

Literary Genre: Legal

Literary genre is a category of written works. Recognizing the type of writing prepares one for how to read and observe the text. For example, legal narratives are presented as treaties or laws governing a relationship between God and human beings.

Legal writings are primarily found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy where God makes a conditional bilateral treaty with the Hebrews of the Exodus (Mosaic Covenant).

In keeping with His promise to Abraham, God promises to be God to the descendants of Abraham and give them the Promised Land.

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." (Gen 17:7-8, ESV)

Numbering over 600 laws, there are three categories of Old Testament Law that God instructed Moses: 1) moral, 2) civil, and 3) ceremonial. The Mosaic Covenant is an agreement of blessings and curses for obedient or disobedient behavior and defines who is a descendant of Abraham.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Ex 19:4-6, ESV)

Legal writings can also be found in the Edenic Covenant, Adamic Covenant, Noahic Covenant, Abrahamic Covenant, Land Covenant, King Covenant, and the New Covenant.

How should you read a legal document in the Bible?

Look for God's statement of what He will do or promise. As you read the Bible elsewhere, does God remain committed to His promises? What does it tell you about the character of God?

Examine what God commands or prohibits. Try to discover their purpose or intent. What does it tell you about God's moral standard and justice?

What is the relationship between divine covenants and faith? Is faith in the Old Testament different from faith in the New Testament?

How does this affect your worldview?

Here is an example of a legal document:

- 1) And God spoke all these words, saying,
- 2) "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- 3) "You shall have no other gods before me.

4) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7) "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9) Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12) "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13) "You shall not murder.

14) "You shall not commit adultery.

15) "You shall not steal.

16) "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17) "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Ex 20:1-17)

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Legal writings are primarily found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy where God makes a conditional bilateral treaty with the Hebrews of the Exodus (Mosaic Covenant).

Help the student understand the meaning of “conditional” and “bilateral.” “Conditional” refers to conditions or requirements that must be met before the other party fulfills their agreement. “Bilateral” refers to the two parties of the agreement. As a comparison, the covenant that God made with Abraham was unilateral and unconditional – God made the agreement unilaterally with Himself and unconditionally, without any condition, with Abraham.

In keeping with His promise to Abraham, God promises to be God to the descendants of Abraham and give them the Promised Land.

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” (Gen 17:7-8, ESV)

Numbering over 600 laws, there are three categories of Old Testament Law that God instructed Moses: 1) moral, 2) civil, and 3) ceremonial. The Mosaic Covenant is an agreement of blessings and curses for obedient or disobedient behavior and defines who is a descendant of Abraham.

Help the student understand the Mosaic Covenant by clearly explaining that the Law was intended to teach one of the holy character of God and how to be holy like Him (by learning what sin was – Rom 7:7), how to make amends (atone) for sin, and how to come to faith, be His treasured people, and enter the Promised Land.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Ex 19:4-6, ESV)

Legal writings can also be found in the Edenic Covenant, Adamic Covenant, Noahic Covenant, Abrahamic Covenant, Land Covenant, King Covenant, and the New Covenant.

The Edenic Covenant was made with Adam before the Fall. The Edenic Covenant provided life, fellowship, and food for man.

The Adamic Covenant was made after the Fall. The Adamic Covenant changed the status of the serpent, woman and man. From a life of fellowship with God: peace, provision, comfort, and life to one without the fellowship of God: hostility, pain, toil, and death.

The Noahic Covenant was made with Noah after the Flood. The Noahic Covenant, God blesses man with food, procreation, and promises to all living creatures never again to destroy the earth by catastrophic flooding. Furthermore, killing another person (because they have the image of God) is punishable by death; the Noahic covenant places an emphasis on the sanctity of the image of God because it is linked with capital punishment.

How should you read a legal document in the Bible?

Look for God's statement of what He will do or promise. As you read the Bible elsewhere, does God remain committed to His promises? What does it tell you about the character of God?

Help the student be discerning. Does God appear capricious? Do you recall any instance where God failed in His commitment to a covenant?

Examine what God commands or prohibits. Try to discover their purpose or intent. What does it tell you about God's moral standard and justice?

Ask the student: What do God's laws teach the nation of Israel? Is God's moral standard relative or absolute? What is God's justice about?

What is the relationship between divine covenants and faith? Is faith in the Old Testament different from faith in the New Testament?

This is a difficult question; but, the student may wonder about this at some point in his life.

Recall that the Law (i.e. Mosaic Covenant, Old Covenant / Testament) was intended to teach one of the holy character of God and how to be holy like Him (by learning what sin was – Rom 7:7), how to make amends (atone) for sin, and how to come to faith, be His treasured people, and enter the Promised Land. By believing that God is real (i.e. the God that brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt) and placing a trust in His Word by obeying His Law, that person would be of God's people and descendant of Abraham.

When the Mosaic Covenant was irrevocably broken, God provided the New Testament. His Son Jesus Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant by teaching one of the holy character of God and how to be holy like Him, how to make amends (atone) for sin, and how to come to faith, be His treasured people, and enter the Promised Land. By believing that God is real (i.e. the God who sent His Son) and placing a trust in the work of atonement by Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, that person would be of God's people (1 Pet 2:6-10) and descendant of Abraham.

Faith in the Old Testament is the same as faith in the New Testament.

How does this affect your worldview?

Ask the student: If you did not believe that God really exists, how does this affect your view of man? Would the concept of sin even exist? Would there be any reason to be moral?

Here is an example of a legal document:

Encourage the student to carefully observe: a) God's statement of what He will or did, and b) God's commands and prohibitions. What do they reveal about God's character and sense of holiness? How does this set one apart from the general population of people?

1) And God spoke all these words, saying,

2) "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3) "You shall have no other gods before me.

4) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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8) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9) Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

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