faith is not an easy virtue, that we have to struggle to trust God, especially in times of difficulty. A secondary feature of the cycle is the lesson Abraham provides as to how we can bring God's blessings to others - through prayer for sinners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>SACRIFICE</th>
<th>HOLOCAUST</th>
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<td>WIFE-SISTER STORY</td>
<td>HAREM</td>
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<td>PHARAOH</td>
<td>INCLUSION</td>
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<td>ABRAM</td>
<td>SARAI</td>
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<td>FEAR OF GOD</td>
<td>BEHOLD</td>
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<td>RISE EARLY IN THE MORNING</td>
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<td>FINDING-A-WIFE-AT-A-WELL STORY</td>
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The **ABRAHAM CYCLE** is composed of individual tales woven together into a cycle. That means that the individual tales stand on their own as complete stories, but that together they make up a larger whole, the story of Abraham. The Abraham cycle is largely **LEGENDARY**.

A **LEGEND IS A STORY WHICH GIVES US AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW**. The trait or characteristic of Abraham which his cycle of stories holds up for us to imitate is **FAITH**. While we are to imitate Abraham's faith, his story also shows that **faith is not always an easy virtue to practice**.

Everything in the Abraham cycle focuses on a **SON**. In granting the **SON OF THE PROMISE**, Isaac, God partly fulfills his promise. Isaac represents the first step in Israel...
becoming a great nation. If Abraham is to be the Father of a Great Nation, he must first have ONE son. This proves to be no easy matter, since Abraham is an old man when he is called by God and his wife, Sarah, is barren. What is called for, in order for Abraham to receive the fulfillment of God's promise, is FAITH. In the cycle of stories about Abraham, at times he is trusting, but at other times he tries to force God's hand and make the promise come true. He even puts the promise at risk for selfish reasons.

The PLOT of the ABRAHAM CYCLE can be outlined as follows:

? **INTRODUCTION** - God calls Abraham to leave his home, travel to a land which he will show him, and promises Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation and **will bring blessing to all the people of the world.** (Genesis 11:27-12:9)

? **SETTING** - Genealogy of Abraham - naming Abram, Sarai, Lot; the notice of Abram's age and Sarai's childlessness; place settings; the call of Abram and his movement to Canaan.

? **PROBLEM I** - The central issue of the cycle is **HOW WILL THE PROMISE THAT ABRAHAM WILL BE THE FATHER OF A GREAT NATION BE FULFILLED** - with a major stress on the getting of a son.

   A. Sarah is childless (11:30)
   B. Abraham is 75 years old (12:4)
   [C. a sub-plot - Lot is with Abraham who has been told to leave all his family behind (12:4-5)]

? **COMPLICATION** - Episodes from the life of Abraham which, while moving to the fulfillment of the promise, also threaten its non-fulfillment (12:10-20:18)

? **RESOLUTION** - The birth of Isaac, the son of the promise (21:1-7)

? **WRAP-UP** - The removal of Ishmael, the 'false' heir (21:8-21)


? **RESOLUTION** - Yahweh spares Isaac (22:11-12a)

? **WRAP-UP**

1. Transitional genealogies preparing for the finding of Rebecca.
2. The death of Sarah; purchase of land and the burial of Sarah - ending her role and indicating the partial fulfillment of the promise of land (23:1-20)
3. Betrothal of Isaac to Rebecca, preserving a stable situation in the possibility of a future son (24:1-67)
4. Final genealogies and journeys (25:1-18)

Most of the material in the Abraham Cycle is contained in the **COMPLICATION.** In any story, the Complication moves from the Problem to its Resolution. The basic problem of the cycle is centered on the question of **how Abraham and Sarah will experience the fulfillment of the promise that they will have a SON.** The Resolution occurs with the birth of Isaac. Within the Complication, the **character** of Abraham is presented, and it is presented in a legendary fashion. In Abraham, we are given an
example to follow, and that example is Abraham's FAITH. This faith, which we are to
imitate, is not an easy faith. The storyteller presents a realistic view of faith. He shows
that it is hard to hang on in the face of difficulties, that it is hard to trust God completely
and not try to take matters into our own hands and make things work out the way WE
WANT THEM TO.

The complicating factors in the Abraham Cycle are arranged in a concentric or chiastic
pattern. That pattern can be outlined as follows:

A. The danger to and preservation of Sarai (A Wife-Sister Story - Gen 12:10-20)
   B. The relationship between Abraham and Lot (Gen 13:1-18)
   C. Abraham and Foreigners (Gen 14:1-24)
   D. 1) The covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:1-21)
       2) The birth and danger to Ishmael (Gen 16:1-16)
   D. 1) The covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:1-27)
       2) Announcement of Isaac's birth (Gen 18:1-16)
   C. Abraham and Foreigners (Sodom and Gomorrah - Gen 18:17-33)
   B. The end of Lot (with destruction of the cities - Gen 19:1-38)
   A. The danger to and preservation of Sarai (A Wife-Sister Story - Gen 20:1-18)

One way in which the storyteller presents the idea that the faith of Abraham, which we
are called on to imitate, is a difficult faith, is by framing the complication with an
INCLUSION. INCLUSION refers to the way that storytellers begin and end a section
of their stories with similar or parallel words, phrases, or even entire episodes. The use
of an INCLUSION makes a kind of envelope and marks a section of the story as a
unified whole. The INCLUSION which the storyteller of the Book of Genesis uses to
mark off the Complication of the Abraham Cycle as a unified whole is the WIFE-
SISTER STORY. The Wife-Sister Story includes the following elements:

1. There is a famine in the land of Canaan
2. The patriarch and his wife travel to a foreign land
3. There, the patriarch fears that his life is in danger because of the beauty of
   his wife, so he lies and says that she is his sister
4. The wife is taken into the harem of the local king
5. God gets involved to protect the wife
6. The king proves to be a good man who would not have taken the wife had he
   known she was married - which stresses the patriarch's lack of trust
7. The patriarch and his wife are given riches and return home.

The storyteller begins and ends the Complication of the Abraham Cycle with this type of
story (Genesis 12:1-10 and Genesis 20:1-18; the third instance of this type of story
involves Isaac and is found in Genesis 26:1-14).
The Wife-Sister Story of Genesis 12:10-20

Now there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine in the land was severe. And it happened, as he drew near to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai, his wife, 'Behold, please. I know that you are a woman of beautiful form. And it will be that the Egyptians will see you and they will say, 'This is his wife,' and they will kill me, but you they will keep alive. Please say that you are my sister so that it will be well for me on account of you and my life will be preserved because of you.'

And it happened, when Abram came to Egypt and the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was beautiful, and the princes of Pharaoh saw her and they praised her to Pharaoh, that the woman was taken into the house of Pharaoh. And this caused things to go well for Abram on account of her and he acquired a flock and cattle and donkeys and servants and handmaids and she-asses.

But Yahweh afflicted Pharaoh with great plagues, both he and his household, because of Sarai, the wife of Abram. And Pharaoh called for Abram and said, 'What is it that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for myself as a wife? And now, behold, your wife. Take her and go!' And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him and they sent him away along with his wife and all that he had.

Abraham had been called by God to receive the land of Canaan and, with his wife, to become the father of a great nation. Yet, his first action upon getting to the land of Canaan was the run away in the face of difficulty. He did not trust that God would take care of him there and decided to take matters into his own hands. Even worse, he thought he might be in danger in Egypt. There he put the promise of a son at risk. In Jewish tradition, the first child to be born to a woman is dedicated to God. That first child is the child of the promise. By allowing Sarah to be taken into the HAREM (a collection of many wives) of the PHARAOH, Abraham took a chance that Sarah's first child would be fathered by Pharaoh and that would deny the promise. The PHARAOH is the title of the King of Egypt. The Egyptian Kings were thought to be gods. The children born to the wives of their HAREMS were thought to share in this divinity. Abraham risked all that God had promised out of fear and selfishness, for a child born to a rival god could certainly not be the child of Yahweh's promise.

If Abraham is the model of faith which we are to imitate, the storyteller wants us to learn from his story that we need to grow as Abraham did. We need to have courage, to put aside fear and selfish concerns to have the kind of faith that God asks of us. We have to
learn to trust that God will care for us in difficult times and will lead us where he wants us to be, even if we have to go through hard times to get to the fulfillment of what God has in store for us. It is also important to note that, by beginning and ending the complicating factors with the same type of story, the biblical writer is underscoring the fact that faith - full trust in God - is a hard virtue to have and practice. The reality is that we, like Abraham will waver in our faith. In all the ups and downs we face in life, sometimes our faith will be strong, but at other times we will doubt. On the model of Abraham, then, we are not to judge ourselves harshly when we face doubt. Even the Bible's greatest example of faith sometimes had doubts and made mistakes.

As was the case with the story of the Tower of Babel, the PLOT STRUCTURE of this story can be outlined from two points of view, that of Abram and that of God:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abram's point of view</th>
<th>Yahweh's point of view</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Setting - Famine in Canaan (v 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Problem</strong></td>
<td>a) Abram leaves the Promised Land</td>
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<td>b) Abram puts Sarai in danger</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Abram leaves the Promised Land</td>
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<td>b) Abram puts Sarai in danger</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Complication</strong></td>
<td>Complication</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) planned deception (v 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) arrival in Egypt, Sarai taken by Pharaoh (vv 14-15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Abram prospers (v 16)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
<td>Resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yahweh afflicts Pharaoh (v 17)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wrap-up</strong></td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Sarai is returned safely</td>
<td>a) Sarai is returned safely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Abram and Sarai have possessions so that they can return to Canaan and survive (vv 18-20)</td>
<td>b) Abram and Sarai have possessions so that they can return to Canaan and survive (vv 18-20)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The rest of the episodes in the Complication of the Abraham Cycle demonstrate Abraham's growth in trust of God, and his struggles along the way. In the stories of Abraham and Lot, Lot is effectively eliminated as a possible heir to the promise. The stories about Lot show him in contrast to Abraham. While Abraham is learning to trust God and go wherever God leads him, Lot always wants the comforts of city life; he wants to take control and make things work out the way he wants them to.

A high-point along the way comes in the story of how Abraham bargained with God over the fate of the two evil cities of Sodom and Gommorah. Genesis develops the theme that we are chosen by God to bring his blessings to all other people. The story of Abraham's bargaining with God gives us an example of how we should do this: LIKE ABRAHAM, WE ARE CALLED UPON TO PRAY FOR SINNERS.
The story of Sodom and Gommorah begins, in Genesis 18:17, with the inner thoughts of God. God has made up his mind what he intends to do about the evil of the two cities of Sodom and Gommorah - and we know that Abraham's nephew, Lot, is living in Sodom and that Abraham has been chosen to bring blessings to all others. It is important to note that God is not presented as a God who acts rashly. He intends to go down and see for himself if things are as bad as he has heard. Only then will he act. Abraham now bargains with God over the fate of the two cities. He raises the all-important question: "Will God destroy the good along with the wicked?" The faith of the biblical writers is that God plays fair, that he does not punish all for the sins of a few. In fact, he spares the few in the face of the sins of many. Out God is a God of mercy. So, on the model of Abraham in this story, We are to bring blessing to others by intercessory prayer for sinners.

The story continues in chapter 19. The two messengers, presumably the two companions of Yahweh from the previous episodes, arrive in Sodom. Lot appears on the scene and is presented as a model of hospitality - as Abraham had been presented earlier. The plot structure of the story can be outlined as follows:

- **Setting** - Two "messengers" meet Lot at the gate of Sodom and he offers hospitality to them. (19:1-3)
- **Problem** - The men of the city demand that the visitors be handed over so that they may KNOW them. (Note: KNOW is a biblical code-word which implies intimacy and is used to express sexual intimacy. The men of the city want to RAPE the visitors. Hospitality is threatened in a particularly offensive way - 19:4-5)
- **Complication** - Lot confronts the men; Lot narrowly escapes the men of the city who are halted by God's involvement (the dazzling light); the messengers must force Lot to leave the city; Lot still seeks the comforts of city life.
- **Resolution** - Yahweh destroys the city with fire and brimstone
- **Wrap-Up**
  - A) Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt
B) Abraham sees the destruction
C) Lot and his daughters reap the results of Lot's reluctance to follow God's command and to change his way of living.

The story teller also shows growth and change in Abraham and his wife in the course of the Story. Originally, when Abraham was first called by God, he was called ABRAM and his wife was called SARAI. At the center of the complicating factors, the storyteller presents a special covenant relationship given by God to the couple. In giving this relationship, God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah. A change in names always represents a change in the person, his or her growth. This change, in the Abraham Cycle, again focuses on the idea of being on the way, on struggling to have and maintain faith.

When the storyteller concludes the complicating factors of Abraham's cycle with a repetition of the Wife-Sister Story, he makes an important point. Though Abraham has grown in his faith, he still struggles with it. The struggle to have faith, to trust God is a life-long struggle. Isaac will be born. God's promise will be fulfilled. Abraham can't earn this; it is a free gift from God. All he has to do is rely on God. But for him, as for us today, relying on God isn't always easy.

The most memorable story in the Abraham Cycle is the story of the Near Sacrifice of Isaac. It is in this story that the LEGENDARY aspects of the cycle are most pronounced. This story is the key focus on Abraham's faith. The story has the following Plot outline:

? INTRODUCTION - God calls to Abraham
? ABSTRACT - God intends to test Abraham
? PROBLEM - All the tension of the narrative arises out of the command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son. Will he obey? If he obeys, will the previous promise - repeated throughout the cycle - be fulfilled? If he doesn't obey, will the promise be taken back?
? COMPLICATION - The complicating factors of the story are presented in a slow-paced fashion. The section is filled with high emotion as Abraham prepares all that is needed for the sacrifice and travels to the mountain God shows him.
? RESOLUTION - The tension is resolved in a new call to Abraham in which he is instructed not to harm his son. His willingness to obey has demonstrated that he has passed the test.
? EVALUATION - From the point of view of God, spoken through the messenger, Abraham's actions are judged as worthy. God is satisfied that Abraham fears him.
? WRAP-UP - Abraham shows his devotion to God by immediately sacrificing the ram and naming the place. God, for his part, shows his faithfulness by confirming the promises he has made to Abraham. Finally, Abraham returns to his settled life.
Now it was after these things that God TESTED Abraham and said to him, “Abraham.” And he said, "Behold! It is I." And he said, "Take, now, your son, your only one whom you love, Isaac, and go for yourself to the land of Moriah and offer him up there as a holocaust on one of the mountains which I will say to you." (Note the silence of Abraham.)

So Abraham rose early in the morning and he saddled the donkey and took two young men with him and Isaac, his son; and he split the wood for a holocaust and he got up and went to the place about which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

Then Abraham said to the young men, "Stay here by yourselves with the donkey and I and the boy will go on and we will worship and we will return to you." And Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and put it on Isaac, his son, and he took in his hand the fire and they went, the two of them together. Then Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, "My father." And he said, "Behold, I am here, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?" And Abraham said, "God himself will show the sheep for the sacrifice, my son." And they went, the two of them together. And they came to the place of which God had spoken and there Abraham built an altar and he arranged the wood and he tied up Isaac, his son, and put him on the altar, on top of the wood. And Abraham sent out his hand and took the knife in order to slaughter his son.

Now the messenger of Yahweh called to him from the heavens and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Behold, it is I!" And he said, "Do not send your hand against the boy and do not do anything! For now I know that you are one who FEARS GOD since you have not withheld from me your son, your only one.

Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and he saw and, behold, a ram held fast in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place "Yahweh-yireh" (= Yahweh causes to see), which it is called to this day: On the Mount of Yahweh It Will Be Seen.

And the messenger of Yahweh called to Abraham from the heavens a second time and said, "By myself I have sworn, the utterance of Yahweh, that because you have done this thing and you did not hold back your son, your only one, indeed I will bless you and surely I will make your seed numerous, like the stars of the heavens and like the sand which is on the shore of the sea, and your seed will inherit the gate of its enemies. Then every nation of the earth will wish a blessing for itself in your seed because you have listened to my voice.

So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba and Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Several vocabulary features are significant in this story. A HOLOCAUST is a whole-burnt offering. It was a special sacrifice in which the whole offering was consumed by
fire, showing that the whole thing was offered to God. A Holocaust is only one of the many SACRIFICES offered to God. Such sacrifices represented a returning to God of some of the gifts he gave his people.

Three words or phrases in this story appear often in the Bible and function as special code words. BEHOLD always shows excitement, a change in point of view, anticipation or the like. TO RISE EARLY IN THE MORNING always indicates that the person rising early is getting up for some purpose - to carry out a special command, to go to war, to receive something special. FEAR OF GOD always refers to the relationship between humans and God. It does not mean being frightened, but the proper relationship between God and people. To Fear God means to give him what is his due.

C. A Note on Isaac

Isaac is the only one of the Patriarchs not to have his own story. What we learn about him as one of the fathers of the Jewish people we learn from the stories about his father and about his son, Jacob. In the story of The Near Sacrifice of Isaac, the boy does not appear too bright. He can't see what is happening around him and is silent when he is placed on the altar of sacrifice. At the end of the story, the focus is on Abraham, Isaac simply drops out of the picture.

The ending of the Abraham Cycle presents one more story which concerns Isaac, the story about finding Isaac a wife. This story is an example of another of the special classes of stories we often encounter in the Bible. It is a FINDING A WIFE AT A WELL STORY. These stories have the following pattern:

1. The hero travels to foreign territory
2. He meets one or more young girls at a well
3. Somebody draws water.
4. There is running back and forth between the well and the girls' house
5. The hero is invited to share a meal
6. He accepts and a marriage is arranged.

There are five examples of this kind of a story in the Bible. They involve Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Saul, and Jesus. When we find one of these stories, the storyteller is using a kind of code to let us know that the man who travels to the foreign territory has a special role to play in the story as a whole. The story also suggests that the hero is at an important turning point in his life. What is important for us to pay attention to is the differences in each instance of the telling of this story. In every case, something happens which tells us about the hero and how his life will turn out. Jacob has to move a heavy stone which covers the well, and he will always be associated with strength and hard work. Moses drives off shepherds who are abusing the young girls and draws water for them. He will end the oppression of Israel in Egypt and 'draw' them through the waters of the Sea of Reed to safety. The story of Isaac finding a wife at a well is interesting for two reasons. First, he is NOT in the story. Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son. Second, Rebecca has the leading role in the story. She draws the
water and controls the action. At the beginning of the Jacob Cycle, Rebecca will control the action and manipulate Isaac. He will be presented as old and blind and helpless.

In sum, the Bible gives a consistent picture of Isaac. He does not have a story of his own; he is not intelligent or perceptive; he takes no decisive action, but is subject to how others act upon him. In short, he is not the picture of the ideal patriarch. What the storyteller stresses in his presentation of Isaac is that **God can use anyone to fulfill his plans and that each of us, no matter how talented, capable, or strong, has a part to play in carrying out God's will.**
D. The Jacob Cycle

Objective:
The Jacob cycle stresses that our actions have consequences, that we have to live with the results of our choices. The stories in the cycle show how favoritism within a family can harm relationships and that using others is sinful and wrong. The cycle aims at driving home the lesson that we are chosen and blessed by God, but that does not mean that we can just do whatever we want. We have a part to play in experiencing God's blessings, and that means hard work and being at peace with others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>ISHMAEL</th>
<th>JACOB</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESAU</td>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIRTH-RIGHT</td>
<td>BLESSING</td>
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The Jacob Cycle begins and ends with the genealogies of marginal people, people outside Israel, but related to God's chosen people. It begins with the genealogy of ISHMAEL. Ishmael was the son of Abraham by the Egyptian slave-girl, Hagar. ISHMAEL is considered to be the father of the ARABS. It seems that there has always been hatred between Jews and Arabs, but the storyteller is stating that this should not be. JEWS and ARABS are half brothers. The cycle ends with the genealogy of Esau. Esau is considered to be the father of the Edomites. These people were an enemy of Israel during the kingship of David. This situation persisted even into New Testament times. The Ancient Kingdom of Edom became Idumea in Roman times. The Herodian kings came from Idumea, which is one of the reasons they were so hated by the Jews of Jesus' day. Again, the biblical storyteller is stressing that this hatred is not part of God's plan. Esau was Jacob's twin brother, implying that the Israelites and Edomites are not only brothers, but twins. All of this suggests, again, that God's people must understand themselves and their story as a story of people related to all other peoples. We are chosen to bring blessings to others, not to focus on differences and prolong hatred. That is a strong message to us today about the hatred and prejudice which exists in the modern world.

If Abraham, in his cycle was associated with FAITH, Jacob will be associated with HARD WORK and TRICKERY. The PLOT outline of the Jacob Cycle can be given as
SETTING - After the beginning genealogy of Ishmael, the setting of the cycle is given in 25:19-34. The promise given to Rebecca about her older son serving the younger lets the reader know in advance who the son of the Promise is to be. In this section, several themes of the cycle are introduced - conflict, birthright, and blessing. The idea of conflict will center on the selfish actions of individuals in the cycle which threaten peaceful relationships. The idea of BIRTHRIGHT challenges the notion that, according to the customs of ancient society, the right of the first-born to inherit his father's house was not necessarily God's way of doing things. The BLESSING which the father pronounces on his son is as important as the BIRTHRIGHT, but God's blessing rests on whomever God chooses. Still, this blessing is never for its own sake, but so that the one who is blessed can bring that blessing to all others.

PROBLEM - The basic Problem of the cycle is suggested in the introduction. The Problem deals with how it will happen that Jacob, the second-born son, will become superior to his brother. The incident of Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of soup suggests that he is not a worthy person to be heir to God's promises, but Jacob, like his grandfather, Abraham, before him, must learn to wait for God to make things work out according to his plan and not try to take matters into his own hands.

COMPLICATION - After a story focusing on Isaac and his negotiations with foreigners over water rights - the one good story about Isaac, and the example of how we can bring blessings to others - during which the fate of Jacob is left hanging in the balance, the cycle unfolds in a series of episodes in which Jacob attempts to force the issue of his favored status. His stealing of his brother's blessing is viewed, simply, as wrong and, as a result, he must make a long journey in which he must finally prove that he is worthy of his special blessing and status.

RESOLUTION - The making of peace between the brothers removes the major threat to Jacob as the heir to the promise and the blessed son.

WRAP-UP - After the incident in chapter 34, in which two of Jacob's sons act foolishly and threaten the safety of the family, the cycle winds down and Jacob is re-confirmed as a worthy patriarch. JACOB, the second-born son of Isaac, is the father of twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. His name is changed to Israel (One who Contends with God and Man) and the cycle concludes with the genealogy of his twin brother, Esau, again demonstrating that Israel must see itself in relation to other people.

Within the Jacob Cycle there are several important themes which are developed:

1. Being blessed by God is a reality, but it takes work to understand what that reality means. We can't assume that because we are blessed or chosen, we can do whatever we want.
2. God's blessings are given, but it takes hard work to fully receive them. We have a part to play.
3. Jacob can hold on to his blessing and chosen status only if he is willing to share it. The same is true for us.
4. Seeing God and making peace with a brother are somehow related. We can be in a good relationship with God only if we are at peace with others.
5. Through all the ups and down of his life, whether Jacob is honorable or not, God is always with him, just as he is with us.

The entire cycle of stories about Jacob also displays an elaborate concentric structure:

An opening Genealogy of Ishmael - a half brother (25:12-18)
A. An oracle sought; Rebecca struggles in childbirth; birth; themes of strife, deception and fertility. (25:19-34)
B. Interlude; strife, deception, blessing; covenant with foreigners (the way Isaac brings blessing to others - 26:1-35)
C. deception; the stolen blessing; fear of Esau; flight to a foreign land. (27:1-28:9)
D. encounter with the divine at a sacred place, blessing (28:10-22)
E. internal cycle opens; arrival; Laban at border; deception; wages (29:1-35)
F. 1) Rachel barren, Leah fertile (30:1-24)
2) Rachel fertile, Jacob increases the herds (30:25-43)
E. internal cycle closes; departure; Laban at border; deception; wages (31:1-54)
D. encounter with the divine at a sacred place, blessing (32:1-32)
C. deception planned; fear of Esau; blessing; return to the Promised Land (33:1-20)
B. interlude; strife; deception; covenant with foreigners (34:1-31)
A. oracle fulfilled; Rachel struggles in childbirth; blessing; death; resolutions; (35:1-29)
An ending genealogy of Esau - a twin brother. (36:1-43)

The Stolen Blessing

Now it happened when Isaac was old and his eyes had become expressionless from SEEING, that he called Esau, his son, the older one, and said to him, "My son," and he said, "Behold, it is I." And he said, "Behold, I have become old. I do not know the day of my death. So now, take up your weapons, your quiver and your bow. Go forth to the field and hunt game for me and make for me the TASTY tidbits which I love and bring it to me and let me eat so that my soul will bless you before I die."

