

“Survey of the Scriptures”

Session #2 – THE PENTATEUCH

Before a British sovereign is crowned, a copy of the Bible is presented to him with these words: “To keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and Gospel of God...we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the Royal Law, these are the lively Oracles of God.”

The first part of this book is the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These names were given when the books were translated into Greek, but in Old Testament times the five books were “the book of the Law of Moses” or simply “The Law.”

This law of God has been preserved for centuries because it was treasured by the Hebrews as “the most valuable thing that this world affords.” In fact, they became known as the people of the Book because they lived by God’s laws.

Through the years Jewish scribes have carefully kept and copied the “law and teachings” of Torah, as the books of Moses are now called. According to their strict rules, the Torah must be handwritten on parchment, and they may never destroy a parchment on which the name of God is written.

The Bible says Moses wrote down the law and ordinances God committed to him and, before his death, entrusted the parchments to his successors. The whole law was to be read to the people every seven years. As long as the Israelites lived by the book, God blessed them; but all too soon, they turned to idol worship which was finally their downfall.

Centuries after Moses, Ezra read and explained the laws to the Jews who were rebuilding Jerusalem. After years of suffering and captivity, they were glad to be back in the homeland, and without hesitation they accepted the law as the Word of God.

In His teaching, Christ frequently referred to the law; and, in His day, the authority and trustworthiness of these books of Moses were clearly accepted.

During the following centuries, the Book of the Law has been preserved and held sacred by the Jewish people. Our survey of the five books of Moses will help us to grasp their content and understand their value to Christian as well as to Jew.

We should remember that the Pentateuch contains the history of God’s people: Genesis, their beginning; Exodus, their deliverance from Egypt; Leviticus, their worship and walk; Numbers, their wanderings in the wilderness; Deuteronomy, their preparation to enter the promised land of Canaan.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. Its record of the creation of the universe is the only consistent and valid account to be found in all the ancient writings. This story is simple enough to satisfy the man on the street, yet so profound as to challenge the most learned scientist.

On the world He created, God placed man – His highest creation – a being having intelligent comprehension, the power of choice, and a moral nature. God gave man dominion over the other things on earth.

Soon the idyllic scene of Eden was darkened by sin. Exercising his power of choice, man chose to disobey God. God's judgment brought banishment from the garden and death as the penalty of sin. But the door of hope was not closed, for God gave the first promise of a coming Redeemer.

The civilization which sprang from the early descendants of Adam was wiped out by the flood. The flood was God's judgment upon the sin which had become rampant. Only righteous Noah and his family were saved to repopulate the earth.

Man's tower building on the plains of Shinar led to further judgment from God in the confusion of tongues and subsequent division of the people. So, in Genesis we have, in addition to the creation of man, the beginnings of civilizations and nations.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis, telling of Adam and Noah, have to do with all mankind. The rest of Genesis deals with the patriarchs of the chosen people: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ...and Joseph who played such an important part in the history of the Israelites.

When Abram was called by God, he demonstrated that he was a man of faith and implicit obedience. He left his home for Canaan, where God promised him special blessings. Abram's life may be symbolized by a tent – to represent his wanderings, and an altar of burnt offering – representing the way he worshipped God.

Under God's special blessing, Abram – later called Abraham – prospered in the land of Canaan. God promised that Abraham would father a nation through which would come blessing to all nations. The covenant was repeated to Abraham's son Isaac, and later to Jacob or Israel.

Joseph was not included among the patriarchs, nor was he in the direct line of Messianic blessing, but many chapters in Genesis are devoted to his life story. Under Joseph the family moved to Egypt. Through him Israel as a family was preserved to become Israel as a nation.

By the time of **Exodus**, the Israelites had increased greatly in numbers. Far from experiencing God's blessing, they were a nation of slaves. Instead of being a witness for their God, they were being used by the pharaohs to build temples for the pagan gods of Egypt.

