

1.4. Leviticus 20:26

You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own

1.5. Later, we must consider *in detail* holiness in Leviticus 19:1, 2. Is holiness a matter of morality or just separation? See notes in talk #48

1.6. Consideration: If holiness is subservient (serves) to justice, then holiness is not a goal in itself, but a means to the goal of maintaining (not gaining) righteousness and justice.

2. Great

In what does the greatness of “great nation” consist? Whatever that greatness is, Gen 12:, 2, 3 assumes that its function is to be a *blessing* to the nations.

2.1. Numerical greatness

“Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous...” (Ex 1:6; cf 1:9, 20). This is also a clear “fulfillment” of or allusion to the command to be “fruitful and increase” of Genesis 1:28. That Israel as a *numerous* people is not something distinctive about Israel but part of God’s desire from creation onward. On Israel as numerous see also Gen 17:20; 46:3; Ex 31:10; Num 14:12; Deut 26:5.

2.2. Economic and political greatness

This kind of greatness does not come about until later in the story, i.e. the time of the monarchy; but we will have questions about *how* this economic and political greatness was achieved and in the Law we will discover that restrictive measures were placed on this kind of greatness (Deut 17:14-20) which we will take up under Law as the Constitution of Israel.

2.3. Military greatness

1. In Egypt: The Exodus event understood as “war” against oppressors via as *mighty acts of justice* (Ex 6:6; 7:4; 12:12).
2. On the way to Sinai: Fight against the Amalekites on the journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai where Moses on a hill raises his hand in prayer (Ex 17:10-12) and as a result Joshua wins the victory on the plane (Ex 17:13).
3. On the way to Moab/Canaan: Display of God’s military might (not exactly Israel’s!) in the defeat of Shion king of the Amorites (Num 21:21-31) and Og the king Bashan (Num 21:33-35) on the way to Canaan.
3. Inside Canaan: Defeat of the Canaanites (Joshua 6-12),
4. Later we will consider the hamstring of horses and the destruction of chariots (Joshua 11:6, 9) and also the restrictions on military greatness (Deut 17:14-20)

We will consider later the military structure of Israel under the Law as the Constitution of Israel.

2.4. Blessing of the nations comes via Israel’s greatness in terms of justice and righteousness

We do not deny that God desired Israel to be great numerically and that they should prosper economically, although such “prosperity” is very carefully defined and controlled in the Law (see Deuteronomy/Leviticus). Besides the clear affirmation of numerical greatness and the understanding that Israel would have some sort of economic “prosperity” (see e.g. Deut 28:11; 30:9), there is a clear assertion that the greatness that would *bless* the nations was Israel’s justice and righteousness. Here we remind ourselves of three key texts which we have already considered in detail.

2.4.1. Genesis 12:2, 3

2.4.2. Genesis 18:18, 19

2.4.3. Deuteronomy 4:6-8

2.5. Beginning of the construction of the *task* of justice

3. Love

If we read the story *backwards* bringing to the text an “understanding” that love is paramount and displaces all else, we will be shocked when reading *from within the story* to discover that *statements* of God’s love for humanity are not clearly articulated until late in the story and that likewise the command to love God (and neighbor) also comes late in the story.

3.1. God’s love for Israel and humankind

3.1.1. God’s love expressed in actions

“Mercy” after the judgments of Genesis 3-11, sin-judgment-“mercy”. One can list other actions in the stories of the Pioneers that illustrate God’s concern, protection and love for them, e.g. the rescue of Sarah from Pharaoh, Lot from Sodom, etc.

3.1.2. God’s love for Israel expressed in *statements*

There are two key words used to express the concept of love: checed (H2617) and ‘ahab (H157). At times their meanings overlap. The usual transliteration of checed is *hesed*. It is often rendered as lovingkindness as well as love.

3.1.2.1. Gen 24:12 kindness (checed) of God shown to Abraham’s servant in procuring Rebekah as a wife for Isaac

3.1.2.2. Gen 39:21 kindness (checed) to Joseph in prison

3.1.2.3. Ex 15:13 kindness (checed) of God toward Israel

3.1.2.4. Ex 20:6; 34:6, 7; Deut 7:9, 10

Ex 20:6

But showing love (checed:H2617) to a thousand *generations*
of those who love (‘ahab:H157) me and keep my commandments.

