

# Historical Prologue to the Sinai Treaty (Genesis 1 – Exodus 19)

## A. Primary Function of the Unit

1. To provide a *historical introduction* to the Sinai Treaty by tracing the historical relations between Yahweh and Israel.
2. To engender *Israel's respect* for Yahweh by demonstrating *his greatness*: He is almighty, the creator of the universe, and the only true god.
3. To engender *Israel's gratitude* to Yahweh, by recounting his *benevolence, protection, and grace* that he has shown to Israel throughout her history, despite her weakness and unworthiness.
4. To teach Israel about *Yahweh's character*, particularly his *goodness, justice, kindness, and his love for the weak and the disadvantaged*.
5. To inspire Israel by recounting *Yahweh's choice of Israel* as his special people, with whom he has chosen to have a unique relationship, and through whom he will bless all other nations

## B. Main Themes & Theological Insights

1. ***Yahweh is almighty.*** He is the almighty creator of the universe, and he is all-powerful as he carries out his plans on this earth. No force can stop him, whether it be mighty human forces, forces of nature, or any magical or supposedly divine forces (such as the “gods” of other peoples). The narratives recount, for example, how Yahweh:
  - a. Created the universe
  - b. Caused the great great flood while also rescuing humanity from annihilation
  - c. Powerfully protected Israel's ancestors while in foreign countries
  - d. Overpowered the “magical powers” of the Egyptians; the great plagues
  - e. Miraculously provided water and food for Israel in the Sinai desert
2. ***Yahweh is just and good.*** Unlike the immoral, deceitful, and fickle pagan “gods,” Yahweh is a being of utmost integrity and goodness; he is unfailingly *just, good, and upright* in all his ways (cf. Gen. 18:25). The narratives demonstrate, for example, that Yahweh:
  - a. Opposes wickedness (e.g., the violence of the pre-Flood population; Sodom and Gomorrah)
  - b. Delights in upright behavior (e.g., that of Noah, Abraham)
  - c. Is committed to righting all wrongs (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah; Israel's enslavement)
  - d. Always keeps his promises (e.g., to Abraham and Sarah regarding a son)
3. ***Yahweh rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness.*** He is consistently *benevolent* to people, except when they begin to behave in deeply wicked and degenerate ways. Then he makes plans to right the wrongs they have committed, which may include punishing them for what they have done if they do not surrender their revolt against him (e.g., the Flood; Sodom and Gomorrah; Egypt).
4. ***Yahweh is kind and benevolent.*** He is *generous, loving, compassionate, merciful, supportive, and protective* (e.g., his provision of a wife for Adam; his compassionate benevolence to Cain, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, and the enslaved Israelites).

5. ***Yahweh is particularly sympathetic toward, and protective of, the weak and disadvantaged.*** He not only helps those who are weak or disadvantaged; he often *honors* them by choosing them to carry out his special plans. The narratives recount, for example, Yahweh's kindness to:
  - a. Abram and Sarai, who were old and childless
  - b. Hagar, the expelled handmaiden, and Ishmael, her rejected son
  - c. Jacob, the younger and unloved son
  - d. Leah, the unfavored wife, and Rachel, the barren wife
  - e. Joseph, the scorned, betrayed brother and imprisoned slave
  - f. The enslaved and helpless Israelites in Egypt
  
6. ***Yahweh often makes his people wait for the good things he is giving them.*** For example:
  - a. Adam waits for Eve.
  - b. Abraham and Sarah wait for a son.
  - c. Abraham's descendants wait for the land promised to them.
  - d. Joseph waits for help and vindication.
  - e. The Israelites enslaved in Egypt wait for rescue.
  - f. The Israelites in the wilderness wait for food and water.
  
7. ***It was Yahweh who brought the nation of Israel into being.*** Specifically:
  - a. He chose to create the nation.
  - b. He enabled Israel's childless ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, to have a son.
  - c. He enabled each successive generation (Rebecca; Jacob's wives; etc.) to bear children.
  - d. He caused the original family of 70 to increase into a massive population.
  
8. ***Yahweh has consistently protected, helped, and blessed Israel and her ancestors.*** Examples include Yahweh's help and protection of:
  - a. Abraham and Sarah in foreign courts
  - b. Isaac and Rebecca in Gerar
  - c. Jacob in Mesopotamia
  - d. Jacob's family during the famine, through Joseph
  - e. Israelites during the persecution and bondage in Egypt; at the Red Sea; in the wilderness
  
9. ***Yahweh has chosen Israel to be his special people, through whom he will bless all the other nations.*** Yahweh repeatedly declared to Israel's ancestors, and to Moses, his special plans for Israel. Specifically, he would:
  - a. Make them his special people
  - b. Make them into a numerous people
  - c. Rescue them from Egyptian slavery
  - d. Bless them and protect them from harm
  - e. Give them his own good laws to live by
  - f. Give them the land of Canaan to live in
  - g. Bless all other nations through Israel
  
10. ***Israel's ancestors, like Israel herself, were weak, often unworthy, and were unlikely recipients of Yahweh's special favor.*** Israel's ancestors are not the heroes of this narrative; Yahweh alone is the hero of Genesis 1-Exodus 19. Indeed, the narratives serve to underscore the weakness or unworthiness of Israel and her ancestors even as it highlights the longsuffering of God. Examples include:

- a. Abraham and Sarah (their barrenness; deceit; vulnerability in foreign lands)
- b. Isaac and Rebecca (deceit; vulnerability in foreign lands)
- c. Jacob and his troubled family (Jacob's deceit; the bickering and deceit of his wives; vulnerability in foreign lands)
- d. The twelve sons of Jacob (their deceit; immorality; treachery)
- e. The moral failures of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah
- f. The helplessness and unbelief of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt
- g. The reluctance and physical handicap of Moses
- h. The grumblings and unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness