

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A, Exodus 21 and Following and the Covenant Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A, Exodus 21 and Following and the Covenant, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture explores the Sinai Covenant, specifically the Book of the Covenant found in Exodus 20-23. The lecture considers the relationship between these biblical laws and other ancient Near Eastern law codes, acknowledging similarities but also highlighting significant differences, such as the condemnation of idolatry and the emphasis on humanitarian concerns. **It addresses whether the biblical text borrowed from these other legal systems, arguing for an indirect relationship based on a common legal tradition.** Vannoy references work by William Dyrness to support the idea that the Covenant is superior and distinctly different. **Furthermore, the lecture examines the formal ratification of the covenant in Exodus 24 and compares it to ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, particularly Hittite treaties.** It discusses how these treaties provide a framework for understanding the structure and implications of the biblical covenant, notably in Deuteronomy.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Historical Books → Exodus to Exile).



Vannoy_ExttoExile_Session04A.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A, Exodus 21 and Following and the Covenant

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and ideas from Robert Vannoy's lecture, "Exodus to Exile, Lecture 4A," focusing on the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-23:33) and its relationship to ancient Near Eastern (ANE) law codes, as well as the establishment and ratification of the Sinai Covenant.

I. The Book of the Covenant and ANE Law Codes

- **Similarities and Differences:** Vannoy acknowledges similarities between the Book of the Covenant and ANE law codes (e.g., the ox goring rule), but argues against the notion of direct borrowing. He suggests that Moses, familiar with the legal traditions of his time, might have incorporated some of that knowledge into the formulation of the laws, but with divine sanction.
- "I don't think there's any reason to conclude that it's not possible that the Lord took up into the formulation of the laws of the Book of the Covenant Moses' awareness, knowledge and familiarity with the legal traditions of the time."
- **Superiority and Distinctiveness of Biblical Law:** Dyrness, as cited by Vannoy, asserts the "literal material of the Book of the Covenant is far superior to what you find in these other ancient law codes."
- **Key Differences Highlighted: God as Lawgiver:** Unlike ANE codes where the king is the lawgiver, in Israel, God is the source of law.
- "In Israel it was God rather than the king who served as lawgiver. This put the idea of law in a unique perspective. In one sense all of OT law was religious."
- **Condemnation of Idolatry:** Idolatry is strictly forbidden (Exodus 20:23, 22:20).
- "Whoever sacrifices to any god other than Yahweh must be destroyed."
- **Respect for Life:** Life is seen as belonging to God, leading to less frequent and less brutal capital punishment compared to codes like Hammurabi's.
- "As a result capital punishment is not nearly so common as it is in the case of the law code of Hammurabi... the punishment stipulated in the OT shows a restraint of gross brutality."

- **Restraint in Punishments:** Biblical law avoids physical mutilation, common in ANE codes. Examples from Hammurabi's code are provided to illustrate this contrast (cutting off tongues, plucking out eyes, etc.).
- **Reduced Class Distinctions:** Biblical law provides protection for slaves and does not apply different punishments based on social standing.
- "There is not one law for the free and another for slaves. Indeed, slaves come in for particular protection in the law against cruel and demanding masters."
- **Protection of Marriage:** Immorality is severely punished, and marriage is protected.
- **Protection of Vulnerable Groups:** Widows, orphans, and resident aliens (WORA) receive specific protection.
- "Specifically unique in the OT law are the numerous provisions for the stranger or alien, and for those who are handicapped in one way or another."
- **Indirect Relationship:** The relationship between the Book of the Covenant and ANE law codes is indirect. The laws of the Book of the Covenant have divine authority but are also rooted in the legal concepts of the time.
- "The Book of the Covenant is unique in its divine authority and in its plan. But at the same time, it's rooted in the legal concepts of the day in which it was written."