Now Rebecca WAS LISTENING while Isaac spoke to Esau, his son, and Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring. And Rebecca spoke to Jacob, her son, saying, "Behold, I HAVE HEARD your father speaking with Esau, your brother, saying, 'Bring me game and prepare for me TASTY tidbits and I will eat and I will bless you before Yahweh before I die.' And now, my son, LISTEN to my voice, to what I am commanding you. Go now to the flock and take for me from there two kids of the goats, good ones, and I will prepare them as TASTY tidbits for your father, just like he loves. And you will bring it to your father and he will eat; because of it, he will bless you before his dying."

But Jacob said to Rebecca, her mother, "Behold, my brother, Esau is a HAIRY man but I am a SMOOTH man. Perhaps my father will FEEL me and I will be in his EYES as one who profanes something solemn and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."
And his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son. Only LISTEN to my voice and go and take for me." So he went and took and he brought to his mother: and his mother made the TASTY tidbits just like his father loved. Then Rebecca took the garments of Esau, her older son, the valuable ones which were with her in the house and she clothed Jacob, her younger son. And with the skins of the kid goats she clothed his hands and the smoothness of his neck. And she gave the TASTY tidbits and the bread which she had made into the hands of Jacob, her son.

Then he went to his father and he said, "My father." And he said, "Behold, it is I. Who are you, my son?" And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first born, and I have prepared according as you said to me. Get up, now. Sit and eat from the game for the sake of which your soul will bless me." And Isaac said to his son, "What is this? You have hurried to find it, my son." And he said, "Yahweh, your God, brought it near before me." And Isaac said to Jacob, "Draw near, my son, and I will FEEL you - are you this, my son Esau or not?" And Jacob drew near to Isaac, his father, and he FELT him and said, "The VOICE is the VOICE of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau," his brother, hairy. And he did not RECOGNIZE him for his hands were like the hands of Esau, his brother, hairy. And he blessed him and he said, "Are you this, my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." And he said, "Bring near to me and I will EAT the game of my son so that my soul will bless you." And he brought near and he ATE and he DRANK. And Isaac, his father spoke to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." And he went near and kissed him and he SMELLED the ODOR of his garments and he blessed him and said, "See, the ODOR of my son is like the odor of the field which Yahweh has blessed. And may God give to you of the dew of the heavens and of the fat of the land and a multitude of corn and new wine. May peoples serve you and people bow down to you; a master will you become for your brothers and the sons of your mother will bow to you. He cursing you will be cursed; but he blessing you will be blessed."

Now it happened that when Isaac had finished blessing Jacob and Jacob had only indeed gone forth from before the face of Isaac, his father, that Esau, his brother, came from his hunt. And he made, also he, TASTY tidbits and brought to his father and said, "Let my father get up and let him eat of the game of his son for the sake of which your soul will bless me." And Isaac, his father, said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your first born, Esau." And Isaac shook with a great trembling, exceedingly, and he said, "Who, then, was he having hunted game and he brought to me and I ate from all of it before you came and I blessed him, also being blessed of Yahweh?" And Esau HEARD the words of his father he cried out in a great and exceedingly bitter cry and he said to his father, "Bless me, me too, my father!" And he said, "Your brother has come in deceit and he took your blessing." And he said, "Is it not true that one has called his name Jacob and he has grasped my by the heal these two times? My right of the first born he took and, behold, now he has taken by blessing." Then he said, "Did you not hold back a blessing for me?" And Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, a master I have set him for you and all his brothers I have given to him for servants; and with corn and new wine I have supported him. For you, then, what will I do, my son?" Then Esau said to his father, "Is there but one blessing to you, father? Bless me, me too, my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Then Isaac, his father, answered him and said to him, "Behold, of the fatness of the land will be your dwelling and of the dew of the heavens above. By your sword will you live and your brother you will serve. And it will be, when you roam about you will break the yoke from your neck."

So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob over the blessing which his father had given him. And Esau said in his heart, "Let come near the days of mourning for my father and I will kill Jacob, my brother." Then Rebecca said to Isaac, "I feel a disgust in my soul from before the daughters of Heth. If Jacob should take a wife from the daughters of Heth like these, from the daughters of the land, what is life to me?" So Isaac called to Jacob and he blessed him and he commanded him and said to him, "You will not take a wife from the daughters of
Canaan. Get up. God to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, father of your mother, and take for yourself from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, brother of your mother. And God Almighty will bless you and will make you fruitful and will cause you to increase and you will be for a multitude of peoples. And he will give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, for you to possess the land of your foreign residence, which God had given to Abraham."

And Isaac sent Jacob off and he went to Padan-aram, to Laban, son of Bethuel, the Aramean, brother of Rebecca, mother of Jacob AND ESAU. And Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Padan-aram to take for himself from there a wife and in his blessing he had commanded him saying, "You will not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." And Jacob listened to his father and his mother and he went to Padan-aram. And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Isaac, his father. And Esau went to Ishmael and he took Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham, sister of Nebajoth as a wife in addition to the wives he had.

The story of the stolen blessing sets the tone for the entire cycle of Jacob. A father favors one son, while the mother favors the other, and both work to promote the son they favor. Neither has any regard for what God might have in mind. Such favoritism in a family has devastating results. One brother ends up hating the other so much that he plans to kill him. Both parents lose the child they favor. Everyone has to live with the consequences of their actions. Rebecca and Jacob are deceitful; Isaac is foolishly blind to what is going on; and Esau lives for the satisfactions of the present moment.

Still, God's plans are not to be thwarted. Jacob will become the father of twelve sons, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. But in doing so, he too will be deceived. What he did to his brother comes back on his own head. In Jacob, the promises of God to his people move closer to fulfillment, despite the weaknesses of the humans who receive those promises.

The End of the Jacob Cycle

Chapter 32 begins with Laban and Jacob taking leave of each other. Immediately we are reminded of the reason for Jacob to be dwelling outside of the Promised Land in the first place - Esau. Jacob sends messengers to his brother, addressing Esau as "My Lord" while calling himself "your servant." On the one hand, this is mere flattery, but it also suggests that Jacob is afraid of Esau - and with reason. He has cheated his brother. Still, Jacob relies on Yahweh and then takes some prudent action on his own - he divides his camp and sending a rich gift to appease his brother.

The most important part of this story comes in 32:22-32 - Jacob's wrestling through the night with a divine visitor. This episode slows the progress of the overall story and delays the meeting between the brothers. The scene takes place at night. Jacob has sent his whole camp ahead of him and during the night, before he crosses the river himself to return to the land of Promise, he is confronted with a divine visitor with whom he wrestles. In the end, he wins and the divine messenger changes his name - indicating a change in him. Jacob's whole life has been a life of struggle. This story, then, implies that successful life before God involves trust in God and definite action. The struggle to make peace with a brother is like struggling with God. We can know what God wants of
us, but it is not always easy to do. It is not always what we want to do. We have to struggle with God and ourselves to do it. Jacob takes on the struggle. Now he has changed. Now he is ready to return home and be a worthy patriarch.
E. The Joseph Story

Objective:
The aim of the Joseph story is to teach about maturity, about growing up. Joseph is favored by Jacob his father who does not seem have to learned what favoritism does to a family, and by God. He has a special role to fulfill in God's plan and that role will make it possible for his family to survive. But the heart of the Joseph story concerns temptation. Joseph has to learn to resist temptation, and his story teaches us that the struggle with temptation is a struggle with our very selves.

The Joseph story is intended to bridge the gap between the Books of Genesis and Exodus. In the Joseph story the family of Jacob moves to Egypt where it grows to be a large people. God's promises are on their way to fulfillment.
Three themes are very important in the Joseph story:

1. **SURVIVAL.** Survival depends on brothers making peace, no matter how shaky that peace is.
2. **FAVORITISM.** Jacob, it seems, has not learned the lessons of his youth. His favoritism of Joseph is the factor which injects the first elements of tension into the story and gets everything moving.
3. **GROWING UP.** In the beginning, Joseph is a snotty little brat who flaunts his favored status and snitches on his brothers. By the end, he is the wise and mature advisor of the King of Egypt, the one who can forgive past mistakes and work for the well being of his family. In the meantime, Joseph has had to grow up and that growing involved some real struggles - with the world around him and with himself.

The PLOT of the Joseph Story moves from the fortunes of the boy at home to the fortunes of the young man as an official in Egypt. At home, the favored son is despised by his brothers and his fortunes fall as the brothers throw him into a pit and then sell him as a slave. From there he rises a little bit to be the favored slave in the house of Potiphar, but he is soon plunged into prison. Finally his fortunes rise in Egypt so that he becomes the favored advisor of Pharaoh. The pattern of the action can be graphed as follows:

**Home**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Pharaoh (Jacob)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Joseph as dreamer</td>
<td>1. Joseph as ruler and interpreter of dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potiphar</td>
<td>(sex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Brothers control Joseph</td>
<td>2. Joseph controls his brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pit</td>
<td>prison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Away from Home**

The Plot Structure of the Joseph Story can be outlined as follows:

? **Exposition** - Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, is a rotten, little snitch and his brothers can’t stand him. He brags about his dreams (37:1-4)

? **Complication** - The actions of the brothers against Joseph leading him to slavery in Egypt where he rises to fame and power in his master's house, only to end up falsely
accused and in prison.

? **Easing of Tension** - Joseph's rise from prison to become Pharaoh's second in command - but he is still away from home and family and the family is still torn apart.

? **Resolution** - Joseph's speech of self-revelation to his brothers

? **Wrap-Up** - The preservation and re-unification of the family and their move to Egypt

A key turning point in the story of Joseph is the episode which involves him and the wife of his master. This is a story about temptation, what it is, and what we need to do to resist it. Only when Joseph passes this test of temptation is he ready to rise to power and play his role in God's plan.

*Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*

Now, in the meantime, Joseph had been brought down to Egypt. And Potiphar, a court official of Pharaoh, commander of the bodyguards, a man of the Egyptians, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. But Yahweh was with Joseph and he became a successful man. Still, he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Then his master saw that Yahweh was with him and all which he was doing Yahweh made succeed in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his eyes and he served him; so he appointed him over his house and all which there was to him he had given into his hand. So it was, from the time of his appointing him over his house and over all which there was to him that Yahweh blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph and the blessing was on all which there was to him in the house and in the field. So he abandoned all that was to him into the hand of Joseph and he did not KNOW anything with him except the bread he was eating.

Now Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. And so it happened, after these things, that the wife of his master lifted up her eyes to Joseph and said, "Lie with me." But he refused and he said to the wife of his master, "Behold, my master does not KNOW what there is with me in the house, and all which there is to him he has given into my hand. There is no one in this house greater than I and he has not withheld from me anything except you, since you are his wife. How can I do this great evil and sin against God?"

And so it was, when she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not listen to her in order to lie by her, to be with her. And so it was on a day like this that he came to the house to do his work and there was not a man from among the men of the house there in the house. And she grabbed his garment saying, "Lie with me!" Be he abandoned his garment in her hand and fled and went forth to the outside. And so it was, when she saw that he had abandoned his garment in her hand and had fled to the outside that she cried out to the
men of the house and she spoke to them saying, “See, he has brought to us a man of the Hebrews to mock us. He came upon me to lie with me and I have cried out in a loud voice. And so it was, when he heard that I had raised my voice and cried out, that he abandoned his garment in my hand and fled and went forth to the outside.”

Then she kept his garment beside her until his master should come to his house. And she spoke to him according to these words, saying, “He came to me, the Hebrew slave whom you brought to us to mock me. And it was when I raised my voice and cried out that he abandoned his garment near me and fled outside.” And so it was, when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him saying, “According to these things has your slave done to me,” his anger burned (literally = his nose glowed). So the master of Joseph took him and gave him into the house of the prison, the place where the prisoners of the king were fettered, and so he was there, in the house of the prison.

But Yahweh was with Joseph and he extended to him loving kindness and gave him favor in the eyes of the commander of the house of the prison. So the commander of the house of the prison gave into the hands of Joseph all those who were fettered who were in the house of the prison, and everything they were doing there he did. There was not a commander of the house of the prison who watched anything in his hand because Yahweh was with him and whatever he was doing Yahweh made successful.

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife has the following Plot Outline:

- Introduction - Joseph's status as a slave; his finding favor with his master; an exaggerated description of his 'pretty boy' status.
- Problem - Mrs. Potiphar's design on the young, good-looking slave
- Complication - Joseph's struggles with himself to resist the temptation; the neglected lady of the house lies about him
- Resolution - Joseph's success in resisting, but also his falling fortune - landing him in prison. Again, however, he finds favor and rises.
- Wrap-Up - Joseph's slightly rising fortunes.

In the end, the story says that temptation must be possible and that it takes a real struggle with ourselves to resist it. This story stresses that the struggle to do right is what is important.
2. The Book of Exodus

Objective:
The Book of Exodus provides the model for the theme of ‘being on the way.’ In the story of Exodus, the nation of Israel, as God’s chosen people, is born. God leads them on a hard journey which ends at Mt. Sinai. There God enters into a special relationship with them, a relationship which the people must begin to live. The aim in studying the Book of Exodus is to come to see its story as a mirror image our the story of our journey with our God.

Vocabulary List: EXODUS MOSES
PASSOVER COVENANT FORM
DECEPTION STORY CALL NARRATIVE
SHEPHERDS’ MEAL PLAGUES
MURMURING TRADITION

The main characters in the Book of Genesis were the patriarchs and their wives. In Exodus the focus shifts from the forefathers of the people of Israel to a single man, a religious leader, a prophet, the servant of God. The focus shifts to MOSES. On the human side, the figure of Moses dominates the whole rest of the Pentateuch.
The portrait of Moses throughout the rest of the Pentateuch is two-fold. He is pictured as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An Heroic Man</th>
<th>A Man of God</th>
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As Man of God, Moses is a 'flat character.' He is THE example of obedience to God's will. He does not act on his own, but simply carries out God's commands.

As an Heroic Man, Moses is a 'full character.' He is the hero of his people who challenges God for the sake of Israel, who makes mistakes and has success.

This two-fold picture of Moses reflects what real life is for us as God's people. Like Moses we are called to carry out God's will for us. But we are also to be fully human, to think and feel and live to the fullest - even if that means making mistakes and learning from them. That is, the biblical story of Moses makes the faith statement that as much as God wants us to do his will, he does not want us to be merely puppets. The picture of Moses as man of God is bigger than life. By combining this picture with the picture of Moses as an heroic man, the biblical writers give us the picture of a man with real dimensions, a man we can imitate.

The stories about Moses in the Pentateuch have the literary form of a SAGA. A Saga regularly has four elements:

| 1. There is an account of the hero's birth, usually under unusual circumstances. (Note that Moses is born in the midst of a persecution of the people of Israel and has to be hidden to save his life.) |
| 2. At first, the hero is identified with or becomes a part of the enemy. (Note that Pharaoh's daughter finds Moses in the basket in the Nile and adopts him as her own son so that he is raised in the palace of the King of Egypt.) |
| 3. Finally, the hero joins his own people and saves them. (Note that Moses helps a fellow Hebrew by killing the Egyptian taskmaster who is beating him and has to flee from Egypt. After God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush, he returns to lead his people to freedom and to tell them of God's laws and teachings.) |
| 4. There is an account of the hero's death, again usually under strange circumstances. (Note that Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Yet, before his death, Yahweh leads him up a mountain where he can see the land and there he dies. No one knows where he died or where he was buried.) |

The word EXODUS means "departure." The Book of Exodus tells the story of how the people of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, were freed from slavery and entered into a special relationship with Yahweh, a relationship that made them is covenant people. In telling this story, the biblical writers drew on two models to give shape to their story:
The shepherds' meal celebration held before moving to new pasture lands

The ancient covenant or treaty form

The SHEPHERDS' MEAL CELEBRATION was one of the most ancient celebrations of the people of Yahweh. In their days as migrant shepherds, Israel celebrated a meal on the night before moving to new pasture lands. They ate standing up and focused on the urgency of responding to God who was about to lead them to new lands. This ancient celebration provided the model for telling the story of the Passover meal and the basic outline for telling the story of Israel's departure, its Exodus from Egypt.

The ancient COVENANT FORM was used to formalize treaties between an overlord king and a subject people. The form regularly included:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The self-identification of the Great King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A listing of past favors from the Great King as a reason to enter into a new and binding relationship with him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A listing of the terms of the agreement - called STIPULATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Provision for a written document to be read in public from time to time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The calling on of witnesses (usually the gods of the peoples making the agreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Blessings and Curses aimed at assuring obedience to the terms of the agreement.</td>
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</table>
This ancient treaty form was a kind of contract between two peoples. The biblical storytellers used the form as an IMAGE of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. In the story of Exodus:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Yahweh reveals himself at the burning and bush and reveals his name (The self-identification of the Great King)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>He frees the people from slavery and cares for them in the wilderness (The past actions which motivate the people to enter into a relationship with him)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The terms of the agreement are revealed in the Ten Commandments and the other laws given at Mt. Sinai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The words of the Law were written on tablets of stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Twelve stone pillars are set up to represent the twelve tribes of Israel and only Yahweh is called on to witness this agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Blessings and Curses are pronounced, promising life for those who are faithful to the agreement, but death for those who break its terms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these two models, the biblical writers provided some special structuring elements for their story of the Exodus. First of all, the events in the story, from the opening of the book and Israel's condition of slavery until the people are freed and led through the wilderness, all repeat, in reverse order, themes and ideas found in the Primeval History:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXODUS</strong></th>
<th><strong>GENESIS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel's slavery is described in terms of a building project using brick and mortar</td>
<td>The building of the tower of Babel with brick and mortar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses is saved in an 'ark' (teba)</td>
<td>Noah is saved in an 'ark' (teba)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses intervenes in a quarrel between brothers</td>
<td>Cain and Abel - one brother kills the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses 'drives' away the shepherds and allows girls access to their work and source of life, water</td>
<td>Adam and Eve are 'driven' from the garden and have work imposed on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The serpent becomes the sign of God's presence</td>
<td>The serpent tempts Adam and Eve to rebel against God's command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sea is parted bringing forth dry land and allowing the people to cross safely - a new creation in the birth of a new nation</td>
<td>The creation acts of the second and third days are the separations of the waters bringing forth dry land - leading to the population of the areas of creation on the next three days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wilderness wanderings in which God leads by a pillar of (dark) cloud by day and fire by night (a reversal of the original night and day of creation.)</td>
<td>The creation of light and the separation of light and darkness as the first act of creation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This structure underlines the faith of the biblical storytellers that what God did in freeing Israel and entering into a relationship with the people was a **NEW CREATION**, a new beginning in God's dealings with his world. Israel, because of its special relationship with God, is becoming the means whereby all the other nations of the earth are to find blessing. That, too, the biblical storytellers are letting us know, is WHO WE ARE CALLED TO BE.

In addition to the above structuring of the first half of the Book of Exodus, we can note a parallel between the first four chapters and chapters 5-19. In this scheme, what happens to Moses in chapters 1-4 is repeated for all the people in chapters 5-19. This structure focuses on the idea that just as God dealt with Moses, his servant and hero, so too does he deal with his chosen people - Israel then, and us now.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exodus 1-4:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Exodus 5-19:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Egyptians impose labor on the Israelites through mortar and brick (1:11-14)</td>
<td>After Moses appears before Pharaoh their labor is made harder through straw and bricks (5:4ff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israelite boys are thrown into the Nile (1:22)</td>
<td>Yahweh throws Pharaoh and his chariots into the sea (14:15-15:19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses is saved (2:1ff)</td>
<td>Israel is saved (14:15-15:19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh appears to Moses in a sneth bush on a mountain of God (3:1-2)</td>
<td>Yahweh appears to Moses and Israel at Mt. Sinai (19:1ff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God hears the cry of his people and prepares to bring them to the Promised Land (3:6-8)</td>
<td>God hears the wail of his people and remembers his promise to bring them to the Promised Land (6:4-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At his call, Moses fears and complains that he doesn't speak well (4:10)</td>
<td>At his second call, Moses fears and complains that he doesn't speak well (6:12, 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God appoints Aaron to speak for him (4:14-16)</td>
<td>Yahweh appoints him as a 'god' for Pharaoh and Aaron as his prophet (7:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh instructs Israel to take silver and despoil the Egyptians (3:21f)</td>
<td>The Israelites take silver and despoil the Egyptians (12:35f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 + 1 signs are given for Israel (and for Egypt) (4:2ff)</td>
<td>3 + 3 + 1 signs occur for Egypt (and Israel) (chapters 7-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fourth sign to Pharaoh involves the death of his first-born (4:23)</td>
<td>The tenth sign for Pharaoh involves the death of every first-born in Egypt (11:1ff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power-producing effect of blood turns aside God's anger (4:24)</td>
<td>The power-producing effect of blood turns aside God's destruction (12:7ff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The signs are shown to the people and they believed (4:31)</td>
<td>At the sea all Israel saw the mighty hand of God and believed in Yahweh (14:31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE also, Moses' experience in the wilderness leading him to Midian and the mountain of God is matched by the people's journey to Sinai.
While the whole story of Exodus is a story of people being on the way to experiencing the fullness of God's promises, and the image of our journey with God, certain portions of the book also treat additional themes.

The first two chapters of the Book of Exodus explore hatred and prejudice. At the beginning of the book, the people of Israel are growing large in the land of Israel and a new Pharaoh assumes that they will rebel against him, that they are a threat. That is exactly what prejudice is - an assumption about a group of people in general. The stories in the first two chapters, then, explore how it is easy to make general assumptions about people and hate them for it, but that it becomes much harder to maintain that hatred with individual members of the group. It is for that reason that the Egyptian Princess spares Moses' life. She cannot look at a single baby boy and hate him.

The story of the Midwives in Exodus 1:15-22 is a good example of this idea. Pharaoh commands the midwives to kill ALL the Hebrew boy babies. But they must do this one at a time, and this, according to the logic of the story is something they can't do. Furthermore, the midwives are Hebrews themselves, and Pharaoh cannot deal with them harshly as Hebrews because he has come to know and deal with them as individuals. The Story of the Midwives is a special kind of biblical story, a DECEPTION STORY. Deception stories have the following pattern:

| 1. | A weaker, good party has a problem - most often involving a life or death situation. |
| 2. | The weaker, good party uses deception (lies) against the stronger, evil party |
| 3. | The deception is successful and lives are saved. |

Deception stories do not hold up lying as a virtue, but say that "God helps those who help themselves." These stories say that God expects us to use our heads, to use the intelligence he has given us when we face critical situations.

The Story of the Midwives

Now the king of Egypt spoke to the midwives of the Hebrews whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, and he said, "When you act as midwife for the Hebrew women and you look on the birth stones, if is a son, you will kill it, but if it is a daughter, she will live." But the midwives FEARED GOD and they did not do as the king of Egypt had said to them, but they kept the male children alive. And the king of Egypt called to the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing and you have kept alive the male children?" And
the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; for vigorous are they. Before the midwife comes to them they have given birth.” So God caused it to be well with the midwives and the people grew and they became very strong. And it happened, since the midwives FEARED GOD, that he made houses for them.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son having been born you will cast into the Nile, but every daughter you may keep alive."

This situation of persecution is the situation into which Moses is born. When the birth of someone is narrated in the Bible, that person is singled out for special attention. The story of Moses birth raises expectations that he may be the one whom God will use to free his people. His birth under strange circumstances also serves to begin a cycle of stories about Moses which is a SAGA. Moses is born and his life is endangered by the persecution of the king of Egypt. When his mother can no longer hide him, she places him in a basket and hides him in the weeds along the shore of the Nile. There the Egyptian Princess finds him and adopts him. So, in the typical fashion of a Saga, Moses is identified with the enemy. Finally, as a young man, Moses goes about among the Hebrews and protects one of his fellow countrymen who is being beaten by an Egyptian. At this point he has begun to break his ties with the enemy and to be identified with the cause of his own people. Because he killed the Egyptian who had been beating the Hebrew slave, Moses is forced to flee for his life. This initiates another story pattern in his saga, the FINDING-OF-A-WIFE-AT-A-WELL STORY. Moses flees to the land of Midian, meets girls at a well, drives off the shepherds who are oppressing them, draws water for them, and marries one of the girls. As we have seen, these stories always point to the importance of the hero and show that he is at a turning point in his life. For Moses, this turning point is that he has now severed his ties with Egypt and must be prepared for the role for which God has destined him.

