

~~next week: 420-424 thru Organization~~

next week

H of G

Chap. 2 & 3

Lecture #2

The Hebrew Bible

God's Call and the covenant with Israel

Biblical religion is grounded upon the experience of God's presence which transforms the lives of the individual and the group.

This encounter of people with a reality beyond themselves to which they are related and with which humans can communicate is the essence of biblical religion and constitutes the foundation of Judaism and Christianity.

The Bible tells the nature and course of Israel's relationship to its god YHWH and how he chose a group of tribes to receive his revelation and how they responded to him.

The Covenant tradition

YHWH revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush when he told Moses that he must free the people from the Egyptians.

The name revealed was eh'yeh asher eh'yeh, which has been translated "I am who I am" meaning he is the being who will be eternally present to his people.

The decision to enter into the covenantal relationship was the great decision of Israelite history, resulting in the emergence of a special religious consciousness. For the Jew, the Exodus from Egypt became the central event in

§

religious history.

The covenant is the central conception of the Bible. it formed the framework in which Israel understood its social constitution and historical meaning. At Sinai the clear will of YHWH had been revealed and the people had accepted it.

The Bible presents the nation as founded in a religious event, and its rule as always to be religious law.

the loose tribes were transformed into a people united by shared loyalty to YHWH and the this covenant ordered the political and social realms as well as religious.

Law became absolutely central in the religious life of Israel.

YHWH was the author of a code which governed the entire range of human life. His majesty and holiness were embodied in the Law which he had issued.

Therefore it was incumbent upon every Israelite to hear the commandments, to learn them and to perform them. as Deut 6:4-7 says:

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lrd; and you shall love the Lored your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children. .

Because YHWH loved Israel he had chosen Israel to be special and to serve his special mission in the world.

Israel must return his love in every generation by acting to fulfill the sacred obligations of the covenant. This is the clear imperative which issued from the covenant

relationship.

Every person of the nation was able to understand and participate in the covenant and thereby share in realizing the divine life.

The conception of a God who acted in history and who participated in an ongoing historical relationship with a community of people broke with the prevailing notions of deity, of nature, and of man in the ancient near east.

the ancient near east viewed the world of nature as being alive with divine forces which were of the same substance and which experienced the same needs as people themselves.

the gods as well as humans were born out of a primeval matter, subject to natural processes and were ultimately subordinate to the laws of nature or fate.

it was because the gods and humans were of the same substance and subject to the same laws that humans could manipulate the gods thru magic and could actually become a god or semigod.

In contrast to the mythological deity, YHWH was conceived by Israel as the absolutely transcendent Lord of the universe whose being was beyond nature and completely other than man. He was totally independent of natural processes and could not be controlled by magic.

The notion was that if Israel fulfilled its side of the covenantal relationship, the progress of history towards its ultimate goal would be advanced. If Israel failed to uphold

the covenant stipulations, the divine plan would be frustrated and God's instrument subject to chastisement and punishment.

Biblical history is the record of successive fulfillments and defections, of faithfulness and waywardness, of social peace and social disorder.

This idea of YHWH being the only transcendent Lord did not spring full-blown to Israel. It took many centuries to develop.

Up until the time of Jeremiah and Ezekial (circe 620-587 B.C.E.) the Israelites were basically monolatrist this meant that YHWH was seen as the god to whom the Israelites owed alligience and yet they recognized that other gods existed and made claims on other people.

for example, in Judges the judge Jephthah professed to follow YHWH but told the Moabites to possess the land which Chemosh their god gave them.

At the time of Moses it was believed that YHWH had chosen Israel but he proved he was stronger than other gods by beating them thru the Israelite army.

The land was an important part of the covenant because one's god needed a place to dwell.

Thus Cyrus the Persian sent the Jews home in 538 B.C.E. because he believed that their god had been away from his land long enough.

by this time, the Jews had come to understand God as one and over all.

