CHAPTER – 5

ETHICS AND MORALITY IN THE BOOK OF TORAH

5.1 Introduction

The book of Torah holds a prominent place in the three largest religious communities, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, within each of these religious communities scholars had interpreted and understood the contents of the five books of Moses with great differences. This immense diverse understanding is often in connection to the first book, namely Genesis. From the first chapter to the last, questions had been raised on its source, authenticity and interpretations. Should the book be understood literally or metaphorically had been a subject of fiery debates. While liberal scholar had interpreted the book away as a myth, fundamental and orthodox scholars had defended the literal understanding vehemently. Nonetheless, despite its wide ranges of interpretations the book of Genesis was written with a purpose and that purpose was for the children of Israel so that when they look back into their history they could understand their origin and traced it back to God himself. Apart from the many differences in the interpretations, the book of Genesis definitely functions as the ground work for all the theology that consequently follows in the Old and New Testament; this is also true in the Qur’anic theology. Young Earth Creationist and apologist, founder of the Creation Research Society and the Institute of Creation Research, Henry M. Morris elucidated this importance of the book of Genesis in his book *The Genesis Record*.

“If the Bible were somehow expurgated of the Book of Genesis (as many people today would prefer), the rest of the Bible would be incomprehensible… The books of the Old Testament, narrating God’s dealing with the people of Israel, would be provincial and bigoted, were
they not set in the context of God’s developing purposes for all mankind, as laid down in the early chapters of Genesis. The New Testament, describing the execution and implementation of God’s plan for man’s redemption, is redundant and anachronistic, except in the light of man’s desperate need for salvation, as established in the record of man’s primeval history, recorded in Genesis.”

The ethics of the Torah cannot be explained or mentioned in few paragraphs as it entails a wide variety and development of the ethical systems. Though a systematic explanation of the Torah is often discouraged, the general ethical principles and its development may be divided as Creation Ethics, Pre-Abrahamic Ethics, Abrahamic Ethics, and Mosaic Ethics. This is based on the timeline of the narratives of the Torah as accepted as a historical development of the Hebrews. These divisions may also be understood through the covenantal relationship established between God and man; creation ethics with the life of man and nature before sin entered the world, Pre-Abrahamic being a reference to the time after the fall of man, particularly with the covenant of Noah, Abrahamic as the name suggested of the covenant with Abraham and Mosaic with the laws, covenant and ordinances under Moses, basing on the covenantal relationship established at Mount Sinai.

5.2 Creation Ethics

Disregard of the Documentary Hypothesis and the acclaimed age of the sections of the Torah, the book of Torah open with the story of creation. It is the expression of the world in its perfection created by God without any defilement or disorder. Though ethical terms are not mentioned in the first two chapters of Genesis, the underlying principle of goodness and perfection seems to be heralded by the narrative. The term

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1 Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1976), 17
“Creation Ethics” had been used in relation to the ethics of life on controversial subjects such as abortions, reproduction, genetics, etc. However, in this research, the term is used in regard to the ethics drawn from the creation narrative of the Torah.

The creation narratives hold a prominent position in the book of the Torah and may as well be regarded as the basis for all that stories that follows. Whether the narratives should be understood literally, scientifically or metaphorically had been a matter of debate till today. Ever since the Enlightenment period, the creation narratives had be understood as a mythological adaptations; and the value of the narratives was further diminished with the coming scientific discoveries. With Darwin’s publication of his theories and discoveries On the Origin of Species in 1859, the role of biblical creation and the creator God was questioned greatly. Nevertheless, these discoveries and scientific interpretations and philosophies never answer the ultimate question of origin adequately, making religious communities interpret the biblical narratives of creation in a new light. Religious communities and biblical scholars are divided on their understanding of the biblical creation narratives as wide as a theistic evolution to a literal six-day creation.

5.2.1 God as the source

“The first verse of the Bible is the foundational verse of the Bible” asserts Morris, which doctrinally and theologically is very true. Undermining the role of God as the creator of the heavens and the earth would result in several repercussions. Without God as the creator, one could only imagine the amount of effect it would have in the fundamental doctrines and theology of the faithful. The doctrinal state of the creation is undeniable in church dogma and well as the fundamental belief of the

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2 Authors such as David DeGrazia wrote a book titled Creation Ethics : Reproduction, Genetics, and Quality of Life (Oxford University Press, New York, 2012), and Elizabeth Harman an article on Creation Ethics: The Moral Status of Early Fetuses and the Ethics of Abortion (Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 28, No.4 (Autumn, 1999), 310 – 324)

3 Morris, The Genesis Record, 37
Jewish and Islamic faith. The creeds of the early church affirm God as the ultimate creator of all things visible and invisible. In quoting St. Augustine’s *De Genesi ad literam liber imperfectus*, the Second Vatican Council stated that in the First Council of Toledo in Spain, God was professed as “the Creator of “all [things] visible and invisible” and that apart from him “there exists no divine nature, angel, spirit or power that can be regarded as God.”

The immense importance of the God as the creator is understood the basis and the root of the theological development of all morals and ethics, so much so that without God as the Creator, one would rob God of his authority and sovereignty. The statement “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is the fundamental assertion of the divine supremacy of God over all things. This statement may perhaps be understood as the foundational statement which set the God of Israel apart. Without this statement, the God of the Bible would easily be compared with the other gods of the Ancient Near East. From the development of theology and the formulation of doctrines, God as the creator is central to the explanation of theologies and doctrines. All later chapters and stories of the Bible is believed to have been founded in this line, especially among the fundamental biblical scholars; as Morris stated, “…Genesis 1:1 is the foundational verse of this foundational chapter, speaking of the primeval creation of the universe itself. It is the foundation of all foundations and is thus the most important verse in the Bible.”

God is the source of all things, the fount of all life and the point from which mankind draws its ethics and morals. With the transcendent God as the ultimate answer for all questions that may rise, it seems to be a very suitable solution to the problem for ancient scholars of the Old Testament. The writers of the Old Testament, including the

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4 Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II* (Vol. 2), (St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2012), 492
5 Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 37
Torah were not very keen in explaining the origin and development of God. For them, God is a reality they could not deny. The religious and cultural life of the Israel community revolves around the transcendent God who is the creator of all things. God is the source of all things that is good, and the world, when created, was perfect.

The narratives of creation found in Genesis chapters one and two had become a subject of debate in both scientific and religious communities. Owing to new interpretations and speculations, the accounts of creation had been countered time and again with new discoveries. The order of creation, the purpose and the mechanism of creation itself had daunted the faithful as well the non-believers. The creation account open doors for many philosophical and theological questions, and leaves room for many intellectual and scientific thought.

On the question of why the eternal God would create the world and that too at a particular time, Augustine replied, “If the motive for this question is to make it appear that the world is eternal without beginning, and therefore not the creation of God, then the questioners are far away from the truth, and affected by the deadly madness of impiety. For leaving aside the utterances of the prophets, we have evidence of the world itself in all its ordered change and movement and in all the beauty it presents to our sight, a world which bears a kind of silent testimony to the fact of its creation, and proclaims that its maker could have been none other than God, the ineffably and invisibly great, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful.”

According to Morris, the biblical account of creation refutes atheism because it stated that God created the universe; it refutes pantheism since God is transcendent to his creations; it refutes polytheism because one God created it; it refutes materialism because matter has a beginning according to the narrative; it refutes dualism because

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6 St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XI:4, 432
God alone created it; it refutes humanism since God is the ultimate reality; and finally refutes evolutionism because God created all things.  

However, the Catholic Church takes a turn in their understanding of the Genesis account of creation affirming that it is not a scientific book. Catholicism in its modern concept after the Second Vatican Council leans towards the theory of evolution for the explanation of the origin and development of life. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church is not devoid of the creation narrative but gave an alternate implication to the narrative. The Council stated that the creation story should be understood in the light of the salvific sacrifice of Christ, “the truth of creation is not to be put forward simply as a truth standing on its own, artificially separated from the rest, but as something which is in fact related to the salvation won by Jesus Christ.”

One of the most controversial themes of the creation narratives for a biblical scholar is the two varying narratives found in the first and second chapters of the book of Genesis. The first chapter gave a systematic day by day detail of creation while the second chapter presents a prose-like with no proper order. The second chapter is often explained as an expounding of the first chapter. Morris claimed, “It does not in any respect contradict the account in the first chapter, but instead is complementary to it.”

However, if taken the Documentary hypothesis and other source criticisms theories into considerations, the second chapter is older than the first, with the second chapter belonging to the J-source and the first to the P-source. It might have been possible that the first chapter was added to present a systematic orderly narrative of the creation without discarding the older tradition. Kizhakkeyil wrote,

“J uses all elements from pagan myths to give a very Israelite message. God begins creation with the human species. In this second account God is

7 Cf. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 38
8 Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II* (Vol. 2), (St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2012), 582
9 Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 83
not transcendent but anthropomorphic. He creates man like a potter and he 
breathes into him his own breath. Thus man shares God’s own life-breath. 
Then God fashions a world that human beings are to cultivate and tend. 
God creates animals for the human beings to rule over.”

In explaining the development of the creation narrative of the Old Testament, 
the Second Vatican Council states that “the truth of God’s creativity is not put forward 
as an abstract philosophical principle, but gains entry into the minds of the Israelites 
with the help of the notion of the unity of God, as a proclamation of Yahweh’s power 
and victory, as demonstration that God always stands by his people.”

5.2.2 Purpose & Goodness of Creation

One of the greatest concepts of the Torah when compared with other religions 
of its time is the creation of man, who is created in God’s own image. Man being in the 
image of God is in God’s likeness and is above all the other creations of the world. The 
Torah and later teachings of the Prophets and even the New Testament affirm the 
superior nature of man only to be a little lower than the angels. Nevertheless, the 
narrative of the creation of man in the book of Genesis “reveals that man is related to 
the animal world, being created on the same day. However, he stands apart from the 
animal creation.”

Man, being in the image of God is both a privilege and a responsibility. Such 
privilege may include his potential and capability to think, reason, communicate, 
among many other spiritual benefits. His power and authority bestowed by God himself 
had also made man greatly responsible for all the other creations of the world.

“...the basic idea of the image is that man is created as God’s 
representative in the world. Earthly monarchs have a habit of erecting

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10 Sebastian Kizhakkeyil, *The Pentateuch: An Exegetical Commentary*, 3rd Ed. (St. Pauls, 
Mumbai, 2013) 90, 91
11 Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Vol.2), 582
12 Cf. Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7
images of themselves. God has created man as His image, the sign or symbol of His authority in the world. Man’s authority or dominion over creation will be effective only in proportion to the reality of his relationship with and dependence upon God. If man is God’s representative in the world he is to participate with God in his work in the world.”

Within the realms of God’s creation, man is given the freedom of choice because without such freedom man would just me a mechanical creation that is to do whatever the creator commanded. This freedom of choice has been understood as the freedom to love God back in the garden, without which the communion between God and man would just be a play-thing rather than being an intimate relationship. Biblical scholars and theologians asserted that in the creation of man, the nature of God love was revealed and manifested.

“…there can be no doubt that God’s nature of love was central to His purpose in creating men and women. In some mysterious depths of God’s own nature, there seems to have been a desire for other spiritual personalities (other than within the Godhead itself) on whom He could bestow His love…Therefore, if God created people with the purpose of bestowing His love on them, His purpose must also have included a mutual and reciprocated love on their parts. But love, by its very nature, must be voluntary. An automation cannot love its maker. If they are really to love God, men and women must be able to choose of their own will to love God, in response to God’s love for them. An involuntary love is a contradiction in terms and there can be no such thing.”

However, that freedom to love comes with a risk, a risk which had a negative impact in the story of mankind in the biblical narrative. Morris explained further,

“…if Adam was free to love God on his own initiative, he was obviously free also not to love God. If he was able to make the right moral choice, he was necessarily able also to make a wrong moral choice. God’s creation of morally free spiritual beings, “in his own image,” clearly must run the risk of having them reject Him and His love.”