The saga of Moses relates a second significant story about him during his stay in Midian. It is the story of his call. CALL NARRATIVES in the Bible follow a regular pattern and always serve to compare the one called to Moses, the first person in the biblical story to receive such a call. CALL NARRATIVES have the following pattern:

1. God confronts the one he calls
2. There is an introductory word by God
3. God gives a commission - tells the one called what he wants of him
4. The one called objects
5. God gives a reassurance
6. God gives a sign

That the person called by God objects to being called offers us a lesson. What God wants of us may not always be easy; it may not be what we want to do. Even the greatest heroes of the Bible, heroes like Moses, found God's will hard and fought against following it. They were not condemned for this, but reassured by God. This is what we can expect. God will let us know what he wants from us and encourage us in carrying it out.
The Call of Moses

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, priest of Midian, and he drove the flock behind the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. And a messenger of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a sneh bush, and he saw and, behold, the sneh bush was burning with fire, but the sneh bush - it was not consumed. And Moses said, "Let me turn aside now and I will see this great sight - why the sneh bush is not burned!"

Then Yahweh saw that he had turned to see and God called to him from the midst of the sneh bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Behold. It is I." And he said to him, "Do not draw near to here. Pull off your sandals from on your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face for he feared to gaze upon God.

Then Yahweh said, "Surely I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and their cry I have heard from before their oppressors, for I know their sorrows. And I have come down to deliver them from the hand of Egypt and to cause him to go up from that land to a good and wide land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. And now, behold, the cry of the Sons of Israel has come to me and also I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. And now I will send you to Pharaoh and you must bring forth my people, the Sons of Israel, from out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the Sons of Israel from Egypt?" And he said, "I will be with you and this will be a sign for you that I have sent you: When you bring forth the people, you all will serve God on this mountain." And Moses said to God, "Behold, should I go to the Sons of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' then they will say to me, 'What is his name?' What will I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." And he said, "Thus you will say to the Sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And God spoke again to Moses, "Thus you will say to the Sons of Israel: 'Yahweh (a causative form of the verb 'to be' = the one who causes to be, the creator), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever and this is my remembrance to generation after generation.' Go! Gather the elders of Israel and say to them: 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers has appeared to me, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'Surely I have visited you and that which has been done to you in Egypt. And I have said, 'I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" And they will listen to your voice and you will go in, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews has met with us and now, let us go, please, a journey of three days into the wilderness and let us sacrifice to Yahweh, our God.' And I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, not even by a strong hand. And I will send out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in its midst and afterward he will send you away. And I will grant favor to this people in the eyes of Egypt and it will be, when you go, you will not go empty, but each woman will ask from her neighbor and from the stranger in her house for vessels of silver and vessels of gold and garments and you will put them on your sons and on your daughters and you will plunder Egypt."

But Moses answered and said, "And behold, they will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'Yahweh has not appeared to you.'" And Yahweh said to him, "What is this in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." And he said, "Cast it to the ground." And he cast it to the ground and it became a snake and Moses fled from before it. And Yahweh said to Moses, "Send out your hand and seize it by its tail." And he sent out his hand and seized it and it became a staff in the palm of his hand. "Thus
they will believe that Yahweh has appeared to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Yahweh said to him again, "Cause now your hand to go to your bosom" And he caused his hand to go to his bosom and he caused it to go forth and, behold, his hand was struck with skin disease like snow. And he said, "Cause your hand to return to your bosom." And he caused his hand to return to his bosom and caused it to go forth from his bosom and, behold, it had returned like his flesh. "And it will be, if they will not believe you and will not listen to the voice of the first sign, then they will believe the voice of the later sign. And it will be, if they will not believe even these two signs and will not listen to your voice, then you will take the water of the Nile and pour it on the dry land and it will become, the water which you take from the Nile, as blood on the dry land.” And Moses said to Yahweh, "Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words, not yesterday nor from longer ago, nor even from the time you spoke to your servant. For heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue am I." And Yahweh said to him, "Who has put a mouth in man or who establishes the dumb or deaf or the clear sighted or the blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? And now, go and I myself will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you will say." But Moses said, "Please, my Lord, send now by the hand you will send.” And grew hot the nose of Yahweh (= he got angry) against Moses and he said, "Do I not know Aaron, your brother, the Levite, that indeed he speaks well? And also, behold, he is coming forth to meet you and he will see you and rejoice in his heart. And you will speak to him and you will put the words in his mouth and I will be with your mouth and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will teach you both what you must do. Then he will speak for you to the people and it will be, he will be your mouth and you will be as a god for him. And this staff you will take in your hand with which you will do the signs."
Now, within the stories of Exodus, special place is given to the cycle of the plagues. These plagues were the signs and wonders Yahweh worked before Israel and Egypt to get people to believe in him and trust the word of his servant, Moses. The PLOT of this section of the story can be outlined as follows:

- **PROBLEM** - The Oppression in Egypt
- **COMPLICATION** - The Plagues Themselves - the stuff of the story.
- **RESOLUTION** - The Crossing of the Sea
- **WRAP-UP** - Israel's Arrival at Mt. Sinai and God's Appearance

Within this scheme of things, the plagues belong, properly, to the complicating factors of the story. One of the first things to be noticed, however, is that in the course of the plagues nothing happens. The people's fate is unchanged. Throughout the long cycle, God multiplies his signs, but the Egyptian king remains unmoved. The storyteller does not want to demonstrate that God's mighty works have no effect, but rather to ridicule the Egyptians as symbols of worldly power. They can do nothing to change the course of the plagues, but remain blind as to the cause of their misfortunes. In modern terms, then, the plague stories functions as a kind of Ancient Israelite version of Hogan's Heroes. The Egyptians are made to look like fools while the Israelites await the saving action of God. This would have been a powerful message for those experiencing the Babylonian Exile, when the Pentateuch received its final shape. Those who were awaiting God's saving action could derive hope from the old story of slavery in Egypt, when God defeated Israel's enemies - but only after a rather long time.

There is one final feature of the Exodus story which deserves comment. That is the murmuring tradition. The Murmuring Tradition provides the theme for the story of the people's wandering in the wilderness. Murmuring, or complaint stories, form in Inclusion around the critical events at Mt. Sinai where God enters into a special relationship with his people and reveals his will for them. The Murmuring stories have two patterns:
PATTERN ONE:
1. The people experience a real lack
2. They complain against God and Moses
3. Moses takes the problem to God
4. God acts to remove the lack.

PATTERN TWO:
1. The people experience something they don't like
2. They complain against God and Moses
3. God acts to punish
4. The people turn to Moses
5. Moses takes their plea to God

Pattern One stories are told during the people's journey out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai. Pattern Two stories are told in the account of the people's journey from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land. It can also be noted that the stories of Pattern One are a special case of a more general type of biblical story, a MIRACLE STORY. Miracle Stories are the other half of the faith statement made by DECEPTION STORIES. If Deception Stories say that God helps those who help themselves, Miracle Stories say that when people face a crisis in which they are helpless, God cares and gets involved. The stories of Pattern Two are also a special case of a more general type of biblical story, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT STORIES. Crime and Punishment stories are familiar from the Primeval History.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIRACLE STORY</th>
<th>CRIME AND PUNISHMENT STORY</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. People face a problem - usually a life or death situation.</td>
<td>1. People sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They take the problem to someone who can help</td>
<td>2. God acts to punish - usually in absolute terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The leader presents the problem to God</td>
<td>3. The people are led to confront their guilt and confess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. God's action or the carrying out of the instructions solves the problem.</td>
<td>A. Acts directly, or B. gives instructions</td>
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That these stories surround the Sinai events, and that the stories which focus on sinfulness come AFTER the great events of God's revelation, all show that the road we travel with God is a difficult road, one on which sin is a reality. However, the message of hope is that no matter how ungrateful or sinful Israel becomes, God was always willing to forgive them and begin his story with them again. That is a powerful message to us, too.
3. Israel's Legal Traditions

Objective:
Israel's Legal Traditions give an ideal picture of the past, of the age of Moses as the time of the formation of the people of Israel. The codes themselves functioned as textbooks for learning basic lessons about right and wrong. Israel's Legal Traditions aim at imparting a sense of right and wrong and challenge readers to be true to their roots.

Vocabulary List:
- DECALOGUE
- PRIESTLY CORPUS
- BOOK OF THE COVENANT
- HOLINESS CODE
- DEUTERONOMIC CODE
- MOSAIC AGE

Most of the rest of the Pentateuch is made up of "Laws." The laws are contained in unified blocks of material

1. The TEN COMMANDMENTS (Ex 20:2-17 and Dt 5:6-21)
2. The BOOK OF THE COVENANT (Ex 20:23-23:19)
3. The PRIESTLY CORPUS (Ex 25-31, 35-40, Lev 1-27, and Num 1-10)
4. The HOLINESS CODE (a special Code in the PRIESTLY CORPUS - Lev 17-26)
5. The DEUTERONOMIC CODE (all of Deuteronomy, but especially chapters 12-26)
The so-called 'law codes' date from the time of kingship in Israel, but have their roots in the ancient educational practices of the people. When Israel lived as migrant shepherds, the people could observe what kind of actions led to a good life, what caused hardship and difficulties. From these observations, they taught a basic morality to their children. In time, these teachings would develop in two directions:

**Wisdom Sayings**

**Legal Pronouncements.**

For example, people easily observe that giving in to anger and doing violence to others has some serious consequences. From this observation could emerge a wisdom saying such as:

"He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword."

It would also have given rise to the legal pronouncement:

"Thou shalt not kill."

Both types of sayings are rooted in Israel's experience of God and what the people believed to be God's will for them. In time, collections of both wisdom and legal sayings were collected to serve as **TEXTBOOKS** on how to live as members of Yahweh's people.

What this means is that the 'law codes' never were used as present day law codes - as guides for judging specific cases. They were instructional materials used to give people a sense of right and wrong. Even the **FORM** of the so-called codes in the Bible support this idea. The codes read much more like sermons (which, in fact, they are) than as precise legal stipulations.

The **MOST BASIC STATEMENT** of Israel's sense of right and wrong is given in the **TEN COMMANDMENTS.** This collection is more fitting named **THE DECALOGUE,** or the **TEN WORDS.** These Ten Words form a core teaching about how to live our lives with God and each other. In a very real sense, all other codes in the Bible are meant to be supplements to and commentaries on the basic teachings of the **DECALOGUE.**

The **BOOK OF THE COVENANT** is the next oldest collection. It was most likely composed by the Elohist and is directly related to the **DECALOGUE.** It is a kind of sermon from Moses explaining the meaning of the Ten Commandments and, as such, it is included in the story of the Pentateuch immediately after the Ten Commandments have been given on Mt. Sinai.

The entire **PRIESTLY CORPUS,** including the **HOLINESS CODE,** is the latest addition to the Bible's legal traditions. The Priestly Writer worked at the end of kingship and during the early days of the Babylonian Exile. The purpose of the sermons on 'legal'
matters included in the Priestly source was intended to present an ideal picture of the past, a picture that could or should have been, in order to give the people hope for what could be in the future when they would be able to go home. The key idea of the PRIESTLY CORPUS, which finds special expression in the HOLINESS CODE, is that the people of Israel are called to be holy since they are in a covenant relationship with Yahweh who is holy.

The DEUTERONOMIC CODE has its roots late in the period of kingship. The core of the book, chapters 12-26, was composed to give an ideal picture of the past as a program for the reform of the Southern Kingdom of Judah under Josiah. The whole Deuteronomic Movement was an attempt to reform Judah so that the Southern Kingdom could escape the fate of its Northern brothers. When Judah failed to reform and was itself exiled, the Deuteronomists added to the book of Deuteronomy and completed the Historical Books to give hope that all was not lost. A key theme in the Book of Deuteronomy and the entire history is "repent, return." In the exile, these materials held out the hope that if the people truly had a change of heart, they would be able to return to the land and again live as Yahweh's special people.

What is common to all the codes is that they are attributed to Moses and the Mosaic age. The Mosaic age was the time in which the people of Israel took shape. What this means is that the sermons in the Law codes look to an ideal age, a time when the people were being formed and proclaim that the values and beliefs of that age can still, and should still, be at the heart of the people; that the sense of justice and right contained in the codes is at the root of being the people of God and that Israel must be true to its roots to fully be God's people.

There is one final consideration which is worth noting. The Priestly Writer is responsible for giving the Pentateuch its final shape. This writer was responsible for including the directions for building the desert sanctuary (Ex 25-31) and the description of the carrying out of those commands (Ex 35-40). The Priestly Writers were also responsible for including the story of the Golden Calf between the directions for building the sanctuary and the account of its completion, and for placing the murmuring traditions immediately before and after the events at Sinai. At Mt. Sinai, in the very process of receiving God's will, the people sin. The effect this has is to underline the reality of human sin. No one of will ever be perfect. But, at the same time, the incident demonstrates, in dramatic fashion, Yahweh's willingness to forgive and begin again. That belief, at the very heart of Israel's legal traditions, is the central faith statement of the biblical writers - that God is willing to forgive and begin again.
Objective:
The aim of the second section of the Old Testament, THE PROPHETS is to present the story of Israel's life in the land of promise, to show how the people used or misused God's gifts. Our purpose in studying the books of the PROPHETS is to learn the lessons of the past, to follow Israel when the people were successful, but also to avoid the mistakes they made.

The Pentateuch, or the Law of Moses, is the most sacred core of the Hebrew Bible. Its theme is that God's promises are partly fulfilled. For us this means that our lives are like a journey and that we are on the way.

God's promises to Israel were:

| **Becoming a great nation** | **Receiving the land** | **Having a special relationship with God** |

Those promises, in the Pentateuch, are symbols of God's promises to us today. God gifts us with people who give us a sense of belonging; he gives us places, things, and people who give us a sense of being 'at home,' of being safe and secure; and he has a special relationship with each of us.
The next major section of the Old Testament is the **PROPHETS**. The theme of this section is:

**WHAT THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL DO WITH THE GIFTS OF GOD**

The **PROPHETS** are divided into two sections:

| The FORMER PROPHETS | The LATTER PROPHETS |

The **FORMER PROPHETS** refers to the **HISTORICAL BOOKS**. These are:

- Joshua
- Judges
- I and II Samuel
- I and II Kings

These books tell the stories of Israel's life in the land, especially the life of the people under the institution of kingship.

The **LATTER PROPHETS** refers to the collections of the written words of Israel's prophets, a written record of their sermons. The **LATTER PROPHETS** has to parts:

- The **MAJOR PROPHETS** - the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
- The **MINOR PROPHETS** - twelve shorter books of prophecy.

The basic difference between the **MAJOR** and the **MINOR** prophets is length. The twelve **MINOR PROPHETS** can all be written on a single scroll, while each of the major prophets needs a scroll of its own to contain the entire book.

**PROPHECY began in Israel when kingship began. It disappeared when kingship passed away.** The role of the prophets was **NOT** to predict the future, but to **challenge the people and their kings to be faithful to God and to use God's gifts well.** They pointed out the consequences of the actions of the people, what would inevitably follow from their sinful behavior.

The **HISTORICAL BOOKS** are grouped together with the written prophets because they include stories about prophets like Elijah and Elisha. The stories about prophets in the Latter Prophets shed light on the meaning of the story of the people's use of God's gifts as it is told in the Historical Books; it completes the picture given in the Historical Books by adding the idea of hope for restoration after the disastrous end of the story in the Second Book of Kings.
1. The Historical Books

Vocabulary List: JOSHUA JUDGES
SAMUEL KINGS
TRAGEDY DEUTERONOMIC HISTORY
TRAGIC FLAW IDOLATRY

The final shape of the Historical Books comes from the **DEUTERONOMISTS**. These thinkers and theologians were active in the last days of the Kingship and during the Babylonian Exile. They told the story of what Israel did with God's gifts and tried to explain why the kingdom was lost. Because their particular World View is so pronounced in the Historical Books, these books are also known as **THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORY**. The World View of the Deuteronomists represents a combination of the two basic World Views which form the background for everything in the Old Testament. The Deuteronomists believed:

1. That God had chosen David and his line to be kings forever and that God's promises to his people would always be valid
2. But they also stressed human responsibility, noting that even Israel's kings must obey the Law of God as given through Moses
3. In the light of this, they taught that God would not let evil go unpunished
4. But punishment would never be God's last word. A basic theme for the Deuteronomists was that REPENTANCE and RETURN was always possible.

The Book of Deuteronomy, written as long speeches by Moses, was meant to be a guide for living out God's promises. The teachings of Deuteronomy provide the key to interpreting Israel's story in the Historical Books. The people use God's gifts well if they follow the teachings of Deuteronomy, but when they do not live up to those teachings, they lapse into sin and misuse God's gifts. For the writers of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic History, the central example of the evil which the people can do is idolatry. **IDOLATRY** means the worshipping of false gods. The Deuteronomists saw the outdoor shrines which were common in Israel as a big part of the problem. Such shrines were open to abuse by adopting the practices of fertility rites which were common
among Israel's neighbors. Because of this, the Deuteronomists stressed that there was only one legitimate place for Israelites to worship, the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Historical Books which follow Deuteronomy went through two editions. The first, in the last days of kingship, told the story of how the kings and people were failing to live up to the teachings of Deuteronomy and tried to get them to turn things around, to repent. In the exile, the Deuteronomists finished the story, explaining how the kingdom was lost because of the people's continued sin.

The story of the Historical Books can be summarized as follows:

- **JOSHUA** - tells the story of a faithful people under a single leader who enter the land and take possession of it and divide the land among the twelve tribes, all according to God's plan.
- **JUDGES** - tells the story of a sinful people, falling into idolatry, and struggling to hang on to God's gifts.
- **SAMUEL** - tells the story of the people seeking to change in order to get back on the right track. The change the people want to make is to become a united nation under a king.
- **KINGS** - tells the story of how the people continue to sin and suffer the consequences by losing the kingdom.

The story that is told by the Historical Books is unusual in the Bible. It can be treated as a **TRAGEDY**. A **TRAGEDY** is a special kind of story in which

1. someone - often someone unlikely - rises to fame and power
2. but that person has a TRAGIC FLAW, something wrong in his person and the way he characteristically acts
3. that flaw leads finally to the hero's downfall.

In the Historical Books

1. a lowly, undistinguished people, the Tribes of Israel, rises to become a world power
2. The Tragic Flaw of the people and its kings involves
   
   A. the abuse and oppression of the common people
   B. the abuse of the land, even selling some of it to foreign kingdoms
   C. the abuse of the special relationship with God through practices of idolatry.

3. The Tragic Flaw leads to the downfall of the people when the kingdom is finally lost in the Babylonian Exile.

But the Historical Books do not tell a story that is completely negative. There are clues in the story to suggest that God is always willing to forgive his people and begin again,
that loss is not the final word in the story.

In the beginning, the people were led by a single leader, Joshua. After Joshua, God raises up individual Judges to lead the people in times of crisis. When that office failed to keep the people faithful to their God, God started again with a new office, kingship. That office also failed, but the pattern suggests that God will begin again with something else. We can expect God to be consistent, to act again a he has acted in the past, to forgive and begin again.
A. The Book of Joshua

Objective:
The Book of Joshua explores what it means to follow God's Law, to follow his teachings. The book, by telling stories about exceptions made to God's law, teaches that God does not want us to be puppets or robots. God wants us to use our heads to figure out what is right or wrong in every kind of situation.

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<tr>
<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>CONQUEST TRADITION</th>
<th>LAW OF THE BAN</th>
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<td></td>
<td>HOLY WAR</td>
<td>RAHAB</td>
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The Book of Joshua combines two themes or ideas. On the one hand, it is the story of the **CONQUEST** of the Promised Land. The **CONQUEST TRADITION** was the view held in Ancient Israel that God's promise of the land was not simply fulfilled, but that the people had a part to play in receiving the promise. The Conquest Tradition, then, stresses human responsibility in living into God's promises. Thus, the Book of Joshua begins to complete the theme of the giving of the land which was only partly fulfilled by the end of the Pentateuch, and does this by showing how humans and God must work together. On the other hand, the Book of Joshua can be seen as the **HEROIC SAGA OF JOSHUA**. As was the case in the story of Moses, the Book of Joshua will play with ideas about what God accomplishes and what people accomplish - how God and people work together to bring God's will to completion. Therefore, like Moses, Joshua is presented as a **MAN OF GOD** and an **HEROIC MAN**. He does God's will, but he is not just a puppet.

In general, the Book of Joshua falls into two large parts:

1. **After the introduction of chapter 1, chapters 2-12 deal with the Conquest of the land.**
2. Chapters 13-24 deal with the DIVISION of the land among the Twelve Tribes of Israel - all according to God's plan.

Both the CONQUEST and the DIVISION of the land are governed by the law of God, but that law is open-ended. **Joshua and the people must understand God's word, figure out what it means and decide for themselves how they will carry out God's will.** For us, this means that **doing what God wants is NOT just a matter of keeping rules, but of making real decisions.** God does not want us to be puppets or robots.

To stress the idea of human responsibility in carrying out God's will, the Book of Joshua tells the stories of some remarkable EXCEPTIONS. - times when it looks as if, in strict terms, the people are breaking God's law. Yet, what they do, while breaking the words of the law, shows that the people understand the meaning or spirit behind God's words.

Chapter One of Joshua introduces the theme of the whole Book:

**The People's Success in the Land Depends on**

Following God's Law  
Working Together

The special way that the book shows that it is necessary for the people to work together comes in the fact that two and a half tribes, Reuben, Gad and half Manasseh, have already received their land east of the Jordan River. But they are still required to cross the river and help their brothers in the war of conquest.

Chapter 2 slows the progress of the story. Now is the time to cross the Jordan, but first Joshua timidly sends out spies. Even though they return with a report of how panic-stricken the people of the land are at the approaching Israelites, this story reminds the reader of the earlier spy story in the Book of Numbers and how the report of the spies then led the people to fear. **This spy story suggests that the present generation is no more confident in God's promise to give the land than the earlier generation had been.**

The conversation between RAHAB, the prostitute, and the spies is the heart of the chapter (2:8-14). The promise which Rahab gets the spies to make is a direct violation of the LAW OF THE BAN. This law called for the total destruction of an enemy. While it is unlikely that this law was ever really enforced, the storytellers used it as a symbol. **THE MEANING OF THE LAW OF THE BAN** is that **Israel should avoid anything and anyone who would draw them away from complete faithfulness to God.** In this story, Israel makes an exception to the Law of the Ban with respect to Rahab and her family. In strict terms, they break the Law, but God approves of the decision they make. This story, then, demonstrates one of the key ideas in the Book of Joshua. **We have to understand God's will and figure out what it means in many different situations. God does not want us to live by blindly following rules with no understanding of what they mean.**

Probably the best known story in the Book of Joshua is the story of the Fall of Jericho.
This story is a clear example of a **HOLY WAR STORY**. Holy War Stories have the following outline:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>God assures the people of victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>God himself does the actual fighting</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>the role of Israel is usually only to make noise</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Yahweh throws the enemy into confusion and the enemy defeats itself</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Israel engages in a 'mop-up' operation (imposing the ban on the already defeated enemy).</td>
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**HOLY WAR STORIES** are not intended to celebrate or glorify violence. They make a statement about Israel's faith. In a time of **CRISIS**, God fights for his people and delivers them. **Holy War Stories are statements of faith that God is with us when we face personal or community crises.**

The first six chapters of Joshua have a concentric structure, but it is important to note that this structure is broken - with the Rahab episode - to highlight the idea of **EXCEPTIONS** with which that episode deals:

| A. | The Commission of Joshua (Joshua 1:1-18) |
| Interlude: | The Spies and Rahab (Joshua 2:1-24) |
| B. | Entry into the Promised Land (Joshua 3:1-4:24) |
| C. | Setting for the Conquest (Joshua 5:1) |
| C. | Preparation for the Conquest in a ceremony of Circumcision (Joshua 5:2-9) |
| B. | Enjoyment of the Promised Land in the celebration of the Passover (Joshua 5:10-12) |
| A. | The Commission of Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15) |
| [The ritual bringing about the Fall of Jericho (6:1-27)] |

In general, what this structure shows is that everything that happens takes place within the context of Joshua's commission to lead the people. He is commissioned by God, so God is directing all that happens, but he is doing so through a human leader. Again, this stresses that God and humans work together to accomplish God's will. The focus of what happens takes place within the land which is first entered - as was promised - and then enjoyed - but enjoyed in terms of a religious celebration. The heart of the structure is the command to take the land and the preparation to do so by means of a circumcision ceremony. While it is to be expected that the adult males of the community would have been circumcised as babies, this detail stresses that it is never too late to follow God's will.

