

1 Oct. 28: Genesis 6-25:18; Richard Friedman, "Torah
2 and Covenant," *OSB*, pp. * 154-163; David L.
3 Petersen, "The Social World of the Old
4 Testament," *OSB*, pp. *68-78.

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6 **Abra(ha)mRite of passage:**

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8 >I am always intrigued by the stark differences between the Old and New Testament. In regards
9 to liberation, I think an interesting angle arises when you look at Abraham as a free slave. Had
10 he not been favored by God Abraham would have just been another man in a village trying to
11 survive, but he was freed from his fate by God. He walked with God and was faithful and
12 accomplished great things. Instead of just being another villager his descendants are more
13 numerous than the stars in the sky. He is famous for his life with God. Like all liberation stories
14 Abraham's follows the usual path. He is in one stage of life, and breaks free to another, more
15 enlightened stage. He undergoes many challenges (his wife, Isaac, etc) and experiences a Rite of
16 Passage (circumcision), and he also changes his name (Abram-Abraham). Like other slaves faith
17 was a big factor for abraham, although a slightly bigger part of his liberation. This view of
18 Abraham and the Old Testament sparks a lot of thought.

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20
21 **Abraham's mistakes / trust/ baptism:**

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23 >First of all, I just want to say how strange it is to read the Bible for the 50th time and try to find
24 something new. However, I enjoy going beyond the usual Sunday school answers to questions.
25 :)

26 ¶Comments from a Liberationist:

27 The two nations and religions that descended from Isaac and Ishmael are interesting to note—I
28 cannot help but think that the conflicts between them are a result of or a punishment for
29 Abraham's mistake in having the child with Hagar. I don't think this was planned or meant to
30 be (we differentiated in class between foresight/God's omniscience and predestination). Free
31 will can really screw things up for humans sometimes, but I think no one would rather be the
32 robot or puppet of a god. Free will is essentially freedom, and we place too much importance on
33 it in modern society to not appreciate how a god wouldn't desire freely given devotion and love
34 over universal control.

35
36 ¶I see a definite relationship between baptism and circumcision: in the Catholic Church, infants
37 are baptized as a sign that they belong to the church and are God's children, and are presented
38 by their parents; later the First Communion and Confirmation show a continuation of this wish,
39 now as a decision (presumably) of the child. If one converts from another religion as an adult,

40 one is then baptized and thus entered into the church. Thus baptism is a replacement for
41 circumcision in the new covenant—one that, interestingly, includes women as well. Also,
42 another thing I will say about this change is, if I were a guy, I'd thank God: pun intended.

43
44 ¶Abraham definitely has a lot to learn about trusting the Lord—again and again he fails to trust
45 and instead takes things into his own hands (having Ishmael with Hagar instead of waiting,
46 lying to the Pharaoh about being Sarah's husband). His willingness to kill his own son shows
47 his progression into greater trust. In this testing, Abraham proves his faith, and God rewards
48 him for it. I cannot imagine what Abraham was thinking in these moments, but I am more
49 interested in what he possibly could have said to Isaac in this moment. What possible
50 explanation could he give? I imagine it was a great example for Isaac, even considering the fact
51 that he was probably frightened to death. The comparison of the father sacrificing his son does
52 not go only as far as God sending Christ to die for us—the ram replaces Isaac as a sacrifice, as
53 Christ replaces all of humanity as a sacrifice. The father and son comparison still holds here
54 because believers are called God's children--humans are supposed to die but instead the ram is
55 killed. (Also, Jesus is called the lamb, but that goes into the whole Passover deal so it might not
56 be directly connected to the ram...hey, they're both animals!)

57
58 **Covenants:**

59 >These chapters of the Bible presented the first two covenants:

60 - Noah: God promised that he would never again wipe out the earth with floods. The
61 symbol for this was the rainbow.

62 - Abraham: God promised him many descendants and rule over many lands. The symbol
63 of this covenant was the circumcision of all males in Abraham's household.

64 The comparison of these two covenants was interesting because in the covenant with Noah, He
65 promised to keep his word no matter how out of hand the people get. In the case of Abraham,
66 Abraham has to uphold his end of the 'bargain' by circumcising himself and all other males in
67 the household. Also, Abraham's faith is tested a few times.

68 ¶The idea of the household is brought up in the article of David L. Peterson. Household and
69 lineage are very important in the Bible. For example, Abraham led his household to Canaan.
70 When searching for a wife for his son, Isaac, Abraham requires it be someone from his 'father's
71 house'. Abraham wants to uphold his lineage and make sure that his descendants will be as
72 great as God promised. Another example of the importance of lineage and continuing it is the
73 case with the two virgin girls and their father in a cave. The elder sister said that there was no
74 other man around for them to conceive and, thus, continue the lineage. Her solution was to get
75 their father drunk and each of them 'lay' with him. I think of this as pure incest, but the idea
76 was that they must continue the family however they can.

77 ¶The article on the Torah analyzed the three covenants of the Torah. This includes the two
78 aforementioned and the covenant given on Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. Richard
79 Freidman analyzed the covenants as if they were treaties. I do not know if it was his style of
80 analyzing, but I did not find this article interesting. Reading it felt more like a duty than a

81 pleasure. It was as if I went into studying law, which can be seen in the Bible, but I'm not
82 interested in it.

