

## A Smooth and Cohesive Literary Structure to the Pentateuch

Lost to destructive critics is the literary unity of the Pentateuch in history, theme, and literary composition. In subject matter, the Pentateuch sets the foundation and basis for the entire Bible beginning with God's creation of life, leading to the greatest act of God's love in Jesus Christ, and ending in the completion of God's work in Eschatology.

The book of Genesis establishes the foundational history of the distant past, introduces the Abrahamic Covenant, and initiates the history of man's redemption. It can be said that Genesis is God and His creation.

**Genesis** begins with the phrase "in the beginning."

Genesis, studied as a literary structure, can be evaluated in 2 major ways:

1. Historically as it telescopes to a single individual
  - a. Primeval history
  - b. Patriarchal narratives
  - c. The story of Joseph
2. Genealogy
  - a. Toledoth formula

The structure highlights the birth of the nation of Israel.

Exodus continues the epic with Israel's redemption from Egypt, subsequent 40 years of wandering, introduction of the Mosaic Law, and the construction of the Tabernacle. Exodus clearly reveals that God is with Israel as its Savior and King.

**Exodus** is seamlessly continuous with Genesis, but this is subtly missed in modern translations of the Bible. In the literal translation of Exodus 1:1, the verse begins with, "And these are the names of..." Thus Exodus begins with the conjugation "and," which is an obvious reference to the content preceding it. In addition, the last verse of Genesis refers to the same subject of the first verse of Exodus, which is "Israel" or "Joseph."

### **Exodus 1:1**

1) Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household:

### **Genesis 50:26**

26) So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus' literary structure can be seen in two ways:

1. Geographically
  - a. Israel in Egypt
  - b. Israel in the Wilderness
  - c. Israel at Sinai
2. Topically
  - a. God saves Israel from bondage
  - b. God gives Israel His Law
  - c. God commands Israel to build the Tabernacle

The structure delineates the thrust of the book: salvation, law, and worship.

## A Smooth and Cohesive Literary Structure to the Pentateuch (page 2)

Leviticus presents the various laws and rituals, sacrificial system, and priesthood for the formal worship of God. Its emphasis is on the purity and cleanliness of man. Leviticus reveals that because God is holy, only those who are ceremonially clean of sin can come into His presence.

**Leviticus** is seamlessly continuous with Exodus, and this too is subtly missed in modern translations of the Bible. In the literal translation of Leviticus 1:1, the verse begins with, "And the LORD called..." Leviticus, like Exodus, begins with the conjunction "and," which refers to the content in Exodus preceding it. In this case, Exodus ends with the Tabernacle completed and the Lord within it, and Leviticus begins with the Lord speaking from within.

### Leviticus 1:1

1) Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,

### Exodus 40:34-38

34) Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35) Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36) Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; 37) but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. 38) For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

Leviticus' literary structure is perhaps the easiest to perceive of the Pentateuch and the best way to present, to the priest and lay, how one is to worship a holy God. It is an outline of the various laws and codes.

### Sample outline of Leviticus' literary structure

- I. Sacrificial Laws (1:1-7:38)
  - A. Instruction for the Laity (1:1-6:7)
    - 1. Burnt offering (1)
    - 2. Grain offering (2)
    - 3. Fellowship offering (3)
    - 4. Sin offering (4:1-5:13)
    - 5. Guilt offering (5:14-6:7)
  - B. Instructions for the Priests (6:8-7:38)
- II. Priestly Narrative (8:1-10:20)
  - A. The Formal Beginnings of the Priesthood (8:1-9:24)
  - B. The Limits on the Priesthood - Nadab and Abihu
- III. Laws to Protect Ritual Cleanness (11:1-16:34)
  - A. Dietary Prescriptions (11)
  - B. Birth Laws (12)
  - C. The Discernment and Cleansing of Skin Diseases (13-14)
    - 1. Discerning the disease (13)
    - 2. Cleansing the disease (14)
  - D. Laws about Bodily Discharges (15)
  - E. The Day of Atonement (16)