II. Ratification of the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 24:1-11)

- **Covenant Ceremony:** Exodus 24:1-11 describes the formal ratification of the Sinai Covenant.
- **Key Elements of Covenant Ratification:** **Covenant Document:** Mentioned in verses 4 and 7.
- **Covenant Stipulations:** Referred to in verse 3.
- **Covenant Oath:** Taken by the people, not God (verses 3 and 7). This distinction is used to differentiate between "promise covenants" (Abrahamic, Davidic) where God takes the oath, and "law covenants" (Sinai) where the people do.
- "In a law covenant, it's the people who made the oath, and in this case, the Sinai covenant is a law covenant, and it's the Israelites who swear to do all that the Lord has required of them."

- **Sprinkling of Blood:** According to Moyter (cited by Vannoy), the blood moves first "Godward in propitiation, but then, secondly, manward" to maintain the relationship of peace with God.
- "The same blood which has made peace with God will keep peace with God. As they walk in the way of obedience, the blood is available for a people committed to obey. As they stumble and fall, so the covenant blood will be available for them."

III. International Treaties Comparison (Hittite Treaties)

- **Mendenhall's Contribution:** George Mendenhall's work in 1954 highlighted the structural parallels between biblical covenants and ancient Near Eastern international treaties, particularly Hittite treaties.
 - **Hittite Treaties:** Divided into vassal treaties (between a superior and inferior party) and parity treaties (between equals).
 - **Suzerain/Vassal Treaties and Biblical Covenant:** Parallels are drawn between Hittite Suzerain/vassal treaties and the biblical Covenant treaty. The Hittite king's interests are protected by the stipulations of the treaty.
1. **Form of Hittite Treaties (6 Elements):**
 1. **Preamble:** Identifies the Hittite ruler.
 2. **Historical Prologue:** A resume of the previous relationship between the great king and the vassal. Emphasizes the benevolent works of the great king toward the vassal in the past to instill gratitude, trust, and obligation.
 - "What is emphasized are the benevolent works of the great king toward the vassal in the past. In other words, the Hittite king will say, "I've done this and this and this for you."
 1. **Basic Stipulation:** Summarizes the obligation of loyalty of the vassal toward the great king.
 2. **Detailed Stipulations:** Specific expectations from the vassal.
 3. **Gods as Witnesses:** Deities of both Hittites and vassals to ensure a binding document.
 4. **Blessings and Curses:** Consequences of obedience and disobedience.
 - **Later Treaties (Assyrian, Aramaic):** Differ in form from Hittite treaties, lacking a historical prologue.

- **Treaties and the Biblical Covenant:** Scholars like Kitchen and Thompson have identified elements of the Hittite treaty form in biblical materials like Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.
- **Kline's "Treaty of the Great King":** Meredith Kline argues that Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal document that exhibits the classic legal form of the Suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic age. He argues that the presence of this structure has implications for the date of Deuteronomy, supporting a Mosaic origin rather than a later composition as suggested by critical scholars.
- "The implication of the new evidence for the questions of the antiquity and authenticity of Deuteronomy must not be suppressed."
- **Implications for Date of Deuteronomy:** Kline argues the structure of Deuteronomy is most consistent with the Hittite treaty form from the Mosaic era (1400-1200 BC), rather than later forms.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A, Exodus 21 and Following and the Covenant

Book of the Covenant and Ancient Near Eastern Law Codes FAQ

- **What is the Book of the Covenant and where is it found in the Bible?**
- The Book of the Covenant refers to a collection of laws found in Exodus 20:22-23:33. It is presented as an application of the Ten Commandments to more specific legal cases and situations encountered by the Israelites.
- **Are there other ancient law codes similar to the Book of the Covenant?**
- Yes, several ancient Near Eastern (ANE) law codes predate the Book of the Covenant, including the Codes of Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, Eshnunna, Hammurabi, and the Hittite Laws. These codes have been discovered, translated, and made available for study.
- **Does the existence of these other law codes mean that the Book of the Covenant borrowed directly from them?**
- While there are similarities, it is unlikely that there was direct borrowing. Some scholars suggest that the similarities reflect a widespread customary law tradition common in the ancient Near East. Furthermore, there are significant differences that set the Book of the Covenant apart. It is plausible that Moses was aware of legal traditions of his time and that God incorporated that knowledge into the formulation of these laws.
- **What are some key differences between the Book of the Covenant and other ANE law codes?**
- Several key differences stand out:
- **Lawgiver:** In Israel, God was the lawgiver, not the king, giving the law a unique religious perspective.
- **Idolatry Condemned:** The Book of the Covenant strictly condemns idolatry.
- **Respect for Life:** The Book of the Covenant places a high value on human life, leading to less brutal punishments.
- **Restraint in Punishments:** The Book of the Covenant shows a restraint of gross brutality when it comes to punishments. There's an absence of physical mutilation, which is common in other ANE law codes.