83

84 >The Floor and the Tower of Babel: I found this particular portion of the reading to be
85 intriguing. Noah is chosen because he has won favor with the Lord, which can be understood.
86 However, I really cannot imagine how awful the world must have been in order for the Creator
87 to become a destroyer. Furthermore, the idea of the ark as a symbol of order and renewal
88 struck me deeply. The excerpt within the notes allowed me further understand this symbol.

89 ¶"How does the Lord's covenant with Noah reconstitute the status of mankind since the fall of
90 Adam?" I'm not completely positive on my personal opinion on the question, but I found it to
91 be of interest considering the new laws about eating blood and bloodshed.

92

93 **Sarai-Abram-Hagar:**

94

95 > I am most interested in the relationship between Sarai, Abraham, and Hagar. It is a
96 relationship between a master, mistress, and slave, obviously. Sarai tells Hagar to bear
97 Abraham a child and then disinherits him. Why would she force Abraham to disinherit his
98 own child? It seems a selfish act. It draws an interesting parallel to Jacob and Esau later in the
99 Bible. Rebekah plays favorites within her own children and helps Jacob disinherit Esau.
100 Again I ask what is the purpose of this? The relationship with Sarai, Abraham and Hagar also
101 draws interesting parallels to slavery in America and the relationships between slave owners,
102 their wives, and the slaves who they slept with.

103

104 **Abraham's mistakes:**

105

106 >In this section of the bible god says that man will live for 120 years, however, multiple people
107 are actually older. In the arc, Noah is 600 at east, and his children are older as well. another thing
108 I noticed is in the story of Abraham how he is forced to give up his kid. by his slave girl, and he
109 abandons them to die in the desert. This doesn't seem to me to be righteous at all. he wanted a
110 son so he tried but his wife was jealous. This seems to also be against what would be good and
111 what God would want. God testing Abraham's faith with his son Isaac seems a little strange. I
112 can understand that he wanted to test him, but why go for such a task, t ask for murder which is
113 against gods commandments, seems very odd and contrary to his own beliefs.

114

115 **The Lord's mistakes:**

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117 > There seems to be an interesting power struggle between god and his creations. He creates
118 man in his image, but when man starts mating with the gods and their offspring gain powers,
119 God has a problem and so floods the earth, eliminating all the animals for what reason I do not
120 understand. Then once they show their skill and cooperation in building the great tower of
121 Babel that can reach the heavens, and do what, pose a threat to go, he decides to have them
122 speak different languages and scatter them all over the place.

123

124 **The Lord's mistakes / "natural selection" / uncleanness**

125

126 Several things in this reading were very interesting to me.

127 1) I think that it's strange how God has to erase his past, through the flood, and start anew. In
128 doing this, he is blatantly admitting that he made a mistake when creating man; the majority of
129 them were wicked beings. This almost makes it seem as if he lost control somewhere along the
130 way, yet he is an all-powerful, all-controlling God. This nearly proves the existence of free will,
131 as humans followed their own paths rather than the one of God.

132 2) I really enjoyed how Genesis explains the differentiation of humans. Though science and
133 religion do not often correlate, a common factor is prevalent in both: "natural selection". While
134 with Darwin, genetics and ability to survive make an organism favorable for evolution, here,
135 God chooses those who will pass their children on. The select few he chooses will bear many
136 children, allowing their name to live on.

137 3) The passage on page 161 also struck me. It describes the process of death, and how people
138 must wash away the death, the uncleanness, from their hands. This reminded me a lot of the
139 White Tiger, where Balram continually washes his hands to rid himself of his master, yet he
140 never feels completely clean. In the Bible, if this uncleanness persists, the person must get cut
141 off from the assembly, leaving them helpless; similarly, if Balram had not rid himself of
142 Mr.Ashok, he would not have been a free man.

143

144 **Misc.:**

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146 > -Story of Noah's Ark

147 -What allows animals to be considered clean?

148 -Ages seem ridiculous

149 -How did they determine which animals to save, did all the other animals deserve to die?

150 -God gives all power to mankind as long as there is no killing and no eating flesh with blood
151 still in it

152 -Rainbow is a symbol of the everlasting covenant

153 -Why does Noah curse Canaan?

154 -Land of Shinar tried to reach heaven, God sees this as people being unstoppable so he confuses
155 their language (Babel, babble)

156 -God makes covenant with Abraham (circumcision, Sarai-Sarah, Isaac)

157 -Sarai gives Abraham Hagar, but then regrets it

158 -Lot offers virgin daughters but not guests?

159 -God tests Abraham's loyalty by asking him to offer him his only son

160 -Isaac and Rebecca (twins Esau and Jacob)

161 -Jacob obtains birth rights from Esau

162 -"Let my people go"

163 -The Lord establishes his name

164 -Moses leads men to Edom (Korah and people against Moses are made an end of in a single
165 moment.