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14 Ibid. 8
15 Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 91
16 Ibid.
This freedom to love God was understood to have been embodied in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was placed in the Garden of Eden. The purpose of this tree had been questioned countless times by every generation of thinkers. Philo, the Jewish philosopher explained that the tree was a “comprehension of science, by which all things are known and distinguished from one another, whether they be good and beautiful, or bad and unseemly, or in short every sort of contrariety is discerned; since some things belong to the better class, and some to the worse.”\textsuperscript{17}

The tree of knowledge of good and evil as its name suggested was named after the destiny to which it would lead, to know good and evil which was “seasoned in discriminating opposites. The context indicates the sphere of discrimination, such as physical sensation…or, as here, ethical-religious experience.”\textsuperscript{18} Morris also explained, “Man already had knowledge of “good.” All he had seen and experienced was “good.” Rejection of God’s word would necessarily convey knowledge of “evil” to him.”\textsuperscript{19}

5.2.3 Sabbath

The Sabbath is of great importance in the Jewish faith, and despite the differences on the acceptance of the day, Christians and Muslims too stressed its importance especially in their theology. The Sabbath is a reference to rest, implying a call to rest or to cease from all labour. The reason for the Sabbath or rest was the resting of God himself on the seventh day after the six days of creation. Since the biblical narrative of the seventh day did not end with the day and night demarcation as mentioned in all the other days of creation, some scholars had come to the belief that it was an indicative of the eternal application of the Sabbath. Even though this explanation had been denied by other scholars, especially those of the inclination

\textsuperscript{17} C. D. Yonge, trans., \textit{The Works of Philo: New Updated Edition} (Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1993), 793
\textsuperscript{18} D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, eds., \textit{The New Bible Commentary: Revised}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1970), 84
\textsuperscript{19} Morris, \textit{The Genesis Record}, 94
towards the literal interpretations, it nevertheless had widened the scope of theology and the understanding of the term Sabbath and the creation narrative itself.

The Sabbath took the seat of prominence in the Ten Commandments and is explained lengthily when compared to all the other nine commandments. Perhaps, the narrative of biblical creation was written to explain the importance of the Sabbath rest with was essential to the Hebrew faith. The command of the Sabbath in the Decalogue was one that the children of Israel could not have taken lightly because it was God himself, who commanded it, who rested on it and who declared it holy. The Sabbath and the laws thereof were also explicitly expressed in the civil and ceremonial laws of the Torah. This commandment appeals to God’s rest at creation and his sanctifying of it. In this light of understanding, the Sabbath may have been the ultimate reason for the creation narrative to be included in the Torah apart from the justification of God as the source of all things. For Anglican theologian John Stott, the Sabbath is not only rooted in creation, but also that the Sabbath is the pinnacle of the creation story; to which he elucidated, “…the climax of Genesis 1 is not the creation of man, male and female, to subdue the earth, but the institution of the Sabbath.” Others had further understood the importance of Sabbath as an ordinance that God established even before the fall of man. Andrew Clarke asserts that “the moral principle of the Sabbath is understood to be a ‘creative ordinance’” which is understood to be a timeless principle established by God. Thus, Sabbath or the keeping of it is understood to be “part of the moral law which last forever.”

Brown elucidated the significance of the relation of creation with the spiritual aspect rather than the literal aspect of creation. He asserted creation to be “a cosmic

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22 David W. Jones, An Introduction to Biblical Ethics ( B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2013), 163
temple in which the holy seventh day corresponds to the temple’s holiest of holies, the inner sanctum (1 Kgs. 8:12 – 13; see Exod. 40:34 – 35). While God remains outside creation, humans, created “in the image of God” reside within (Gen. 1:27).”

The creation narratives, especially that of the life in the Garden of Eden enjoyed by the first man and woman, may have served as an explanation for all the good things in life and the reason for the goodness in itself. The first two chapters of Genesis explains the origin of the world, the origin of all living things, the origin of man, the origin of marriage and the origin of the Sabbath. The creation story thus suggests God as the source, beginning and origin of all things, including the life and ethos of the Israelites, which was essential in the understanding of their history as a nation and as a people of God.

5.3 Pre-Abrahamic Ethics

Pre-Abrahamic ethics may be used in reference to the narratives between the fall of man and the story of the great patriarch Abraham. It would thus include all the stories of the fall of man, the murder of Abel, the generations of Adam, Noah and the great flood, and the tower of Babel. Considering the events, this period may have the longest span of time to consider but had minimal narratives to examine the life and understanding of the people. However, these narratives hold great clues to the later construct of ethics and morals in the generation to come.

Some of the most philosophical and theological questions were raised during this period. The Hebrew understanding of ethics and all values are theocentric and this understanding had shaped the ethics of the later writings in the Scriptures. “Where are you?” was God’s question to Adam when they disobeyed. “What is it that you have

24 Genesis 3:9
done?" was God’s question to Eve and later to Cain. God asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” to which Cain questioned God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?" These questions must have made the writers of the Torah and the other Scriptures ponder on man’s purpose, morals and values. “These questions were the beginning of a continuing dialogue between God and man…” said Maston which eventually climaxed when God’s Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

5.3.1 The Fall of Man

Though the Torah and all writings of the Old Testament give importance to man, he is not the centre of it. God is the centre of all the stories and events recorded and expressed in the Old Testament. The problems and hardship of man’s life is rooted in the story of Adam and Eve. They are the first man and woman to ever walk on earth. In Jewish and later Christian understanding, man’s problem all arises from the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Interpretations of man’s fall may vary and differ in theological circles, but all the narratives and problems of man described in the Torah are theocentric rather than being anthropocentric. The problems emerged not because of what man had done to man, but rather what man had done to God. In biblical understanding, man is of great importance because of his relation to God.

Man’s relation to God and God’s laws are important because man is made in the image of God, “which is one of the most significant concepts in the Bible and one of the most formative factors in [the] Western way of life.” However, this image was marred and destroyed by man himself when Adam and Eve disobeyed the instructions of God. Man in the Torah is a sinner that rebelled against God’s authority and love. Though the concept is not emphatically expressed in the Torah as later Prophets and

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25 Genesis 3:13 & 4:10
26 Genesis 4:9
27 Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 3
28 Ibid. 7
New Testaments writers would, sin separates man from God and the evil of sin had brought consequences of man. The evil consequences thus became visible in human relations, as in Cain and Abel, and also in the human-divine relations.

The act of partaking the fruit in the Garden of Eden was an attempt to become like God. Man was made to depend on God and the disobedient act was to abandon the creaturely dependence on God, which would mean mankind losing his humanness. It was the destruction of the original humanity. God driving out Adam and Eve from the Garden means that they have lost their fellowship with God which resulted in alienation from God. But this alienation is not only from God alone, but as Russell Chandran puts it, has four-fold affect on it.

“The Fall myth is meant to affirm that the humans are involved in a four-fold alienation, from God, from fellow humans, from the rest of creation and from one’s own self. To regain the authentic humanity this four-fold alienation has to be overcome. The fall also means that by human will alone the humans cannot overcome their falleness. The restoration of the lost fellowship with God and the acceptance of the absolute sovereignty of God in all spheres is the object of redemption to which the Bible testifies.”

Chandran explained how the fall of man is a failure to be subjected to the authority and will of God, and how this alienation from God has its consequences on the natural world and how it affected the life of every man despite the best effort that may be attempted.

“Failure to be subject to the sovereignty of God has resulted in the brokenness of humanity and of the whole of creation. By absolutising the claims of particular communities or nations on the basis of race, language, religion or culture, the human community has been involved in different kinds of conflicts, and instead of peace and harmony we are faced with complex problems of disunity and bitter enmity among the peoples and nations. The alienation has also caused environmental degradation resulting in the threat to life on our plane.”

29 J. Russell Chandran, Christian Ethics (ISPCK, Delhi, 1997), 23-24
30 Ibid. 23
This fall of man and its consequences is of great importance to the theology of the Torah as sin was seen to disrupt not only personal life but also the community. The evil of man and his sins cannot be contained within the individual himself but is brought about and the consequences seen in the entire community. This elucidates the need for the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden lest their generations would destroy the garden itself. This is because “sin is social as well as spiritual – no man can sin unto himself. Inevitably others are involved in and affected by his sin.” The account of the fall of man found its significance in the curses God pronounced on the serpent and the woman. Man was not to sweat and toil, woman would suffer childbirth, these pains and sufferings were all understood as a result of sin. This was also the beginning of the struggle and fight between good and evil, the ever internal struggle between the sons of Adam and the principalities of Satan, which Christians believed comes to an end in the incarnation of Christ. The serpent is cursed by God when he said “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

5.3.2 Noah and the Deluge

The image of God marred by sin at the fall of man is understood to be not completely lost in the story of Noah and the great flood. God told Noah that man shall not shed blood because man is made in God’s image. Despite the sins and short comings of mankind, man has not fully lost the image of God he was created in. This asserts and affirms the dignity and sacredness of all mankind and the life thereof. This truth was of great importance to the people of Israel even though they were a chosen nation. They were not to despise other nation simply because of their ethnicity, colour

31 Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 8
32 Genesis 3:15 (KJV)
33 Cf. Genesis 9:6
and cultures. The Torah specifies many details how they should care for people of other nation who are their servants and guests. The dignity of all men essential to the Torah is also of great significance in today’s cultural and racial understanding of the human race. Apart from the destruction of the world by flood, man’s dignity should be respected and no man should reject their fellow men.

The story of Noah describes how Noah and his family survived the flood. Noah was a righteous man and because of him his family was saved. Central and significant to the Jewish thought was the “close relation of the individual and the group or community. The sense of solidarity was unusually strong. The group was punished for the sins of the individual. Rewards were likewise shared by all…not only was Noah, the just man, saved but also his family.”34 Individualism and individual expression does not have much place in the Torah. Righteousness was rewarded to the family or to the entire community, and similarly, so was punishment executed.

Noah and the Deluge is a reminder of God’s sovereignty over creations and his authority to end all life if he so wishes. Yet, the narratives of Noah and the flood end with a promise where God made a covenant of not flooding the world ever again to destroy life. The story affirms the power and omnipotence of God, and that hope and goodness too comes from God. The theocentric thought of Noah and the Deluge asserted that renewal of life and the sustenance thereof is entirely of God.

5.3.3 The Tower of Babel

The story of the construction and consequences of the Tower of Babel must have been inserted in the Torah primarily to remind the children of Israel of the consequences rather than any other details that may be important at the event. The descendants of Noah must have spoken the same language and constituted a common

34 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 9
culture with uniform social construct and worship. Remembering the flood that destroyed the world, they decided to build a tower so high that it reaches the heavens. The attempt was futile as God confused them as they spoke in different languages.

The construction of the tower was an act of arrogance that undermines the authority and power of God. After the flood, God was understood as the sustainer of life and that all things were in his hands. Nothing goes unnoticed in the sight of God, and perhaps this narrative was to remind of God’s omnipotence and omniscience. In a theocentric culture as that of the Hebrew, this narrative explains the origin of languages and different cultures, tribes and nations they must have seen around them. Though the ultimate aim of the Torah is not to provide historical details of the beginning, it does offer explanations to the Jewish nation the origin and development of the things around them as well as it asserted prominence in the plan of God as a chosen people.

Babel may be understood as a humanistic approach to resolute problems, which to a community such as the Hebrews that embraces theocracy would be as vile and blasphemous as an attempt overthrow God himself. The motivation of the builders of Babel may not be to challenge God as their “desire to remain in international harmony was perhaps reasonable at that juncture, but unfortunately it involved an effort to maintain One World unity upon a humanistic basis. The tower they planned to erect…would keep all of Noah’s descendents politically correct, as it were, without any meaningful regard to the supremacy of God.” 35 Their act and attempt of self-preservation assume that man could manage life without God and solve the social and personal problems simply by working together. In a theocentric society such as the Hebrews, such ideas would be dangerous because no amount of cooperative work and

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communal force would undermines the authority and supremacy of God no matter the size of the force they may be able to achieve.

Ziggurats and ancient towers in Middle East had been likened and compared to what the tower of Babel must have been. Unfinished towers which must have been constructed to serve as temples are often considered as contenders for the actual tower of Babel. They must have been constructed to bring their god closer to them. Nevertheless, the biblical narrative affirms that God did not let them complete such constructions and confuses them only to cause chaos amongst themselves. God’s action on the builders of the tower may be interpreted as a “divine chastisement of men whose pride had sought to climb into heaven.”

5.4 Abrahamic Ethics

After the narrative of the Tower of Babel, the readers are confronted with the call of Abraham; and such contrasting and yet related stories elucidate “how God rejects humanity’s attempt to entrench its security in Mesopotamian royal-religious superstructures (the city and the [temple]-tower). He chooses, instead, a family line to become instrumentals in his plans. This “elected” family is to live insecurely, by human standards, guided solely by the promise of God.” Abrahamic ethics in a sense would constitute the time and period of the Patriarchs, namely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their story had influenced the theology and mindset of three main religions in the world, so much so that they are sometimes referred as the branches of Abrahamic religions. The ethical standards, historical setting and theological concept of Abraham and his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob are vital to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

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37 Ibid.
The identity of Abraham is not clear and there is no way of knowing his real identity apart from his account in the Scripture. Upon reading the narratives, scholars have different understanding of the historical background he may have lived in. It may however, be agreed as Armstrong suggested, that he was “one of the chieftains who had led their people from Mesopotamia towards the Mediterranean at the end of the third millennium BCE” and his people were probably “wanderers, some of whom are called Abiru, Apiru or Habiru in Mesopotamia and Egyptian sources, spoke West Semitic languages, of which Hebrew is one.”