Ex 34:6, 7a

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,

“The LORD, the LORD,

the compassionate (rachuwm:H7349) and gracious (channuwm:H2587) God,
slow to anger,

abounding in love (checed:H2617) and faithfulness, ⁷

maintaining love (checed:H2617) to thousands, and
forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. “

And most explicitly in Deuteronomy 7:9, 10, which also repeats and modifies the statement of God’s love in the third commandment:

But it was because the LORD loved (‘ahabah:H160) you and
kept the oath he swore to your forefathers
that he brought you out with a mighty hand and
redeemed you

from the land of slavery,

from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God;
he is the faithful God,

keeping his covenant of love (chece:H2617) to a thousand generations of those who love ('ahab:H157) him and keep his commands.

3.1.3. God' love for Israel motivates him to do mighty acts of distributive justice

Deut 7:9, 10: "It was because the LORD loved you ...that he brought you out with a mighty hand" which elsewhere is clearly stated to be a mighty act of justice (Ex 6:7; 7:4; 12:12). The wrath/anger of God motivates him to bring retributive justice against an oppressor (Ex 15:7; 22:24)

3.1.4. New elements in the Bringer of Justice model: agent, enablement, recipients and results

We step back for a moment to expand the *Bringer of Justice* model by adding several **new** features to that model.

Agent: At least for the present God is the "agent" who brings justice. Later we shall consider Moses and Israel as agents in bringing justice.

Enablement: God as "agent" is "enabled" (motivated) by mercy, kindness, love and wrath and anger to do justice (task).

Task of justice:

mighty acts of distributive justice and retributive justice
proclamation of standard of justice

Recipients: the Israelites enslaved as aliens in Egypt and now are refugees

Results:

Israel as a just society that is both
the *goal* of God's plan and
the *means* to the accomplishment of his promise that
Israel should be witness to the nations (goal).

We have discussed before that Israel, as the people of God, is *both* the *goal* of God ("I will make you a great nation") and the *means* to his ultimate goal of blessing all of the families of the earth. And if one wants to add at this point that this ultimate goal brings glory to God, I would not argue with that; but I am not sure it is stated in those terms at this stage of the story. A diagram is called for:

AGENT ENABLEMENT TASK OF JUSTICE			RECIPIENTS	RESULT
GOD	LOVE, KINDNESS, MERCY CONCERN (WRATH)	MIGHTY ACTS OF JUSTICE, EXODUS EVENT, RED SEA, ETC PROCLAMATION OF THE STANDARD OF JUSTICE IN THE LAW JUDGING ALL OF THE ABOVE DONE JUSTLY	----->ENSLAVED-----> ISRAEL, MARGINALS	JUST SOCIETY (GOAL & MEANS) -----> TO THE NATIONS (GOAL)

3.2. Israel's love for God

At this location in the story we have not yet had any mention of Israel loving God and certainly not any mention of Israel being *commanded* to love God.

3.2.1. Deut 6:5: first time Israel is commanded to love God

The first command to Israel to love the LORD comes in the *Shema*, Hear, O Israel (Deut 6:4, 5):
Hear (shama':H8085), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵

Love (ahab:H157) the LORD your God
 with all your heart and
 with all your soul and
 with all your strength.

3.2.2. Deut 10:12-11:1: love involves emotions and motivates justice

This command to love the LORD your God needs to be understood in light of its repetition and *expansion* in Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1 where love (ahab:H157) occurs five times:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but
 to fear the LORD your God,
 to walk in all his ways,
 to love (ahab:H157) him,
 to serve the LORD your God
 with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and
 to observe the LORD's commands and decrees
 that I am giving you today for your own good?¹⁴

To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens,
 the earth and everything in it.¹⁵
 Yet the LORD set his affection (chashaq:H2836) on your forefathers and
 loved (ahab:H157) them, and
 he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.¹⁶
 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and
 do not be stiff-necked any longer.¹⁷
 For the LORD your God is
 God of gods and Lord of lords,
 the great God, mighty and awesome,
 who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.¹⁸
 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and
 loves (ahab:H157) the alien, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ And
 you are to love (ahab:H157) those who are aliens,
 for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.²⁰

Fear the LORD your God and serve him.
 Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name.²¹
 He is your praise;
 he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders
 you saw with your own eyes.²²
 Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and
 now the LORD your God has made you as numerous
 as the stars in the sky. 11:1

Love (ahab:H157) the LORD your God and
 keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.

Observations:

1) The kind of love that Israel is to have toward God is the kind of love that God has toward Israel. God's love involves both *emotions* and *actions*. Therefore, Israel's love for God ought to involve both *emotions* and *actions*. Actions alone are not sufficient. Actions must involve emotions, i. e. feelings. God set his *affections* on the forefathers. Loving the LORD "with heart, soul and strength" involves emotions.