166
167 > I just want to respond to the readings about how I feel. It always seems to be a point of
168 interest to me when it comes to the topic of where somebody comes from. However, for some
169 reason Genesis seems to be my least favorite book in the Bible, perhaps because it is only a
170 genealogy. There are so many great and captivating stories in the Bible and these chapters do
171 not seem to be the most enthralling. In response to the articles, I never thought about connecting
172 God's covenant to the way we make contracts and binding agreements today, that is an
173 interesting notion. It just emphasizes how we take practices from religion and apply it to
174 everyday life, similar to what we talked the length of the week coming from the creation story.
175

176 **The status of Biblical truth:**

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178 > A few things popped out at me while reading:
179 1. One page 27, I was surprised by Lot's suggestion to the men of Sodom that they take his two
180 virgin daughters (And boy, was he quick to do so!) While this issue seemed to clear up a bit
181 more after reading the article by David L. Petersen, it still flashes in my mind as a red flag: We
182 can talk about 'symbols' and 'interpretations' all day, but blatant biases are hard to argue.
183 2. I really liked the article by Richard Elliott Friedman. The parallels between the Sinai/Israelite
184 Covenant and the suzerain treaty became much more pronounced. The fact that the Bible bears
185 a similar structure to other documents written during its time period raises a lot of questions
186 concerning the Bible's legitimacy: If it was in fact "written by man but dictated by god", why
187 would god of chosen to use this format? Likewise, I think it's safe to assume that any documents
188 written during this time period were written only by members of a select educated (or political)
189 class. Therefore, is it safe to say that the bible must have been written by these 'political' men
190 also?
191 Now there's a scary thought.

192
193 > After reading the passage about the Tower of Babel, I remembered just how much I had loved
194 the story as a small child and just how remarkably different my understanding of it is now.
195 When I was young I saw this description and reasoning behind why the world didn't share a
196 language to be a factual statement. I saw it not as a story, but as a reality. As I have grown my
197 understanding of the Bible and its stories has grown and matured just as my faith has. I now
198 understand that this story was not meant to be taken literally, but instead to be remembered
199 and revered and respected as just as legend. It's a remarkable idea and is obviously the work of
200 a brilliant man oh so many years ago. Whereas I used to believe that the miracle of this story
201 was in the hands of God, I now see a miracle in the fact that this work has lasted so very long.
202 Literally, it's beautiful and I loved rereading it.

203 204 **Procreation:**

205

206 >It is interesting to see how much the story is focused on procreation.
207 I read it as a process through which Abraham's line becomes distinguished from
208 others(Canaanites, Philistines etc.)
209 Yet I'm hesitating to delve into the story deeper than now, because of hermeneutical diversity.
210 (How deeply should I delve into it?)
211

212 **Gifts:**

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214 >I found it interesting that Abraham accepted the gifts of livestock from the king of Egypt but
215 declined to accept anything from the king of Sodom. What does the giving of a gift imply? It is
216 mentioned in the chapter on 'Torah and Covenant' that the royal grant was a transaction in
217 which a suzerian gave a gift to some weaker party but in considering Abram and Melchizedek
218 it does not apply because Melchizedek does not seem like the weaker party. Could it be that
219 giving and receiving gifts means approval of both parties? Doesn't Abraham's servant give gifts
220 to the family of Rebecca and doesn't it mean that they have approved of his offer?
221

222 **Inconsistencies / Noah / Abraham and Isaac**

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225 >On 6.3, God commands (or proclaims) that man is to only live for one hundred and twenty
226 years. If this is the case then why does Noah live to see the flood at the age of six hundred years
227 old (7.5)? Why does this proclamation take so many generations to actualize? Did he merely put
228 this commandment (or proclamation) aside until after the world was repopulated? If that were
229 the case, then why not command (or proclaim) this after the flood, when it is applicable?
230 ¶Why is Noah so temperamental? After being found naked by his son's and cloaked, Noah
231 curses Canaan, his grandchild, to be the "most servile of slaves" but blesses Shem, his son, to
232 have Canaan as his slave (9.27). They merely clothe him, why is he so angry that they should
233 not want to see him naked? Could Noah be insecure about his appearance? It is possible that
234 Noah might feel like being clothed is as insulting as being called ugly, yet why should his
235 attractiveness matter to his sons? Also, why curse your grandchild if you are angry with your
236 own child, and why make one a slave to the other? Wasn't it Noah's son's who made him
237 angry? So why does he not then curse his sons, who are responsible for the offense and why
238 bless one of them if he is just as guilty as the other two?
239 ¶On 11.7, God exclaims, "come, let us go down there and confuse their language". Why the
240 "us"? Who could god possibly be speaking to, the angels? Who else might God be talking to?
241 ¶When Abraham goes up to the Shrine to sacrifice his son Isaac, Isaac asks "here are the fire and
242 the wood, but where is the sheep for a sacrifice" (22.7)? Abraham tells his son not to worry and
243 that god will provide the sacrifice, but it is strange that no dialogue between the two is
244 mentioned just before or even during Isaac's bondage. What makes the above mentioned
245 question so much more significant than any of the questions that Isaac must have asked his
246 father while being bound?