They may have served as mercenaries with other being government employees, servants and merchants.

Abram, who later became Abraham, is commanded by God to leave his family in Haran and migrate to Canaan. God told Abraham that he is a chosen person from whom a great nation would come. He was destined to become the father of a mighty nation that will be as numerous as the stars in the future. His descendants were promised the land of Canaan as their home. This involvement of God in the life of a mortal would be very strange for the religions of the Ancient Near East.

“Marduk, Baal and Anat were not expected to involve themselves in the ordinary, profane lives of their worshippers: their actions had been performed in sacred time. The God of Israel, however, made his power effective in current events in the real world. He was experienced as an imperative in the here and now. His first revelation of himself consists of a command: Abraham is to leave his people and travel to the land of Canaan.”

The command and promise to Abraham comes in twofold. Firstly, Abraham was to relocate with the promise of a future nationhood. Secondly, he was instructed to be a blessing and was promised to be the source of international blessings.

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40 Ibid. 21
Large part of the narratives of the Abrahamic times being the work of the Yahwist writers, God is presented in a very anthropomorphic manner. We see Abraham being visited by God himself and yet we see the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is portrayed as both friendly and powerful in the Abrahamic times. The revelation of God is also understood at mental level, an example of which would be Abraham bargaining with God to save the city where Lot and his family dwells.

The relation of Abraham and Lot is evident in the Abrahamic narratives with Abraham often showing favouritism towards Lot. However, that such partiality may not be God’s intent in the later story. “Whatever hopes Abraham may have entertained for Lot, they are clearly dislodged by Yahweh in Genesis 15.” Ethically, the life of Abraham, especially in the attempt to fulfill the promise of God is not very exemplary. “Unlike the eternal covenant announced in Genesis 17, the fulfillment of the promise of nationhood is not conditioned by Abraham’s subsequent ethical behaviour (cf. Gen, 17:1). Thus, understood the covenant of Genesis 15 guarantees the fulfillment of only the first dimension of the programmatic agenda of Genesis 12:1-3, that of nationhood.” Nevertheless, it is clear that God’s purpose and plan is far greater than the commitment of men. Abrahamic ethics should probably be understood with the historical context and background it was narrated. Expecting the patriarchs to behave on the norms of the later Mosaic ethical standards would seem unreasonable considering the fact that they were wandering people that have only encountered a settled community and a well governed nation such as that of Egypt.

Central to the life of Abraham is the covenant in which God guarantees Abraham to be a blessing. It was not a blessing of a single nation that descended from

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42 Ibid.
him but of a multitude of nations. Abraham in a sense would thus be a father of many nations since through him all they would be blessed. The God of Abraham often referred as “El” followed by various epithets, was the deity him and his descendants worshipped. Only in the book of Exodus with Moses’ encounter with the burning bush is the reference to God as Yahweh. The Priestly literature in later narratives further asserted that “El” and “Yahweh” is the same God only referred and understood by different names.

Significant in the life of Abraham was perhaps his faith in the God he served. Even the New Testament praised Abraham for his unshakeable faith.\(^\text{43}\) The faith of patriarchs such as Abraham and Jacob can considered a great faith because of the pragmatic result that comes out of it. The philosophical and the spiritual aspect of faith may be thought of; rather the pragmatic application of the faith was more important for them. Armstrong asserted that “Abraham and Jacob both put their faith in El because he worked for them: they did not sit down and prove that he existed; El was not a philosophical abstraction. In the ancient world, \textit{mana} was a self-evident fact of life and a god proved his worth if he could transmit this effectively.”\(^\text{44}\) She further claimed that the adoption of a particular god in the ancient civilization was based on the working of that god for their benefit rather than the concept of the divine and the philosophical attachment it may have. The Abraham narratives also do present God to be pragmatically essential to Abraham and his descendants, but there are times when the God of Abraham calls and demanded steps of faith from his followers when the pragmatic may have not yet are evident.

Till the revelation of God to Moses at the burning bush, God is presented in an anthropomorphic manner not only to Abraham but also to Jacob. The Yahwist account

\(^{43}\) Cf. Romans 4

\(^{44}\) Armstrong, \textit{A History of God}, 25
does not elaborate God into a powerful and transcendent as the Elohist would, but decided to preserve the “ancient flavour of these primitive epiphanies in his account.”

Jacob is recorded to have experienced an epiphany where he dreamed of a ladder that stretched from the earth to the heaven with angels going up and down between the realms. He dreamt that God would bless him as he once promised to Abraham. Jacob’s descendents would become a mighty nation and occupy the land of Canaan as promised. Armstrong suggested that this was the point in history when the God of Abraham who she considers a deity of the Canaanite found its universal implication.

“Pagan religion was often territorial: a god only had jurisdiction in a particular are and it was always wise to worship the local deities when you went abroad. But El promised Jacob that he would protect him when he left Canaan and wandered in a strange land: ‘I am with you; I will keep you safe wherever you go.’ The story of this early epiphany shows that the High God of Canaan was beginning to acquire a more universal implication.”

Jacob’s reaction after the dream was the realization of the fact that he was in a place of divine dwelling. He named the place “Beth-El” the house of God, and consecrated the ground which may have been similar to the ancient customs of consecration like any religion would do. Though such act would be condemned after the Mosaic period, it was acceptable and understandable that Jacob would do so as they were in the early stage of the spiritual development of the people of God with little theological and spiritual understanding of God and his will.

Jacob the later wrestles God and named the place “Peni-El” suggesting he saw God face to face. Jacob demanded that he know the name of the person he is wrestling to which Jacob was inflicted. This concept must have originated from the ancient concept of their gods, that knowing the names of their gods would give them power.

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45 Ibid. 24
46 Ibid. 24 – 25
Invoking god was a common practice in the ancient world and knowing which they should invoke, knowing the name was essential. Unlike the ancient customs of the Ancient Near East, this concept take a turn when God revealed himself to Moses but that too in an enigmatic concept which is now known as Yahweh.

Of all the Abrahamic narrative, the most controversial would be the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. After the long ordeal of Abraham finally having a son through his wife Sarah, God commanded, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”\(^{47}\) The biblical narrative does not seem to indicate even momentary hesitation from Abraham’s side. The next verse reads that Abraham rose early in the morning and go on his way as he was commanded. This event in history had baffled many scholars and makes many question the authenticity and purpose of the story, and even the character of God.

Christian theology often explained this moment in history as the foreshadow of God sacrificing his own Son for the sins of the world. For Judaic tradition, and even Christian theology it is understood to be a test which Abraham had to undergo in order to prove his loyalty to God so that he may become the father of many nations. For scholars of the other camp that rejected the mere existence of God and the purpose of religion such as Richard Dawkins, acts such as these make the Bible immoral and unacceptable to be embraced even as a tradition. Dawkins retorted,

“A modern moralist cannot help but wonder how a child could ever recover from such psychological trauma. By the standards of modern morality, this disgraceful story is an example simultaneously of child abuse, bullying in two asymmetrical power relationships…Yet the legend is one of the great foundational myths of all three monotheistic religions.”\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\text{Genesis 22:2 (KJV)}\)
\(^{48}\text{Richard Dawkins, }\textit{The God Delusion} (\text{Bantam Press, London, 2006}), 274-274\)
Armstrong understood this from the ancient belief and understanding of the divine and explained the act of human sacrifice to be a norm of the ancient customs. However, she pointed out how the case was different with the Abrahamic narratives.

“Human sacrifice was common in the pagan world. It was cruel but had a logic and rationale. The first child was often believed to be the offspring of a god, who had impregnated the mother in an act of droit de seigneur. In begetting the child, the god’s energy had been depleted, so to replenish this and to ensure the circulation of all the available mana, the first-born was returned to its divine parent. The case of Isaac was quite different, however. Isaac had been a gift of God but not his natural son. There was no reason for the sacrifice, no need to replenish the divine energy. Indeed, the sacrifice would make a nonsense of Abraham’s entire life, which had been based on the promise that he would be the father of a great nation…Abraham had proved himself worthy of becoming the father of a mighty nation, which would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the sea-shore.”

How is it possible that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, when later prohibits such horrendous act in the laws of Moses? Can God command and prohibit something simultaneously? Even if the act was a test, how could the God of love and mercy demand such a traumatic and monstrous test?

Bart Ehrman, theologian and agnostic asserted that the act of offering Isaac illustrated the concept that God allows suffering to happen in order to test his followers of their obedience. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard claimed that God’s command of Abraham suspended all ethical obligations because God used his authority to violate basic moral standards. God seems to take a relativist approach when testing his followers. Such act was heinous and is a sin if anyone was to execute it. However,

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49 Armstrong, A History of God, 27
50 Cf. Bart D. Ehrman, God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer (HarperOne, San Francisco, 2008)
to Kierkegaard, Abraham has the right to do so because he was commanded to do so, so that he may be a great man.\(^5\)

It would be necessary to understand that through this monstrous act to sacrifice his own son, God’s test to Abraham was accomplished. Abraham is regarded as a man of faith. His obedience had made him stand out amongst all other. He is chosen by God to be the one through who his chosen nation would be established. Abraham’s unconditional obedience to God seems to the fundamental principle of his story. Later command to obey God’s laws and ordinances through Moses even proved futile in the later writings of the Torah. Despite all these, Abraham was already an obedient follower of God even before the laws of Moses. In the Torah, God declared, “Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”\(^5\) Abraham trusted God and was eventually declared righteous. Even before the giving of the laws to Moses, he kept the intentions of the law because he lived by faith. Abraham is more a man of faith than Moses was. Paul Copan contrasted the exemplary life of both Abraham and Moses as follows:

“Abraham is the positive example of faith, while Moses is the negative example. Abraham had faith without the law of Moses, which was given at mount Sinai. Despite his wavering, he trusted God’s promise, and so he was declared righteous by God (Gen. 15:6). By contrast, Moses actually failed in his faith – even though he lived under the law given at Sinai. Yes, he played a crucial role in Israel’s history, but we see a critical failure of faith in Moses…Moses had the law, but he failed in his faith; this prevented him from entering the land across the Jordan. He is the negative contrast of Abraham. Though Moses had the law, he died in the wilderness because of his and Aaron’s lack of faith at Kadesh (Num. 20). Moses wasn’t barred from the Promised Land just because he struck a rock. He had struck rocks before! The Hebrew text makes clear that both Moses and Aaron displayed unbelief in their exasperation. They weren’t trusting God…As a result of this failure of faith, Moses couldn’t enter the

\(^5\) Genesis 26:5 (KJV)
Promised Land…God used Abraham as a picture of trust – without the benefit of the law.”

God’s covenant with Abraham was seal with a sign, the ceremony of circumcision. The act of circumcision was already evident in the life of Abraham probably four hundred years prior to the giving of the law to circumcise at Sinai. Even New Testament writers such as Paul acknowledged the life of Abraham is being lived by faith which pleased the Lord. Abraham was declared righteous because he lived by faith.

Central to the ethical principles of the Abrahamic period are the concept of the covenant, the promise of God and the election of a descendent from Abraham. Without these events in history, all the later concept of the covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai, the call for holiness and the development of Israel as a nation would not be sensible. The Abrahamic narratives are of great significance in the ethical and theological understanding of the Torah as it presented a time before there ever was a proper administration and regulation of laws. It was the beginning of a new nation that is not yet established.

“Prior to the Abraham narrative the book of Genesis presents two major phases in God’s dealings with humanity and does so in terms of two individuals, Adam and Noah. The Abraham narrative, therefore, represents the third phase in salvation history, thus indicating the patriarch’s theological significance.”

The significance of the Abrahamic covenant and the promise had altered the course of history so much that even in the compilation of the Bible itself it “set the agenda, not simply for the rest of the book of Genesis, but for all of the subsequent

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54 Alexander & Baker, Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch, 16
material in Genesis to kings – indeed, arguably well beyond that to the NT fulfillment through Jesus Christ.”

5.5 Mosaic Ethics

Larger part of the Torah is dedicated to the lives of the people of Israel in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. Moses in the central figure in the Torah, and the authorship is in itself often attributed to him by tradition. Out of the five books of the Torah, four of them are concern with the narratives of the children of Israel under Moses. Thus, ethics and morals that make it way in the understanding of the ethics and morality in the book of Torah is largely from the times of Moses. From the crossing of the Red Sea, the narratives exhibit the character and nature of God which was to determine the ethical standards and the religious practice of the people of Israel. A small wandering Hebrew tribes were now to become a nation, whose civilization and beliefs would bring about change to the philosophical, religious and ethical thoughts of the world.