The two episodes involving Jericho, the story of Rahab and the ritual fall of the city, again stress God and humans working together. These episodes break the strict pattern of the structure and this stresses the need to make exceptions, to understand God's word as alive and dynamic, not as a mere set of rules to be followed exactly and with no thought. Good people must figure out which of God's teachings applies in any given situation and...
how that teaching is to be understood. This is a constant theme in the book of Joshua.

The story of Jericho (chapter 6) is followed by the story of the failure to defeat Ai (chapter 7), the discovery of a violation of the law of the Ban, and the final victory (chapter 8). The stories of both Jericho and Ai have to do with the correct understanding and application of the Mosaic Law of the Ban.

Joshua's last command before Jericho falls, 6:16-19, gives approval to the spies' decision not to enforce the Ban in the case of Rahab and her family. But the initial setback at Ai in chapter 7 is due to a man named Achan who took forbidden loot from Jericho and broke the Ban. Also, the failure is due in part to Joshua's sending of spies, again demonstrating his lack of confidence in the word of the Lord. The Jericho and Ai stories both explore the idea of making exceptions to God's will and word. In the case of saving Rahab, the exception is approved; but in the case of Achan, the exception is condemned. People have to figure out what God's word means, but sometimes they will make mistakes, or even sin by trying to justify exceptions to God's will which only stem from selfishness. The stories also show that what individuals do, good or bad, has consequences for the whole community.

Chapter 9 tells of a covenant (agreement) made with the people of Gibeon, an agreement won by the Gibeonites' trickery. The Gibeonites trick Israel into giving an oath. This recalls the story of Rahab. This story, too, focuses on explaining how a group of 'outsiders' became members of Israel's company. The story tries to come up with an understanding of the teaching contained in chapter 29 of Deuteronomy, the law about having nothing to do with those who are under the Ban. Both Gibeon and Israel have come to realize that they have no right to a covenant relationship - Gibeon with Israel, and Israel with God. Strict interpretation of the law would call for the death of both people since Gibeon is under the Ban and Israel, in strict terms, is breaking the law. But, just as God is both just and merciful, Israel can make an exception for Gibeon and bring them into the community. They pose no threat to Israel's faithfulness to God.

The story in chapter 10 describes the attack on Gibeon by five Amorite kings and Israel's defeat of those kings. In Joshua 9-10, the story of Israel's relations with Gibeon represents how God's protection of Israel is not something earned, but a free gift. God is just, but in his mercy, he too makes exceptions. Likewise, the stories of Israel's relationship with Gibeon highlights a theme developed in the Pentateuch - Israel is chosen to bring God's blessings to all other people.

Most of chapters 13-21 is concerned with a detailed description of the territories each of the tribes receives. In the end, the two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh) return across the Jordan to their own land. The ending of the book, then, stresses that these tribes are 'insiders,' they are real members of the people, even though they do not live within the proper boundaries of the Promised Land. This is an important message for the people living in the Exile. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE 'IN THE LAND' TO BE 'IN GOD'S PEOPLE. For us, this means that we can be 'at home' with God wherever we are.
The whole story of the Book of Joshua, then, is a meditation on 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' It is part of God's plan that we stay away from anyone and anything that can draw us away from God, but there is a place in God's people for whoever is willing to follow God's will and work together for the good of all. Even more, God's people are not confined to a single people in a single place. Everyone who is willing to follow God's will can belong to him and be at home with him wherever they are.

In the end, the Book of Joshua wants to teach us that we can have success as God's people if we follow God's will and are willing to work together. However, following God's will is not a simple matter of following rules, but of using our heads and acting responsibly in figuring out what is right and wrong in every situation.
B. The Book of Judges

Objective:
The Book of Judges tells a dismal story of the people's continued sinning. The book wants to teach us that sinning, just as doing good, can become a habit and that bad habits are very difficult to break. Breaking bad habits means making real changes, but the more fixed a habit becomes, the harder it is to change.

Vocabulary List: MAJOR JUDGE MINOR JUDGE JUDGE STORY APOSTASY

The Book of Joshua presented the CONQUEST in more or less positive terms, though the book did not shy away from dealing with the incomplete nature of the conquest and the failures of Joshua and Israel along the way. Joshua and Judges are two sides of the same coin, but with Judges we no longer deal with a unified Israel nor with a single leader. The book characterizes the period of the Judges as one of dissension, diversity, unfaithfulness and failure.

The core of the book consists of individual stories about the deeds of local heroes. The material consists of popular folk stories preserved by different groups of people to say, basically, "Hey, Look! Local boy makes good!" At this point, then, we begin to get stories which are derived from historical remembrances, though they are re-told to give an understanding of Israel's faith about how God dealt with the people during this time in their history. To provide an interpretation of the stories, the Deuteronomists gave them a framework, the basic pattern of a JUDGE STORY:
1. The people did evil in the eyes of Yahweh (Yahweh's PROBLEM)
2. Yahweh gave them into the hand of their enemies (Israel's PROBLEM)
3. The people cried out to God
4. God raised up a deliverer (Judge) for them
5. Under the Judge, the people defeated the enemy
6. The land had rest (peace) during the rest of the lifetime of the Judge
7. When the Judge dies, the people turned back to sinning.

Note how this pattern is a special adaptation of the CRIME AND PUNISHMENT STORY. As was the case in other Crime and Punishment Stories, these stories stress the willingness of God to forgive and begin again.

As is the case for all the Historical Books, Judges received its final shape during the Babylonian Exile. A key phrase in the book is:

"At that time there was no king in Israel."

That is again the case during the time of the Exile. In the final shaping of the book, the repeating pattern of the stories (the pattern noted above) becomes a downward spiral, with sin, idolatry, and apostasy growing constantly stronger as we move from one story to the next. APOSTASY is presented as the basic evil of the time. APOSTASY refers not so much to absolutely abandoning Yahweh, but to combining idolatry with the worship of Yahweh. Apostasy was a temptation for the Exiles, too. Perhaps they could better their condition in Babylon by practicing the religion of their captors as well as their own Yahwistic faith. But, in the face of the downward spiral presented in the book, there is hope that God will act, that he will continue to deliver, just as he had in the past.

A pointer to the message of the whole book comes in an addition to the key phrase:

"At that time there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was good in his own eyes."

In the period of the Judges that could and did have terrible consequences, but the time is here again when there is no king, when people must decide to do what is good in their own eyes. The book of Judges challenges us to look to the past, to learn from our mistakes, and start again - just as God is always willing to start again.

Within the core of the book, there are six major episodes - each governed by the phrase, "The sons of Israel did/continued to do that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord." The episodes feature Othniel, Ehud, Deborah/Barak, Gideon/Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. Each successive leader is more unlikely and unexpected than the one before and each of their stories ends with things in a worse condition than when the story began. These episodes involve the MAJOR JUDGES. Within the book, the Major Judges were military leaders.
The major episodes are supplemented with notes on the **MINOR JUDGES**. The Minor Judges appear to be local government officials, more what we mean in modern English by a 'Judge.' The notes on the Minor Judges also follow a fixed pattern:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A man arose and judged Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>His term of office is specified</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Judge's death notice is given</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The place of his burial is recorded.</td>
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These notices do not refer to military feats and suggest periods of relative peace and prosperity.

All together there are six stories of Major Judges (military leaders) and six notices of Minor Judges (local government officials). That there are Twelve Judges in all suggests that one judge represents each of the Twelve Tribes. On the one hand, the twelve independent stories point to the lack of unity among the people during the period. But, on the other hand, **that there is one judge for each tribe suggests that whatever happens, good or bad, involves all the people.** In this, the Book of Judges states that there is one story of God's chosen people, no matter how they are divided.

The lack of success in the Book of Judges comes directly from the people's abuse of the gift of their relationship with God. This abuse comes in two ways:

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The people fall into Apostasy, combining worship of Yahweh with the worship of false gods, and even, at times, abandon God for idol worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Even in their own religious practices with Yahweh, they abuse their relationship and make the practice of religion nothing more than superstition.</td>
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The end result is that the unity of the people continues to crumble so that, by the end of the book, the tribes are engaged in a civil war and are in danger of destroying one of the tribes, their own brothers.
The entire book of Judges is arranged in an elaborate concentric pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROLOGUE</th>
<th>A. War of occupation (Israel vs. Canaanites) - 1:1-36</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Israel abandons Yahweh for other gods - 2:1-3:6</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>Othniel - the model of success - 3:7-11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(His success stems from his Israelite wife)</td>
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<td>D.</td>
<td>Ehud - takes bribes to a foreign king; defeats</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moab at fords of the Jordan - 3:12-30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(After him, Shamgar - 3:31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Jael (a woman) kills Sisera and ends a war - 4:1-5:31</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Gideon a. his fight against idolatry - 6:1-32</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. his fight against enemy - 6:33-7:25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. his fight against his own people - 8:1-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. his fall into idolatry - 8:22-35</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. A certain woman kills Abimelech (an Israelite) and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ends a war - 9:1-57</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Jephthah sends messages to a foreign king, kills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ephraimites (Israelites) at the fords of the Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and sacrifices his own daughter - 10:6-12:7</td>
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<td>(bracketed by &quot;minor judge notices&quot; in 10:1-5 and 12:8-15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Samson’s foreign women lead to his downfall - 13:1-16:31</td>
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<tr>
<th>EPILOGUE</th>
<th>B. Idolatry everywhere; Levite priests serve at pagan shrines; the tribe of Dan conquers Laish and establishes idolatry - 17:1-18:31</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Civil War (Israel vs. Benjamin) - 19:1-21:25</td>
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**The Story of Othniel**

The story of Othniel is the first and shortest of the stories of the Major Judges. Practically all that the story does is to plug names into the basic story outline. As such, Othniel is the model of what a judge could be, but he is not a fully human character. He is just a stereo-type of a judge, but not a man about whom we learn anything of his personality, character or motives. The PLOT of the story of Othniel can be outlined as follows:

1. The people of Israel did evil (3:7)
2. God handed them over to Cushanrishathaim (the name means Cushan of double
wickedness) (3:8)
3. In response to the cry of the people (3:9a)
4. God raised up Othniel (3:9b)
5. who beat Cushanrishathaim (3:10)
6. and the land had rest (3:11)

The Story of Ehud

The story of Ehud again illustrates the pattern of the stories of the Major Judges. It is also another good example of a DECEPTION STORY. What we can begin to notice about this story is that Ehud does not seem to be a very likely candidate for high office - judgeship. As we move on through the stories of the Major Judges, the candidates are going to get even more unlikely. Ehud's story and the story of Deborah which follows both make use of DECEPTION. Deception stories always develop the theme that God helps those who help themselves, that God wants us to use our heads in all kinds of situations. Such stories show God and humans working together to accomplish God's will.

The Story of Ehud

Now the sons of Israel continued to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh and Yahweh made strong Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel because they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek and went and struck Israel and they took possession of the City of the Palm Trees. And the sons of Israel served Eglon, the King of Moab, for eighteen years.

Then the sons of Israel cried out to Yahweh and Yahweh raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a man hindered (crippled?) in his right hand (= left handed). So the sons of Israel sent by his hand a gift to Eglon, the King of Moab. But Ehud made for himself a sword and on it were two edges; a cubit was its length. And he girded it under his garments on his right thigh. And he brought near the gift for Eglon, the King of Moab.

Now Eglon was a very fat man. And so it was, when he had finished offering the gift and had sent away the people carrying the gift, that he turned from the carved images which were at Gilgal and said, "I have a secret word for you, O King." And he said, "Be Quiet!" Then all those who were standing with him departed. And Ehud came to him while he was sitting in the upper room of coolness which he had by himself. And Ehud said, "A word of God do I have for you." And he rose from his seat. And Ehud sent his left hand and took the sword from his right thigh and he thrust into his belly. And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out from his belly, and it (something) came forth from the anal aperture. Then Ehud went out to the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. When he had gone forth, his servants came and saw and, behold, the doors of the upper room were locked and they said, "Surely he is covering his feet in the roof chamber of coolness." And they waited until they became ashamed and, behold, he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber. So they took the key and they opened and, behold, their lord having fallen to the ground, dead!

So Ehud escaped while they were still waiting, and he crossed by the carved images and he escaped to Seirath.

And so it was, when he came, he blew on the ram's horn on Mt. Ephraim and the sons of Israel went down with him from the mountains and he was before them. And he said to them, "Pursue after me, for Yahweh has given your enemies, Moab, into your hand." So they pursued after him and they captured the fords of the Jordan for Moab and they did
not allow a man to cross over. And they struck Moab, at that time, about ten thousand men, every robust man and every man of strength, and not a man escaped. And Moab was subdued on that day under the hand of Israel. Then the land had rest for eighty years.

The PLOT of the Ehud story can be outlined as follows:

1. The people of Israel did evil (3:12a)
2. God delivered them into the hands of the Moabites (3:12-b-14) Note: the oppression is longer and we learn more details about it
3. The people cry out to Yahweh (3:15a)
4. Yahweh raised up Ehud (3:15b)
   A. But Ehud was left-handed (not usual for ancient warriors - especially for a Benjaminite, which means "son of the right hand").
   B. The people do not recognize him as God's judge, but use him to send tribute to the king of Moab
   C. Ehud uses deception by
      i. making and concealing a sword on the side where he would not be searched
      ii. saying he had a secret message for the King from Israel's God - getting the King to think he would get more tribute
   D. Through his deception, Ehud kills King Eglon (3:15c-26)
5. Ehud rallies the troops and defeats Moab (3:27-30a)
6. The land had rest for 80 years (3:30b)

The Story of Deborah

The story of Deborah continues us on the downward spiral of the book. Again, the story-teller stresses that God uses unusual means to get his will accomplished. In this story the Judge is a woman. In fact, this woman is called a PROPHETESS. Deborah is the first woman in the Bible to be so designated. So, one of the things the biblical writers want us to know is that anyone - even those who seem most unlikely - can and do have a part to play in God's plan. A second major idea in this story deals with putting conditions on our response to God. We have seen this idea before in the stories about Lot. The story teller suggests that putting conditions on our response to God will always make things turn out worse than if we simply try to follow God's will whole-heartedly. Finally, an unexpected character emerges in this story, Jael, and she too has a major role to play. The fact that this story lays so much stress on the unexpected highlights the fact that our ways and our expectations are not necessarily those of God. We can't presume to know the mind of God but need to be open to many possibilities in our lives.

The PLOT of the Story of Deborah can be outlined as follows:

1. Israel continues to do evil - and it is possible that the return to evil happened before the death of Ehud - 4:1
2. God hands the people over to the hands of plunderers - 4:2
3. The people cry out - 4:3
4. The designated Judge leads in the defeat of the enemy - 4:4-22
   a) Deborah summons Barak, her general, but he puts conditions on being willing to lead the troops - 4:4-10
   b) The enemy general, Sisera, takes counter measures and the battle is engaged. Sisera's troops are defeated and he flees the battle - 4:11-16
   c) Jael, a Kenite woman, uses deception to kill Sisera - taking victory from the hands of Barak - 4:17-22
5. The enemy king is defeated, victory is celebrated, and the land has rest - 4:23-5:31

The Story of Gideon

The story of Gideon represents a key turning point in the downward spiral of the Book of Judges. While it was suggested in the Story of Deborah that the people might have turned back to evil ways during the life-time of Ehud, in the story of Gideon this becomes explicit. By the end of the story even the Judge himself has turned to idolatry. With the story of Gideon a major idea of the book is becoming more obvious. Sinning can get to be a habit and habits are hard to break. One of the first things Gideon is told to do is to tear down a pagan altar in his own homeland and his own people want to kill him for it. They don't want to give up their evil ways. They are in the habit of doing evil. Similarly, the story of Gideon picks up on the idea of putting conditions on our response to God. Gideon does this by trying to bargain with God, by trying to test God. This also begins to deal with another important idea in the book - the idea of using religion or religious practices in a false way, in a way that tries to manipulate God and force his hand. For the biblical story-tellers, this is not what religion is all about.

Again, Gideon will be an unlikely leader and the pattern of his story includes some unusual and unexpected elements. We are getting the feeling that the office of Judgeship is not working and begin to wonder how long God will put up with the stubbornness and willfulness of his people.

The PLOT of the Story of Gideon can be outlined as follows:

1. The people of Israel continued to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh - 6:1a
2. Yahweh hands them over to the Midianites and the story-teller expands the details of the oppression, suggesting that the people are willing to merely accept their fate - 6:1b-5
3. Israel finally cries out to God - 6:6
   [Yahweh sends a prophet, not a judge, to confront the people with their sinfulness, not to immediately deliver them. Crying to God, saying we're sorry, when we have no real intention of changing, is empty - 6:7-10]
4. God raises up Gideon (A Call Narrative - 6:11-26)

Note: A CALL NARRATIVE always suggests that the person called has an important part to play in the story and could be another person like Moses who received the first call. The person always raises an objection - Gideon says he's too young - and God always gives assurances of his guidance and protection.
Old Testament Notes

5. Gideon delivers Israel - 6:27-7:25
   a) Gideon tears down the altar of Baal - but the people want to kill him for it
   b) Clothed with Yahweh's spirit, Gideon rallies the troops
   c) Before carrying out his commission, Gideon bargains with God and asks for signs
   d) Yahweh reduces the size of Gideon's army so that there can be no doubt that victory belongs to God
   e) more signs and assurances
   f) The actual battle, patterned as a HOLY WAR STORY

   [An expansion of the story beyond the usual pattern showing Gideon turning against his fellow Israelites, his vengeance against Midianite kings and his own people, the way he is offered and rejects kingship but rather falls into idolatry himself - 8:1-27a]

6. Israel "whores" after Gideon's idolatrous object, that is, the people return to their evil ways during the life-time of the judge - 8:27b
7. Midian was subdued and the land had rest for forty years - 8:28

The Story of Jephthah

The story of Jephthah is the next step on the downward spiral. Jephthah, too, is a very unlikely hero. He is an outsider, an illegitimate son who is spurned by his neighbors. He is forced to be a renegade and the people turn to him only when they think they can get something from him. The major idea which the story teller presents in this narrative is the false use of religion. Jephthah, though assured of victory, takes a foolish vow. He makes a promise in an attempt to force God's hand, mistakenly thinking that he knows what God would want. His vow locks him into an evil course of action which he is unwilling to change. In this story, Jephthah represents all of us when we stubbornly refuse to admit that we might be wrong and stick with actions which end up being harmful.

The Jephthah story is a kind of cycle of tales with an elaborate story design. It is a good example of how the biblical writers took an existing story about a local hero and fit it into the basic pattern of a Judge story.

Framework introduction (the Judge pattern) - 10:6-16
A. Expanded listing of the sins of Israel, naming the gods whom the people served - 10:6
B. The anger of Yahweh leading to the people's oppression - 10:7-9
C. Israel cries out to Yahweh - 10:10
D. Direct speech of Yahweh - he refuses to help them - 10:11-14

[Note how this is similar to the story of Gideon in which God first sends his prophet to confront the people for their evil. Simply sending a judge and saving the people is not enough to get them to change. The situation in Israel is getting progressively ...]
worse.]
E. Only with God's direct confrontation of the people do they change and remove their sinful practices so that God finally relents and determines to rescue them - 10:15-16

The Particular Events in the Jephthah Story

Introduction: Two crises - 10:17-11:3
   A. The Public Crisis - a conflict between nations - 10:17-18
   B. The Private Crisis - hatred between brothers because Jephthah is illegitimate - 11:1-3

Scene One: Decision and Discord - 11:4-28
   A. Resolution of the Private Crisis within Israel (the people now see in Jephthah something they want) - 11:4-11
   B. The open conflict between Israel and Ammon - 11:12-28
   [Note: Jephthah's first attempt to resolve the conflict is through negotiation. While this seems good, Jephthah does not know his own people's history. Israel is getting farther away from its roots.]

Scene Two: Slaughter and Sacrifice - 11:29-40
   A. Resolution: the public slaughter of Ammon by Israel - 11:29-33
   B. Conflict: the private sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter - 11:34-39a
   C. Postscript: 11:39b-40

Conclusion: The aftermath of conflict and death - 12:1-7
   A. Interbribal conflict: Ephraim vs. Gilead - 12:1-6
      i. words of accusation - 12:1-3
      ii. words of death - 12:4-6
   B. The death of Jephthah - 12:7

Note that the private crisis of the introduction is resolved in the opening of scene one and this leads the story into the public crisis. The public crisis of scene one is resolved in the opening of scene two and this leads the story into the private, personal crisis within Jephthah's own family. The personal, private crisis within Jephthah's family is arranged in a concentric pattern build on ways of speaking - narrative and direct speech:

   A. Narration: Jephthah confronts his daughter (11:34-35a)
   B. Direct speech of Jephthah (11:35b)
   C. Direct speech of the daughter (11:36)
   C. Direct speech of the daughter (11:37)
   B. Direct speech of Jephthah (11:38a)
   A. Narration: Jephthah confines his daughter to death (11:38b-39)

The conflict, arranged in a concentric pattern, closes in on itself, allowing for no satisfactory resolution so that the wrap-up of the Jephthah story ends in conflict and upheaval. In other words, the steady progression from conflict to resolution in the cycle is deliberately broken to highlight the break-down in the pattern of the stories of the Major Judges. Again, we see how things are getting worse.
The Story of Samson.

Samson is the last of the Major Judges and his story is the longest and most developed of all. The story of Samson shows just how bad things have gotten in Israel - even the judge resists his special role.

The Story of Samson is both a SAGA (see page 23 for the definition of a Saga) and a TRAGEDY (see page 83 for the description of a Tragedy). Samson is born under very unusual circumstances. He is born to a barren woman. His special role in God's plan is demonstrated by the fact that his birth is foretold in one of the examples of an ANNUNCIATION SCENE (see page 25 for a description of Annunciation Scenes). He is dedicated to his task of being a Judge in his mother's womb, consecrated as a NAZIRITE - a special kind of soldier who took a vow not to touch anything unclean, drink alcohol, or have sex during the entire time of his military service - but all is not well. It is noted that he will "BEGIN" to save Israel, not that he will get the job done.

In a SAGA, the hero is identified with the enemy. In Samson's story, this is the TRAGIC ELEMENT. Samson is really no one of note, but he rises to great power, demonstrated by his great strength. His flaw is his violent nature and his lust for women, Philistine women. In seeking out and marrying Philistine women, he identifies himself with the enemy. His finding wives recalls the FINDING-A-WIFE-AT-A-WELL Scene (see page 25 for a description of the elements of this scene), but again, his story does not fit the pattern exactly. Things are breaking down! Only in his death does he finally take up the cause of his people and it is primarily for reasons of vengeance, not to fulfill his role as judge. His death is unusual. He pulls down the temple of the Philistines and kills himself in the process.

Samson's story falls into two balanced parts. After the introduction to the story, the Annunciation of the Birth of Samson in chapter 13, what happens in chapters 14-15 is repeated in chapter 16. The stories of the adventures of Samson, as opposed to the story of the annunciation of his birth which focuses on his parents, is marked off by an inclusion in 13:25 and 16:31. (Recall that an inclusion is the repetition of the same words or ideas at the beginning and end of a unit of the text, marking off that unit as a unified whole). In this case, the inclusion is carried in place names, Zorah and Eshtaol. The progression of events in both units is similar:
1. Samson sees a woman
2. He marries her
3. He is persuaded by the woman to reveal a secret
4. He calls on Yahweh and Yahweh answers his prayers

The turning point in both accounts is that, with the help of Yahweh, Samson kills great numbers of Philistines. But, in both cases, Samson's motive for turning to Yahweh is selfish.

The story of Samson brings the stories of the Major Judges to a close. The Judge himself would rather be identified with the enemy and only fights for his people to gain personal vengeance. The people never cry out to God for help. Yahweh has to take matters into his own hands by designating and consecrating a Judge even before he is born. Still, this does not work. Israel is on a path of self-destruction which only radical changes in the way they live can possibly alter. The book of Judges closes on a horrible note. Israel, who should be following Yahweh and resisting and eliminating the enemies, turns, in the end, against one of its own tribes. Rather than fighting the enemies of Yahweh, Israel almost destroys one of the bribes of Yahweh's own people. In those days, **THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL AND EVERY ONE DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES** and this led to disaster. In the final editing of the book, when there was again no king in Israel, the Book of Judges challenges its readers to learn from the mistakes of the past and again to do what was right in their eyes, but this time to do what was REALLY right.
Objective:
The Books of Samuel tell a generally positive story about the rise of kingship in Israel. The stories in the two books focus on three main characters - Samuel, Saul, and David. Out of these, David is by far the most important. While the story in Samuel is generally positive, the accounts of the exploits of each of the main characters involve a presentation of sin. In the end, the aim of the Books of Samuel is to teach about sin. The books teach that sin always involves SELFISHNESS, that sin always its CONSEQUENCES, and that those CONSEQUENCES are drastic if sin goes unrepented.