Ezekial's vision of the Merkavah the chariot throne, showed that God was not tied to Jerusalem as the throne lifted from the temple in Jerusalem and flew to Babylon. This was a big step in understanding the nature of God.

kings and prophets

under Joshua the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan around 1200 B. they renewed the covenant at Shechem (Josh. 24:22-24) and formed a confederacy based upon the covenant agreement.

there were those that had never left Canaan when Jacob's tribes went to Egypt who renewed the covenant with the conquerors.

the judges of the O. T. were believed to be graced with the spirit of YHWH and in a holy war carried the tribes to victory.

the ideal form of Israelite communal life was most closely realized during this period of the judges. The tribes were linked with common faith and worship and believed themselves to be protected by YHWH's spirit.

however, tension between the ideal and the real were ever present, and resistance to God's commands were constant.

Monarchy

the strain between the divine and human order became most intense when the question of monarchy arose, for the institution of monarchy meant that a permanent human ruler

was placed over the people of God and secular interests were asserted over the moral and religious ideals of the Yahwist order.

the institution of the monarchy threatened the foundations of covenant society as it says in I Sam 8:7:

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Harken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Saul was first annointed as king in about 1020 B. He was a tribal leader not followed by all.

David was made king in 1000 B. and from then on considered the prototype of all great kings. He brought the Israelites to the largest empire they have ever known.

The second type of covenant found in the Heb. Scrip. is with David. This is found in II Sam. 7 and Psalm 89 as well as with Abraham in Gen. 12. The concept here is not a covenant of law but of grace. YHWH swears his alligiance to David (and Abraham) regardless of what they have done only their allegiance.

This understanding of the covenant is found in many of the prophets and also in the New Test thru Jesus and Paul.

although kingship was integrated into the covenant the basic tension between the divine and human rule was never overcome.

the history of Israel under the kings was plagued by

15

continual crisis both internally and externally..

Political maneuvering in the international arena brought military defeat and finally downfall to Northern Israel in 722 and to Judah in 586..

the prophets

The prophets were YHWH's representatives sent to try to call the people back to the covenant..

they battled against syncretism with foreign religions, economic oppression, social injustice, and international political involvement..

the prophets called for inner change, for a revival of the covenant, and a regeneration of religious life..

Elijah is a semi-legendary prophet of the 9th cent. b. and he is the prototype of the prophet. Most of the first book of Kings is involved with him waging war to win back the allegiance of Israel to YHWH

However, Israel persisted in its defection, the decline in religious life was unabated, despite the mighty effort of the prophets to return Israel to itself and thus save the nation from disaster..

Amos an 8th cent. prophet, condemned this moral degeneration most thoroughly, finding Israel guilty of all manner of ethical behaviour..

The concept of Justice and the demand of YHWH for

adherence to ethical norms came from Amos.

Amos proclaimed that according to the religion of YHWH ethics was more significant than than cult and that moral behavior would determine the national fate of Israel.

this same proclamation was echoed by the later prophets such as the first Isaiah and Hosea.

to Isaiah the worst of Israel's sins was pride, the self-assertion and self-confidence of man which inevitably led to rebellion against God.

he proclaimed that history was controlled by YHWH and that human force did no determine its order. Trust in self was idolatry, a sin which Israel committed constantly. and punishment would come.

According to the prophets, knowledge of God and knowledge of the covenant were absolutely essential if Israel were to realize its true national distiny, and yet it was just this knowledge which had been lost.

The great 8th cent northern prophet, Hosea believed and preached that Life without God had led to life without righteousness, life without truth, and life without mercy.

to Hosea, loss of self implied lossss of the relationship with YHWH and it was this sin of which Israel was guilty.