- **Class Distinctions:** The Book of the Covenant does not emphasize class distinctions; even slaves are protected against abuse.
- **Immorality and Marriage:** The Book of the Covenant strongly punishes immorality and protects marriage.
- **Protection of Vulnerable Groups:** The Book of the Covenant has unique provisions for the protection of widows, orphans, and resident aliens (WORA).
- **Humanitarian Concern:** There's an emphasis on equality between the crime and the punishment (an eye for an eye). Accidental deaths were legislated and did not have the death penalty enforced.
- **How was the Sinai Covenant ratified, as described in Exodus 24?**
- The Sinai Covenant ratification involved several key elements:
- Moses presented the Lord's words and laws to the people, who pledged obedience.
- Moses wrote down the Lord's words.
- An altar and twelve stone pillars were erected, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.
- Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were sacrificed.
- Moses sprinkled blood from the sacrifices on the altar and on the people, symbolizing the covenant bond.
- Moses read the Book of the Covenant to the people, who renewed their pledge to obey.
- Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel saw God and shared a meal.
- **How does the Sinai Covenant relate to ancient Near Eastern international treaties?**
- Scholars have noted striking parallels between the structure and elements of the Sinai Covenant and Hittite Suzerain/Vassal treaties. These treaties, common in the ancient Near East, established a relationship between a superior (Suzerain) and an inferior (vassal) party. Like these treaties, the Sinai Covenant includes elements such as a preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, witnesses, and blessings and curses.

- **What are the key elements of a Hittite Suzerain/Vassal treaty?**
- Hittite Suzerain/Vassal treaties typically contain six elements:
 1. **Preamble:** Identifies the author of the treaty, the Hittite ruler, with names and titles.
 2. **Historical Prologue:** Outlines the past relationship between the great king and the vassal, emphasizing the king's benevolent acts.
 3. **Basic Stipulation:** A general clause summarizing the vassal's obligation of loyalty to the great king.
 4. **Detailed Stipulations:** Specific expectations of the vassal, such as prohibitions of foreign relationships and annual tribute.
 5. **Witnesses:** A list of gods (Hittite and vassal) who would ensure the treaty is binding.
 6. **Blessings and Curses:** Consequences for obedience (blessings) and disobedience (curses) of the treaty stipulations.
- **What does the similarity between the Hittite treaties and Deuteronomy suggest about the dating of Deuteronomy?**
- The structural similarities between Deuteronomy and Hittite treaties, which date to the second millennium BC (the Mosaic era), provide strong support for the traditional view that Deuteronomy is a Mosaic composition. This challenges the critical view, which dates Deuteronomy to the 7th century BC, because treaties of the later period lack the historical prologue found in Deuteronomy and the earlier Hittite treaties. The treaties from the 7th and 8th centuries focus on stipulations, witnesses and curses which creates a much harsher tone.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Session 4A, Exodus 21 and Following and the Covenant, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Exodus and the Sinai Covenant: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the Book of the Covenant, and where is it found in the Bible?
2. What is the significance of comparing the Covenant Code to other ancient Near Eastern law codes?
3. According to Dyrness, what is one way in which the Book of the Covenant is superior to other ancient law codes?
4. Give an example of a punishment found in Hammurabi's code that is not present in the Book of the Covenant.
5. How does the Book of the Covenant protect the vulnerable members of society?
6. What key elements are present in the covenant ratification ceremony described in Exodus 24:3-11?
7. What is the difference between a "promise covenant" and a "law covenant"? Give an example of each.
8. What is the significance of the sprinkling of blood in the context of covenant ratification?
9. What was George Mendenhall's contribution to understanding the Sinai covenant?
10. Describe the six basic elements in the literary pattern of the Hittite Suzerain vassal treaties.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Book of the Covenant is a collection of laws found in Exodus 20:22-23:33. These laws apply the Ten Commandments to more specific legal cases and provide a framework for Israelite society.
2. Comparing the Covenant Code to other ancient Near Eastern law codes helps us understand the cultural context of the laws and determine to what extent Israel