Vocabulary List:
| PHILISTINES        | ARK OF THE COVENANT |
| JERUSALEM          | ZION                |
| YAHWEH'S ANOINTED  | MICHAL              |
| ABIGAIL            | BATHSHEBA           |
| UNITED MONARCHY    | GOLIATH             |
| CONTEST-WITH-A-BARREN-WIFE STORY |

The BOOKS OF SAMUEL are the next phase in the story told by the Historical Books. In Joshua, a faithful people, following God's teachings, had success in taking and dividing the land. In Judges, a sinful people, turning to idol worship, had to struggle to hang on to God's gifts. In Samuel, the people have to make changes in the way they live in order to get back on the right track and enjoy God's blessings.

In all of this, we have to remember that the Historical Books were given their final shape during the Babylonian Exile when the people had lost the land, when they no longer had a king and their temple lay in ruins. At such a time, it was easy for the people to lose hope, to think that God had abandoned them. The Historical Books give the people the hope that they can change and enjoy God's gifts again if they return and are faithful to God's teachings and work together as God's chosen people. Just as God started over again with his people after the disasters of the age of Israel's Judges, so after the exile there is again hope that God will do something new, will lead his people again.
The Books of Samuel are divided into three major parts:

1. **The Story of Samuel (I Samuel 1-7)**
2. **The Rise and Fall of King Saul (I Samuel 8-15)**
3. **The Kingship of David and the Taking of Jerusalem (I Samuel 16 - II Samuel 24).**

The **STORY OF KINGSHIP**, as it begins to unfold in the Books of Samuel, has a special **INTRODUCTION** which bridges the gap between the period of Judges and the beginning of Kingship. This **INTRODUCTION** is the *Story of Samuel*. When biblical stories have an introduction - especially a long one, as we have here - it is important because it outlines the key ideas with which the storyteller will deal in his account.

The **STORY OF SAMUEL** includes the following events:

1. **The birth of Samuel to a barren woman (I Sam 1)**
2. **The sins of the sons of Eli are contrasted with the development of Samuel (I Sam 2)**
3. **The CALL NARRATIVE of Samuel (I Sam 3)**
4. **Israel's defeat at the hands of the Philistines (I Sam 4-6)**
5. **Israel's victory under the leadership of Samuel (I Sam 7)**

**NOTE** how the story of Samuel follows the pattern of the stories about the Major Judges:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JUDGES</th>
<th>SAMUEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Israelites do evil before Yahweh.</td>
<td>1. The sins of the son of Eli as an example of the sins of Israel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God delivers them into the hand of an enemy.</td>
<td>4. The CALL of Samuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The people cry out to God.</td>
<td>3. MISSING.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. God raises up a deliverer.</td>
<td>2. Defeat at the hands of the Philistines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Israel wins.</td>
<td>5. Israel wins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There is peace during the life of the Judge.</td>
<td>6. But Samuel’s sons continue the same abuses as the sons of Eli (I Sam 8).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While nearly every element in the pattern of the Judge stories is found in the story of Samuel, the order of events has been changed. By this, the storyteller is showing that the **JUDGE PATTERN IS BREAKING DOWN AND SOMETHING NEW MAY BE CALLED FOR.**

The **STORY OF SAMUEL** develops some key ideas:

1. **God and the people are working against each other.** Before the crisis is even described (the sins of Eli’s sons), God has provided a leader through the
miraculous birth of Samuel. But, when the crisis occurs, the battle with the Philistines, the people do not call out to God, but call for the Ark of the Covenant, which they use as a good luck Charm. (The **ARK OF THE COVENANT** was an elaborate wooden case used to hold the stone tablets on which were written God's Law. It was a religious symbol, like a holy picture, or the crucifix. It had no power in itself, just as statues and holy pictures have no power in themselves, but merely serve to remind us of what we believe).

2. The **CALL** of Samuel comes before the crisis and, in the call, Samuel is made not so much a Judge, but a Prophet. With the rise of Kingship, prophecy began in Israel. The prophets were not so much men who predicted the future, but men who interpreted God's word for the people and their kings. They pointed out failures to keep the covenant and spelled out where such unfaithfulness would lead.

3. Samuel, by being trained by Eli, was also a Priest. Before leading the people to victory over the Philistines he exercised his priestly office by offering sacrifices. So, in Samuel, three roles are combined: priest, prophet and military leader (Judge). These three roles will be important in the story of kingship, but with the beginning of kingship, the three roles can no longer be combined in one person.

4. In the Book of Judges, Yahweh always raised up a leader to meet a particular situation or crisis. The office ended with the death of the leader. It was not passed on to the leader's sons. The crisis in this story begins when the son's of Eli abuse the office they receive from their father, and the people's cry for a king will come when Samuel's sons abuse the office he passes on to them. **Neither Eli nor Samuel could control their sons, and this pattern will continue in the story of David.**

5. Both the Israelites and the Philistines look at the Ark of the Covenant as if it had some magical powers. **The story, then, pictures Israel as being like the Philistines.** When the people ask for a king, it is so that they can be like the other nations. **Being like other nations will be a continuing problem in the story of Israel's kings because the people will be like other nations in worshipping their gods.**

6. Samuel's sacrifices in chapter 7 are contrasted with the people's calling for the Ark in chapter 4. In this way, **the storyteller is contrasting proper and improper religion, religion which becomes superstition with religion which expresses true love of and dependence on God.** The ideas of true and false religion provide a constant refrain throughout Samuel and Kings.
The Story of Samuel provides an introduction to the story of the beginning of kingship in Israel. Introductions present key ideas to be developed in the story. The Story of Samuel itself has an introduction and the key ideas of the book are presented in this introduction - the story of Samuel's birth in I Samuel 1. The story of Samuel's birth is an example of another special type of Old Testament story, the story of THE CONTEST-WITH-A-BARREN-WIFE. Other examples of this type of story can be seen with Sarah and Hagar, and Rachel and Leah. These stories include the following elements:

1. The favored wife is barren
2. The husband has another wife who is her rival
3. The rival woman can have children and does
4. The rival abuses the barren wife, bringing about the conflict
5. The favored wife engages in aggressive action to get a child

Even though the favored wife engages in aggressive action to get a child and eventually has a son, it is only because God allows her to give birth. These stories always say that IT IS GOD WHO BRINGS LIFE OUT OF BARRENNESS, OUT OF A LIFELESS SITUATION.

Within the stories of the Books of Samuel, Israel is in a lifeless situation - the period of Judges is coming to an end in failure. Just as God brings life to a barren, favored woman, so he will bring life to his favored people, Israel.

_Hannah and the Birth of Samuel_

Now, there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim, from the hill country of Ephraim and his name was Elkanah, son of Jerotham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, the Ephraimite.

(Note how the introduction of Elkanah sounds impressive - listing his ancestors. But
what is important to note is that none of the people named is notable. We know nothing about them. Samuel will not be well connected, but will be born into an undistinguished family.)

Now, he had two wives. The name of one was Hannah and the name of the second was Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. That man used to go up from his city from time to time to worship and make sacrifices to Yahweh Sabbaoth in Shiloh. And there, the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were priests of Yahweh.

(Note that the Book of Judges ended by stressing that this was a time when everyone did what was right and good in his own eyes. For Elkanah and his family, what was good was to go from time to time to worship Yahweh. Though the family may be undistinguished, we are getting a picture of a good family.)

And it was the time, and Elkanah slaughtered a sacrifice. Now he would regularly give portions to Peninnah his wive, and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah but Yahweh had shut up her womb. And her rival wife would provoke her to anger in order to upset her because Yahweh had shut up her womb. Thus he would do year by year; and as often as she went up to the house of Yahweh, so would her rival wife provoke her so that she would not eat.

Then Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep and why won’t you eat and why is your heart discontented? Am I not better for you than ten sons?" So Hannah arose, after eating in Shiloh, and after drinking.

Now Eli, the priest, was sitting on the chair at the doorpost of the temple of Yahweh. And she was bitter in soul and she prayed to Yahweh and, indeed, she wept and she made a vow and said, "Yahweh Sabbaoth, if indeed you will look on the affliction of your handmaid and remember me and not forget your handmaid and give to your handmaid a seed of man, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life and a razor will not go up to his head." And it was when she continued to pray before Yahweh and Eli was watching her mouth and Hannah was speaking in her heart only, her lips were moving but her voice was not heard, that Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Get rid of your wine from you!" And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord. I am a woman of hard spirit, but wine or intoxicating drink I have not drunk; but I have poured out by soul before Yahweh. Do not consider your handmaid as a daughter of wickedness, for from the abundance of my complaint and my irritation I have spoken up till now." And Eli answered and said, "Go in peace. The God of Israel will grant your request which you have asked of him." And she said, "Let your maid servant find favor in your eyes."

So the woman went her way and she ate and her face was no longer downcast. And they rose early in the morning and worshipped before Yahweh. And they returned and went to their house in Ramathaim. Then Elkanah knew Hannah, his wife, and Yahweh remembered her.

Now it was the turning of the days and Hannah conceived and bore a son and she named him Samuel saying, "Because I asked for him from Yahweh." And the man, Elkanah, went up and all his house to slaughter the sacrifice of the days and of his vow. But Hannah did not go up for she said to her husband, "Until the boy is weaned, then I will bring him and he will appear before the face of Yahweh and he will stay there forever."

And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Do what is good in your eyes. Stay until you wean him. Only let Yahweh carry out his word." And the woman remained and she suckled her son until she weaned him. And she brought him up when she had weaned him, with three young bulls and one measure of flour and a skin-bottle of wine. She brought him to the house of Yahweh in Shiloh and the boy was young. And they slaughtered the young bull and brought the boy to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord. As lives your soul, my lord, I am the woman who stood with you in order to pray to Yahweh. For this boy I prayed and Yahweh has granted to me my request which I asked of him. And also I have lent him to Yahweh all the days which he lives. He is lent to Yahweh."

And they worshipped Yahweh there.
Hannah completes her vow and dedicates her child to God. One of the major factors in the development of this story is the contrast that is drawn between Hannah and Eli. Note his silence when she presents her child. Though she has cared for the boy and has kept him with her as long as she could, she is devoted to God and will keep her promise to him. This is a sacred obligation carried out by a simple woman. But Eli, the priest, the religious leader of the people is silent. It is as though he does not even remember his encounter with the suffering woman and her promise.

The contrasts between Samuel and his family and the house of Eli continue in Chapter 2. Here, while Samuel is growing in grace and favor before God, the sons of Eli are abusing their priesthood, taking for themselves the best part of the sacrifices they offer on behalf of the people, the parts which should be reserved for God, and even committing sexual crimes in the temple - suggesting that they are mixing worship of Yahweh with the practices of the Canaanite fertility religions. (Such a mixture of true and false religious practices is called APOSTASY.)

Finally, Samuel receives his special call from God in chapter 3. He has been living with Eli and has been trained as a PRIEST. In his call, he will be designated a PROPHET. The CALL OF SAMUEL is another example of a CALL NARRATIVE (see page 71 for a description of the elements of a CALL NARRATIVE). This story pattern suggests that the person called can be another Moses, that he can play a major role in the story of God's dealings with his people. What is important to note in this example of the story is that Samuel does not understand who is calling him and what is being asked of him. This trait will mark Samuel's entire career. He will never quite agree with or understand exactly what God asks of him.

Chapters 4-7 stand together as a single unit, marked by an elaborate concentric structure.

**Structural Elements in I Samuel 4-7.**

A. The word of Samuel was to all Israel (4:1)  
B. Israel went out  
   C. to meet the Philistines for battle  
   D. and they camped at Ebenzer  
   E. Israel was beaten (4:2)  
   F. the people sent for the ARK (4:4)  
   G. the ARK came to the camp (4:5)  
   H. The Philistines knew the ARK had come to the camp (4:6)  
   I. God struck Egypt (4:8)  
   J. They return Dagon to his place (5:3)  
   K. the hand of Yahweh was heavy (5:6)  
   L. Send...the ARK...let it return...the hand of Yahweh 
      was heavy (5:11)  
   M. The ARK was in the field of the Philistines for 
      seven months (6:1)  
   L. do not set it empty...you will return it to him...his 
      hand did not turn aside (6:3)  
   K. Perhpas he will remove his hand (6:5)  
   J. What sin offering will return (6-4 - not strict order)
I. Why do you harden your heart like the Egyptians? (6:6)
   H. They would know whether God had struck them (6:9)
   G. The cart (with the ARK) came to the field (6:14)
   F. The men of Beth-shemesh send to have the ARK taken away (6:21)
   E. the Philistines were beaten (7:10)
   D. Samuel set up a stone at Ebenezer (7:12)
   C. the Philistines drew near for battle against Israel (7:10 - not strict order)
   B. The men of Israel went forth (7:11 - not strict order)
   A. Samuel judges all Israel (7:15-17)

This whole section of the story carries out the Judge pattern. By the end, Samuel has assumed his third role, that of Judge or military leader. What the balances of structure in these chapters show is that Israel acts just like the Philistines. They make an idol out of the Ark and use it as a good-luck charm in much the same way that the pagans use their idols. The break down in the order of elements at the end of the structure indicates that things work differently - they work well - once Samuel gets on the scene and approaches God in the right fashion.

The next section of the Books of Samuel tells of THE RISE AND FALL OF KING SAUL. What happened to Israel in the Promised land, especially the disasters of the period of the Judges, led the people to want a king like the other nations, a king who could lead them in battle and protect them from their enemies. Samuel, in his role as prophet, was commanded by a reluctant God to appoint Saul as Israel's first king. But Saul proved to be unworthy and was rejected. Samuel was then instructed by God to secretly anoint David to replace Saul. David was introduced to Saul's court where he was a musician who could calm Saul when he fell into fits of depression, and as a mighty warrior. It was David's success as a warrior which made Saul insanely jealous so that he wanted to kill David.

The STORY OF KING SAUL is a TRAGEDY. A Tragedy is a story whose plot outline basically follows an up-side-down U.

| 1. The hero begins in a lowly state |
| 2. He rises to great heights |
| 3. But he has a character flaw which finally leads to his downfall. |

All the elements of Saul's story fit this outline:

1. Saul, an insignificant member of an insignificant family in the tribe of Benjamin - though a good son, in contrast to the sons of Samuel and Eli - is chosen by God to
be the one who answers the people's request for a king. [Note, however, that even here, at the beginning of Saul's rise, a cloud hangs over him and his tragic end is foreshadowed. The people had asked for a king, but Saul is named by God and Samuel as a nagid, a Hebrew word which means 'designated leader' or 'prince.' He is fated to try to act like a king when, in fact, he is something less in the eyes of God. Also, in chapter 9 and the beginning of chapter 10, Saul is anointed in a story which follows the pattern of a FINDING-A-WIFE-AT-A-WELL STORY.

1. The hero travels to a foreign land
2. He meets a girl or girls at a well
3. He is invited to share a meal
4. A marriage is arranged.

In searching for his father's lost animals, Saul travels in foreign territory where he, in fact, does meet girls at a well. He is invited to share a meal, but not at one of the girls' homes. He is invited to eat with Samuel. Then, instead of finding a wife, he is anointed as the designated leader. By breaking the pattern of the story, the storyteller is suggesting that something will be 'broken' about Saul's kingship.

2. After his anointing, Saul meets a band of prophets and prophesies with them. At this point in the story, this points to something special about him, but it also suggests the mixing of roles which cannot be. Prophets stand over against kings to keep them on the right track. After this, Saul goes on to lead Israel to a decisive victory against the Ammonites and is acclaimed as king by all the people. The story of Saul has reached the high point in the up-side-down U.

3. Saul's downfall is told in chapters 13-15. His downfall centers on three events.
   A. Before battle, Saul is told to wait for Samuel who will come to offer sacrifices. After waiting the required time, Samuel still has not come and Saul himself offers the sacrifice. The problem, here, is again that Saul is taking on a role which does not belong to him, the role of priest. Because of this, he is told that his sons will not be kings after him (chapter 13).
   B. Chapter 14 is a battle story. In the course of the battle, Saul makes a vow that no one would eat anything until the battle was won. He vowed that anyone who broke this promise would be killed. His son, Jonathan, does not know of his father's promise and eats some honey and Saul, like Jephthah, is ready to execute his son. Here, Saul's vow, like Jephthah's, represents the wrong use of religious practices. He is bargaining with God rather than simply trusting him and is willing to stand by his ill-advised vow.
   C. Finally, in the battle story of chapter 15, Saul violates the BAN. For this he is rejected.

The rest of Saul's story, in chapters 16-31, shows Saul vainly trying to hang on to what he has lost - kingship. Everything works against him until he finally kills himself during the battle with the Philistines.
Within the **HISTORICAL BOOKS**, then, the Story of King Saul is a summary of the story of Israel's whole experiment with kingship. Israel's story, too, is a tragedy.

1. A lowly people is chosen by God for a special destiny
2. Under its kings, Israel becomes a great nation
3. But the people and its kings
   A. didn't listen to the prophets and acted willfully, independently, thinking it knew best how to make its way in the world
   B. abused their own religious practices and thought they could dictate to Yahweh how he should help them and get things done
   C. did not clear away the foreign religious practices from their midst and were drawn away from faithfulness to God. Just as Saul's behavior set him on a path that led to his suicide, Israel's behavior during the time of the kingship set the people on a path that led to its self-destruction. For the writer of the Historical Books, this is why the Babylonian Exile happened. The people had abused the gifts God had offered to them. But, in telling this story, the writer of the Historical Books holds out hope - hope for renewal and a return to Yahweh, hope for a new and different way of life.

The story of the **RISE OF KING DAVID** overlaps with the ending of Saul's story. In I Samuel 16-31, everything is fixed. Saul has been rejected. His kingship will be done away with. However, in this part of Saul's story, the storyteller also points ahead to the possibility for something different in the future. He begins to tell the story of David's Rise, and he does this in the same way that he told the story of Samuel's rise, by alternating stories about David with stories about Saul to show that David would be better than Saul and would finally replace him.

When Saul is finally killed in battle, David is waiting in the wings. He becomes king first of the southern tribes and is finally able to unite all the people - something that had not happened since the time of Joshua. He captures Jerusalem and makes it his capital. Still, all is not rosy. David sins by committing adultery and then by killing the woman's husband in an attempt to cover up what he had done. In the end, however, David is willing to admit he was wrong and to turn back to God. As such, he is remembered as Israel's greatest king. **David's story, then, says that people sin. That is simply true. What matters to God is that we turn back to him when we do sin.**

In chapter 16, David is chosen to replace Saul. He is still a mere lad and the youngest of his brothers. In this, the storyteller continues to display the theme that **Yahweh chooses the weakest and least significant to accomplish his will so that there can be no doubt that it is God himself who guides the events of history.**
The story of David continues with the story of how he defeats the Philistine champion, Goliath. Here we see David as a cocky young man - much like Joseph at the beginning of his story. But, here, too, we see David as a person who can trust totally in God, not in human power, armor, or the trappings of kingship. His simple faith is held up against the fear of Saul's soldiers and Saul's own inability to act as an example of the faith that leads to victory in the face of horrible odds. In the end, the story of David and Goliath presents David as a worthy young man, a man with great gifts and talents, but also as a young man who needs to learn common sense, self-restraint, and how to use his talents without hurting or insulting others.

The story of David’s Rise continues to draw a comparison between David and Joseph. David’s success makes Saul insanely jealous so that he attempts to destroy David, just as Joseph’s brothers planned to destroy him. When Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, he had to pass a test to show that he was growing up, that he was fit for the high office he would later take on. He had to resist the temptation of Potiphar’s wife. David, too, has to pass a test to demonstrate his worthiness, and, for him too, a woman plays a significant role in this test.

**David’s TEST** is narrated in I Samuel 24-26. In this section of the story, David has had to flee from Saul and has gathered about him a band of violent men. On two occasions, Saul is chasing after David and David comes upon Saul secretly and has the chance to kill him. In both cases, chapters 24 and 26, David holds back his hand, refusing to violate the Lord’s anointed. In these two chapters, David is showing himself to be worthy. He is willing to wait until God decides how things should turn out. He refuses to take matters into his own hands - which was one of the things that lead to Saul’s rejection.

The real **KEY** to the test comes in chapter 25 where David nearly does take matters into his own hands. In the story of David, Nabal and Abigail, David and his men are basically running a protection racket. They want to share in Nabal’s feasting simply because they have not done anything to harm the man. When David is put in his place by Nabal, he swears a violent oath - and such oaths have led both Jephthah and Saul to carry through on acts of violence which showed them to be unworthy. It is Abigail who stops David and saves him from shedding innocent blood. He is dependent on her to learn his lesson. He takes back his rash vow and waits for God to determine the outcome of things. When Nabal realizes how close he has come to disaster, he has a heart attack and dies. David then marries Abigail and begins to build his power base in the South.

***The Story of David and Abigail***

Now Samuel had died and all Israel was gathered together and they mourned for him and they buried him in his house in Ramah. Then David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maon and his business was in Carmel and he was very great and he had three thousand sheep and one thousand she-goats and it was during the shearing of his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal and the name of his wife was Abigail, and the woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was hard and evil in his deeds and he was a Calebite. When David, in the wilderness, heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, David sent ten young men and David said to the young men, “Go up to Carmel and go to Nabal and ask...
him in my name about his well being (shalom). And thus will you say, 'To life! (la chaim) Peace to you and to your house peace and to all that is yours peace. And now, I have heard that those who shear are with you. Now, your shepherds have been with us. We did not disgrace them and there was not missing for them anything all the days of their being in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you and let the young men find favor in your eyes that on a good day we have come. Give, please, to your servants and to your son, David, whatever your hand finds.' And the young men of David went and spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David and they waited. But Nabal answered the servants of David and said, "Who is David and who is the son of Jesse? Today the servants who have broken away, each from the faces of their masters, have become numerous. And I should take my bread and my water and the meat which I have slaughtered for those shearing for me and give it to men whom I don't know from where they come?" And the young men of David returned to their way and went back and told him the whole matter.

So David said to his men, "Gird on, each man, his sword." And each man girded on his sword and David also girded on his sword and they went up after David, four hundred men, and two hundred remained by the equipment.

Now a certain young man from among the servants reported to Abigail, the wife of Nabal, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our master and he screamed at them. Now the men had been very good to us and we were not shamed and we did not lack anything all the days of our wandering with them when we were in the field. They were a wall for us both night and day, all the days of our being with them pasturing the sheep. And now know and see what you should do since evil has been determined against our master and against all his household, for he is a son of worthlessness to anyone speaking to him."

Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves and two wineskins of wine and five sheep and made ready and five measures of parched grain and one hundred bunches of raisins and two hundred pressed fig cakes and she put them on the he-asses. And she said to her young men, "Pass on before me and, behold, I will come after you." But to her husband, Nabal, she did not say a thing.

Now she was riding on the he-ass and going down the mountain secretly and, behold, David and his men were coming down to come against her and she met them. For David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that was for this man in the wilderness and there was nothing lacking from all which he had, nothing, and he has returned to me evil in place of good. Thus let God to the enemies of David and thus do more if I leave to come in blood and to save your hand, so now let your enemies be as Nabal, all those seeking evil for my lord. But now, this blessing which your handmaid has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men wandering at the feet of my lord. But lift up the transgression of your handmaid, for indeed Yahweh will make a stable house for my lord, for my lord has fought the battles of Yahweh and evil has not been found in you all your days. And should a man rise up to pursue you and seek your life, then the life of my lord will be tied up in the pouch, alive with your God, and the life of your enemies he will sling from the hollow of the sling. And it will be, when Yahweh accomplishes for my lord all the good which he has spoken to you and appoints you for a leader over Israel, then this will not be for you an obstacle or an offense of the heart of my lord, to shed blood in vain in order for my lord to help himself, and Yahweh will do good to my lord and you will remember your handmaid."
And David said to Abigail, "Blessed by Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to come to me. And blessed by your discernment and blessed are you who have kept me back this day from coming with blood and helping my hand for myself. Indeed, as Yahweh lives, the God of Israel, he has held me back from doing evil to you, for unless you had hurried and come to meet me, not would there have been left to Nabal to the light of morning any of those who urinate against the wall." And David took from her hand that which she had brought to him and said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice and have lifted your face."