The Northern Kingdom of Hebrew tribes (10 of them) was

finally defeated by Assyria in 722 B.

the land was ruined, towns destroyed, and the population exiled.

throughout that cent and the next Judah was threatened in the eyes of the prophets the wrath of YHWH had been brought to the people and only genuine repentance could avoid the same fate.

the safety and prosperity of Israel depended upon the protection of YHWH alone, and this was granted only when the moral conditions of the covenant had been fulfilled.

prophets speaking at the height of the national danger called Judah to repent to avoid catastrophe saying it was not YHWH who had failed but the people.

as the moral crises deepened the prophets began looking at the future rather than the present.

belief was that YHWH's plan for history was not permanently overthrown nor his promises void.

the prophets perceived meaning in this condition and projected new hopes for a renewed covenant people.

Jeremiah was the solitary defender of the covenant from 617-586.

in 622 a scroll was found in the temple and brought to the king, Josiah. He called for the Passover feast to be celebrated, which it had not been in many years.

However, Jeremiah could see that the people were not changing within so he warned the king and the people of the

doom to come promising hope for the righteous few who would survive the holocaust.

Of all the prophets, the fate of Jeremiah was the most tragic. He prayed for the people, tried to turn them from ;destruction and was ignored. He was treated badly and in Jer chap 15 he begins to curse the day he was born for he is miserable.

Jeremiah predicted defeat upon the erring nation, but not complete doom. There would also be salvation

The hope of salvation was tied to the entire prophetic theodicy, which had to do with the vindication of the divine attributes , particulary holiness and justice, in regard to the existence of physical and moral evil. It attempted to make sense of the religious crisis and give meaning to the severe difficulties which the covenant people was to undergo.

The Exile

In 597 Judah participated in a rebellion of minor powers against Babylonia which was crushed in 598 B.

Jehoiachin, the newly crowned king, along with government officials, important citizens and priests were exiled to Babylonia.

Zedekiah became king of Judah. he didn't learn from the recent rebellion and began plotting another rebellion.

Jeremiah warned him but the king could not deter the patriotic drive for political independence.

in 589 rebellion broke out and in July, 587 Jerusalem fell and was razed to the ground.

Jeremiah had a vision of the new covenant which would herald salvation for Israel:

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer.31:31-34)

Man had been unable to change himself, so that God had had to transform him inwardly.

Ezekiel prophesied from Babylon trying to give comfort to the exiles.

He had tremendous zeal and called on the captives to repent.

first, he taught that God's actions were just, for the sins of Israel had merited the wrath he visited upon them.

By justifying God's ways it enabled the exiles to recover the inner strength required for the reconstruction of a community dedicated to YHWH's service on foreign soil.

from this time on, in fact, the main thought in Judaism came from Babylon, not Jerusalem.

second Isaiah, which begins with chapter 40, are close in style and spirit to the original Isaiah.

He taught that YHWH had a plan for universal redemption, and it involved the special participation of his chosen people. Israel must spread the message of redemption and must demonstrate God's saving power to the nations.

This task would be difficult, entailing suffering and humiliation.

The suffering servant passages in Isaiah 42-53 are addressed by YHWH to an idealized figure, commissioned to perform the labor.

no one would listen to him or notice him but in the future all would listen to him.

Deutero-Isaiah's image of the servant became the model for Israel, which interpreted its suffering of the present as having redemptive value.

Israel must become the servant bearing witness to YHWH.

a great messianic hope arose at this time looking toward the

time when all nations acknowledged YHWH as sovereign king and God.

universal peace would reign, the cosmos would be transformed, Rightousness and peace would prevail among all creatures.

the prophet conceived YHWH's plan to be the progressive revelation of himself to the nations thru the special mission of Israel toward the end goal of universal knowledge and universal peace.

The destroyed national institutions of Jewish life were replaced in Babylonia by two key religious institutions , around which community life was ordered. These were the synagogue and the Torah.

without the temple, they now had to substitute for the official cult.

prayer in sanctuaries consecrated by the people, fasts, and the Sabbath celebration formed the core of the new worship.

The religious and national unity of Israel had been gravely challenged by the destruction and exile, and the challenge was met by the resolution to remain loyal to YHWH and the religious values of the covenant tradition.