Many ethical and moral standards could be drawn from the narratives of the people of Israel, on how they behaved, their perception of God, the acts of God and the miracles they witnessed. However, it may be best to draw the ethics and moral perception of the Torah from the laws and commandments by which the children of Israel abide. The life of the people changed in history from being a wandering nation to become a settled nation, and then becoming a nation in exile under various empires. But the standards and commandments by which they function did not change with their state of mind. The Decalogue, the laws and the concept of liberation in the Torah shaped the ethics of their everyday life. Later classification of the Torah as the Code of

55 Ibid.
the Covenant, the Priestly Code, the Holiness Code, the Deuteronomic Code offers great insight to the ethical and moral understanding of the people of Israel as they presumably adopted what we know called as the Torah or the Pentateuch.

5.5.1 The Decalogue

The Decalogue or commonly known as the “Ten Commandments” are the set of ten brief commandments that the Israelites received directly from God. The importance of the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel had resounded even into our modern age that it affected the word’s understanding on ethics and morals. The power of influence and effect it had in the development of civilization is immense, so much that Christian theology and political theories still revolves around it. They are still a subject of discourse even in political and religious field till today. In a way, the Ten Commandments are the power that structured and hold together the socio-political life of Jewish and Christian communities. The reverence and honour the Decalogue demands is worthy of it as it was the “first and only commandments that the whole people of Israel hear directly from God, as opposed to the rest of the Sinai legislation, which is mediated by Moses.”56 The narrative’s assertion that the commandments being authored directly by God57 makes the Decalogue distinct from all other laws of the Ancient Near East and even from the other laws and ordinances of the Pentateuch.

The numbering of the Ten Commandments varies from tradition to tradition. However, they all hold the commands mentioned in the Decalogue intact. When the people of Israel received the Ten Commandments, they were just becoming a nation. People of different communities, yet of the same ancestry, were coming together to become a people. This fact was reminded by Moses in Deuteronomy just before the

57 Cf. Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13
people of Israel would enter the land of Canaan. The Ten Commandments binds them together as a nation, and it was reminded of them the significance it should have on them. In it are the revelation of God, the worship due to God, the ethics of right living with their fellow being and their own history. “The text makes no claim that the Ten Commandments constitute the complete will of God, but their placement within the narrative suggests that they possess an ethical priority.”

It is clear from the narratives of the Torah and later traditions of the Jewish and Christian communities, the Decalogue is distinct and is rightly set apart from the rest of the legislation and laws of the Torah. The Code of the Covenant, the Holiness Code, the Priestly Literature and the Deuteronomical Code are the illumination, explanations and unfolding of the Ten Commandments. These Codes and laws tells us how the Decalogue actually functions in the life of a community be it the community of the Israelites. They display how the Ten Commandments may be applied in real life situations.

The Decalogue had been understood and explained by scholars and theologians as the summary of the moral law in which all the laws emanates. Philo of Alexandria understood all the laws of the Torah as mere elaboration of the Decalogue. Church Reformers in the sixteenth century also put the Ten Commandments to a place of prominence because they understood it to the source of ethical standards. Martin Luther understood all the other laws of the book of Deuteronomy as amplification of the Decalogue. John Calvin even goes to the extent of interpreting the negative commandments such as “You shall not kill” to a broader and positive implication, in this instance would be the promotion of each other neighbour’s well being. The Ten Commandments would rightly be asserted that it has effect on nearly every aspect of a person’s and communal life. It established the framework and standards by with a

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58 Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “Ten Commandments” 194
person should live and how a community, perhaps even a nation, should functions. As twentieth century theologian and ethicists H. Richard Niebuhr suggested, the Decalogue outlined an understanding of human moral action as the response to God’s redeeming action.\textsuperscript{59} As the Israelites were set free from bondage to become a free people, adhering to the standards of the Ten Commandments was their way of responding to their newly gifted freedom. The Ten Commandments illustrate how people in freedom respond to the freedom the achieved in their new identity.

The Israelites were not to simply obey the Commandments simply for the sake of obeying. They were to understand the benefits of keeping them. Through the law, God shows that it was possible to be community that thrive and flourished. It was to be a gift they could enjoy rather than it being a burden. Unlike the other laws and commandments that followed, the Ten Commandments do not come with a punishment. Philo explained the reason,

“…let us now proceed to relate the cause for which God, having pronounced these ten commandments or laws, in simple injunctions and prohibitions, appointed no punishment for those who should violate them, as lawgivers usually do. The reason is this: he was God, and being so he was at once the good Lord, the cause of good alone, and of no evil; therefore, thinking it most appropriate to his own nature to deliver saving commands unalloyed, and partaking of no punishment, so that no one yielding to a foolish counselor might accidentally choose what is best, but might do so from wise consideration and of his own deliberate purpose, he did not think to give his oracles to mankind in connection with any denunciation of punishment; not because he meant to give immunity to transgressors, but because he knew that justice was sitting by him, and surveying all human affairs, and that she should never rest, a being by nature a hater of evil and looking upon the chastisement of sinners as her own most appropriate task.”\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 195
\textsuperscript{60} C. D. Yonge, trans., \textit{The Works of Philo}, 533
The Ten Commandments comes with a motivational clauses; one such would be the promise of longevity and blessings towards the obedience to parents. The presence of such motivational statement indicates the law to be a source of goodness and blessings if they choose to obey them. Their presence suggested that “from God’s point of view, the commandments are not self-evident” and that God “seeks to persuade the people that this way of life is attractive.” \footnote{Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “Ten Commandments” 196} The Commandments are rational and sensible in and of themselves because they are good for the well being of an individual and the community. God presented through the Commandments that his way of life is good and that obedience to the Commandments was their reasonable response to God’s redeeming love.

Of the Ten Commandments, the first commandment is of immense importance for the Jewish community and so is it for theological understanding. Often considered as the prologue in various traditions, the statement “You shall have no other gods before me” is the foundation in which all the following commandments rest. If one were to violate any of the other commandments, it violates the first automatically. The ethical principle behind the other commandments rest on the faith that there is no other God but Yahweh. Thus, to kill or to commit adultery would be wrong only because the God of Israel Yahweh had commanded so. To violate them would mean that the violator disregarded God himself. The first commandment demands total surrender to the God of Israel with undivided trust.

The Torah portrays the desire of God to form a community that thrives and flourish based on their relationship with God. Israel was chosen for that, and through the laws and commandments, God was trying to achieve that community. The Ten Commandments stand as the foundation and principles of right ethical living for the
community. However, the Ten Commandments were not there to simply imparted or taught to the new generations. They were meant to be taught and interpreted to every new generation that was to follow so that they are reminded of the redeeming act and steadfast love of God. Such reminder is found in the book of Deuteronomy, and Moses was the one who stood to remind them. He reminded them of God’s graciousness and presented to them again the God who gave them all these laws.

5.5.2 The Covenant

The Code of the Covenant or the Book of the Covenant mentioned in Exodus 20:22 – 23:33 is a significant material to the understanding of the ethics and morals in the Torah. Central to the religion of the Hebrew was this covenant which makes it unique and diverse from other religions of the Ancient Near East. The term “covenant” is used extensively in the Old Testament, especially in the Torah in reference to agreements of various kinds. Agreements between husband and wife, between tribes, between individuals, between rulers, between a king and his people, etc. could all be termed as covenants. However, in biblical tradition, no covenant has more depth and significance than the covenant between God and his people. The concept of the covenant expressed greatly in the Covenant Code runs through the Old Testament and the New Testament so much so that the word covenant could be found in twenty eight of the books of the Old Testament.62

In the covenant of the Torah, God is the great ruler and he offer protection and providence to his people if they turn to him and obedient to his laws and commands. The concept of covenant runs through the stories and narratives of the Bible so much so that it could be said that the idea epitomizes all the actions of God in the Bible. The two divisions of the Christian Bible – the Old and New Testament is firmly based on the

62 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 15
Christian understanding and theology of the old and new covenant. In the Old Testament, the Code of the Covenant is central to the understanding of the covenants that follows. “All subsequent covenants, such as the one at Moab, recorded in Deuteronomy, were renewals or extensions of the covenant at Sinai.”\(^{63}\) The history of the Hebrew could be said to have begun with this covenant at Sinai.

Unlike the covenant made by God to Noah and Abraham, the covenant at Sinai consists of obligations that have to be met. To Noah, the rainbow was the sign of the covenant; to Abraham, circumcision was the sign. God obligated himself to carry out the promises without imposing obligations to Noah and Abraham. However, at Sinai, God entered into the covenant with his people, where he laid specific obligations on the people. The people of Israel were to obey the rules and instructions of the covenant and in turn God would offer his protection and blessings.

In the Bible, God is always the initiator of the covenant. Contract and agreements between two equals are normal and common in history; however, in the Bible, God initiates the relationship. The terms and conditions of the covenant are often non-negotiable and man is not involved in the drafting of the terms. Even though the covenant is understood as a two way contract with God offering protection and blessings on one side and the people obeying his laws and commands, it is a covenant offered by the divine. The Covenant is a divine contract, and the supremacy and sovereignty of the God of Israel was never to be forgotten.

“...although there are two partners in the covenant – God and Israel – it was really unilateral rather than bilateral. God alone stated the conditions of the covenant; the people could not negotiate with God regarding the covenant nor change its conditions. They would either accept it or reject it. Once they accepted it they could not annul it, although they could violate its conditions or break it. God alone had the

\(^{63}\) Ibid. 16
power to dissolve the covenant, a power He never used. He is revealed not only as a covenant-giving God but also as a covenant-keeping God.”

In the Torah, God offers to enter into relationship and communion within the circle of the Israelites. In turn, the Israelites were admitted into the circle of God’s plan when they accepted the covenant with God. By this association, the children of Israel were thus suppose to be set apart as a holy nation to be holy and sanctified to the purpose of God. “The fact that Israel entered voluntarily into covenant with God made the relationship a moral one.”

The Code of the Covenant can be considered as a collection of sentences and judgments of civil and criminal laws for a community. The Code of the Covenant is central to the teachings and instructions of the Torah, perhaps only next to the Decalogue. Biblical scholars differ in their opinion of whether the book of the Covenant be a single compilation or later additions. However, its significance in the Torah and the effect it had in the minds of the Abrahamic religion considering how such ethics framed the mind of modern civilization cannot be overlooked. With the discovery of the Hammurabi Code in 1902, the Covenant Code of the Torah had been compared and acknowledged to have similarities to the Hammurabi Code which is believed to be as old as the 1700 B.C. The analysis and comparison of the Code of the Covenant and the Code of Hammurabi had led to the understanding that the Code of the Covenant in the Torah is “similar in form and content to the laws of ancient Mesopotamia.” The concept and the understanding of the law is however different in the kinds of the Hebrews. The concept that lay behind the laws of the Covenant differs greatly when compared to the belief of the Ancient Near East.

64 Ibid.
65 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 17
66 De Vaux, Ancient Israel,143
67 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 14
In contrast of the Ancient Near East belief of kings receiving laws and to whom the enforcing of the law is entrusted, the laws of the Torah are received by Moses only as a mediator who receives it on behalf of the Israelites. The people of Israel is not responsible to Moses or any leader but to God alone. All the instructions and laws they received revolves around the Covenant, and it was to remind them of the dependence and accountability to God.

“But since these pacts governed the relations of Israel’s dependence on Yahweh, not on a human suzerain, the Israelite law, for all its resemblances in form and content, differs radically from the clauses of the Oriental ‘treaties’ and the articles of their ‘codes’. It is a religious law. It established the principles of the Covenant with Yahweh: its aim was to ensure that this Covenant remained in force. It is perfectly true that the Hittite and Assyrian treaties invoke their gods as guarantors, and this in the prologue and epilogue of their codes Lipit-Ishtar purports to be the interpreter of Enil, and Hammurabi to be ‘the king of justice to whom Shamash has entrusted the law’; but God was not merely a guarantor of the Covenant, he was a party to it, and no Oriental code can be compared with the Israelite law, which is ascribed in its entirety to God as its author. If it contains, and often mingles, ethical and ritual prescriptions, this is because it covers the whole field of the divine Covenant, and because this Covenant governed the relations of men with one another as well as their relations with God.” 68

As Maston asserted that the people of Israel voluntarily entered into covenant with God thus making the relationship a moral one, they were morally bound to keep the laws and commands of God. The obligations of the Covenant were both ritualistic and moral without clear distinction. Time and again in the Torah, the two are mingled without proper distinction but often with an emphasis on the moral. It may properly be concluded that “the covenant at Sinai called “into being a new moral entity: the people Israel,” and that for both the Law and the prophets morality was “a covenant between God and man.” 69 Thus, ethical and moral understanding of the Old Testament is

68 De Vaux, Ancient Israel, 148 – 149
69 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 17
largely derived from the understanding of the covenant relationship and the obligations of the covenant, with the Code of the Covenant at its core.