And Abigail went to Nabal and, behold, he was having a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and the heart of Nabal was good and he was very drunk and she did not tell to him a word, little or big, until the light of morning. And it was in the morning, when the wine went out of Nabal, and his wife told him these things and his heart died in his inward parts and he was like a stone and after about ten days Yahweh struck Nabal and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be God who pleaded the case of my reproach from the hand of Nabal; and his servant he has kept back from evil and the evil of Nabal Yahweh has turned back on his head." And David sent and spoke to Abigail in order to take her as his wife. So the young men of David came to Abigail in Carmel and they spoke to her saying, "David sent us to you in order to take you as his wife." So she arose and bowed her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your handmaid is as a handmaid to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." And Abigail hurried and arose and rode on the he-ass and five young women were going at her feet and she went after the messengers of David and became his wife.

And David also took Ahinoam from Jezreel and they both became his wives. And Saul gave Michal, his daughter, the wife of David, to Phalti, the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

The basic point of this story, according to the storyteller, is that things work out well for David because HE DOES NOT ACT LIKE A BULLY. He does not abuse his power or position, but trusts God to guide things the way he wants. This story, then, sandwiched between the two opportunities David has to kill Saul, sheds light on those two stories. In all three instances, David could take matters into his own hands, but, as chapter 25 shows, that would be rash and probably lead to disaster. In the context of the Historical Books, Israel is seen to rebel against foreign powers, against such nations as Assyria and Babylon whom Yahweh has chosen to punish Israel for its unfaithfulness. Instead of turning to and trusting God - as in the example of David - they tried to take matters into their own hands, and that led to disaster.

The SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL tells the story of DAVID'S KINGSHIP. After the death of Saul, David was able to unite the twelve tribes of Israel and make Jerusalem, a neutral city which had not belonged to any of the tribes, his capital. David was from the southern tribe of Judah and had the undivided loyalty of the south. He forged unity with the north by bringing the Ark of the Covenant, a special religious symbol of the northern tribes, to Jerusalem and making it a key focus in the national religion.

The STORY OF DAVID'S KINGSHIP is the main content of II Samuel 9-20. This section of the story presents DAVID UNDER BLESSING AND DAVID UNDER CURSE. Whether David enjoys God's blessing or his curse depends on whether he is GIVING of GRASPING.
1. David is presented as GIVING in II Samuel 9-10 and here he experiences God's BLESSING.

2. David is presented as GRASPING in II Samuel 11-12 and the rest of the story spells out the consequences David suffers as a result of his sin, his selfishness.

II Samuel 9-10 presents two aspects of David's kingship -

**In internal affairs of state**

**In foreign policy or relations with other nations.**

In both aspects of David's kingship, he is portrayed as GIVING and all goes well.

1. In chapter 9, David discovers that there remains an heir to the line of Saul, a son of Jonathan, and David shows him kindness, demonstrating the peace and forgiveness which are part of his kingdom since this son of Jonathan is the last in Saul's family who could challenge David for the throne.

2. In chapter 10, David sends a delegation to offer sympathy to a neighboring king whose father has just died. He is showing a willingness to maintain peaceful relations with another nation, but his delegation is accused of spying and treated shamefully and this leads to war. David's kingship seeks peace, but is still a power to be reckoned with and David will protect his servants. All is as it should be.

In II Samuel 11-12 David is pictured as GRASPING. He sins. The story of David and Bathsheba is a meditation on the part of the storyteller into the nature of sin. **David's basic sin is selfishness.** He abuses his gift, his kingship, to take what he wants, the wife of another man. He selfishly tries to hide what he has done by arranging the death of Uriah, the woman's husband. Everything he does is possible because he IS king - a gift granted to him by God.

**THE BASIC POINT OF THE STORYTELLER IS THAT THE ROOT OF ALL SIN IS TO USE SELFISHLY THE GIFTS GOD GIVES TO US.**

In the story, David is confronted by Nathan, the prophet. Here we see the proper role of a prophet - to call the king and the people to the task for their sins. The prophet is a check against the misuse of kingly power. Nathan tells David the story about a poor man and his little lamb that a rich man steals to give a dinner party for a friend. Outraged, David says that the guilty man must repay fourfold. Nathan then lets David know that he is talking about what the king himself has done and David admits his guilt. Even in sin, then, David is a model. Sin is a reality, but on the model of David, we are called to admit it when we sin and repent and return to God.

**The Story of David and Bathsheba**

*Now it was at the turning of the year, at the time that messengers go forth that David SENT Joab and his servants with him and all Israel and they wiped out the sons of*
Ammon and they besieged Rabbah; but David was staying in Jerusalem. And it was the time of THE evening and David rose from on his bed and paced on the roof of the King's house and he saw a woman washing herself from the roof and the woman was very good of appearance. And David SENT and inquired about the women and one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite?" And David SENT messengers and he took her and she came to him and he lay with her and she had been purifying herself from uncleanness, and she returned to her home. (NOTE that the little bit of information that Bathsheba had been purifying herself means that she had been engaged in the customary ritual bath after menstruation. This seemingly insignificant detail allows the storyteller to let us know that if she is to conceive a child, there can be no doubt as to who fathered the baby).

So the woman conceived and she SENT and told David and she said, "I am pregnant." Then David SENT to Joab, "SEND Uriah to me, the Hittite." And Joab SENT Uriah to David. And Uriah came to him and David asked him about the well-being of Joab and the well-being of the people and the well-being of the war. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went forth from the house of the king and a gift from the king went forth after him. But Uriah lay down at the opening of the house of the king with all the servants of his lord and he did not go down to his house. Then they reported to David saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house." And David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go to your house?"

And Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents and my lord, Joab, and the servants of my lord are camping on the face of the field, and I should go to my house in order to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing!" So David said to Uriah, "Stay here also today and tomorrow I will SEND you away." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem on that day and on the next. And David called to him and he ate before him and drank and he made him drunk and he went forth in the evening to lie down on his couch with the servants of his lord, but down to his house he did not go.

On the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and he SENT it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, "Give Uriah (Note that 'give' is from the root n-th-n) in front of the faces of the strongest battle and turn back from behind him and he will be struck and will die."

And so it was, when Joab was keeping guard over the city, that he gave Uriah to the place where he knew that there were men of strength. Then the men of the city came forth and did battle with Joab and some of the people form the servants of David fell and also Uriah, the Hittite, died. Then he commanded the messenger saying, "When you finish saying all the words of the battle to the king, if it should happen that the anger of the king flares up and he should say to you, 'Why did you draw near to the city in order to do battle? Did you not know this, that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck Abimelek, son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman throwing down an upper millstone upon him from the wall and he died in Thebez? Why did you draw near to the wall?' then you will say, 'Also your servant, Uriah the Hittite, has died.'"

So the messenger went and came and reported to David all for which Joab had SENT him. And the messenger said to David, "The men grew strong against us and came forth upon us in the field and we were upon them to the opening of the gate. And the archers were shooting on your servants from the wall and some of the servants of the king died and also your servant, Uriah the Hittite, has died." Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you will say to Joab, 'Let not this matter be evil in your eyes, for like this and like that the sword devours. Make strong your battle against the city and overthrow it.' And you will strengthen him."

And the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah, her husband, had died and she mourned over her husband. And the mourning passed and David SENT and gathered her to his house and she became his wife and she bore him a son. BUT THE THING WHICH DAVID HAD DONE WAS EVIL IN THE EYES OF YAHWEH. So Yahweh SENT Nathan (recall that n-th-n = 'give') to David and he came to him and
said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, one rich, one poor. The rich man had very many sheep and cattle. The poor man had nothing but one, small ewe-lamb which he had bought. And he kept it alive and she grew up with him and together with his sons. From his small morsel she would eat and from his cup she would drink and on his bosom she lay down and she was like a daughter for him. Now a traveller came to the rich man and he held back from taking from his sheep or his cattle in order to prepare for the traveller who had come to him. So he took the ewe-lamb of the poor man and he prepared it for the man who had come to him.” And the anger of David blazed against the man and he said to Nathan, "As Yahweh lives, a son of death is the man who has done this. The ewe-lamb he will repay fourfold because he did this thing and did not hold back!" And Nathan said to David, "You are the man. Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you as king over Israel and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. And I gave to you the house of your master and the wives of your master on your bosom and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if it was little, I would have added to you like those and like those (whatever you would have wanted). Why have you despised the word of Yahweh in order to do this evil in his eyes? Uriah the Hittite you have struck with the sword and his wife you have taken for yourself as a wife and him you have killed by the sword of the sons of Ammon. And now the sword will not turn aside from your house forever because you have so despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself.’ Thus says Yahweh, ‘Behold, I am causing to rise against you evil from your own house and I will take your wives before your eyes and I will give them to your neighbor and he will lie down with your wives in the eyes of this sun. For you have acted in secret, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’"  
Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yahweh." And Nathan said to David, "Also Yahweh has made your sin pass. You will not die. Only, indeed, you have caused the enemies of Yahweh to scorn in this matter, so the son born to you will surely die." And Nathan went to his house and Yahweh struck the child which the wife of Uriah had born to David and he was in poor health.  
Then David sought out God for the sake of the boy and David fasted and went and spent the night and lay on the ground. And the elders of his house rose up to him in order to cause him to get up from the ground but he was not willing and he did not eat bread with them.  
Now it was on the seventh day that the child died and the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child had died, for they said, "Behold, when the child was alive, we spoke to him and he would not listen to our voice, and how will we say to him, ‘The child has died,’ and he will do evil." But David saw that his servants were whispering and David understood that the child had died and David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, "He has died."  
Then David got up from the ground and washed and anointed and changed his garments and went to the house of Yahweh and worshipped and came to his house and he asked and they set before him and he ate. And his servants said to him, "What is this thing which you have done? For the sake of the living child you fasted and wept, but when the child died you arose and have eaten bread?" And he said, "For the sake of the living child I fasted and wept for I said, ‘Who knows? Yahweh may pity me and keep the child alive.’ And now he has died. Why this, that I should fast? Am I able to bring him back again? I am going to him but he will not return to me.”  
Then David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and went to her and lay with her and she conceived and she bore a son and called his name Solomon and Yahweh loved him. And he SENT by the hand of Nathan, the prophet, and called his name Jedadiah, because of Yahweh.  
Then Joab did battle against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon and he captured the royal city. And Joab SENT messengers to David and said, "I have done battle against Rabbah, also I have captured the city of waters. And now gather the rest of the people and encamp against he city and take it lest I capture the city and my name should be proclaimed over it. And David gathered all the people and went to Rabbah and did
battle against it and captured it. And he took the crown of their king from on his head and its weight was a talent of gold and it had a precious stone and it was on the head of David and the spoils of the city he brought forth in abundance. The people who were in it he brought forth and put them to the saw and sharp tools of iron and to axes of iron and he caused them to pass into the brick mold and thus he did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon and David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

In the end, David will pay for his sin by losing four of his sons - the first child born to him and Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. So, in the end, what the storyteller says about sin is that

| SIN ALWAYS HAS ITS CONSEQUENCES. |
| IF SIN GOES UNREPENTED, THE CONSEQUENCES ARE DEVASTATING. |
| WHEN WE TURN FROM SIN, WE STILL HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES, BUT THE STORY GOES ON AND, PERHAPS, THINGS CAN EVEN GET BETTER. |

The rest of the story in the Second Book of Samuel shows how David must live with the consequences of his sin. By the end of the story, David is fully in command of his kingdom and his relationship with Yahweh is completely restored. But to get to that point, he must suffer the consequences of his actions. The storyteller presents these consequences by telling stories of problems within David's own family. David was responsible for destroying a family, so it is fitting that the storyteller should present his family problems as the result of his sin. (Note, too, how this is simply an observation of how things are in the real world. Adultery has effects for two families, that of the man and that of the woman. Actions have consequences. Adultery, in this story, is just an example of sin, whose root is selfishness. Any act of selfishness in our lives has consequences with which we must live.)

Note how David's verdict "The man who has done this thing will repay fourfold" is carried out in his own story:

1. At the end of the story of David and Bathsheba, the child born to the couple falls ill and dies.
2. In II Samuel 13, one of David's sons, Amnon, lusts after his half-sister and rapes her. Because of the violence involved, the love he felt turned into hatred. The storyteller is, again, simply observing how things are. If we use violence to satisfy our selfish desires, what we achieve is just a constant reminder of how we have behaved and shames us. We grow to hate what we have gotten. Because of his sin, Amnon faces the anger of Absalom, the girl's full brother, who arranges to have Amnon murdered. David has now lost two sons.
3. Because of the murder, Absalom flees and lives in exile. With the help of David's general, Joab, Absalom obtains David's partial forgiveness and can return to Jerusalem. David, however, does not fully forgive his son and will have no dealings with him. In this, again, the storyteller is exploring the reality of human relations. David's lack of full forgiveness for Absalom leads Absalom to revolt against his father and start a civil war. In the course of the war, Absalom is killed and David has lost a third son. The lesson to be learned from this story is that when we are called on
to forgive someone, we need to completely forgive them. If we keep throwing up how they offended us into their faces, we will lose them.

4. At the end of Absalom's rebellion, David is restored to Jerusalem and his kingdom finally has peace. The Second Book of Samuel ends with the notice that David was a man after God's own heart. He is fully forgiven by God - something he could not do with his own son. David's story ends, then, with his death as an old man in the opening chapters of the First Book of Kings. In his failing years, his oldest son, Adonijah, assumes he will be king after his father and begins to act the part. God, however, had other plans and Solomon was anointed. After David's death, Solomon has his brother executed because, again, he made an attempt to establish a claim to the throne in requesting to marry David's concubine.

In the end, David loses four sons. In the light of the ideas presented in the introduction to the whole story in I Samuel 1-7, the inability to control one's sons has been a major theme in the story. This theme hangs over the story as a dark cloud, since now the story will continue with the accounts of the kings and their **SONS** who succeed them.
D. The Books of Kings.

Objective:
One of the chief purposes of the Books of Kings is to show how the lessons presented in the other Historical Books were carried out. These books show how God worked with his people, through his prophets, to try to bring them success in their life under their kings. The tragedy of the story, that the people did not listen to the warnings of the prophets, does not change the fact that God works with us in all circumstances in life to try to make things work out well. That was a message of hope for the exiles in Babylon and for us today.

Vocabulary List:
- HIGH PLACES
- DIVIDED MONARCHY
- HAREM
- CONFRONTATION STORY
- POLYTHEISM
- MONOTHEISM
- ELIJAH
- ELISHA
- AHAB
- JEZEBEL

One of the first things to notice about the Books of Kings is the way that the story of each king is presented in a similar pattern. The story of each king has:

1. A framework introduction which includes:
   A. a note relating the reign of the king of one kingdom to the current king of the other Kingdom (Israel and Judah)
   B. the age of the king when he assumed his reign (for Judah only)
C. the length of the king's reign
D. a mention of his capital city
E. the name of the Queen mother for the kings of Judah, where the Queen mother had an influential role
F. a religious evaluation of the king - always negative for the northern kings, and generally negative for the kings of Judah (Hezekiah and Josiah are the notable exceptions).

2. A central narrative
3. A framework conclusion which includes:
   A. reference to further sources of information
   B. mention of the king's death
   C. mention of the place of the king's burial
   D. the naming of his successor.

An additional feature adds unity to the stories of the kings. That feature is the reason why they are judged to be evil. THEY FAIL TO REMOVE THE HIGH PLACES. While it is most likely that during the age of kingship in Israel there were many places of worship, for the writer of the history the Jerusalem temple was the ONLY PLACE where true worship of Yahweh should take place. In the early stages of writing, this stress on the temple was an attempt at reform. The HIGH PLACES or other legitimate places of worship were open to abuse - taking on the practices of Israel's pagan neighbors, who practiced their fertility rites and pagan worship at outdoor sanctuaries - and the Deuteronomists wanted to avoid this practice by centering all worship at the temple.

The story told in the Books of Kings has three parts:

1. The Age of Solomon (I Kings 1-11)
2. The Divided Monarchy until the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (I Kings 12 - II Kings 17)
3. The story of the Kingdom of Judah until the Babylonian Exile (II Kings 18-25).

These three parts are arranged in a concentric pattern:

| A. Solomon and the United Monarchy (I Kings 1:1-11:25) |
| B. Jeroboam/Rehoboam: division of the kingdom (I Kings 11:26-14:31) |
| C. Kings of Judah/Israel (I Kings 15:1-16:22) |
| D. The dynasty of Omri: the rise and fall of the cult of Baal in Israel and the stories of Elijah and Elisha (I Kings 16:23 - II Kings 12) |

| C. Kings of Judah/Israel (II Kings 13-16) |
| B. Fall of the Northern Kingdom (II Kings 17) |
| A. The single Kingdom of Judah (II Kings 18-25) |

THE STORY OF SOLOMON presents the pattern or theme of the whole story. Historically, Solomon was remembered as the builder of the temple, but it was also
immediately after his reign that the unity of the people fell apart and the kingdom was divided. The Deuteronomistic Historians told the story of Solomon as one of endless possibilities, possibilities that were lost because of Solomon's sin and misuse of his power. To present these themes, the Deuteronomistic storytellers divided Solomon's reign into two parts:

1. The period of blessing and prosperity (I Kings 1-10)
2. Solomon's idolatry and abuse of power (I Kings 11)

This twofold story sets the pattern for the entire rest of the history. Within the story of Solomon, what is most notable about him is that, like his father David, Solomon becomes king as a young man, a young man who needs to acquire the maturity and skills to rule well. Early in his story, Solomon prays for the wisdom to be a good king. This request is looked on favorably by God who grants him not only wisdom, but power and wealth as well. The storyteller demonstrates Solomon's wisdom by concentrating most on Solomon's building of the Temple of Jerusalem. Solomon is wise enough to get the needed materials and skilled craftsmen to complete the Job and build a worthy house for Yahweh. The most familiar story which was told to demonstrate Solomon's wisdom is the story about the judgment he was called on to render for two women.

A Story of Solomon's Wisdom

Now two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. And the one woman said, "O, my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house and I gave birth with her in the house. And it was on the third day after my giving birth and this woman also gave birth and we were together; there was not a stranger with us in the house except the two of us in the house. Now the son of this woman died on the night on which she lay on him. And she rose up in the middle of the night and took my son from near me and your handmaid was sleeping; and she caused him to lay on her bosom and her son, the dead one, she caused to lay on my bosom. And I arose in the morning in order to nurse my son and, behold, dead! And I looked closely at him in the morning and, behold, he was not my son whom I had borne." But the other woman said, "No, but my son is living and your son is dead." So this one was saying, "No, but your son is dead and my son is living." And they spoke before the king.

And the king said, "This one is saying, 'This, my son, is living and your son is dead,' and this one is saying, 'No, but your son is dead and my son is living.'" And the king said, "Take for me a sword." And they brought the sword before the king. And the king said, "Cut the living child in two and give half to the one and half to the other."

But the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for her compassion was stirred up over her son, and she said, "O, my lord, give to her the child, the living one, but, indeed, do not kill him!" But the other one was saying, "As to me so also to you let him not be. Cut him!" And the king answered and said, "Give to her the child, the living one, and indeed you will not kill him. She is his mother."

Then all Israel heard the judgment which the king had judged and they feared before the face of the king for they saw that the wisdom of God was in his inward parts in order to do judgment.

The end of Solomon's story, however, shows his fall from wisdom. Solomon engages in all the abusive practices which Samuel had warned the people would be the result of kingship. He enslaved his people and grew rich for himself rather than the good of his
people. Solomon became a king like those of the other nations. He established for himself a royal HAREM, large group of wives, many of whom were foreign women. He allowed his foreign wives to carry out their practices of idol worship in the very heart of the capital city and caused his own people to fall into idolatry.

There are two main themes which are developed in the ongoing story of kingship after Solomon.

1. The sin of Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom. His successors followed his pattern and God condemned the Northern Kingdom to fall to the Assyrian Empire.

2. The promise of GRACE to the house of David, a theme that reaches its high point in the reign of Josiah.

These two themes explore the possibilities and limitations of kingship. It can be a good thing for Israel, but, in itself, it is of no value. The value of kingship, like the value of 'judgeship' or any other office is seen in how that office is carried out. If people are faithful, any office can serve the needs of the people, but if the people are not faithful, every office can lead to bad results.

A first edition of the history is to be dated during the reign of Josiah. It's purpose was to demonstrate the goodness of Josiah and provide a reason for the reforms which he tried to make (such as demanding that all worship should be carried out only in the temple). This edition of the history was also a call for those who had survived the destruction of the Northern kingdom to be re-united with their brothers and sisters in the Southern Kingdom, and a warning to the people of the Southern Kingdom to avoid the sins and loss which had fallen upon the people of the north.

Later, in the last days of kingship and during the Babylonian Exile, the history was re-edited and brought up to date to tell the story of the last days of Judah. In this, however, the later Deuteronomistic editor sees the destruction of Judah not as the final
word of the story but as a beginning stage of the continuing story in which the people may return and rebuild, a story in which the people can learn from past mistakes and be faithful to their God.

The story of the **DIVIDED KINGDOM** begins in I Kings 14 and continues through II Kings 17. The story moves rapidly in I Kings 14-16, listing nine kings. In I Kings 16:29-34, King Ahab is introduced and his sin is seen in his taking of Jezebel as his wife and allowing her to bring idolatrous worship into his kingdom. Now the story slows down considerably to tell the events in the lives of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah comes on the scene from out of the blue in chapter 17 and Elisha receives his prophetic office from him. After the account of Elisha, the story again speeds up to list nine kings in rapid order, bringing us to the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

All of this points to the significance of prophecy in the mind of the writer. *The stories of the prophets are at the very heart of the story of kingship. Prophecy arose and fell with kingship in Israel, and the possibilities for kingship as a good office in Israel could have become realities if the people had listened to their prophets.* Tragically, this was not the case. Still, the story of the prophets shows God's willingness to work with human institutions in order to try to get the best out of them.

In a real sense, then, the story of Israel's kingship is told from the point of view of prophecy. The stories of Elijah and Elisha can be treated under three broad headings:

**Confrontation Stories**

**Miracle Stories**

**Legends.**

1 As **CONFRONTATION STORIES** the stories of the prophets show the prophets pitted against the kings and the people. The story of kingship is told through the story of the prophets. The failures of Israel's kings came from apostasy, mixing worship of Yahweh with that of other gods. In their
confrontations with kings, the prophets demonstrated not that Yahweh was bigger and better than the other gods of Canaan, but that there was no other God. That lesson still needs to be learned by us when we combine our trust in God with trust in material things or in misguided ideas of independence and self-reliance.

2. As **MIRACLE STORIES**, the stories of Elijah and Elisha demonstrate that God cares when people are helpless to help themselves. (Recall the pattern of Miracle stories).

3. As **LEGENDS**, the stories of the prophets hold up examples which we are to imitate. The faith and trust of the people and the good things that can happen when they display such faith is the trait held up for imitation. The people of Israel, then, and we today, can experience God's care if we trust him completely and realize that besides him there is no other.

**The stories of Elijah and Elisha, basically, challenge two false beliefs.** First, people believed that there were many gods and that each god was powerful in the land of his own people. The stories of the prophets demonstrate that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is powerful everywhere and will help his people wherever they may be. This was an important message for the exiles, but also tells us today that God will be with us no matter where we are or what situations we experience. Secondly, the stories make the faith statement that Yahweh, in fact, is the only God, that the idols of the other nations are merely wood and stone and no gods at all. That is, the basic world view of ancient peoples was **POLYTHEISTIC**. (POLYTHEISM means a belief in many gods). It was during the period of kingship that the people of Israel began to change this world view and become **MONOTHEISTIC** - they began to realize that there was only one God who was the God of all people.

The story of **ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZEREPHATH** is a good example of a story that teaches that God cares for his people wherever they are. Note that Zerephath is a city in Sidon, the homeland of Jezebel and supposedly under the care of the god, Baal.

> Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah. (I Kings 17:8-16)

The story of **ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL** is a good example of a story that teaches that Yahweh alone is God.
After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth." 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you trouble of Israel?" He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel, with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD: the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down; Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God." Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." Then they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon, and killed them there.

Probably the worst of the Northern Kings is Ahab. His story represents the worst of what kingship has to offer. The story of Ahab and Naboth is a good example of the abuses to which kingship was open.
The Story of Ahab and Naboth

Now it was after these things and there was a vineyard to Naboth the Jezreelite which was in Jezreel, near the palace of Ahab, the king of Samaria. And Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, "Give me your vineyard and it will be for me a garden of green vegetables for it is close, near my house, and I will give you in place of it a better vineyard, or, if it is good in your eyes, I will give you money for the price of it." But Naboth said to Ahab, "Far be it from me, by Yahweh, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you." So Ahab went to his house sullen and vexed over the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, "I will not give to you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his couch and turned aside his face and would not eat food.