The traditions telling of YHWH's acts and his relationship to Israel were gradually gathered together in Babylonia by the Priests. These men edited the various traditions inserting their own and compiled a history of the

world from creation, preserved in ordered form the words of the prophets and formulated a priestly code of ritual laws grounded upon earlier cultic prescriptions.

Acquiring knowledge of the past and fulfilling God's commandments became the most sacred activity in the religious life of the Jew.

Israel interpreted their duty to remain holy as a duty to remain separate and distinctive.

This meant to remain holy and distinctive in conditions of exile that legal prohibitions were imposed such as those against mixed marriage and dietary laws.

the calendar of special religious observances separated Jews from non-Jews and symbolized the determined separate existence of Israel.

When Cyrus the Great won victory over Babylonia he appeared as a messianic figure to many Jews who saw Isaiah's prophecy coming true.

In 538 B. Cyrus issued an edict telling the Jews they could return home to Israel. It is certain that the initial response of the exiles was weak and in fact, few actually went back.

Psalms 23 comes from this period trying to encourage the exiles to go home.

reestablishment was difficult tho the temple was rebuilt in 515 B. after a 20 year struggle to obtain funds and labor.

Nehemiah was appointed by the Persian court and arrived in Palestine between 444 and 440 and proceeded to set up a strong and honest government. He fortified the walls around Jerusalem and provided the residents with security from external threat

Ezra the scribe came from a priestly family. He brought with him to Palestine the code of the law of Moses, consisting either of the entire Pentateuch or large parts of it compiled by the priests in Babylonia. He proclaimed this code as the law of the land in the name of the King of Persia.

He was very strict and the books of Ruth and Jonah were written at this time protesting the exclusiveness of the new attitude.

during this time the Five books of the Law were finally canonized. This "Torah" was disseminated among the people.

The Jew, no matter where he lived, was to be defined as one loyal to the Law of YHWH, one devoted to the ancient

Intertestamental period

Persian Period

Local control and good government.

Religion was left alone and the Jews that stayed in Babylon prospered.

Egypt, Judea-- cultural and priestly class became more developed & the greatest thought in Judaism remained in Babylon from then on.

Don't use unless time

DOCUMENTARY THEORY

There are several writers within the Hebrew scriptures each with a different viewpoint. I need to discuss the four major ones briefly here.

When reading the Hebrew scriptures, one has to keep in mind that the relationship between actual history and what is in the Bible is edited by these writers over a period of about 500 plus years for their own theological purposes.

To understand these views one must keep in mind that there are three authority figures in the Hebrew scriptures and each was given priority depending on which writer one is reading.

these three are the PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING.

the JAHWIST or J writer was the earliest of these. this person wrote around 900 BCE and was probably in the court of Solomon and perhaps David. probably a court scribe and possibly female.

This writer sees history moving from chaos (the creation) to order. Adam > Noah > Moses > David.

YHWH's name was known from the very beginning of creation.

This writer is concerned with the question of authority and it is the kings authority that is paramount.

The creation account beginning in Gen 2:4b is J's version.

J's version of the covenant with Abraham is found in Gen. 15. there is the promise of land (their God needs a place to live). occasional ritual but its not real important.

Creation is seen as being for the sake of men and women, thus the man is created first in J's account.

Gen. 2:5-4:1 human life is bondage. men are involved in hard labor and women in painful labor.

J says our problems are because of a falling away from the law of God (rebellion in eating the forbidden fruit)

Men and women are in competition but the REAL problem is internal waywardness of human life.

humans dislike being under a law and the world is filled with temptation. So humans are cured by being sent out into the world of human bondage.

cain and able is a story to show that humans can't handle their internal problems.

ROYAL THEOLOGY - Kings are absolutely necessary to control people. David and his sons are priests. David is a warrior, lawgiver, law executer, priest, prophet as well as king.

it is J that has a special covenant with David and his family the covenant of grace.

David (I kings 2:1-12) tells Solomon to be the most ruthless king he wants because of this covenant.

in I kings 3:4-15 God speaks wisdom thru the king.

