THE EQUIP INSTITUTE
Theme: Christian Story
Topic: Old Testament Survey: The Pentateuch
Fall 2023

## Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. This fall, we are spending twelve weeks studying the Christian Story. Last week, we had a brief introduction to biblical theology. This week, we begin a four-week survey of the Old Testament with a study of Genesis through Deuteronomy.

## An Introduction to the Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Though they are individual books, each with their own emphases, the Old Testament and New Testament both speak of them as a single literary unit. According to one textbook, "The Pentateuch was the first divinely prompted literary collection acknowledged as Scripture by the Hebrew community."

As a group, these five books go by several different names. The Hebrew word for "instruction" or "law" is *Torah*. In English Bible translations of the word *Torah*, these books are often referred to as *The Law*. Since the second century AD, many Christians have called these books the *Pentateuch* (Latin = "five books"). Various Old Testament writers, as well as Jesus (Mark 12:26), refer to these books collectively as the *Book of Moses*.

The Pentateuch does not claim a particular author. Traditionally, both Jews and Christians argue that Moses authored the Pentateuch. The reason is because the rest of the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, each state this to be the case. Critical scholars believe the Pentateuch was written over a period of about 1000 years, but these books were attributed to Moses by later generations. While critical scholars make many spurious claims, they do rightly note that at least some of the Pentateuch was clearly written after Moses's death (e.g. Deut. 34) or it seems unlikely Moses wrote it (e.g. Num. 12:3).

Most conservative scholars believe that Moses is the "essential author" or "substantial author" of the Pentateuch and wrote the earliest version of the five books. However, it is likely later editors added at least some material to tie everything together. When we speak of the inspiration of the Pentateuch, we are referring not just to the words Moses wrote, but the final form of the Book of Moses, which dates to at least the time of the Davidic kingdom around 1000 BC. This means the Holy Spirit not only inspired Moses himself, but later editors who had a hand in finishing the final form.

## The Books of the Pentateuch

### Genesis

The name *Genesis* comes from the Hebrew word for "generations" in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. Moses is the primary author. Genesis can be divided into three major sections. Genesis 1–11 focuses upon God's creation of the world, the creation of the first humans, the origin of sin, a global flood, and ancient kingdoms that predated the Hebrews. Genesis 12–36 focuses upon Abraham and his descendants, from whom the Hebrews descended. Genesis 37–50 focuses upon Joseph and the migration of the Hebrews to Egypt on account of a significant famine.

Genesis challenges the various creation myths of the ancient world by demonstrating that the one true God created all things by the power of His word and for His glory. Genesis also serves as the prologue, not only for the Pentateuch and the rest of the Old Testament, but for the entire Bible. Genesis also introduces several key figures in redemptive history, especially Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham.

Key Themes:

- There is only one God
- The one God created all things that are not God
- God's creation is good
- Humans are created in God's image and rule creation as His representatives
- The human race is corrupted and the rest of creation is distorted because of the sins of the first humans
- The consequences of sin are relational separation from God, sickness / suffering, and death

- God is gracious to sinners, offering mercy to those who seek Him
- God will one day conquer sin completely through a descendent of the first humans
- God establishes a covenant with Noah that includes all creation
- God establishes a covenant with Abraham that includes his descendants and leads to blessing for all nations

Exodus

The name *Exodus* comes from the Hebrew word for "going out" or "departure" (Exod. 19:1). Moses is the primary author. Exodus can be divided into three major sections. Exodus 1–18 focuses upon the oppression of the Israelites and their deliverance from Egypt through the leadership of Moses. Exodus 19–24 focuses upon the beginning of Israel's wilderness wanderings and God's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Exodus 25–40 focuses upon the construction of the Tabernacle, where God promises to be present with His chosen people. Exodus also introduces Moses, one of the most important figures in redemptive history.

Key Themes:

- There is only one God and He will defeat all His would-be rivals
- God delivers His people from bondage
- God will lead His people into a promised land of perpetual flourishing
- God establishes a covenant with Israel that binds them to Him as His chosen nation marked by His *Torah*
- God's *Torah* is a gracious gift that assumes a covenant relationship with His people
- Disobedience to God's *Torah* leads to exile
- God is uniquely present with His people through the Tabernacle

Leviticus

The name *Leviticus* comes from Levi, the tribe identified with the priests. Moses is the primary author. Leviticus can be divided into two main sections. Leviticus 1–16 focuses upon the sacrificial system and proper worship of God. Leviticus 17–27 focuses upon God's *Torah* and the call to holiness. In many respects, Leviticus can be interpreted as

the sequel to Exodus. Now that the Tabernacle is complete, Moses is teaching Israel how they are to live before the presence of God.

Key Themes:

- God is Holy and He calls His people to be holy
- God's Torah provides divine boundaries for holiness and divine guidance for authentic human flourishing
- The role of the sacrificial system in pointing to Israel's need to be purified from sin
- The role or atonement in turning away God's just wrath against Israel's sin

Numbers

The name *Numbers* is a reference to the census of Israel (Num. 1–4; 26). Moses is the primary author. Numbers can be divided into three main sections. Numbers 1–10 take place at Sinai and focus upon the preparation for the journey into the wilderness. Numbers 11–21 take place in the wilderness and focus upon Israel's exile and struggles to remain faithful to God. Numbers 22–36 take place in the Plains of Moab and focus upon Israel's conquest of pagan peoples and preparation to enter the land of promise.

Key themes:

- God's intention to fulfill His land promise to Abraham and Moses
- God's intention to multiply His people as He promised to Abraham and Moses
- God's presence with His people, even when they sin
- God's provision for the needs of His people
- God's conquest of pagan nations that worship idols instead of the Creator
- God's selection of Joshua to take Moses's place as Israel's leader

Deuteronomy

The name *Deuteronomy* means "second law," since Moses is reminding God's people of God's *Torah* before they enter the land God promised to Israel. Moses is the primary author. Deuteronomy can be divided into four main sections. Moses delivers his first sermon in

Deuteronomy 1–4, focusing upon recounting God's past mighty deeds and calling Israel to loyalty to Him alone. Moses delivers his second sermon in Deuteronomy 4–28, reiterating the role of God's *Torah* among His people. Moses delivers his third sermon in Deuteronomy 29–30, focuses on God's recent mighty deeds and calling Israel to faithful obedience to *Torah*. The fourth section in Deuteronomy 31–34 covers Moses's final instructions to Israel, two psalms recounting God's faithfulness, and Moses's death and burial.

Key Themes:

- God's election of Israel as His chosen people
- The importance of proper worship of God
- God's faithfulness to Israel in keeping His covenant with Abraham
- God's conquest of Israel's pagan enemies because of their idolatry
- Israel's need to keep God's covenant with them at Sinai
- The blessings of *Torah* and the consequences of disobedience
- The need for Israel to remain faithful once Moses is dead

Recommended Resources

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic* (InterVarsity, 2019).

Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2000).

Eugene H. Merrill, Mark Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (B&H Academic, 2011).

Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (IVP Academic, 2019).

Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (IVP Academic, 2015).