## A Smooth and Cohesive Literary Structure to the Pentateuch (page 3)

### IV. Holiness Code (17-27)

#### A. The Laws (17:1-24:23)

1. Handling blood (17)
2. Incest laws (18)
3. Miscellaneous laws (19-20)
4. Laws concerning priests and sacrifices (21-22)
5. Sabbath and festivals (24:1-9)
6. Tabernacle law (24:1-9)
7. The story of the punishment of a blasphemer (24:10-23)
8. The Jubilee (25)

#### B. Blessings and Curses (26)

1. Blessings for obedience (26:1-13)
2. Curses for disobedience (26:14-46)

#### C. Gifts to the Lord (27)

Numbers is a story of sin and judgment; the death and replacement of a disbelieving generation with the hope of a new generation at the threshold of the Promised Land. Numbers reveals that despite the efforts of man, God is still with His people and fulfills His promises.

**Numbers** is seamlessly continuous with Leviticus, and this too is subtly missed in modern translations of the Bible. In the literal translation of Numbers 1:1, the verse begins with, "And the LORD spoke..." Numbers, like Exodus and Leviticus, begins with the conjugation "and" connecting it with the content preceding it. Leviticus ends with God reviewing the blessings of obedience and the penalties of disobedience on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant and how to deal with the promises that Israelites make to God in response. Numbers resumes the story at the beginning of the 40 year wander in the wilderness.

#### **Numbers 1:1**

1) Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying,

#### **Leviticus 26:1-46**

#### **Leviticus 27:1-34**

Numbers' literary structure can be seen in three ways: chronologically, geographically, and topically. While scholars debate the merits of each perspective, each has provided a better understanding of the time, setting, and theological significance of the book: the death of the old and rise of the new.

Deuteronomy contains a second version of the Mosaic Covenant that was previously revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Now, while the Israelites await on the plains of Moab, they are reminded that they are a nation elected and set apart by God, and unified and defined by their covenant renewal with God. Deuteronomy defines the ideal nation of Israel: one people with one God on one land with one sanctuary and one law.

## A Smooth and Cohesive Literary Structure to the Pentateuch (page 4)

**Deuteronomy** is seamlessly continuous with Numbers, because the second generation of Israelites is gathered on the plains of Moab and preparing for the start of the Conquest. The Pentateuch ends with Deuteronomy and the death of Moses.

### **Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

Deuteronomy's literary structure, traditionally viewed as three speeches by Moses, is marked by the description of Israel's location preceding his sermons (Deuteronomy 1:5; 4:44-49; 29:1).

**Deuteronomy 1:5** - Moses reviews Israel's past up to their present moment at the doorstep of the Promised Land.

**Deuteronomy 4:44-49** - Moses speaks towards the future focused on Israel's covenantal relationship.

**Deuteronomy 29:1** - Moses exhorts and leads Israel's renewal of their commitment to the covenant.

Another literary structure seen in Deuteronomy is the strong resemblance to a combined form of a second millennium suzerain-vassal treaty with the structure of ancient Near Eastern law codes.

Writing the Pentateuch as a single continuous literary unit provides Moses with the knowledge and familiarity of the patriarchs and their distant history.

Moses knew about God's week of Creation (Exodus 20:11)

Moses reminds God of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 32:13)

Genesis 15:5-7 - The Covenant with Abraham

Genesis 26:2-5 - The Covenant with Isaac

Genesis 35:9-13 - The Covenant with Jacob

Moses knew that 70 people went to Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:22)

Genesis 46:26-27

Moses knew that the Israelites were originally from Mesopotamia.

Genesis 25:20

Moses knew the exact words of Jacob's blessing on Joseph (Deuteronomy 33:16)

Genesis 49:26

The literary unity of the Pentateuch is recognized by both constructive and destructive critics. This unity implies a single author; however, destructive critics refuse to acknowledge Moses and instead have chosen to speculate with hypothetical editor(s) to account for this unity.

### References:

1. Dillard RB, Longman III T, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (1994).