ELOIST WRITER. called E, was written after the kingdom divided at Solomon's death between 900 and 750 BC.

this represents the northern 10 tribes that went with reaboam, and is the PROPHETIC view of history.

it sees history in terms of the development of prophecy
Abraham > Moses > Joshua > Samuel > David > the prophets.

It represents the so called "Joseph Tribes" Ephraim and

Mannasa who used the word "Elohim" for God, hence "E".

God does not give the name YHWH until the burning bush incident. For E the name given means new activity for God, that he will be always with the people.

Moses is seen as a prophetic leader.

By around 700 BC J and E are thoroughly mixed so J does not have an independent view of Moses.

Promise in E is land and national greatness (remember, God must have land yet to dwell on.)

PROPHETIC VIEW OF KINGS

kings are annointed by prophets and must obey the prophet. Gideon is chosen by God (Jud 6:1-24, 7:9-25); Samuel annoints the king Saul (I Sam 2:27-36)

and in I Sam 8:1-22 Samuel gives an anti-kingship speech looking back on all the worst of Solomon's reign.

David shows prophetic virtues and in II Sam 12, Nathan the prophet makes it clear that the king must submit to the prophet.

DEUTERONOMIC WRITERS between the fall of the north in 722 and the "finding" of a scroll in the temple in 622, the Deuteronomic writer is at work. (II Kin 22:8ff)

D sees Josiah as the favorite king because of the reforms he tries to bring. He does not approve of David so goes to Josiah

books whose final editor was D are Deuteronomy, Judges, I and II Samuel and I/II Kings.

D used J and E's writings and put them together to make a history of Israel beginning with Moses, who is seen as a king-

prototype of leadership. the D writer accepts only the royal prophets and priests with the king who are equal in power. This is called the Josianic compromise. All others are illegitimate.

The Ark of the covenant is obsolete for D and had probably disappeared by this time.

WAR THEME runs thru all deuteronomic history. All leaders are war leaders. For the king, it expands the territory. for the prophet, it verifies his/her word. For the Priest it shows God is on their side.

PASSOVER is the central mythological symbol for all these strands because of the exodus and the national beginning. Deuteronomy is written to emphasize that all individuals are to follow the law.

PRIESTLY WRITER P was the final editor of the books as we know them (all except what D edited) and was done in Babylon between 538 BC and about 400 BC when Ezra brought them to Palestine.

Thus Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Num, Joshua, I/II Chron, Ezra and Nehemiah.

P is concerned with law, traditions, and ritual and especially priestly authority.

P sees history moving from parochial to universal faith.

it is with P that henotheism gives way to monotheism

history moves from creation >noah >Abraham >Moses >solomon >Hezekiah >Ezra.

the covenant with Abraham is Gen 17 and includes the ritual of circumcision for the first time.

Moses (and more especially Aaron) are seen as priests.

Exodus 6 God gives name of YHWH and is a covenant seal.
Before this P calls God El Shaddai or the great one.

God's nature is a covenant keeper who is creating a new type of nation. Land important because of the covenant.

In Ex 19 Moses is a priest giving the 10 commandments
the idea here is that the priest protects the people from the destructive elements of the divine and only the priest can approach God. There are ritual barriers between the holy and profane and the death penalty to anyone who usurps priestly power.

The difference between the priest and the prophet is that any Israelite could be called as a prophet but a priest must come from the tribe of Levi.

the priest sets up an unchanging order while the prophet can be innovative and bring change.

P's creation account has 6 days that God created and on the 7th he rested. This was to show that the sabbath was an event on the Lord's calendar, not man's. This is the reason for the 7 days of creation and should not be taken literally

P is concerned with genealogy and emphasizes every 10th generation. Adam > Noah > Abraham > Moses. etc. Why? because God must make a new covenant with humans every 10th generation since there is a progressive decline from the potency of the creative act. Then God must give another push. This has been called the "Theology of the Push."

P agrees with E that God's law is the law not the king's law. God is king.