With the covenant of the Torah, the values and principles of the covenant could only be understood with nature of the initiator of the covenant, which is God. The Old Testament emphasizes on God being a God of mercy whose loving-kindness does not end. The laws and articles of the covenants in the Torah seems legalistic and burdensome to many readers. Nonetheless, the “fundamental idea back of the covenant was not legal obligation but divine grace, a grace not only expressed to and for Israel but a grace that was reaching out to all men though Israel. God’s covenant people were to be the instruments of His redemptive purpose.”70 This is perhaps the reason why the covenantal relationship is the fundamental basis for all the things that happened in biblical history. Christian theology understood the need of Christ’s sacrifice and the pouring of the Holy Spirit as the continuation and the consequences of the covenant that was entered at Sinai.

Covenant being a significant theme in the Old Testament, the covenant at Mount Sinai is at the heart of Hebrew identity. This covenant became the foundation of their understanding as a nation and as a people. It ensures them of their place in the world and greatly influenced their understanding of God. Obedience to the laws of God and keeping the obligations and terms of the covenant was essentially their appropriate response to God in this covenantal relationship. Obligations and instructions in the laws and covenants are embedded with blessings and curses, “but the character of the covenant is shaped more by gratitude for blessings received than by fear of threats made.”71 The people of Israel are a chosen nation, asserts the Torah, with

70 Ibid.
71 Joel B. Green, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, 2011), 184
God as their Lord. The law and the covenant of the Torah shaped the lives and beliefs of the people through which they are reminded of the complete dependence on God, and yet of their mutual dependence on one another as a community and also as a nation. The covenant bound them to one another and to God; therefore Israel is a chosen people and a treasured possession.\textsuperscript{72}

Despite the assertion of Israel as a chosen people the “covenantal imagination resists exclusivism and nativism. A wider array of covenants placed God’s relationship with Israel in a more universal context.”\textsuperscript{73} The covenant with Noah through the rainbow as a sign was a covenant that transcends a particular nation, which shows God’s mercy and providence to all mankind. Through Abraham God promised blessings to all nations. The covenants at Sinai was not exclusive either as it encouraged and instruct the children of Israel to show generosity towards foreigners and strangers, rejects oppression of other tribes and nations, and exhorted to be a blessing to others. Even the Decalogue opens with God reminding them of them being oppressed in the past and that they were delivered by God himself.

Clearly, the covenants mentioned in the Torah, from Noah to Abraham, and then to Moses had shaped the ethical and moral understanding of the people of Israel. The impact it later had on the civilized world need not be elucidated as these principles and values had still been the subject of debate and discussion even in the modern world today.

“Religious leaders such as Heinrich Bullinger (1504 – 75) in Zurich, Johannes Althusius (1557 – 1638) in the Netherlands, William Ames (1576 – 1633) in England, and Samuel Rutherford (1600 – 1661) in Scotland developed a covenantal approach to theology but also applied this image to the political and social spheres of life. Whether reforming ecclesiastical or civil structures, they moved in the direction of limiting

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6
\textsuperscript{73} Green, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, 184
power, dispersing authority, and federating diverse and relatively independent agencies. Their self-consciously theological, covenantal thinking played an important role in the development of modern conceptions of social and political life that founded their legitimacy upon mutually binding promises made by relatively free and equal partners. Without a doubt, these religiously inspired social movements influenced the more secular social contract philosophy of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) and John Locke (1632 -1704)."

5.5.3 The Laws

The Torah portrays God as the divine Lawgiver issuing laws and commands to his people. The narrative of creation itself opens with God’s command that brought about existence of all things. Much of all the legal matters in the Bible, Old and New Testament, are confined to the book of Torah where terms such as laws, statues and ordinances are used. Though the book in its entirety is known as ‘Torah’ (referencing to it being the ‘law’ or ‘instruction’), Deuteronomy uses the term to designate the laws within the book itself.\textsuperscript{75} The biblical account asserts God giving laws when Israel entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai establishing them to be a priestly nation and a holy nation.\textsuperscript{76} The obligations of the covenant are expressed in the laws recorded in the Torah.

The law opens with God reminding them that he is the Lord God who brought them out of oppression. The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue that follows constitutes the basic obligations of the people of Israel as they have now entered into a covenant with God as a free people. The Decalogue is then followed by a series of law codes and articles of instructions. The Code of the Covenant established the prime ethical and moral standards of the people. Through the Covenant Code, they

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. 185 \\
\textsuperscript{75} Deuteronomy 4:44 \\
\textsuperscript{76} Exodus 19:6
understood the covenant they were in and the depth of such relationship with God himself.

A set of cultic laws follows in Exodus 34 onwards, which was given by God after Israel’s rebellion when they create and worshipped a golden calf. God affirms his mercy and forgiveness. It repeated certain laws from the Code of the Covenant and largely focuses on right worship. Proper worship due to God and the rejection of idols are the major theme throughout. The sanctity and importance of Sabbath, the importance of worship and the need of a tabernacle follow. These laws affirm the originality needed in the worship of the God they have made a covenant with. They are not to worship God in the manner their neighbouring nations would. As a nation that is set apart to holiness, they were to worship God as he demanded. Conforming to other nations and their religious beliefs was a dreadful thing to the Israelites.

Enabling the right form of worship and a ceremony of holiness, the Priestly Code was intact. The laws and instructions of this Code are found largely in the book of Leviticus. It focuses on the maintenance of the holiness of the sanctuary and the tabernacle wherein the presence of God dwells. The Code ensures the holiness and purity of the priests and the qualities of the worship they regularly offered to God.

The laws of Holiness or the Holiness Code play an important role in the ancient understanding of what is clean and unclean. The Holiness Code is an expansion of the Priestly Code which demands the entire camp of Israel to be holy. Holiness was not to be confined only to the tabernacle and the priests but they were to be a holy nation. This notion of holiness as a nation is central to the purpose of the Hebrew identity. Part of the obligations of the covenant, the Holiness Code could essentially be understood as the dogma of the covenantal relationship. The laws of holiness thus have deeper meaning and significance to the people of Israel.
In the book of Numbers, other laws are given to the people of Israel by God as they continued their journey in the wilderness. The Deuteronomic Code or laws are presented as the final sayings or sermons of Moses. It was to teach the new generations of Israel before his death. The Deuteronomic Code includes new laws of which are largely of the reinterpretations of the Covenant Code from the book of Exodus.

The laws in the book of Torah are often the descriptions and the interpretations of the ethical. Proper analysis and examination would yield scientific significance to the ancient traditions and laws of the Torah. The different laws of the Torah could be categorized in the least manner as ceremonial laws and civil laws. Both these laws often intermingled when written in the Torah but their moral and ethical overtones ring out through the acts and sentences pronounced through the cases mentioned.

5.5.3.1 Ceremonial Laws

The ceremonial laws largely deal with the religious practices and rituals of the priests and the people as demanded by the Priestly and Holiness Code. After their exile, during the reconstruction of the city Jerusalem, Leviticus plays a significant role in the establishment of holiness to the people of God. It focuses on sacrificial rituals, consecration of priests, standards of purity and holiness. At the same time, bringing out the deeper meaning of all the rituals, it commands the people of Israel to love their neighbours and strangers that lived among them. Much of the ceremonial and ritualistic laws and their ethical significances may be discussed in the Holiness Code and the Priestly Literature.

5.5.3.2 Civil Laws

With selected parallels in the book of Leviticus, the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy addressed civil and criminal laws. The articles of laws cited in them and

77 Cf. Leviticus 19:17-18, 33-34
their enforcements offers comprehensive insight to the kind of society the Israelites were after their covenant with God. The maintenance of a wandering people as they become a single unified nation was essential, and the “maintenance of civil order is essential to covenant faithfulness, and such order requires viable systems of civil and criminal law.” The civil and criminal laws of the Torah presented sentences that seems morally unacceptable to contemporary readers. Endorsement of slavery, death penalty for sexual misconduct and idolatry are amongst the few that may seem barbaric and unethical. Nevertheless, despite their limitations when dealing them in the light of their context and background, these texts in the Torah “retain their pertinence for present-day social concerns because they challenge us to engage legal issues in a fashion that fosters social justice and advances a substantive vision of the common good.”

The civil and criminal laws described in the Torah are not a separate law and cannot be categorized separately but are part of the Covenant Code, Holiness Code and the Deuteronomic Code found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These laws and ordinances ordered the lives of the children of Israel as a nation, discern their rituals and religious practices. They also include dietary laws and standards of purity. Some of the civil case laws that are depicted in the Torah are often compared and rightly have parallels with the law codes of the Mesopotamian regions. Nevertheless, the law code of the Torah begins and ends with distinct instructions from God. The teachings and orders of Yahweh are the communal roots of Israel’s heritage which they obtained through the covenant with God at Sinai. This relationship provides the moral framework for their civil laws.

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78 Green, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, 469
79 Ibid.
The people are called to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, which are emphasized greatly in the book of Deuteronomy. The underlying principle being that their love for God would motivate them to keep the laws and obligations of the covenant, thus ever enjoying the blessings of the God of Israel. The opposite would incur the curses as described in the book of Deuteronomy. Despite the persistent disobedience of the Israelites, God’s steadfast love ensures the keeping of the covenant. However, in order to enjoy the blessings of the covenantal relationship they must stick to the conditions and terms of the covenant.

The civil laws of the Torah covered various instances and cases from small disputes to grave atrocities. Green summarized the civil and criminal laws presented in the book of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy into five types of issues:

1. “Class and property matters, including honest commercial transactions;
2. Loans and debts;
3. Physical assaults and interpersonal conflicts;
4. Abominable sexual acts;
5. Unacceptable religious practices.”

Many of the terms described in the Torah may not be compared with modern civil laws because some of these cases are addressed as moral imperatives. The usage of just weights and measures, the denial of frauds, payment of wages to workers, the call for Sabbath rest and the needs of the poor are all part of the civil laws that have strong moral obligations attached to it. They are demanded to offer tithes to support priests and the Levites, offer food to the poor and met the needs of strangers, orphans and widows. The people of Israel were forbidden to oppress strangers, abuse widows or disregard orphans. These laws arose and may be considered as the continuation of the Yahwistic teachings of the Covenant Code in the book of Exodus. The policies of

80 Ibid. 470
lending and borrowing were all dictated in the Torah with mentions of values, amounts and the case in which such lending and borrowing may occur. The Israelites were to honour the property in their hands and that of their neighbours. The civil laws also prescribed the placing of boundary markers, the setting free of burdened animals and the caring or domesticated animals.

There are no instances or standards of loans for business investments in the Torah or the Old Testament, but a system of lending was evident to ease the burden of the poor. Such loans would enable those that are desperately poor to survive. People from the fellow community would lend money to the poor in need and they would do so without charging interest. They were also obliged to abate all the debts every seventh year.\(^8^1\) They were prohibited from taking and demanding from the borrower an object as a pledge. Though slavery being considered to be of great offense in modern context, to the Hebrews, it could have been a system for survival. Hebrew servants and their families were to be sustained by their owners with their basic needs. They were also to be released at the beginning of the seventh year. They should not be send empty-handed when they are set free. Such was the predicament of the slaves and servants that even the laws of the Torah protected their welfare.