Then Jezebel, his wife, came into him and she said to him, "What is this? Why is your spirit sullen and you are not eating food?" And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money, or, if it pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in place of it. And he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, "Do you now exercise kingship over Israel? Arise! Eat food and let your heart be good. I will give to you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

So she wrote letters in the name of Ahab and she sealed them with his seal and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living in the city, living with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters saying, "Call for a feast and make Naboth sit at the head of the people. And have two men, sons of worthlessness, sit in his presence and have them accuse him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' And they will bring him out and will stone him and he will die." And the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who were living in his city, did just as Jezebel had sent to them and just as it was written in the letters which she sent to them. And they called for a feast and made Naboth sit at the head of the people. Then two men of worthlessness came in and they sat in his presence and the men of worthlessness bore witness against Naboth in front of the people saying, "He, Naboth, has cursed God and the king." And they brought him out, outside the city, and they stoned him with stones and he died. And they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and has died."

And so it was, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and had died that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise! Take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite which he refused to give to you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead!" And it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead that Ahab arose in order to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite in order to take possession of it.

Then the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Arise! Go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria, behold, in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone to take possession of it. And you will speak to him saying, 'Thus says Yahweh. You have murdered and you have taken possession!' And you will speak to him saying, 'Thus says Yahweh. In the place where the dogs have licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick your blood also.'"

And Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, my enemy?" And he said, "I have found you because you have sold yourself in order to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh. Behold, I am bringing upon you evil and I will sweep away after you and root out from Ahab anyone who urinates against a wall, both bound and free in Israel. And I will give your house up as the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and as the house of Baasha, son of Ahijah, for the provocation by which you have provoked Israel and caused it to sin!"

And also Yahweh spoke to Jezebel, saying, "The gods will eat Jezebel at the rampart of Jezreel. The dead of Ahab in the city the dogs will eat and the dead in the field the birds of the heavens will eat! Surely there has not been anyone like Ahab who sold himself in order to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh, whom Jezebel, his wife, led astray. And he has acted very abominably in order to go after the idols just as the Amorites did whom Yahweh drove out from the face of the sons of Israel."

And it happened, when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his garments and put
sackcloth upon his skin and he fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about in gentleness. And the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Have you seen that Ahab has humbled himself before me? I will not bring down evil in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the evil upon his house."

The story of Ahab and Naboth is like the story of David and Bathsheba. It is an exploration of the nature of sinfulness. As was the case with David, Ahab and Jezebel's sin is selfishness. In this case, their selfishness is motivated by greed and the abuse of power. But, as is the case in all stories which present people's sinfulness, this one ends on a note of mercy. God will forgive and lessen the consequences when we admit our guilt and turn from evil.

The final section of the Books of Kings covers the last period of Judah's existence as an independent kingdom, with a concluding note about the fate of the last king, Jehoiachin. He is exiled to Babylon and is pictured as eating at the king of Babylon's table. In this final phase of Judah's story, two kings are singled out for praise:

**Hezekiah (chapters 18-20)**

**Josiah (chapters 22-23)**

But the good that they offer, the possibilities they hold forth are short-lived. Their good is not enough to overcome the continuing pattern of sin and evil and Judah finally falls. The ending of the history asserts again, in powerful terms, that existence, authentic existence as God's special, chosen people does not depend on national independence or any political or religious institution in itself. To be God's special people is a possibility in all sorts of circumstances - inside and outside the land of promise.
2. The Latter Prophets

Objective:
The Purpose of the Latter Prophets is to round out the story told by the Historical Books. With the Historical Books, the Latter prophets tell the story of what the people of Israel did with God's gifts. But, where the Historical Books end in failure, the Latter Prophets offer hope for renewal. Today, the prophetic words in the Latter Prophets offer us lessons on morality, on what needs to inform our decisions about right and wrong, as well as the hope that when we fail, though we may have to suffer the consequences, God will forgive us and begin with us again.

Vocabulary List:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARAMAIC</th>
<th>CLASSICAL PROPHECY</th>
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<tr>
<td>DIRECT ACCUSATION</td>
<td>SEMANTIC PARALLELISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>SATIRE</td>
<td>PROPHETIC WARNINGS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORACLE</td>
<td>PROPHETIC CONSOLATION</td>
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<td>RETRIBUTION</td>
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For a long time it was thought that the prophets who were active during the time of the kingship in Israel preached against breaking the covenant and its law as it was given by Moses on Mt. Sinai. In this respect, it can be noted that prophecy basically arose in Israel along with the beginning of kingship and passed out of existence when the kingship ceased to be Israel's form of government. That observation remains true whether or not the preaching and writing of the prophets actually depended on Israel's written laws, and now it seems most likely that Israel's written, legal traditions and the written words of the prophets were most likely developing at the same time.

The preaching of the prophets began to be written down - probably by groups of followers who desired to preserve their masters' words. At least two reasons account for this:
1. The followers did not want to lose the insights of the prophetic preachers and saw in their words a call to morality which was worth preserving.

2. The warnings which the prophets spoke about the end results of not being faithful to God were beginning to come true and the spoken words of the preachers were recalled to support the idea that the people were getting what they deserved - and yet they also stressed that the story was not over with God's punishment, but that there was still hope of rebuilding after the time of trial and punishment had passed.

In and after the exile, the collections of prophetic writings underwent extensive editing - most likely at the hands of the Deuteronomists who were responsible for the Historical Books, which were a story of Israel's life in the land. This editing is most obvious in the Book of Jeremiah. It seems likely that it was during this editorial stage that the legal traditions of Israel began to be stressed in the prophetic writings. Israel's stories, legal traditions, prophetic traditions, and sacred prayers were all taking shape during and after the time of Kingship and all these lines of traditions influenced each other.

In Israel's PROPHECY we need to account for the presence of both prose and poetry.

1. It seems that prose was generally reserved for the special accounts of the prophets' visions. In such visions, the prophet is shown a mysterious and symbolic picture. The burden of the prophetic task, then, is to explain the meaning of this vision to the people.

2. The other clear instance when prose seems to be preferred is the situation in which the direction of speech is from God to the prophet, rather than from God through the prophet to the people. This creates the impression that God speaks to his prophets directly, legitimizing their authority and demonstrating how necessary they are for the people.

3. Most of what the prophets preach, what they have to say to the people, is expressed in poetry.

A. Some Notes on Hebrew Poetry

The literature of every language and culture consists of prose and poetry. What is significant about the literature of ancient Israel is that it chose prose as the mode of expression for its epic traditions - its stories. In this, Israel differed from its ancient Near Eastern neighbors who told their epics in poetry. The choice of prose, however, is consistent with Israel's faith. The prose form allowed for the development of human characters in the drama of God's dealings with his people. The elevated language and imagery of poetry in the epics of other cultures was suited for stories of gods, stories in which humans are presented as victims or heroes, but seldom as 'real' human beings. Israel saw God as a personal God who related with his people and gave them tremendous freedom in living their lives. Israel's story is the story of ordinary people, meeting God in their daily lives. Prose is the best form of expression to tell this story.

Still, Israel's literature was not without its poetry. It is found in the writings of the
prophets, the wisdom literature, and in the Psalms. In the prophets, poetry is met in the words which God addresses through his prophets to the people. Direct revelations to the prophets are generally in prose - a clearer message reserved to the prophets, highlighting their closeness with God - while the poetry highlights the importance of the prophetic office as something out of the ordinary. The poetry of the Wisdom Literature gives emphasis to the eternal truths of wisdom and stresses the 'lofty' subject matter which the literature teaches. The poetry of the Psalms suggests the drama and 'other-worldliness' of Israel's world of prayer.

There are some problems with Israel's poetry. According to most definitions of poetry, it consists of the imaginative use of language, patterned in verses according to definite meters, and very often using rhyme. In Hebrew verse, however, there is no conclusive evidence that meter was ever used. The Hebrew language itself, sometime after the Babylonian Exile, ceased to be a living, spoken language. ARAMAIC became the spoken language of the people and Hebrew was reserved for the language of the Sacred Text. Meter is based on long and short pronounced syllables, but we are not sure today how Hebrew was pronounced. The language is made up entirely of consonants and the fixing of vowels as a guide to pronunciation did not occur until the tenth century AD.

In the seventeenth century, a man named Robert Lowth set the stage for the study of Hebrew poetry down to the present day. He described a specific trait which seems to be characteristic of all Hebrew verse. Hebrew poetry is made up of lines which have two parts in which the second half of the line reflects or mirrors the meaning of the first half. This is called SEMANTIC PARALLELISM. Lowth described several types of semantic parallelism in Hebrew verse and until about the last ten years, treatments of Hebrew poetry have simply been refinements on his work.

In recent years the question has been asked, "Are there any true parallels in meaning between two expressions?" Is it not the case that similar meanings are carried in parallel expressions, but that each expression is unique? The result is that it is now seen that the second half of a line in Hebrew verse does not simply repeat the idea of the first half, but in some way completes the idea, intensifies it, focuses the image, moves from the general to the specific or from the specific to the general, or even negates the idea in the first half of the line.

The basic components of any language are words. What is meant by 'semantic parallelism' can be demonstrated by the free association of words. This is done in the game in which one person says something and the other person responds with the first thing that comes into his or her mind. Our minds make, basically, two types of associations. In the first, we respond with a word which can substitute for another - a word that describes something with similar features (gold - silver), common opposites (good - bad), or words that move from the general to the specific (tree - oak). In the second, we associate words which complete ideas (old - man; green - grass). All such pairings produce similarities or contrasts. So, the basic function of 'semantic parallelism' in Hebrew verse is to either make things clearer or, by contrast, to create ambiguity or uncertainty.
Within Hebrew verse, as we move from one line to the next, the device of parallelism works to provide focusing, intensification, specification, a broadening of perspective, to give clarification, to note consequences, and the like. Temporal sequences in parallel lines give a sense of 'narrative' to a poem. Focusing and clarification from line to line lend intensity to the developing poetic images.

B. The Poetry of the Prophets

The poetry of the prophets has some distinguishing features:

1. It is highly vocative, that is, it most often uses direct address to a particular people in a particular situation.
2. In most instances, it is not the prophet who is speaking, but God who is speaking through him. This is a literary fiction of sorts. The prophet is seemingly telling the people what God has said. What this means is that the prophets were men of insight who basically said, "If God were to speak in this situation, this is what I imagine he would say."
3. The overall aim of prophetic expression is to correct the people, to point out their failings (not prediction). This aim is carried out in three types of prophetic speech:

   A. DIRECT ACCUSATION
   B. SATIRE - taking on the viewpoint of someone to show it is silly
   C. PROPHETIC WARNINGS - or the sounding of alarms of disaster. This form of speech is the most story-like.

DIRECT ACCUSATION is the form of prophetic speech that is used most often. Satires and warnings are used less often and seem to come from the prophet's confrontation with his audience. When the people fail to listen to the prophet, he will adopt their point of view to ridicule it, to try to get them to see the folly of the way they are thinking. When ridiculing the people's point of view does not work, the prophet
resorts to announcing the disaster that awaits the people.

Prophecy, however, was not all bleak. The prophets spoke out against their own people for breaking with Yahweh, but that was not the end of the story. When the warning signs were aimed not at Israel, but at those nations which were oppressing Israel, we begin to move into the area of **PROPHETIC CONSOLATION**. In this case, the prophetic speech begins to talk about the reversal of fortunes in which Israel will no longer be oppressed and those who have been oppressing them will feel God's anger on them.

In the final shaping of the prophetic books as we now have them, the editorial process provided a basic framework for the books. First come the oracles of doom against Israel; these are followed by the oracles against the foreign nations; the oracles against the nations, in turn, are followed by promises of restoration. In its final form, then, the collection of prophetic books address all future generations with a message of hope that God will rebuild out of every imaginable situation.

**C. The Major Prophets**

The **MAJOR PROPHETS** are the Books of **ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, and EZEKIEL**.

**ISAIAH** was written in three stages. **First Isaiah** consists of chapters 1-39 and comes mostly from the time of the kingship in Judah around the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. That is, First Isaiah belongs to the **CLASSICAL AGE OF HEBREW PROPHECY**. The Classical Age of Hebrew Prophecy refers to the **Eighth Century B.C.**, when the first of Israel's great prophets began their ministry to the people in the face of the impending Assyrian Crisis. In First Isaiah, the preaching of the original prophet was preserved. Isaiah's message was one of hope for Judah if the people could avoid the sins of the Northern Kingdom. He accused the people for their lack of faithfulness, but held out the hope that Judah could escape the fate of Israel if they turned from their evil ways.

**Second Isaiah** is found in chapters 40-55. This part of the book represents the ideas of the original prophet, but was written during the Babylonian Exile. In the exile, people felt that God had abandoned them and that their relationship with Yahweh was over. The prophet of the exile announced the rise of Cyrus the Persian who would conquer Babylon
and allow the people to return home. The primary focus of Second Isaiah, then, is consolation.

Third Isaiah is a later addition to the book, chapters 56-66. This part of the book most likely dates from the return to Judah. It applies the teachings of the original prophet and the prophet of the exile to the rebuilding projects of the people once they had returned to their homeland.

JEREMIAH is the work of a prophet during the last days of Judah's monarchy. It comes, not from the Classical Age of Prophecy, but from the Babylonian period. The role of Jeremiah was to advise the people to accept God's judgment and wait patiently for God's anger to lessen. He addressed his teachings to Judah's kings and people who falsely believed that salvation and safety would come in the form of national independence and political alliances, not from trust in God.

EZEKIEL was a prophet of the exile. His prophetic career seems to have spanned the time from the first deportation to Babylon, about ten years before the actual destruction of the kingdom, till nearly the end of the Babylonian exile. In the early days of his career, Ezekiel had to tell his fellow countrymen in the exile that Jerusalem was really going to be destroyed. But after this destruction, he, like Second Isaiah, had the task of fostering hope among his people, assuring them that God's love was still a reality and that they would one day return home with a chance of starting again.

D. The Minor Prophets

The MINOR PROPHETS consist of twelve shorter books, all of which can be contained on a single scroll. The Minor prophets include the books of

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<tr>
<td>JOEL</td>
<td>MICAH</td>
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<td>AMOS</td>
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<td>ZECHARIAH</td>
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<td>OBADIAH</td>
<td>HABAKKUK</td>
<td>MALACHI</td>
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In the final form of the collection, these books are not arranged in the order of composition. (For example, Amos, Hosea, and Micah all date from the Classical Period). Rather, they are arranged according to a "PLOT."

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM: Hosea Joel
(These books issue warnings to Israel about the unfaithful actions of the people.)

COMPLICATION: Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah
(These books show Israel's unwillingness to listen to the message of the prophets.)
CRISIS
Nahum
Habakkuk
(These books present the idea that the destruction of the people is unavoidable.)

FALLING ACTION BEGINS
Zephaniah
(Zephaniah begins to suggest that there may be a possibility for a future with God.)

RESOLUTION
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi
(These books deal with the idea of beginning a new life with Yahweh)

In the end, the prophetic books offer a balance to the tragedy of the Historical Books. Doom and disaster are not the end of the story. The prophetic books, then, address us now with warnings about sin, but also hold out the hope that God will always begin again with us no matter what the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

E. Examples of Prophetic Oracles

Amos

The first of the classical prophets was AMOS. Amos was a prophet of Doom. He addressed the ruling elite of the Northern Kingdom before its fall to Assyria in 722 BC. He was not concerned with social change, repentance, or reform, but solely with pointing out the inevitability of the end.

Typically, his ORACLES offer direct accusation, followed by an announcement of condemnation. Note, PROPHETIC ORACLES simply refer to the speech of the prophets. In the Eighth Century, the idea of retribution was strong. A theology of RETRIBUTION holds that the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished. The idea was misunderstood by being read backwards. If someone is wealthy or enjoys success they must be good, while if someone is poor, sick, or suffering in any way they must be wicked. This misunderstanding of the idea of Divine Retribution allowed the ruling class to maintain their rich lifestyle at the expense of the common people. Amos' oracles began to do something new. He began to speak out against the false notion of retribution. If the poor, common people are suffering it is not because they are wicked, but because they are oppressed.
In Amos’ day there was an absolute separation between the classes. The lifestyle of the ruling elite depended on the exploitation of the peasants. More and more were forced to sell their ancestral share in the land and, as debts mounted, even to sell themselves into slavery. The political scene required tribute to be paid to the Assyrian overlords, or bribes to other nations for alliances against Assyria. All of this was taken from the peasants. What Amos saw was that the whole structure was about to collapse and this is what he announced. The policies of the ruling elite had bankrupted the kingdom and destroyed the larger population base which supported it.

Amos’ words were collected and remembered because what he said had come true. The Northern Kingdom did fall. In the seventh century, In Judah, the words of Amos were given an order, new material was added, and now what the prophet had said and the lessons learned from the fate of Northern Israel became a word of warning addressed to three groups - those who had remained in the north after the destruction of Samaria, the people of the south in general, and particularly the ruling elite of the south. To the remnant of the north, the book now speaks a word of warning about faulty religious practices, fostering centralization of worship - as in the Deuteronomic program. To the ruling elite of Judah, the book speaks a word of warning about social justice and oppression. And to the people in general, the book offers warning to hear the word of the prophet and to learn from sad experience.

In the last stage of the editing of Amos, in or shortly after the Babylonian exile, reversal is the chief characteristic and the book is rounded out on a note of hope. In that situation, the oppressors, the sons and daughters of the ruling elite, are now the oppressed and the whole production of the book, through all its stages has portrayed Yahweh on the side of the oppressed - and this is a reason to hope. But this stage is not a simple vindication of the exiles; it is not a call to confidence that God is on our side and with us no matter what. That was the false faith of the ruling elite in earlier ages. The message of hope is contained with warnings to do justice and to worship well.

**ii. Hosea**

The prophet **HOSEA** also has its origin in the classical age of Israelite prophecy, when the nation was divided. A cover theme for the book of Hosea is "**SEEKING GOD IN A DIVIDED NATION.**"

One of the major problems in understanding Hosea is how to approach the presentation of his marriage in chapters 1-3. Hosea is commanded to marry a wife of harlotry and get children of harlotry. He marries Gomer and has three children in rapid succession. The
language and imagery suggest that who has actually fathered the children is at least open to question. This account, then, functions as an introduction to the major image of Hosea's message - the characterization of Northern Israel's life before and with Yahweh as an expression of harlotry or prostitution. Israel is accused of whoring after other gods. In the original historical situation of Hosea, it is possible that Gomer was not so much a whore as a typical Israelite girl. This would have been a horror to Hosea. But, in the fertility rites of the ancient Near East, rites which Hosea was concerned to condemn Israel for adopting, a priest would sleep first with a young girl of marriageable age prior to her marriage to ensure her fertility. So, Gomer may represent what was typical in Israel.

It is primarily Hosea's criticism of cultic abuses which distinguishes his thought from that of Amos, who was so concerned with social justice. For Hosea, the cultic abuses summed up all the other evils of the kingdom, and were the root of the disasters which were to follow. As such, it can be held that Hosea did not condemn the sanctuaries of the Northern Kingdom in themselves. He did not speak out against Bethel and Gilgal, but against the abusive practices carried out in them. The sites were honorable places in the Yahwistic tradition, places where significant events had occurred and encounters with Yahweh had taken place.

The condemnation of the places as legitimate sites for worship which may be found in the book reflects the later editorial stages in the south when the move for centralization (under the Deuteronomists) began.

If Hosea himself mourns the disunity of the two kingdoms and attaches hope to the south for the preservation of Yahwistic traditions when the north has been destroyed, the later, southern edition of his message offers a critique of the south, a possibility of return for the remnant of the north, and a hope for repentance for the re-united people. The final stages of editing, which make the book scripture intended to speak to all ages, offer a hope for unity for all divided people, a call to fidelity, and an expression of faith in the constancy of God who may punish, but who always offers his love, who will restore, even before repentance, and will always cause his people to remember.

In the end, all of the prophetic books address words of warnings and hope to God's people throughout the ages. People are called to live up to what Yahweh expects of us, but also to hope that when we fail, God will not ultimately abandon us, but will always, after the consequences of our failings have been suffered, begin again with us and try something new.

In the prophetic message of hope, one concept needs some further explanation. That is the concept of the REMNANT. For Israel's prophets, the hope held out for the future centered on the FAITHFUL REMNANT, those who suffered through the consequences of sin and returned to God. Out of this REMNANT, God would begin to build again. The concept of the faithful remnant, was a significant new development in Israelite theological thought. Up until the time when the prophets began to speak of a hope for return, Israel considered itself to be a single body. The fate of the whole people was the
fate of each individual. If God punished Israel, then all the people deserved that punishment. The Prophetic Oracles of Consolation which began to speak of a faithful remnant represent something new, because in these God is presented as dealing with individual, holding individuals accountable, and no longer dealing with all the people on the basis of the actions of a few. While each individual is accountable to and for the whole community, the idea of individual responsibility and accountability would eventually develop into the belief in God's just reward for the good in the afterlife, a belief that did not enter into the Jewish faith until well after the return from the Babylonian Exile.
The WRITINGS contain everything else in the Hebrew Scriptures. They contain the Chronicler's re-telling and reinterpretation of Israel's history, some additional stories, the Wisdom Writings, and the Book of Psalms. All of these writings draw on Israel's earlier traditions and give a fresh interpretation to them. For our purposes, we will be concerned only with Israel's Wisdom Traditions and the Book of Psalms.

Israelite Wisdom

Objective:
The aim of Israel's Wisdom Traditions was to stress the value and dignity of human beings. The Wisdom Writings of Israel intended to hand on the lessons learned from life's experiences to later generations. The Pentateuch stresses that we are on our way to fully experiencing God's promises and gifts; the Historical Books teach lessons about how to use those gifts, focusing on human freedom and responsibility; the Wisdom Books spell out what we need to do to live good, happy, peaceful lives and they derive their lessons from simple observations of life as it is lived in the real world.
Around the turn of the century, when the modern era of biblical study began, the Wisdom material in the Old Testament was thought to be derived from the law - so the question of the relationship between Wisdom and Law was already being raised, though at that time, with the assumption that the biblical material was produced in the general order of the books as we now have them, the simple priority of the Law was maintained - and we have seen the mutual influence of the different streams of tradition (narrative, legal, prophetic, etc.) on each other in the final form of the Bible.

At this time the wise men were also seen as heirs of the prophets. In an age when prophecy had passed out of existence (after the death of the kingship) the wise applied the moral principles of the prophets to everyday life. In this, they were concerned with the working out of divine retribution (good is rewarded and evil is punished), but more on an individual level than on the level of society that the prophets stressed. At this point, then, people were already looking at significant themes in the Wisdom writings.

Finally, in those early days, the wisdom works were studied for the special forms they contained. The forms and character of the wisdom teachings were, however, found to be unique and distinctive. Such forms could not have been derived from the Law or the Prophets, but must have had a distinctive setting of their own. It was concluded, then, that the Wisdom teachings must have come from a special class of educators concerned with man's general progress and advancement in life. The setting that was suggested as the home of Israel's wisdom was that of the presence of scribes and secretaries in David's court - who are mentioned in the Historical Books of the Bible - and from this point on it became common to speak of wisdom schools attached to the court.

By this point in the study of Israel's Wisdom it was now considered that Wisdom Traditions grew up along with all the other traditions in Israel's scriptures; that it was influenced by those other traditions and, in turn, influenced them.

A basic assumption of early wisdom was that it was accessible. Truth and order filled the universe - having been put there by God - and man, using his God-given gifts of observation and reason could discover that truth and order and derive principles for leading a well ordered life.

In its latest writings, such as in the Book of Sirach, Wisdom had begun to be identified with the Torah - the revealed will of God for his people. When this happened, saving history themes entered the realms of Wisdom. God's word was now considered to be a part of the world which men could consider and study in order to discover how to live well. It was this development, late in the Old Testament period, that give rise to the Rabbis, the teachers of the Pharisee party, and it was the Rabbis who were responsible for the survival of the Jewish faith after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the sacrificial system of the Jews passed out of existence forever.
There are some characteristic forms of expression which are distinctive in the wisdom writings. These include the proverb, parable, fable, allegory, riddle and other skillful and humorous types of sayings which are common to all people - rustic and urban - and at all times. Such speech forms had their original setting in the clan (family) life and were addressed by the elders of the clan to the young. Such clan wisdom, in time, would develop in two directions:

1. Proverbial wisdom and the creation of more literary proverbs
2. Legal statements (such as are found in the Ten Commandments)

Now, the idea of Wisdom in Israel means three things:

1. Wisdom is a body of literature
2. Wisdom is a way of thinking (which informs the body of literature)
3. Wisdom is a tradition of the wise - a movement, along with prophetic and priestly (cultic) movements, which was concerned with handing down the knowledge and experience gained over time to successive generations.

