

Session 2

The Structure and Purpose of Torah

Series: Living The Torah / Dr. Randy White

“For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”

DEUTERONOMY 4:7–8

I. Covenant Setting at Sinai (Exodus 19–24)

- Torah given in a concrete covenant ceremony with public stipulations and blood ratification (**Exodus 19–24**).
- Sequence and form:
 - Arrival at Sinai and sanctification of the people (**Exodus 19:1–15**).
 - Theophany at the mount; boundaries and mediation (**Exodus 19:16–25**).
 - Ten Commandments publicly spoken by God (**Exodus 20:1–17**; cf. **Deuteronomy 5:2–5**).
 - Book of the Covenant delivered, written, read aloud, and ratified with blood (**Exodus 20:22–23:33; 24:3–8**).
 - Tablets given by God; covenant signs and breaches recorded (**Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 32–34**).
- Pattern recognizable in ANE suzerainty treaties (preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, deposit/reading, witnesses, blessings/curses), yet the Suzerain is the LORD, not a human king (**Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 31:9–13, 24–29; Deuteronomy 28**).
- **Arrival and Proposal (Exodus 19:1–8)**
 - Israel addressed as a redeemed people; law follows redemption (**Exodus 19:1–4**).
 - Proposed status: “peculiar treasure,” “kingdom of priests,” “holy nation” conditioned on national obedience (**Exodus 19:5–6**).
 - Corporate assent: “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (**Exodus 19:8**; cf. **Exodus 24:3, 7**).
 - Torah functions as Israel’s national constitution, not a universal code imposed on all nations

(Psalm 147:19–20).

II. The Ten Commandments as Foundational Charter (Exodus 20)

- Direct divine speech to the whole assembly; covenant’s public charter (**Exodus 20:1**; **Deuteronomy 5:4–5, 22**).
- Historical prologue grounds ethics in redemption (**Exodus 20:2**; cf. **Deuteronomy 5:6**).
- Two tables summarize obligations Godward (1–4) and manward (5–10) (**Exodus 20:3–17**).
- Written by God on stone, signaling permanence and primacy within the corpus (**Exodus 31:18**; **Deuteronomy 9:10**).
- People request mediated revelation thereafter (Moses as mediator) (**Exodus 20:18–21**; **Deuteronomy 5:23–27**).

III. The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21–23)

- Initial legal corpus applying Decalogue principles in case-law forms (“if/then”) (**Exodus 21:1**).
- Civil and social justice: slavery limits, injury, property, theft, liability, restitution (**Exodus 21–22**).
- Judicial integrity; care for sojourner, widow, orphan; economic fairness (**Exodus 22:21–27**; **23:1–9**).
- Worship calendar and allegiance: Sabbaths/festivals, no syncretism (**Exodus 23:10–19, 23:24–25**).
- Public writing, reading, and ratification with sacrificial blood (**Exodus 24:3–8**).

IV. Levitical Legislation (Leviticus 1–27)

- Delivered from the tent of meeting after tabernacle completion (**Exodus 40:17**; **Leviticus 1:1**).
- Sacrificial system: burnt, grain, peace, sin, trespass offerings (**Leviticus 1–7**); priestly consecration/glory (**Leviticus 8–9**); profanation warns (**Leviticus 10**).
- Holiness code: clean/unclean, purity cycles, atonement day, ethical holiness (**Leviticus 11–16**; **17–20**).
- Sacred times and signs: feasts, lamps/bread, sabbatical/Jubilee, blessings/curses (**Leviticus 23–27**).
- Governs worship and holiness in tandem with civil provisions.

V. Deuteronomic Covenant Renewal (Deuteronomy 5; 12–26)

- Forty years later, on Moab’s plains; same Torah applied to a landed nation (**Deuteronomy 1:1–5; 5:1**).
- Rehearsal of Decalogue and exhortations to covenant love/loyalty (**Deuteronomy 5; 6:4–9; 10:12–13**).
- Central sanctuary and worship safeguards (**Deuteronomy 12**).
- Leadership and institutions: judges, kingship constraints, priests/Levites, prophet like unto Moses (**Deuteronomy 16:18–20; 17:14–20; 18:1–8, 15–22**).
- Social justice, warfare, inheritance, family law, weights/measures (**Deuteronomy 19–25**).
- Covenant sanctions and renewal (**Deuteronomy 27–30**).