The year of Jubilee which occurs in a fifty year cycle is of great significance in the ethics and economic system of the Israelites. The Jubilee year is stressed significantly in the book of Leviticus wherein throughout the year debts are released, servitude ended and the people return to their lost lands. There is a redistribution of property. Those that have been unfortunate would have a new beginning at the Jubilee year. However, there still are provisions where servants and their families are permitted

\(^8^1\) Cf. Deuteronomy 15:12
to choose to remain in the service of their master as their master might offer them security and livelihood which they may otherwise achieve.\(^{82}\)

Laws concerning physical violence and sexual misconduct are very straightforward in the Torah with definite sentences. They are treated as serious crimes with death penalty often imposed on acts such as intentional killing, kidnapping, assaulting parents, cursing parents, abominable sexual practices such as incest, bestiality, adultery and so on. Death penalty is also demanded for idolatry, sorcery, false prophecy and the defamation of the Lord’s name. Such execution of laws may be a barbaric act to many contemporary readers, but such action was required because such crimes “violated the covenant calling of the people of Israel: death and kidnapping deprived people of life and freedom; sexual misconduct threatened the patriarchal structure that preserved kinship bonds vital for their collective identity; and idolatry was a blatant betrayal of God, who had formed them as a covenant people.”\(^{83}\)

Hebrew justice was such that perpetrators would meet the same injury as what they committed. It was “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”\(^{84}\) In case a slave dies because of the beating administered by the master, he is to be punished by the law; while a slave that suffers a permanent injury such as a lost of the eye, tooth, etc. would be set free.\(^{85}\) Causing a miscarriage on a pregnant woman was to pay a fine as administered by the judges, while a man who seduces a virgin should pay the father and take her as his wife. If a man rapes a woman and she does not cry for help, both are guilty of adultery and should be put death; whereas a rape that occurs out in the fields or outside the

\(^{82}\) Cf. Exodus 21:2-6; Deuteronomy 15:16-17
\(^{83}\) Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 472
\(^{84}\) Exodus 21:23-25 (NRSV)
\(^{85}\) Cf. Exodus 20:20ff
town, only the man would be punished because the woman’s cry for help would not be heard by others.\textsuperscript{86}

The laws and ordinances found in Exodus and Deuteronomy provide standards for fair judicial processes amongst the people of Israel. There are cases where judges preside over trials, questioned witnesses and make concluding judgments. Conflicts between families are also settled in the presence of judges and Levitical priests. The law condemns false witnesses and bribery and demands at least two witnesses in a case. They were to show no partiality and should never disregard or take advantage of the poor, strangers, widows, or orphans.

Central to the civil and criminal laws is the authority of God because they “derive their authority and their authenticity from fundamental covenant commitments: honoring God’s glory; embracing God’s steadfast love and loving God in return; maintain stability and order; laboring for the material well-being and physical security of the people, including strangers living among them; offering special care for the vulnerable and protecting them from exploitation, especially the poor, widows, and orphans; reinforcing marital bonds that undergirded the identity of the people.”\textsuperscript{87}

Despite the laws of the Torah having many similarities with other law codes of the Ancient Near East, they also display an array of unique features. The Torah does not segregate the laws into categories separating the social and communal laws from that of the religious ones. Laws concerning social, economic and political life are mingled with those that are concern with worship and religion. Biblical laws strongly emphasize on the worship of the one God of Israel and prohibit idolatry and all other forms of pagan worship. In biblical understanding, the laws come from God himself unlike the belief of their neighbouring nations where their laws would originate from

\textsuperscript{86} Cf. Deuteronomy 22:23-27
\textsuperscript{87} Green, \textit{Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics}, 472
their kings. The divine attribution to the laws of the Torah became so important to the
Israelites that it was to be read aloud in public and they were to teach their children and
instruct the generations to come to abide by them. Daily meditation was a practice of
devotion so much so that they ought to find joy, delight and blessings.  

Old Testament Prophets seldom cited specific laws from the Torah, but they
would clearly base their announcement of the coming judgment because of their
disobedience and disregard of the laws in the Torah. Israel’s act of worshipping false
gods and social injustice would often the reasons for their downfall as such acts would
be a direct disobedience to the laws mentioned by God in the Torah. Their religious
acts of sacrifice and rituals were criticized by the prophets because it was not combined
with the concerns of God’s justice for orphans, widows and the poor. The prophets
thus blamed their exile in Babylon and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem as a
result of Israel’s disobedience to the laws and commands of God.

The laws of the Torah are complex and they offer an intricate understanding of
the ethics and morals of the Hebrew community. The relationship between the laws and
ethics is undoubtedly clear in reading the narratives of the Torah. Central to the belief
in respect to the laws is that the laws are directly from God. Over the course of time,
the laws of the Torah had been a subject to interpretations, with reinterpretation of
several parts of Exodus in Deuteronomy itself. Christian theology also affirms the
interpretation of the Torah in the time of Christ. The spirit of the laws of the Torah
seems to assert that the laws are mere obligations that stem out from the covenantal
relationship, while its purpose may be even deeper than the outward actions demanded
by the commandments.

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88 Cf. Psalm1, 119
89 Cf. Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8
90 Cf. Isaiah 42:24-25
“...the laws and commandments of the OT often represent the minimum expectations of obedience to God and boundaries of behavior beyond which God’s people should not go (the prohibitive commandments, such as “You shall no other gods,” “You shall not murder” and the like). But these minimum legal standards within the OT do not fully encompass the deeper and more positive ethical ideals that both OT and NT witnesses urged upon their communities of faith: to love God with passion and urgency in every aspect of one’s life (Deut. 6:5-9; 10:12; Mark 12:30), to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Luke 10:25-37; Gal. 5:14), and “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8 [cf. Col. 3:12]).”

In Judaism and Christianity, the Torah is an important religious and moral category as it embodies the law of God wherein the covenantal relationship between God and his people is established. The law sets the people of God apart and it provides guidance in their journey of their relationship with God. For this reason, the law is cherished by the people as it promised blessings and promotes abundance. Hence, good ethics as prescribed by the law promotes abundance to the people of God.

The role of the Torah and the understanding thereof had shaped the minds of many thinkers and reformers; so much so that they in turn had heavily influenced and shaped the thinking of the western civilized world. Thomas Aquinas believed that the natural law available to all through reason is necessary. However, he believed that it is insufficient to guide human purpose and existence, only enough to provide direction to their natural end as rational and social being. For Martin Luther who emphasized the sinful nature of human beings, the law is a negative element that convicts people of their sinfulness, but restrain human disobedience because of the fear of punishment through civil laws. John Calvin understood the negative impact it had on people, but also believed to have a purpose, that is to understand the will of God.

“For it is the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what the will of the Lord is which they aspire to

91 Green, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, 469
follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge; just as a servant who
desires with all his soul to approve himself to his master, must still
observe, and be careful to ascertain his master’s dispositions, that he may
comport himself in accommodation to them….Even in the case of a
spiritual man, inasmuch as he is still burdened with the weight of the flesh,
the Law is a constant stimulus, pricking him forward when he would
indulge in sloth.”^92

5.5.4 Liberation

Though the word “liberation” rarely appears in the Old Testament, the act of
liberation and the proclamation of liberty are not unheard in the Old Testament. Taking
a prominence status in the laws of the Torah is the assertion made by God himself that
he is the liberator of the people of Israel.

“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land
of Egypt, out of the house of bondage…”^93

The concept of liberty and liberation is deeply rooted in the Torah and is
essential in the theological and ethical discourse of the Bible. Putting the story of the
Patriarchs aside, the people of God in the Torah gained their identity as a nation upon
their liberation from the bondage of the Egyptians. For this reason, they are constantly
reminded that it is God who set them free and choose them in the first place. The
liberating power of God is a theme the Israelites were never to forget.

God liberated the people and continue to liberate the people of God in Judaism
and Christian concept of God’s liberating power. His liberating power works on those
that are socially and politically oppressed, and the Torah also made provisions and
commandments to liberate and help those who are economically oppressed. God
liberating power also works on those that are under the bondage of sin and temptations,

^93 Exodus 20:2 (KJV)
from the attack of the forces of evil, dangerous places and death. It delivers them out from their deprived state of suffering and persecution.

The liberating power of God brings about wholeness, justice, equality and communal harmony. This is evident in the communal lives of the children of Israel as they began their journey from Egypt toward the Promised Land despite many difficulties they endured. As they experienced liberation, they became a nation and laws were ascribed to knit the community together. The liberating power of God restores the dignity of the Hebrews and brings the whole community to a full participation in worship and administration.

Creation began with complete harmony which has been destroyed by the sins of Adam. Liberation in the original plan at creation was not a mere absence of oppression but also the working together and harmony of all things. All components of creation, from human to the vegetation of the earth, were in perfect harmony. The abuse of power and freedom disrupt the balance only to promote the self-centered agenda of one which leads to the subjugation of others. This in turn brings about sufferings and persecutions.

God’s liberation in the Torah is a calling and an attempt to restore the original harmony at creation. By renouncing evil and all oppressive forces, by confronting destructive structures, harmony could be achieved with God as the liberator. It is understood that the liberation offered by God is a holistic liberation which has its impact at the spiritual, physical, social and personal level. The fact that God desires liberation is not hidden in the laws of the Torah when reading it with this liberative act in mind. The Torah emphasized on liberation that brings about social transformation through narratives such as the exodus and the ordinance of the Jubilee year, later prophets of the Old Testament understood and interpreted to affirm spiritual liberation
as well. Green is convinced that the ultimate end of liberation is the restoration of the perfect harmony at creation which ensures the restoration of the dignity of man individually and the establishment of a harmonious community.

“…God’s liberation is intrinsically connected to the creation narrative, in which all aspects of human being and society are crafted in perfect harmony, and to the eschatological images of the book of Revelation, in which the promise of perfect harmony comes to fruition. Then, the “in-between” time is precisely God’s call to liberate – that is, to resemble the perfect harmony described at the beginning and at the end of the biblical narrative. God’ liberation, then, encompasses all aspects of the human being and all elements of the universe and society.”

At a spiritual and inner level, without the ethical standards of God, man ends in bondage. God is the liberator of all things, which to Green also includes liberation from ideological oppression where the control of interpretative processes and dissemination of particular interpretation becomes dominant. This too could lead to the marginalization and oppression of minor groups and interpreters whose interpretations are ignored simply because they are not part of the dominant norm.

In response to the social concerns and aligning with biblical tenants, liberationist ethics, also known as liberative ethics had developed with a methodology of ethical analysis in the lives of the disenfranchised and the marginalized. They engaged in the attempt to reconcile academic and theological propositions through a particular process. It is an ethics of action and doing where they are involved with the struggles and concerns of the oppressed. In religious tradition, such liberation would stress on human oppression socio-economic challenges, political and racial discriminations, environmental concerns and religious oppressions. They struggle with God’s character rather than God’s existence. God is understood as the one who imparts

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94 Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 481
95 Ibid.
life and not death, who acted in history, who sided with the down-trodden and the oppressed, who is deeply concerned with justice and kindness.

Liberationist ethicists are comfortable using theories from Marxism, post-colonialism and postmodernism with subscribing to their worldviews as long as it helps in the implementation of the liberation process. Liberation is linked with salvation, and salvation may be liberation from personal sin as well as the social sins which are inflicted on the oppressed. Oppression and poverty are seen as an expression of sin. This is because a few people had grabbed the welfare and benefit of the others for their selfish gains. Thus, this would lead to the poverty of others from whom it is grabbed. In this line of thought, liberation is therefore also needed for those that grabbed from others, as they would need to be liberated from their selfish desires. On the spiritual side, the oppressors are as much in need as their oppressed of salvation and liberation.

Liberation then requires knowledge and consciousness of the communities around. Only when the knowledge that liberation is required then the oppressed and the oppressor may see the need of liberation. The goals of liberation include freedom from exploitation, to establish a more humane and dignified life, the elimination of social injustices and a community based on biblical teachings of love, mercy and justice. Liberative ethics may thus be said attempt to promote God’s kingdom through the principles of biblical justice and love. The process in which the liberative method is carried out is itself in contrast to other methodology. Here, theory is shaped by praxis as it requires the understanding of the situation and community first, which is then supported by the biblical theory that may be attached. For this reason, liberationist ethics has to vary from culture to culture, community to community.

“Ethics are never developed in a cultural vacuum. All ethics are a reflection of the social location and theological beliefs (or disbeliefs) of a given people. Liberationist ethics is no different. It is indigenous to specific communities, seriously considering the local cultural settings of
the group desiring to implement a liberative ethical response to oppressive structures. As such, liberationist ethics cannot be exported from community to community as if it were a commodity.\textsuperscript{96}

African liberative ethical movements would focus on racial oppression such as the apartheid with the appreciation of the indigenous religion, whereas Native American movement would concentrate on the recovery of their identity and acquire liberation in the form of self-determination. African American liberative ethical movement took the form of making the Gospel relevant to their community in their struggle against white supremacy and slavery. In Asia where Christianity is a minority, the movements are often based on local religious ethics. It often includes ecumenical movements and attempt to provide an open platform against the narrow and selective Western view of history. Dalit theology had focused on the dismantling of caste system whereas in South Korea minjung had become an effort for human rights based on the theological and ethical principles for the downtrodden and the oppressed. The liberative ethical movement even has its effect on feminists and womanist where the liberation of the oppressed group is their primary agenda.

From contemporary liberationist ethicist to ancient social reformers, the Bible, particularly the Torah played a significant role in the formation of their moral standpoint. The narratives of the exodus where God involved in history by leading the people out of bondage of oppression had been cited time and again to elucidate the fact that God stand on the side of the oppressed. God’s demand of justice, kindness and love as proclaimed by the prophets had been the cry of many organizations and ethicists. The oppressed are often understood to have a better, truer and more relevant view and interpretation of biblical text as they may be undergoing the same hardship.