2) Israel is to be *like God* in loving the alien which in the context must surely involve both emotions and actions, i. e. giving them food. God appeals to Israel's *feelings*--"for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt"-- in order to stir them up to love the alien. They know what it *feels* like to be an alien (cf Ex 22:21; cf Lev 19:34). To love the alien with emotions and actions is to act like God, i.e. to be godly. We need to recognize that different

cultures express emotions differently as do different individuals within the same culture. Some may weep aloud: some may weep inwardly. The important issue is that we must all weep (i.e. be moved with emotions) in the face of human tragedy and suffering often caused by injustice, e. g. the massive refugee issues of our times, sexual trafficking, oppression of minorities, killing of the unborn, ethnic cleansing, racial and gender discrimination, etc.

3) The God who loves is a God who 1) *does justice in the courts* (“who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes) especially on behalf of the marginals, the widow and orphan/fatherless and whose justice is linked to loving the alien which results in action, giving them food and 2) *does justice in mighty acts* of deliverance from Egypt (“who performed for you those great and awesome wonders”). The inclusion of these two major facets of justice, i.e. forensic and distributive/retributive, *in this context of love* signals that it is God’s love that motivates him to do justice. (see Bringer of Justice model above).

4) Finally, Israel’s *emotional* love for God results in their “keep(ing) his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always”, i.e. his standard of justice. Love does not *replace* the law; love *enables* Israel to keep the Law.

4. Just

As we have asserted above but now try to demonstrate, justice is prominent in the narrative and the Law to this point in the story with holiness and love coming much later into the story and being subservient to justice. Again, by subservience we certainly do not mean they are of less value or worth, but only that *functionally* they *serve* to protect (holy) and motivate (love) justice.

The relations of love to justice and of mercy to justice are huge issues not only in biblical theology but also in modern jurisprudence. We are not yet in a position to adequately address the mercy-justice tension.

The prominence of justice in the narrative to this point is seen in the following:

In Genesis 2:24 “naked” symbolized the open, right or just relation between Adam and Eve (and also God).

In Genesis 3-11 the narrator carefully selects and arranges the elements of sin-judgment-mercy, repeated three times, and places these to the fore.

In Genesis 12:2, 3 God selects Abraham and *promises* to make of him a “great nation” that will bless all of the families of the earth (Gen 12:2,3).

In Genesis 15:6 Abraham believes this *promise*, and God responds to that faith by saying that Abraham has done the right thing by believing and in this sense he is justified (vindicated, shown to be *righteous*) by his faith in God’s promise.

In Genesis 16:5 Sarah in dispute with Abraham about Hagar and Ishmael cries out “May the LORD *judge* between you and me.”

In Genesis 17:1 when God again repeats and amplifies the *promise*, he requires Abraham to be “*blameless*” (Gen 17:1; cf Noah 6:9; 7:1).

In Genesis 18:19 which is also a reference to the promise, God commands Abraham to “direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is *right* and *just*...”

We pause to underscore that these three critical references to justice (15:6; 17:1; 18:19) are *embedded* in the discussion of the *promise* of God to make Abraham a great nation and through him to bless all of the families of the earth. This promise/covenant is *the central organizing motif of the narrative* (Pentateuch) to this point. Justice is integral to the fulfilling of this promise.

In Genesis 18:25, Abraham asks “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” In context this question pertains to God’s justice in dealing with Sodom.

In Genesis 19:1-19 the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Genesis 20:4 the question of God’s justice is extended to include his dealing with Abimelech as indicated by Abimelech’s question, “Lord will you destroy an innocent (righteous) nation?”

In Genesis 26:5 the Abraham narrative concludes by declaring that Abraham “kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my law”. These terms, which occur in abundance later in the Law, speak of the standard of justice which righteous Abraham observed.

We conclude that justice/righteousness is

the climax of the creation account of a just (“naked”) society,
the recurrent motif of judgment upon sin (Gen 3-11) and
is at the heart of the narrative account of Abraham and Sarah in the creation of a
great nation.

5. Reflection of the title of Act III, “God constructed a great, holy and just nation”

If we have time, we might discuss how others deal with the periodization of this story and how those periods are labeled.

Next week we return to the Book of the Covenant and consider justice in the court system, Ex 23:1-8.

Slightly edited after talk