But God had not forgotten His people, and He sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand the release of the enslaved nation. God manifested His power over Egypt and all it represented. On the night of the Passover He redeemed His people, freeing them to walk in His ways and fulfill His purposes.

After the exodus from Egypt, Moses led the Israelites into the wilderness, a sharp contrast to Goshen in the fertile Nile delta. Away from the many gods of Egypt, they were to learn that their God was one God – the Lord Jehovah.

God redeemed His people that He might entrust them with His Word. At Mount Sinai He gave Moses the law which contained the statutes and ordinances by which the people were to live.

God also gave instructions for the erection of a tabernacle or tent which was to be His dwelling place among His people – a place where they could worship Him. The manifestation of His presence was in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night.

Leviticus – the book of law – contained detailed instructions about how the Israelite was to worship God. He was to come to the door of the tabernacle and to the waiting priest; he was to bring an offering to the brazen altar; in most cases, his offering was an animal from his stock.

There were five principal offerings, each of which had a special significance: the burnt, the meal (called the meat offering in the Authorized Version), the peace, the sin and the trespass offering. The shedding of blood was clearly stressed for without this there could be no remission of sins.

From the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat of gold, to the outer court, the tabernacle spoke of God's holiness. "*Be ye holy for I am holy,*" God said to His people. The first part of Leviticus showed them how to get right with God; the second part dealt with their daily walk which was to be holy and separated from the people around them.

Numbers has been called the book of wilderness wanderings. When the people reached the borders of the promised land, they were afraid to invade it. They had forgotten the power of the Lord Who redeemed them. Lost faith meant lost opportunity for that generation, and they never entered Canaan.

Numbers derives its name from the two occasions when Moses took a census of Israel's fighting strength. The soldiers who stood up to be counted on the first occasion never entered the promised land; instead, they had to return to the wilderness. At the second census, 38 years later, the forces numbered slightly less than before.

In **Deuteronomy** we find the new generation of Israelites encamped on the plains of Moab and preparing to enter the land God had promised them. Here Moses gathered the people together for his final instructions.

In his three discourses Moses exhorted the people to look back over their history of the past few years; to look up, remembering the laws and ordinances given to them by the Lord; and to look forward to promised blessing. At the same time, Moses prophesied dark day of trouble and suffering in the future.

The book of Deuteronomy was called the Second Law. Instructions were given for a new settled life in Canaan. Over and over again the people heard the words HEAR and DO. They learned that God's blessings were conditional upon obedience, and that they would be cursed if they turned from His laws.

This then is the Pentateuch, the book of the people of God. Genesis tells the story of their beginnings; Exodus of their redemption and the giving of the law; Leviticus contains instructions for their worship and walk; Numbers tells of their dark days in the wilderness; and Deuteronomy prepares them for a new life in the Land of Promise.

Like the Israelite, the Christian is chosen, redeemed, instructed, guided, chastised and promised future blessing. The Pentateuch is of particular interest to the Christian because in it he finds many parallels of his own experience. More than that, he realizes that these books of the law were the foundation of Judaism, the roots of Christianity and the pattern for the laws of all Christian nations.

Christians fall heir to the blessing promised to Abraham – the blessing that would come to all nations through Christ: This blessing may be traced back through Mary of the line of David, to the tribe of Judah of the family of Jacob. Christians are not only the people of God but they should also be known as “the people of the book.”

When Christ talked to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he expounded on these Old Testament Scriptures, pointing out how they testified of Him.

Christ is the Rock; He is the Water of Life. The books of Moses are full of types of Christ, as the New Testament so clearly shows. He is the Heaven-sent Manna and our Passover Lamb.

The book of Hebrews points to the Old Testament types of Christ's redemptive and sacrificial work. The tabernacle manifested His glory, the offerings pointed forward to the time when Christ would be the one perfect and eternal sacrifice.

So, the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, are to the Jew the Torah – the law and teachings of God; to the sovereign, they are the royal law, of more value than his crown; to the Christian, they are part of the Book of Books, testifying of His Lord and Savior, and “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*”

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