\textsuperscript{96} Green, \textit{Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics}, 484
Tenants of human rights are of important topic of discourse in biblical theology. Man is made in the image of God; he is given divine right to nurture and care nature, promote equality among man, with the care of every living being. The Torah being written in a strong patriarchal standpoint had often been a subject of criticism. However, the laws in the Torah grant many provisions that care the needs of women and protected their welfare. From rape to marriage, the laws cover conditions and cases often with equality between man and woman.

5.5.5 The Holiness Code

The Holiness Code is a term used for the collection of laws in the book of Leviticus, primarily from the seventeenth chapter to the twenty sixth. The laws are believed to be from the “Holiness School” and are closely related to the Priestly Literature which concerns the priesthood of the Israelites. It may have postdated the Priestly material but the precise dating of the Code is unknown as there is not general consensus among the scholars. It is however argued that “it comes from a period prior to the Babylonian exile (586 BCE), while other contend that the Holiness School material is exilic or even, in part, postexilic.”

The code derives its name from God’s call to be holy as he is holy because God is the source of holiness and he has bestowed it to the children of Israel. The word “holy” or “holiness” is approximately found in three-fourths of the books of the Old Testament. Apart from the book of Leviticus, it is numerously mentioned in the book Exodus, the Psalms the book of Isaiah and Ezekiel. The concept of holiness is so revolutionary and yet very central to the teaching of the Torah that Jewish theologian Kohler asserts Leviticus 19:2 to be the central and culminating concept of Jewish

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97 Ibid. 365
98 Leviticus 19:2
99 Maston, Biblical Ethics, 23
Lazarus stated that it “sums up all morality in one comprehensive expression.” Baruch Levine contended that holiness is more of God’s way of action rather than it being his nature. The holiness of God set apart God from all other things, and the priests and Levites were expected to imitate that holiness. The Holiness Code demands the holiness of God being not imitated only by priests but also by the people in general because they had become a chosen nation. To be chosen nation was to be holy to God, which would mean that they should set themselves apart as a nation. The nation of Israel should stand out amongst its neighbouring nations. They ought to be unique and separated from the cultures and traditions of the other nations.

It is clear that the Holiness Code is about pragmatic laws and instructions which may constitute the daily events of the Israelites. It determines the tenants of their everyday life. The laws of the Code established that holiness is achieved in active terms through ethics and behaviour. Even though the “ethical was evidently not an integral part of the original idea” the ethical implications of the laws of Holiness without a doubt calls for it. The central concern of the Holiness Code is a community-based holiness with holiness in all its spheres of activities. From their interaction with God, their interaction within their community, their interaction with other nations and peoples, their interaction with their land and their property are to be determined by the standards of holiness prescribed by the Holiness Code. Objects, space and time are part of the holiness ethic. This would then establish a community that is holy, which is the fundamental goal of the Code. To the Torah, the establishment of holy community is as important as the sanctification of an individual because the individual exist in a community; and they cannot exit apart from each other.

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100 K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (Macmillan, New York, 1918), 101
102 Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 365
103 Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 23
The combination of ethical behaviour and distinctness found in the Holiness Code is a departure and expansion from the Priestly Code as the demand is not only for the priesthood but of all the people of the nation of Israel. This manifestation and requirement of God’s holiness to the masses is what makes the nation stands out amongst their neighbours. This holiness intended to mark them as God’s own chosen people. “The Holiness Code goes further than P too by suggesting that Israel’s actions have, in turn, a consecrating effect on God (Lev. 22:32); in other words, there is a reciprocal quality to holiness.” Holiness is therefore a relational concept wherein God and the people are in relation. For this very reason, the relationship of the people of Israel with their God is of great significance, so much so that their day to day life is entirely affected by it.

The Holiness Code shows a confluence of moral laws with ritual laws giving the Code a unique quality. In the Priestly Code, there is a demand of proper rituals and procedures that are ought to be followed. Failure would resulted in one becoming ritually impure, thus making the person unfit to be in the presence of that is holy. However, in the Holiness Code, impurity is contracted by the person when he disobeyed the moral instructions. The impurity that resulted thus would make the person morally and ritually impure. It connotes a sinfulness where one would be deemed as a transgressor and would atone for his sins only though punishments and not by ritual means.

As the laws of the Torah develop, it is clear from the Holiness Code that moral impurity defiles the community, the sanctuary, the land and the nation. This train of thought was perhaps essential with the historical context the Holiness Code was

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perhaps written. Assuming the inception of the Holiness Code around the exile, McCall explained,

“At the time of the Holiness Code’s inception, Israel was keenly aware of the real threat of exile. Israel had experienced it at the hands of the Assyria, and, depending on the dating of the code to which one subscribes, the same threat was either imminent or fully present from Babylon. It is hardly surprising that the code’s most severe punishment for breaking many of its laws is not death, but karet: exile from the community (the punishment occurs thirteen times [e.g. Lev.17:10; 18:29; 20:3]). To be “cut off” (Heb. kārat) from the community threatens not just the offender’s life but also the extinction of his or her whole family line, so that the offender’s existence will not even be remembered once he or she is dead…The establishment and preservation of a clear national identity for Israel in the face of that threat, then, is also a principal aim of the Holiness Code. Israel’s social and historical circumstances demanded that a definition of holiness including strong measure of exclusivism. This does not mean that Israel was isolated from its ancient Near Eastern neighbours; they interacted with their neighbours and shared many aspects of culture with the nations around them. But the Holiness Code seeks to develop and codify Israel’s theology and ethics in ways that are uniquely Israeliite, distinctively different from those of their neighbours.”

The Holiness Code established to the nation of Israel what is clean and unclean, promotes sexual ethics, and demands the care of the poor, widows and orphans, and call for holiness like no other since they are a holy nation. The Holiness Code separated the culture and worldview from their surrounding nations which gives and affirms their meaning and purpose as a chosen nation. They were to know the difference between things that are holy and common in their day to day life. The laws of the Code reflect on the meaning of the term “holiness” from a biblical standpoint within the context of the Torah. It exhibits how holiness is manifested ethically and morally to and within the community.

105 McCall, “Holiness Code,” 54
Though the laws of the Holiness Code may sound pedantic to many contemporary readers, it touches on some of the most controversial ethical and social issues of the present world. On debates about marriage, gay rights, adoption, homosexuality and others of controversy, the laws of the Holiness Code in the book of Leviticus are some the most cited verses. Laws on agriculture and caring of the land, the effect of human sinfulness on land invite its readers to reconsider the exploitation of land in current times. The care for the poor, disenfranchised and the marginalized is also one of the important principles of the Code. The Jubilee year when Israel was to give their land a rest and set their servants free, cancel debts and restore land ownership is perhaps the greatest achievement in the area of economic development of a nation.

Holiness is so important to the covenantal relationship of the Israelites and their God. The numerous laws and commandments mentioned in the Torah aims to bring about the holiness that God desires. Holiness is thus the end goal of all the laws that are presented in the Torah because then only would the covenant be sustained. Holiness could perhaps be regarded as the “climax of biblical morality.”¹⁰⁶ The morals and ethics of the Old Testament, especially that of the Torah revolves around the call and need of holiness. It reminds them of their fallen nature and they are to obey the ordinances of the Torah ever remembering the fallen short nature of mankind. Holiness brings them closer to God individually and most importantly as a nation.

5.6 JEDP Ethics

In light of JEDP theory of the compilation of the book of Torah, it may be safe to assert that each literature brings about the evolution of ethics and morals in the life of the Israel community. As they undergo hardships and sorrow, joy and victory, the people of Israel wade and developed in the ethical understandings. Assuming the timeline of the development of the writings in line with the Documentary Hypothesis, it would be wise to analyze the ethics and moral principles each writers tries to emphasized in each of their literature.

5.6.1 Yahwistic Ethics

The literature of the Yahwist may have originated during the time of King Solomon (ca. 950 BCE) when a “radical shift took place from agrarian and communitarian society to a well-organized structural society, from charismatic leadership of the nation to a monarchy, even the priesthood was restructured.”\(^{107}\) It was a time when development was in the cultural and economic spheres of the Israelites. Furthermore, it was a time of political stability.

There is a very strong anthropological and theological concern in the Yahwists writings. The cultural and social progress of the time was perhaps responsible for the inclination towards anthological understanding of the sacred. If the presumed dating is true, the Yahwist is probably the earliest of narratives compiled, so it may be safe to assume that it may have borrowed myth and narratives from older traditions. The traditions need not necessarily be from neighbouring pagan traditions but may as well be their ancient oral traditions which they have handed down over the generations. Nevertheless, the Yahwist account often offers a very anthropomorphic representation of the divine.

In describing the Yahwist version of the creation narrative, Armstrong wrote, “Instead of concentrating on the creation of the world and on the prehistoric period like his pagan contemporaries in Mesopotamia and Canaan, J is more interested ordinary historical time. There would be no real interest in creation in Israel until the sixth century BCE, when the author whom we call “P” wrote his majestic account in what is now the first chapter of Genesis. J is not absolutely clear that Yahweh is the sole creator of heaven and earth. Most noticeable, however, is J’s perception of a certain distinction between man and the divine. Instead of being composed of the same divine stuff as his god, man (adām), as the pun indicates, belongs to the earth (adāmah).”

Though biblical scholars may not fully agree with Armstrong, the Yahwist account of creation is not as elaborate and majestic as that of chapter one of Genesis. Here, God is depicted as one who stoops down to make the living creatures including man with his own hands.

Furthermore, in the Yahwist literature, God come down to earth and walk amongst Adam and Eve in the garden and even visited Abraham as though he was a traveler. Such event would almost be considered an anathema in the later traditional understanding of God.

The fundamental relation of man with his fellow man is of immense importance in the Yahwist writings as it must have greatly been influence by the idea of a harmonious society. The Yahwist shows how a good communal relationship can have an effect on their relationship with God. Unlike later writings of the Torah, it presented a more universal view of God’s blessing. It affirms that all people on earth would receive blessings through Abraham and his descendants. Yahwist writers did not exclude their neighbours from the blessings of God and also shows “the same

108 Armstrong, A History of God, 21
theological concern of universality through the narrative of Joseph which culminates in that the rejected Joseph was given God’s wisdom through which Joseph became channel of blessings to the Egyptians and ultimately to his father’s family as well.”¹⁰⁹

The Yahwist also highlighted the dark nature of mankind. The fall of man, the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden, the killing of Abel, the flood and the survival of Noah are all part of the Yahwist writings. The Yahwist presented the need of ethical good living because of the disobedience nature against God. Though the Yahwist do not present the narratives as dogma or laws, these narratives which to some category may be classified as myth are the foundation in with later laws and commandments developed their ethics and moral standards on.

The Yahwist literature presented God in a very mild manner and being very close to mankind. The anthropomorphic representation of God is significant in the narratives, it perhaps display the desire of God to dwell with man. It has a very universalistic approach on the account it presented; the writers must have been influenced and motivated to be blessings to others in whatever situation they may be. Goodness over evil was significant through the lives of characters such as Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Almost none of the laws in the Torah could be attributed to the Yahwist to which it may be safe to say that Yahwist is not very legalistic and opts to present the narratives as a retelling or preservation of the existing accounts of its time.

5.6.2 Elohist Ethics

The Elohistic source of the Torah is often understood to have originated from the northern kingdom of Israel about 850 BCE. Showing favour to Israel over Judah the Elohist often speaks negatively of Aaron. Believed to be from the time of King Ahab and the apostasy with his wife Jezebel, there is a great distance between God and his

people. They emphasized on the transcendent nature of God, and unlike the Yahwist account, there is no direct encounter between God and man. God deals with man only through angels, dreams and visions. God appears as cloud and fire, and even when he appeared to Moses, Moses could only see his back.

Unlike the Yahwist account, there is no creation story which would describe the origin of mankind. Rather it presented a more inclusive focus on Israel as a chosen nation of God. While the Yahwist presented Abraham to be a blessing to all nations, the Elohist presented Israel to be an exclusive nation devoted to him.

Consistent throughout the Elohistic writings is the concept of fear and reverence. God is to be feared. Almost all the narratives of the Elohist have a moral underlying principle, which is the fear of God. Exemplary characters form the Elohistic writings are often presented as one that fear God. God, to the Elohist, could be approached only through specific and well ordained rituals that undergo purification and sanctification. The patriarchs are even presented as prophets, suggesting the writing to have been written during the times of the prophetic circle of Elijah and Elisha.