As a BODY OF LITERATURE, ISRAELITE WISDOM CONSISTS OF

1. Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) in the Hebrew Bible
2. Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon (in the SEPTUAGINT - the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures produced in Alexandria of Egypt in about 200 B.C.)
3. Some of the Psalms
4. other scattered pieces of writing
5. And, much later, some Rabbinic Writings.

Within this body of literature, there are various categories - all of which make observations from experience and attempt to pass on lessons that can be learned:

1. FAMILY or CLAN WISDOM - tries to master life, expresses itself in exhortations, and makes extensive use of proverb forms. (The imparting of basic family and social values is the aim of CLAN WISDOM).
2. COURT WISDOM - seeks to educate a select group of people (court officials) and uses a didactic method, a repetitious style, in the process of education.
3. SCRIBAL WISDOM - a more universal form of teaching which approached a doctrinaire stance on such subjects as retribution and the justice of God. This category makes full use of dialogue and admonition.

The fundamental premise of Wisdom - as a WAY OF THINKING - is the belief in order. Implicit is a world view of reality as subject to laws established by the Creator, governing principles of life which are observable by the use of reason. A key idea in wisdom circles was that Chaos was conquered once and for all in the creative act of God. This would lead to a problem in the tradition - as can be seen in the Book of Job: What are we to make of the evidence that Chaos rears its ugly head, that there is suffering for no apparent reason?
Still, in general, Wisdom Thinking was optimistic. Man was valued. (Note that these themes were developed in the stories of the Yahwistic writer and in the stories of David - again demonstrating the mutual influence of various streams of Israel's traditions on each other). But, in time, the system hardened - as the tradition of the wise developed - approaching dogma, particularly in the realm of retribution. The ensuing struggle led to the recognition of the limits imposed on human knowledge, especially in regard to the absolute 'otherness' of God.

**Wisdom in Israel was always anti-establishment.** It dared to question. It rejected easy answers. Wisdom stood outside some of the main streams of Israelite traditions as a critique and when its own teachings began to harden, the movement produced thinkers to challenge its own premises and critique them.

**The Book of Proverbs**

**THE BOOK OF PROVERBS** is a collection of proverbs and Wisdom poems. The basic core of the book dates from the period of the monarchy, some parts even demonstrating the international flavor of wisdom by displaying similarities to wisdom works from Egypt. The book is framed by material in chapters 1-9 and 30-31 which are most likely from post-exilic times. The opening chapters present the two ways - Wisdom and Folly - both of which are personified as females, both of whom make appeals to those who will listen to them. The final portrait of the worthy woman again uses the female image to round out the book, returning, as it were, to its place of origin, and presenting a realistic portrait of what is possible for one who follows the right way. The woman at the end seems to serve two functions:

1. She represents a person who exemplifies the way of wisdom - her life is ordered and pleasant.
2. She is the concrete symbol of the good life that can be had by the man who is modest, sober, faithful to his wife, etc., that is, the embodiment of the blessings of achieving Wisdom.
In general, the proverbial wisdom of Israel deals with four basic themes:

1. retribution and divine justice
2. wise utterance
3. the tradition of the 'fathers'
4. individual self-discipline

These themes are interrelated so that, in the end, the result of learning wisdom is an ordered life marked by self-control. ("Discretion is the better part of valor." "On medias stat virtus." "Enjoy all things, but not too much.") There is a sense of balance and calm. Such are the lessons which the Book of Proverbs teaches.

The Book of Job

**THE BOOK OF JOB** is both a masterpiece of biblical literature and of world literature in general. It raises some of the most complex questions of human experience and existence that there are and raises them in a realistic and impassioned way.

The Book of Job is a **NARRATIVE** - that is the function of the narrative frames (chapters 1-2 and 42:1-7). As such, the point is what happens - to Job, to the Friends. We need to pay attention to movement, narrativity, progress, and results. In the narrative frames, we view the story of Job from the point of view of the narrator. We are outsiders looking in on the heavenly contest between God and the adversary (The Satan) in which Job is the hapless victim. With Job's opening speech, which begins the rounds of poetic dialogue, the whole situation changes. We are pulled inside and made to view Job's suffering from his perspective. He suffers; he does not know why and we are made to identify with him - to forget the picture of the prologue.

The book's struggle with traditional wisdom becomes apparent in the cycle of speeches:
CYCLE ONE:
Job speaks first (chapter 3). He curses the day of his birth and wants death. His words are structured in a lament-like poem.
Eliphaz - the oldest and most venerable of the 'consolers' speaks first for the friends. He speaks conventional wisdom, offers answers rather than consolation - which will characterize all of the friends' speeches. What he says is devoid of any real sympathy, but is perhaps closer to the truth than the rest of the friends' advice. Basically, Eliphaz encourages patience. He accepts Job's piety and argues from it to say that the suffering will run its course and pass.
Bildad upholds the justice of God, but holds out hope for Job if he searches himself and acknowledges his sin and repents.
Zophar is outraged that Job would dare to question the wisdom of his friends. He claims that Job is a sinner - his sufferings prove it.
In round one, the speeches of Job are longer than those of the friends - Job and his experience are the focus.

CYCLE TWO:
In Cycle Two the speeches are roughly of equal length. The focus is now on the endless round of disputation going nowhere. Throughout the rest of cycles two and three, Job begins with his particular circumstances which govern his view of the general state of things. The friends, by contrast, start with general 'wisdom tradition' and apply it to Job's particular circumstances.

CYCLE THREE:
The whole third cycle is marked by a more vehement tone on the part of the friends, with Eliphaz and Bildad - while maintaining the distinctive features of their speeches - moving closer to the hostile stance of Zophar. Job's speeches are again longer. The focus is on him. The friends' wisdom is breaking down. In the end, Job will complete Bildad's final speech for him, imparting a note of mockery. The breakdown of the dialogue is also indicated by the lack of a final speech for Zophar - and again mockery is the tone since Job, essentially, offers what Zophar would have said - he is as much a master of the traditional wisdom as are the friends and in this he defeats them. They are not able to answer him.
At the end of the third cycle THE FRIENDS ARE SILENCED.

Chapter 28 of Job provides a calm interlude - an assertion of man's place in the created universe and of his dignity, but also of his limitations. This chapter speaks against an anti-wisdom theme for the work as a whole. Job does not reject wisdom, but asserts that wisdom has value. Job is its master, but there are questions that the best wisdom can't answer.

After this interlude, Job's final words come in chapters 29-31.
1. he denies the easy answers of traditional wisdom
2. he proclaims his innocence
3. he makes a final appeal to God
4. THEN JOB FALLS SILENT ("The words of Job are completed.")
The SPEECH OF ELIHU, who comes on the scene out of nowhere (chapters 32-37), presents
1. a brash, impetuous youth
2. summarizes and recapitulates the arguments of the friends, but does not move the dialogue forward in any significant way
3. his creation talk and questions about man's limits which do anticipate and provide a transition to God's speech
4. his addition of one further (ridiculous) note that Job's sufferings could have been a warning to keep him from future sins

Finally, the poetic dialogue closes with the SPEECHES OF GOD and Job's responses (chapters 38-42).
1. 38:1-40:2 is a series of rhetorical questions, moving through the arena of created universe, and basically making God's assertion that he is bigger and better than Job.
2. Job's response in 40:3-5.
3. 40:6-41:34 is God's final speech centering on the hippopotamus and crocodile.

In the Book of Job, all the human actors proceed from the view that divine justice fills - or should fill - the world, that the natural order and the moral order are equivalent. God's speech denies this, while the final dialogue, with the epilogue upholds Job and his right, his need, to protest, to voice his anger and frustration.

IN THE END, the book asserts

That sin can never be inferred from suffering
That God's animosity to the sufferer can never be presumed

The Book of Job grapples with the basic problem of "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People." It struggles with the easy answers provided by traditional wisdom and asserts that there are some things in life that we just can't know, that we can't master. It challenges the notion of retribution and claims that God is just. It says that suffering is a reality, but not a reality caused by God, that the natural order runs its course. But it also makes one significant claim - that humans who suffer have a need and a right to express their anger and frustration at God, that God is a person to whom we relate in all aspects of our life, and that being angry with God, in itself, is NOT wrong or sinful.
The Psalms

Objective:
The Book of Psalms, in its final form, includes **ALL** of Israel's traditions - God's word and law, his mighty acts on behalf of his people in history, the wonders of creation, the reality of suffering, the consequences of sin, the joy of forgiveness. The prayers of the book are arranged in such a way as to provide a meditation of Israel's life with God and to reflect the journey of life. That is, as we move from one Psalm to the next in the book, we celebrate in Israel's prayers the fact that WE ARE ON THE WAY.

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<th>Vocabulary List:</th>
<th>PSALM</th>
<th>HYMN</th>
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<td>LAMENT</td>
<td>PSALMS OF ZION</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROYAL PSALMS</td>
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<td>HISTORICAL PSALMS</td>
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For a long time, the Psalms were given a secondary place in Biblical studies because they were thought to be the product of Temple worship in the Second Temple Period - the time after the return from the Babylonian Captivity, when most of the more important biblical traditions had already been given their final shape. They were thought to be late meditations on Israel's earlier traditions. That view of the Psalms, however, has been roundly disproved in the last hundred years of biblical scholarship. The cult (religious practices) and piety of Israel throughout its whole history is captured by these prayers. The **PSALMS** were **PRAYERS**, often set to music, which celebrated Israel's relationship with God. As is the case with all other streams of biblical tradition, the formation of the Psalms influenced the expression of Israel's stories, laws, prophetic preaching, and wisdom writings, just as the prayers of the **PSALTER**, the collection of 150 of Israel's
prayers in the biblical Book of Psalms, was influenced by these other traditions.

Some of the most significant advances in Psalm study came from Form Criticism. Form Criticism tried to identify special forms of writing and figure out the particular ‘Setting in Life’ in which such forms would have been used. Form Criticism identified several types of Psalms, their setting in life, and the regular structures and functions of the types. The findings of Form Criticism are as good a place to start as any:

### MAIN TYPES OF PSALMS

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<th>INDIVIDUAL ('I')</th>
<th>COMMUNAL ('We')</th>
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<td>Setting</td>
<td>Setting</td>
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<td>Religious Festival</td>
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<td>Personal Tragedy</td>
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Form Criticism also identified the structures by which the various types of Psalms can be recognized:

**HYMN** - a prayer which praises God in himself or for something he has done
1. Introduction - a call to praise, usually in the imperative
2. Body - a celebration of the reasons for praising God
   A. God in himself or some attribute of God
   B. God's acts in saving history
3. Conclusion - a repeat of the call to praise, or simply a statement of praise.

**LAMENT** - prayer of complaint addressed to God in hard times
1. Introduction
   A. A calling on God's name
   B. A call for help (often in the imperative)
2. Body
   A. Statement of the complaint
   B. A plea addressed to God
   C. A statement of Motivation - why God should help
      i. his faithfulness and consistency as seen in his past actions
      ii. the innocence and goodness of the one praying
3. PSALMS OF LAMENT HAVE NO FIXED CONCLUSION
   A. sometimes they just stop
   B. sometimes they include or imply an Oracle of Salvation which leads to a Thanksgiving
   C. sometimes there is an expression of the assurance of being heard
**THANKSGIVING** - a prayer of thanks to God who has answered a Lament or for other favors from God

1. **Introduction**
   A. statement of the Psalmist's intention to give thanks
   B. invitation to others to join in

2. **Body**
   A. description of the danger or the problem
   B. proclamation of the goodness of Yahweh

3. **No fixed conclusion.**

**HYMNS, LAMENTS, and THANKSGIVINGS** are the three major types of Psalms. They may be either **INDIVIDUAL** or **COMMUNAL,** that is, they may be the expression of a single person praying or of the whole community. In addition to these three major types, there are several sub-types. **ROYAL PSALMS** can be any of the three types. These prayers may have originally celebrated some event in the life of a ruling monarch in Israel, but in the final shaping of the Psalter they have taken on a broader meaning. Now these Psalms celebrate the Kingship of Yahweh. **PSALMS OF ZION** are generally restricted to the category of Hymns. These Psalms generally draw on Creation Imagery and celebrate God's dwelling with his people on his Holy Mountain, symbolized by the Temple of Jerusalem. **PSALMS OF ASCENT** are pilgrimage songs. They are the prayers of pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem, sometimes for a festival, sometimes seeking a refuge. These Psalms, too, may be of any of the three types.

Two other types of Psalms are to be found in the Psalter which do not fit into any of the major categories. These are the **HISTORICAL PSALMS** and the **WISDOM PSALMS.** The HISTORICAL PSALMS generally present a re-telling, in poetic and prayerful form, of some major event in Israel's history. The WISDOM PSALMS translate the lessons of Israel's Wisdom Traditions into prayer. These Psalms may be some of the latest additions to the Psalter, coming when WISDOM in Israel had come to be identified with the TORAH. These prayers, then, provide a meditation on TORAH as a source of life and a celebration of the people's JOURNEY WITH GOD.

The **BOOK OF PSALMS,** as we now have it, consists of **150 prayers.** The Book is marked by a fivefold division, with doxologies, special prayers of praise, at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, and all of 150. Most scholars believe that the book reached its final form - more or less - about 400 BC, that is, early in the Second Temple Period when the narrative, legal, historical, and prophetic traditions of Israel also received their final form. It is possible, though not proven, that in the Second Temple Period a cycle of readings developed from the Torah - the five books of the Pentateuch - and that the five divisions in the book of Psalms correspond to this - a psalm matched to each Torah reading over a three year cycle.

Whatever the case, the Psalms are now a literary collection - meant to be read as a book, an anthology of the traditions, prayers, and theology of Israel. The book is introduced by Psalms 1 and 2, with a picture of the **TWO WAYS.** These two Psalms suggest that this...
book will portray the two ways - righteousness and wickedness - and serve as a guide to true piety and religion.

A. Psalm One

Happy the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
nor in the way of sinners does he stand
nor in the seat of scoffers does he dwell.
But only in the Torah of Yahweh is his delight
and on his Law he ponders day and night.
So he has become like a tree transplanted by channels of water,
the fruit of which it will give in its time
and its leaf will not wither,
and in all which he does he will be successful.
Not so the wicked
but only like chaff which the wind scatters.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment
nor sinners in the company of the just.
For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

One of the most noticeable features of Psalm 1 is the tight structure of opposites. The effect is to suggest a neat package of retribution. This retribution is either built into the very nature of things, or, more likely, is viewed as how things ought to be - could be - if the right way is observed.

The beginning of the poem introduces the opposites in a narrative sequence - walk, stand, sit - all governed by negatives. In the second sentence, the righteous man is not the subject of an active verb, but his action is quiet meditation - as opposed to the actions of the wicked in the first sentence.

The central image of the poem is the tree transplanted by channels of water. This image is, again, not introduced by an active verb, but a passive participle - indicating the opposite of movement - PLANTED. In the image, the giving of fruit depends on being nourished by the channels of water. When the wicked are introduced, they, too, are passive - but the verb governing them denotes a passive scattering, a random, restless, uncontrolled and uncontrollable movement. The rooted substantiality of the righteous is contrasted with the brief mention of the insubstantiality of the wicked. At the heart of this, the language of the simile is put aside for a summary conclusion or central affirmation - whatever the righteous person does will be successful - deliberately vague. Not so the wicked - deliberately curt.

The ending of this section reverts to the beginning. The righteous are righteous because they do not partake in the assemblies of the wicked. The wicked - being wicked - have no place in the assemblies of the just.
At the end, Yahweh becomes the subject of an active verb - and only here:

**For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,**  
**but the way of the wicked will perish.**

He knows the way of the righteous:
1. a 'way' implies a totality, a beginning, end, and the journey through it all  
2. 'to know' implies that he is intimately involved  
3. the way of the wicked perishes - God is not involved. They are left to their own devices.

In the central image, the channels of water which nourish the tree so that it bears fruit are like the TORAH which nourishes the righteous and brings them success. (Remember that the primary meaning of TORAH is TEACHING).

In Hebrew, the first word of the Psalms, "Ashre" (happy, fortunate), begins with an aleph; the last word, "tobed," (to perish), begins with a tau, the first and last letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. This is a kind of alpha-omega, the beginning and end. It points to who will last and who will perish in the whole scheme of things. Note, too, that man is celebrated in the Psalm. The Torah is made for man, not man for the Torah.

**Psalm Two**

Psalm Two moves in four stanzas and it seems that the guiding principle is parallelism. Each stanza consists primarily of two lines which a concluding summation, emphasizing the major point of the stanza.

**STANZA ONE:**

**WHY**

ARE RESTLESS the nations / the peoples PONDER EMPTINESS  
TAKE A STAND kings of earth / dignitaries CONSPIRE TOGETHER  
AGAINST YAHWEH / AGAINST HIS ANOINTED?  
"LET US TEAR OFF fetters / LET US THROW OFF cords."

The implication of the first stanza is that the rebellion of the nations in trying to throw off the domination of Israel (real or imagined) is an attempt to escape the rule of Yahweh himself. The king and Yahweh appear in parallelism, indicating this. Israel has a place to fill in the universal reign of Yahweh over creation.

**STANZA TWO:**

HE SITTING IN HEAVEN laughs / MY LORD mocks them  
NOW HE WILL SPEAK in his anger / in his wrath HE WILL TERRIFY.  
"I HAVE SET my king / on Zion MOUNTAIN OF MY HOLINESS"
The parallelism of the final summation of the stanza associates the king and Mt. Zion. The verse begins and ends with the divine 'I' (the pronoun to begin the verse and a suffix to end it). The parallelism again identifies Yahweh and holiness. A basic aspect of Yahweh is that he is holy, but then his holy dwelling, Mt. Zion, associated with his chosen king also shares in this holiness. An affront to this holiness in any of its aspects, Yahweh himself, the king, Zion, engenders Yahweh's burning anger.

STANZA THREE:

I will proclaim A STATUTE OF YAHWEH / HE said to me
my son ARE YOU / I fathered YOU
YOU ask of me / I give nations OF YOUR INHERITANCE /
landed property to the ends of the earth.
YOU WILL BREAK with a rod of iron / like a potter's vessel YOU WILL SMASH.

The relationship of the king with Yahweh defines his relationship with the peoples of the earth. Perhaps the promises to the patriarchs are implied. Yahweh's anointed is to subdue the peoples of the earth, but under the father, that is Yahweh himself.

STANZA FOUR:

KINGS understand / take advice JUDGES.
SERVE YAHWEH in fear / EXULT HIM in trembling
YOU KISS THE SON lest he be angry / YOUR PERISH, his anger burns.

The summary verse of this stanza makes it clear that honoring Yahweh entails honoring his anointed, and by implication the people whom the king incorporates into himself. This picks up on the notion of the first stanza, that rebellion against Yahweh and his anointed amount to the same thing.

As each stanza concludes with a summation, so too the entire Psalm concludes on a note of acclamation which summarizes the whole:

Happy are all who take refuge in him.

This fits the universal aspect of royal ideology in the Zion tradition. When all the world, not just Israel, finds its refuge in Yahweh, an era of peace will begin and all the world will experience the blessings which Yahweh has promised, blessings to be mediated through Israel (as was seen in the Yahwistic Source of the Pentateuch - a stream of tradition very much influenced by the Zion traditions).

Psalm Two is bracketed, with Psalm One, by the closing 'Ashre' formula. The two Psalms are intended to function together. Now the focus is not on the individual, but on nations and peoples. God's knowing the way of the righteous (Psalm One) is balanced in Psalm Two by his wrath against the wicked. The "plotting" of the wicked, here, is the same word used for the "meditation" of the just in Psalm One. The two psalms set in
Psalm Two is related to Psalm 149 as outer brackets for the whole Psalter. The nations, peoples and kings in rebellion in Psalm 2 become the object of Yahweh's retribution in Psalm 149. Zion, where the king is anointed (Psalm 2) is paralleled with the binding of princes with fetters of iron (Psalm 149).

In sum, by aligning ourselves with the just in Psalm 1, and with those who trust in Yahweh in Psalm 2 - Psalm 2 making explicit and historical the didactic generalities of Psalm 1 - the wicked enemies against whom the king prays as we move into Psalm 3 become our enemies and we become part of that people upon whom Yahweh's blessing is invoked. WE NOW ENTER ON THE WAY.

Now, it is possible to argue for a development or progression in the final arrangement of the Book, a kind of organizational principle governing the collection as a whole. Most of the Laments are clustered together in the first part of the book. Generally, the Royal Psalms are not collected together, but are scattered throughout. They serve as punctuation marks throughout the collection emphasizing Yahweh's kingship. The final five Psalms are HALLELUJAH PSALMS of praise. In short, there is a journey through the Book of Psalms, from crying out in distress, periodically punctuated by acclamation of God's saving rule, especially in the messianic age to come, to an ultimate affirmation of God in praise. This journey incorporated virtually all of Israel's beliefs and themes which informed the formation of Sacred Scripture throughout the biblical period.

Psalm 150

The whole Psalter comes to a close on a note of triumphant praise in Psalm 150. What is significant about this Psalm is that it is open-ended. It is totally a call to praise with no main section which identifies the reason for praise. That reason appears to be, in the final form of the book, the whole of the Psalter which precedes this poem.

Structurally, the Psalm consists of 10 (2X5) more or less balanced lines, each beginning with the phrase "Praise him" (Praise God, in v 1).

Praise Yahweh!
Praise God in his holiness
Praise him in the firmament of his strength
Praise him in his mighty deeds
Praise him according to the multitude of his greatness
Praise him with the blare of the ram's horn
Praise him with harp and lyre
Praise him with tambourine and circle dance
Praise him with stringed instruments and pipe
Praise him with cymbals causing horror
Praise him with cymbals sounding an alarm
Let all that has breath praise Yahweh.
Praise Yahweh!

Is it possible to see a summary of biblical history in this Psalm?

Note:
HIS HOLINESS. Recall Psalm Two, and elsewhere, in which Zion is called the
mountain of Yahweh's holiness, the place where he chooses to dwell on earth. Zion, in
the stream of tradition, comes to be identified with the creative center of the world
(Eden).

FIRMAMENT is a rare word. It is the word found in Genesis 1:6, describing the action
of God in dividing the primeval waters. Yahweh sits enthroned above the firmament.
Thus, heaven and earth are called upon to praise Yahweh - and the imagery seems to
recall the act of creation itself.

MIGHTY DEEDS. Usually the reference to God's saving acts in the exodus and desert
wanderings, along with the theophany on Sinai, are termed signs and wonders. Here the
vocabulary differs, but the allusion could still be to God's great deeds on behalf of his
people during this period. g-b-r can mean strength, or a hero in battle. Such heroic
strength characterizes Yahweh's action in the Exodus and desert phase of Israelite
existence.

THE BLARE OF RAM'S HORNS has specific reference to Israel's Holy War traditions
and could be an allusion to the conquest of the land under Joshua (see Josh 6:4).

THE HARP AND LYRE could be a reference to David. Recall that he is introduced into
Saul's court as one skilled in playing stringed instruments.

TAMBOURINE AND CIRCLE DANCE. Of these two items, Circle Dance is
significant. After gaining the kingship and conquering the capital city, David brought the
Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in a festival procession. In the procession he danced
before the Lord. The words for dancing are not precisely the same, and here the circle
dance seems more of a dance in the round, a kind of ancient Israelite Square Dance.
Note, however, that several words for instruments throughout the Psalm do appear in the
account of the transfer of the Ark in II Samuel 6.

THE STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AND PIPE, then, could refer to the usual musical
accompaniment used in Temple worship during monarchical times.

CYMBALS CAUSING HORROR, CYMBALS SOUNDING AN ALARM could be
significant. Such a sound could have signaled the onslaught of the Babylonians and the
sacking of Jerusalem. That event and its aftermath was of major concern to Israel's
prophets. So the history of Israel has come full circle.

Finally, there is a call for all that has breath to praise the Lord. Again, in the prophetic
writings, the oracles of doom directed toward Jerusalem were generally followed by
oracles of restoration. The restoration was conceived of as the re-establishment of the saving deeds of God in history, and the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the creative center of the universe. Here, to the place where Yahweh chooses to dwell, all nations of the world would flock to pay him tribute. Fittingly, then, the end of the Psalm calls for all that has breath, that is, for every living thing, to praise the Lord.

Now, if this psalm has no content in terms of a main section, the invitation to praise Yahweh, repeated over and over, seems to recapitulate all the motives for which praise is offered and the whole of biblical history up to the time of the restoration. In short, this Psalm calls for praise in terms of the entire Law and Prophets. Hence, the final result of reading and studying the Psalter, like the final result of meditation on Israel's sacred traditions in the Torah and the Prophets, ends in an emphatic call to praise.