VI. Functional Categories

- *Ritual/Ceremonial* (worship, priesthood, purity, feasts):
 - Offerings and priestly service (**Leviticus 1–7; 8–10**).
 - Purity and atonement (**Leviticus 11–16**); sacred calendar (**Leviticus 23**).
- *Civil/Judicial* (property, injury, restitution, courts):
 - Case laws and equity (**Exodus 21–23**); cities of refuge (**Deuteronomy 19**).
 - Equal justice for native and sojourner (**Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:15–16**).
- *Moral/Ethical* (truth, fidelity, love of neighbor):
 - Core prohibitions and duties (**Exodus 20:13–17; Leviticus 19:11–18, 35–37**).
 - Weight of honest scales, mercy, and righteousness (**Deuteronomy 25:13–16**; cf. **Proverbs 11:1**).
- Overlap is pervasive (e.g., Sabbath: creation/moral + cultic rhythm + civic calendar) (**Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:12–15**).

VII. Purpose of the Torah (Stated by the Text)

- *For life and ordered blessing*:
 - “Which if a man do, he shall live in them” (**Leviticus 18:5**; cf. **Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21**).
 - Blessings for obedience / curses for disobedience (**Deuteronomy 28–30**).
- *Covenant relationship and national wisdom*:
 - “This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations” (**Deuteronomy 4:5–8**).
 - “For our good always, that he might preserve us alive” (**Deuteronomy 6:24**).
- *Good and righteous in itself*:
 - “The law of the LORD is perfect...” (**Psalms 19:7–11**); love for the law (**Psalms 119 passim**).

VIII. Scope of Application (Jurisdiction of Torah)

- *Given to Israel, not to the nations:*
 - God revealed statutes to Israel uniquely (**Psalm 147:19–20**; **Exodus 19:3–6**).
 - Nations observe Israel’s wisdom; they are not covenant parties (**Deuteronomy 4:6–8**).
- *Resident aliens (ger) within Israel’s borders:*
 - One law for native and sojourner in civil/penal matters (**Leviticus 24:22**; **Numbers 15:14–16**).
 - Participation in Passover requires circumcision; then “as one born in the land” (**Exodus 12:48–49**); leaven ban applies territorially (**Exodus 12:19**); moral prohibitions bind both (**Leviticus 18:26**).
 - Blood/sacrifice regulations apply in the land (**Leviticus 17:8–16**).
- *Israelites outside the land (exile):*
 - Torah assumes central sanctuary and land-based life (**Deuteronomy 12**).
 - Exile foretold as covenant curse with promise of return upon repentance (**Deuteronomy 4:26–31**; **28:36–68**; **30:1–10**; cf. **1 Kings 8:46–53**).
 - Diaspora piety is real but not equivalent to full cultic observance (e.g., prayer toward Jerusalem, **Daniel 6:10**).
- *Lo-Ammi period (suspension signs):*
 - “Not my people”; without king, sacrifice, ephod (**Hosea 1:9**; **3:4–5**).
 - Many commands presuppose temple/priesthood; without these, full operation pauses.
- *Post-exilic restoration:*
 - Altar rebuilt, feasts kept, law read, covenant renewed (**Ezra 3:2–6**; **Nehemiah 8–10**; cf. **Haggai 1–2**; **Zechariah 3**; **6**).

IX. The Nations and the Law

- Gentile nations judged for idolatry/violence/injustice, not for Torah cultic breaches (**Genesis 15:16**; **Amos 1–2**; **Obadiah**; **Jeremiah 46–51**; **Isaiah 13–23**).
- Prophetic horizon: nations will voluntarily seek instruction in a future age (**Isaiah 2:2–4**; **Micah 4:1–3**); worship at Jerusalem (**Zechariah 14:16–19**); inclusion of foreigners who join themselves to the LORD (**Isaiah 56:6–8**).

X. Synthesis

- Torah = structured, integrated, land-centered covenant for Israel’s national life (civil + cultic + ethical).
- Designed for *life*, wisdom, order, and witness when obeyed (**Leviticus 18:5**; **Deuteronomy 4:6–8**; **28–30**).
- Proper interpretation requires honoring its structure, scope, and stated purposes before debating applicability across dispensations.