Much importance is given to the covenant at Sinai which is understood to the origin of the covenant, rather than the covenant with Abraham. Mount Sinai is often present as Horeb in Elohistic sources.

The Elohist believed that Israel must fear God and be obedient to his laws. Their obedience must be shaped by their covenantal relationship with God. It is concerned with laws for right ethical living. It does not offer much motivational reasons for obedience but fear. The Code of the Covenant, one of the most important Codes of the Torah is attributed to the Elohistic sources which would immediately suggest to the readers of the significance covenant and obedience to the law would mean to the Elohist.
5.6.3 Priestly Ethics

The Priestly sources are regarded the latest amongst the four sources and are suspected to be distinctive in style and content. It exhibits a deep and disciplined theological understanding of God, worship and the ethics of the laws. A majority of the book of Leviticus is believed to be the work of the Priestly writers. It contains the codes and regulations for the working of a priest and also extended the concept of holiness to the community as a whole. It presented laws and instructions in order. There is a clear distinct theology and concept behind the Priestly literature.

Due to the immense interest and dedication towards rituals, purification and holiness, contemporary reader often find it pedantic and arcane. However, the systematic instructions it presented display the theological, philosophical and ethical concept it embraced.

The Priestly writers understood the concept of time based on the covenant they entered. The primeval period is marked by the covenant with Noah, the ancestral period with Abraham and the period in which they dwell in was marked by the covenant under Moses at Mount Sinai. These three distinct periods shaped their understanding of God, his actions and his will. For them, worship is of great significance and thus the tabernacle and its role in the community is of utmost importance. Through the tabernacle, God is with the people of Israel. The Priestly Literature marked the Israelites as a chosen people, and most importantly as a worshipping community.

The Priestly literature seems to bring the former traditions of the Torah together. The relation between the usage of the name Elohim and Yahweh may not be as distant as it may incur. The name “El” may have easily been used in reference to God in generic, but “Yahweh” for the personal name of God. The fact that “El” God is the same as “Yahweh” is asserted in the Torah itself. Yahwist asserted that Yahweh
was worshipped since the time of Adam’s grandson. However, the Elohist states that the divine name “Yahweh” is revealed only to Moses at the burning bush. Upon reading texts from the Priestly literature, from the conversation between Moses and God, it is clear that the God whom Abraham called “El” is one and the same as Moses’ Yahweh, only that the name is revealed to Moses only at that moment. The Priestly Literature seems to merge together and explain the old texts of the Torah to present a better cohesive singular book of the law.

The affirmation of Yahweh as the God of the Israelites seems to be done by the Priestly literature as it brings about a cohesive history of the people of God. Vital to the development of the faith of the Israelites was the role of Moses because “the events of the Exodus made Yahweh the definitive God of Israel and that Moses was able to convince the Israelites that he really was one and the same as El, the God beloved by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Unlike Abraham’s “El” in pre-Mosaic times, Yahweh is a God of holiness from whom the people of the Israel must distant themselves. Though Priestly Literature uses the name “Yahweh” from the Yahwist writings, it attached to it the character of God from the Elohists. The Yahweh presented is no longer that Yahweh who walks with man, visited Abraham and fought with Jacob. Though God was referred by many names, Yahweh stands out for the people of Israel because it was the name revealed to Moses. Despite the Israelites being a communion of different ethnic groups from the bondage of Egypt, they were “bound principally together by their loyalty to Yahweh, the God of Moses.”

The Priestly understanding of order is about distinction. Their attention to order plays a significant role in their understanding of the ethical. In the Priestly account of creation, unlike the Yahwist account, creation occurs in particular orders separated by

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10 Armstrong, A History of God, 30
11 Ibid. 19
days. There is a creation of land and land animals, sea and creatures of the sea, sky and things that could fly. The order of creation is maintained by separation. Thus, creatures that cross their boundaries would mean that they violated the order of the world, and any violation of the order would be a thing of impurity. Lapsley explains laws about clean and unclean food and the strange laws of clothing through this distinct order concept of the Priestly Literature.

“In the Priestly worldview, lobster and other shellfish break the boundaries of the “natural” order and therefore are defiling to eat. Likewise, wearing garments made of two different fabrics breaks boundaries and invites chaos (Lev. 19:19). So also with human sexuality: in the Priestly worldview, there are men and women, and all are assumed to be heterosexual (the priest did not imagine anyone being created “homosexual”), and so all sexual activity should be heterosexual; to do so otherwise crosses boundaries and invites chaos…”

The Priestly writers established the norms for their own time, but their rituals and strange laws are often proven to have certain benefits to the individual who practices it. Certain laws also need to be understood from the point in history when it was written. The forbid of certain practices were also due to it being a practice of the neighbouring political enemies.

The book of Leviticus, a work of the Priestly writers envisioned a world in order, shaped by God’s purpose, created by the power of God. They believed that creation and order is sustained and established by rituals and worship. It is a world where God invites mankind to share responsibility in the sustenance and restoration of

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his divine purpose for the world. Cultic rituals and dietary laws keep the sanctuary pure and clean from the disorder that may disrupts the sanctity of the tabernacle. The priests are called to organize and officiate worship and rituals. They are to teach the people the laws of the Torah so that they may keep themselves away from those that can make them impure. However, it is the people that must know their state of whether they are pure or impure. It is the people that must bring the sacrificial animal required for the sins they committed.

To the Priestly writers, the world is subjected to sin and disorder, and sinning causes disruption and disorder to that which is holy. Thus, sin defiles the sanctuary. The sanctuary is holy and holiness increases as one enters the inner sanctum. The sins of the people that violated the holiness of the place must be atoned through sacrifice. The priests believed that if they keep defiling the sanctuary with their impurity, it would bring about greater disorder and God would leave them. The abandonment of God would result in disorder and chaos. To them, God is the God of orders.

In agreement with Elohist, Priestly literature presents God as a transcendent and majestic God. He is “El” to Abraham and later “Yahweh” to Moses. God is concerned with holiness and Israel as a chosen people ought to be holy because God is holy. Holiness is the means by which they could draw themselves near to God. And since God was a God of orders, the people of Israel must systematically follow the laws and commandments so that they may receive the blessings of God and live an orderly life.

5.6.4 Deuteronomic Ethics

The book of Deuteronomy with its so called Deuteronomic Code\textsuperscript{113} is one of the most significant in the interpretation of the laws of the preceding books. They are understood to be the exhortation of Moses before he died, with interpretations of the

\textsuperscript{113} Particularly Deuteronomy chapter 12 to 26
laws. The book of Deuteronomy takes the laws of the Priestly Code, Holiness Code and the Covenant Code to another level wherein it adopts a more spiritual side of the law.

Considered “one of the most beautiful and profoundly ethical books of the Bible,”114 the book of Deuteronomy is one of the most frequently cited book in the New Testament. It contains unrivaled codes of morals and ethics which could perhaps be regarded as an expression of a true religion.115 Smith acclaimed that the book of Deuteronomy has a “bigger, richer heart than any of its fellows in the Pentateuch.”116 The Deuteronomic Code is however difficult to date and so is its authorship. With the Documentary Hypothesis and Form Criticism, it is perhaps the last of the Torah.

The concept of covenant central to the Covenant Code in the book of Exodus is revisited and reinterpreted in the book of Deuteronomy. It affirms that the covenant is the source of morality as it did in the book of Exodus. The covenant made by God and the people of Israel at Sinai is repeated again in the book lest they should forget it. They are assured that God will not forget the covenant he made with their forefathers. Not only would God be faithful in the keeping of his covenant, his steadfast love with be with them if they abide by his laws and commandments. The ethical and conditional basis of the covenant is revealed in the book of Deuteronomy. Love is commanded from the people because love will express itself in obedience to the laws and commandments of the Torah.

Keeping the covenant they have entered into was essential to their prosperity and to forsake the covenant was to ensure God’s judgment. Deuteronomy is in a way a covenantal renewal as it showcased many of the Covenant Code and other laws of the previous books in a new light. Others have contended that there being a slight shift in

the concept of covenant in Deuteronomy since it established obligations to the relationship, makes conditions to the covenant, and the legal basis of the covenant take precedence.\textsuperscript{117} Warnings about the breaking of the covenant are emphasized, and the elucidation of the law “tends to heighten the ethical content of the covenant concept.”\textsuperscript{118}

The concept of holiness which was very prevalent in the Holiness Code and the Priestly Code found its way in the Deuteronomic ethics as well. Deuteronomy emphasizes on the nation being a holy nation because they are God’s own possession, chosen from amongst the other nations. They are a people holy for a purpose, called and chosen by God himself. This set the overtones to the ethical requirements of holiness because to walk in God’s way would mean the purging of evil from their midst. However, in Deuteronomy this walk in the direction of holiness is also meant as walking in the way of love.

Love, being a motive for living amongst the Israelites is very prevalent in Deuteronomy than any other books of the Torah. In Exodus, “covenant” is the key concept, and “holiness” is the central theme in Leviticus, and “love” is the distinct thought of the book of Deuteronomy. This love is to God and to fellow mankind. The act of loving God is understood as the central motive and purpose for obedience to the laws and ordinances, signifying the ethical nature of the laws and the commandments. God instructed that they should love him with all their hearts and soul, walking in his ways and abiding in him always.\textsuperscript{119} God’s commands are of mercy and grace, and the command to love him is therefore for their own good. Their obedience would bring

\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Maston, \textit{Biblical Ethics}, 29-30
\textsuperscript{118} Maston, \textit{Biblical Ethics}, 30
\textsuperscript{119} Deuteronomy 11:22
about blessings; on the other hand, their disobedience would bring curses. Love is “the essential principle of the fulfillment of the commandments.”

The purpose of the laws and the commandments was also to teach the people and their children the fear and reverence of God. Such reverence was to be expressed by obedience. The famous Hebrew “Shema” considered as the Jewish confession of faith was said to have been recited twice a day. It was a method by which they remember the providence and mighty acts of God lest they should forget. It calls the children of Israel to love God wholeheartedly without any reservations. Their love for God was to be expressed with all their personalities as it was a love to the supreme. Their love for God is also to be expressed in their love for the fellow man. Moses instructed that they should teach all these percepts to their children diligently. This love from God to man is not a unidirectional flow but “moves in a threefold direction: from God to man, from man to God, and from man to man.” The communal solidarity is expressed to be a development of Old Testament ethics as Smith-Christopher would explain.

“It is widely noted that the language of the Mosaic legal tradition changes rather significantly from the earlier Covenant Code (Exodus) to the more compassionate language used in the Deuteronomic Code (dated, at the earliest, to the reign of Josiah, 640 – 609 BCE, but amended to include references to exile [e.g., Deut. 28:49 – 68]). Among the more compelling aspects of the Deuteronomic Code are counsels to mutual aid – care for fellow Hebrews (and even non-Hebrews) typified especially by a concern for the indigent (widow, orphan, foreigner). Many laws instituting

121 Deuteronomy 6:6-7
122 Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 32
care for the poor are unique to the later law code (e.g., gleaning [Deut. 24:19], provisions for hunger [Deut. 24:20]) and suggest an increased social solidarity among the Hebrew people that may well be tied directly to a sense of common threat in the Assyrian and Babylonian periods."

The ethics of Deuteronomy does not end with a philosophical imperative of love alone, but also has its pragmatic side. Many laws, teachings and instructions in Deuteronomy tackled with social and moral problems. It shows provisions for those who may excused in a battle while it exhorts and encouraged those that are going out. Its laws on divorce regulate the rights of husband and summarize the conditions which require proper legal documents. Laws about inheritance are well established with no favoritism out of question. In conditions of death, the survival of the remaining family members are protected and proper care is ensured. The necessity of good justice and the requirement of at least two witnesses are established. Instructions on lending and borrowing, settling of debts, and segregation from pagan customs are well maintained.

The laws of Deuteronomy also exhort the respect for authority and the worthiness of the people in power or leadership. Ecological concerns, the care for nature and animals are also met in the book of Deuteronomy. The Sabbath commandment and the explications of the Sabbath laws also take strong precedence along with the call for regular worship. The book of Deuteronomy is a collection of ethical, political, social and theological interpretations of the laws with a formative strategy. Narratives, laws, rituals, poetry, oral recitation and finally the life of Moses as an exemplary character are all part of this anthology.

124 Green, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, 227
The book of Deuteronomy exhibits a pragmatic and in-depth purpose of the law and the commandments. It reinterprets the laws of the Covenant, Holiness and the Priestly Code to a people that had recently become a nation. Deuteronomy is in a way a summary of the previous books of the Torah with a more spiritual inclination.

From the readings of the literatures in the Torah, it is evident that the covenant is the source of morality, and holiness is the means by which it is achieve, and love is the driving force of that ethical and moral life.