was unique in its legal system. It also addresses the question of whether Israel directly borrowed from other legal codes.

3. Dyrness argues that the Book of the Covenant is superior because God, not the king, is the lawgiver. This puts the law in a unique perspective where all of the Old Testament law is religious in one sense.
4. Hammurabi's code includes physical mutilation as a punishment, such as cutting off the tongue or hand for certain offenses. This type of punishment is absent in the Book of the Covenant.
5. The Book of the Covenant provides specific protections for widows, orphans, and resident aliens. These vulnerable groups are protected from mistreatment and oppression under the law.
6. Key elements of the covenant ratification ceremony include a covenant document, covenant stipulations, and a covenant oath. In addition, there is the religious ceremony including sacrifices and the sprinkling of blood.
7. In a promise covenant, God makes the promise and the oath, while in a law covenant, the people make the oath. The Abrahamic covenant is an example of a promise covenant, and the Sinai covenant is an example of a law covenant.
8. The sprinkling of blood establishes a relationship of peace with God through propitiation and maintains that relationship for those committed to obedience. It is available as a provision when people stumble and fall.
9. George Mendenhall demonstrated the structural parallels between the biblical covenant material and ancient Near Eastern international treaties. That produced a whole field of study, that is, books and articles, in the second half of the 20th century.
10. The six basic elements are the preamble, historical prologue, basic stipulations, detailed stipulations, witnesses, and blessings and curses. These elements create a structure that defines the relationship between the Suzerain and the vassal.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between the Book of the Covenant and other ancient Near Eastern law codes. How do these similarities and differences impact our understanding of the origins and nature of Israelite law?
2. Explain the significance of the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24:1-11. What are the key elements of this ceremony, and what do they symbolize?
3. Describe the structure of Hittite Suzerain/vassal treaties. How does this structure compare to the structure of the biblical covenant as presented in Exodus and Deuteronomy?
4. Analyze Meredith Kline's argument that Deuteronomy reflects the literary form of a Suzerain/vassal treaty. What are the implications of this argument for the date and interpretation of Deuteronomy?
5. Explore the theological implications of the Sinai covenant being a "law covenant" in which the people, not God, take the oath. How does this understanding of the covenant shape our understanding of the relationship between God and Israel?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Book of the Covenant:** A collection of laws found in Exodus 20:22-23:33 that apply the Ten Commandments to specific legal cases.
- **Covenant:** A formal agreement or treaty between two parties, often involving promises, obligations, and consequences.
- **Sinai Covenant:** The covenant established between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai, as described in Exodus 19-24.
- **Ancient Near East (ANE):** A geographical region including modern-day Middle East, with ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hittite Empire.
- **Hammurabi's Code:** One of the earliest known sets of written laws, originating in ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Suzerain Treaty (Vassal Treaty):** A type of treaty in which a superior party (Suzerain) makes an agreement with an inferior party (Vassal).
- **Parity Treaty:** A treaty between equal parties.
- **Historical Prologue:** A section in ancient treaties that reviews the past relationship between the parties, often highlighting the benevolent actions of the Suzerain.
- **Vassal:** The inferior party in a Suzerain treaty, bound by oath to the stipulations.
- **Suzerain:** The superior party in a Suzerain treaty, holding authority over the vassal.
- **Treaty of the Great King:** A book by Meredith Kline arguing that Deuteronomy reflects the structure of ancient Suzerain treaties.
- **Promise Covenant:** A covenant where God makes the promise and the oath.
- **Law Covenant:** A covenant where the people make the oath.