

SESSION 1: OVERVIEW OF THE PENTATEUCH

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION:

Read Genesis 12:1-9, 15:1-21; Exodus chapters 1-4, ch. 15, ch. 20, 29:38—30:10, 40:34-38; Luke 24:44-49; Galatians 3.

Summary of the Video: Module 1, Episode 1

This course begins with an overview of the whole Bible. It describes the biblical story from Creation to New Creation. It answers the question: How does the whole Bible fit together?

In this first video, we're introduced to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. We call these books the "Pentateuch." The Pentateuch was primarily written by one man, Moses, who knew God intimately. The videos discussing the Pentateuch will address the question, "How does the Pentateuch fit together?" It will describe the basic storyline, themes and purposes of these foundational books.

The video provides an orientation to these books. It tells us how to read them, what themes we'll find and the major elements of the story to pay attention to.

Many of us assume that the Pentateuch is mostly law, but in fact it is primarily a story about God forming a people who will know him. Law comes into the story in response to people rejecting God or when they don't know how to approach him. As you read the Pentateuch, keep your mind attuned to the story. That's the main point. When law enters the narrative, ask the Lord what this particular law tells you about the story, about himself, and about the people he is creating.

The Pentateuch reveals much about God, humanity, the world, life, death, sin, sickness, disease, work, family, government, visions, dreams, angels, false gods, history and a whole lot more. But certain themes stand out prominently: faith/faithfulness in life together as God's people, the "Seed" who blesses all peoples, the ruler from the tribe of Judah, the kingdom of God, and law and judgment.

Different cultures tell stories in different ways, so it's helpful to know a bit about how to read a story as told through ancient Hebrew culture. The video instructs us to pay attention to stories, meals and songs. The story is the main point; it helps us know the reason for the laws and what the laws are trying to do. When meals are eaten together usually something significant is happening in the narrative. Often they tell us about covenants and treaties, but sometimes they tell us about rebellion. Songs often summarize the past, forecast the future, and drive the story forward. Each song invites the reader to slow down and get God's perspective on the story.

Remember that this video is only a brief overview. Don't worry if you don't pick up all the details mentioned. You're simply trying to grab onto some main ideas. Future videos will repeat this information and explain it in greater depth.

Terms You'll Need to Know:

Biblical Theology—this is a way of summarizing what God says about a subject by looking at one portion of Scripture (a book, an author, or a section of Scripture [e.g. the Pentateuch]).

Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Primeval—this refers to the “earliest history” of the human race.

Patriarchs—the “fathers” of the faith, including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Pauline—something that Paul (the apostle) wrote or a way that he thought about something.

“Types” (of Jesus)—certain elements from the Old Testament seem to point to Jesus without expressly saying so (e.g. Day of Atonement—Leviticus 16, Melchizedek—Genesis 14, the serpent on the pole—Numbers 21).

Seed—another word for “offspring” or “descendent”; the “seed” introduced in Genesis 3:15 refers to the coming Messiah.

10 Words—Ten Commandments.

Pentateuch

I. Overview of the Pentateuch

- II. Primeval History (Gen 1-11)
- III. Patriarchal History (Gen 12-50)
- IV. Exodus Narrative (Ex 1-15)
- V. Wilderness Narrative (Ex 16-19, 24, 32-34; Num 11-25; Deut 1-4)
- VI. Laws, Lists & Land at Sinai (Ex 20-23, 25-31, 35-40; Lev 1-27; Num 1-10, 26-36; Deut 5-28)
- VII. The Punchline of the Pentateuch (Deut 29-34)

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An overview of the Pentateuch

✍ When reading the Pentateuch, it can be easy to forget that we are dealing with the work of one author. I will refer to him as Moses, while acknowledging that Moses couldn't have written every last word of it (Deut 34 was likely written a thousand years later, and there appear to be a few other signs of editing, e.g. Num 12:3!)

✍ But because we have one author, we have one unifying structure (for a much fuller exposition of this idea see John Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*)

NARRATIVE

- Primeval history (Gen 1 – 11)
- Patriarchal history (Gen 12 – 50)
- Exodus narrative (Ex 1 – 19)
 - × Moses and the elders meet Yahweh (Ex 24)
 - × The golden calf (Ex 32 – 34)
 - × Worship of goat idols (Lev 17:1-9)
 - × Preparations for departure from Sinai (Num 1 – 10)
- The wilderness narrative (Num 11 – 25)
- The conquest narrative (Deut 1 – 4)
- Moses' departure (Deut 31 – 34)

LAW

- Covenant code (Ex 20 – 23)
- Priestly code part I (Ex 25 – 31)
- Priestly code part II (Ex 35 – Lev 16)
- Holiness code (Lev 17:10 – 27:34)
- Further laws (Num 26 – 36)
- The Moab covenant (Deut 5 – 30)

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An overview of the Pentateuch (cont.)

- ✍ Within that structure, there are a number of key themes that come through
 - The five major narratives place a huge emphasis on the role of faith in Israel's life together, and as the suitable response to Yahweh's grace to them
 - The "seed" of Gen 3 is subsequently clarified as the seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12, 15, 17, 22, 26) ...
 - ... and the poetic pieces of the Pentateuch, especially Gen 49 and Num 23-24, develop this further, until it is clear that a specific ruler from the tribe of Judah will bless the world, inherit the land, possess the gate of his enemies (and quite possibly crush the serpent's head as well)
 - This overlaps closely with the theme of God's kingdom, as expressed through the star / sceptre / lion of Judah – but the theme of God's kingdom comes through even more clearly in one of the two other major poems, Exodus 15
 - Law and judgment are only given to humanity because of hardness of heart. The original Mosaic covenant did not have masses of laws; it was only after Israel's rebellion that these were given (cf Gal 3)
- ✍ Look out for stories, meals and songs (Eugene Peterson)
 - Narrative sections are the main point, not legal sections
 - Meals are often important story-markers and covenant signs (Melchizedek, Abraham's fellowship with the angels, Passover, the elders' meal on Mount Sinai) ...
 - ... as well as demonstrations of idolatry and rebellion (after the golden calf, the demand for meat and other delicacies in the wilderness, idolatrous meals with the Moabites, etc)
 - And songs carry enormous significance within the overall story: Genesis 49, Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32
- ✍ Read the text through ancient eyes (**JOHN WALTON DVD**)

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GROUP MEETING:

This first meeting contains less material on purpose. Initial meetings require a bit more explanation and clarification. Our heart is that you would emphasize the shape and purpose of the course in this first session both by direct communication and by allowing plenty of time for response in prayer and worship.

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification. (Please make a note of what is confusing and include it in the Feedback Doc so that we can adjust these notes for future users. This can be found on the Course Portal.)

1. Have you read the Pentateuch before? What was your experience like? What parts were your favorites/least favorite? What themes did you notice? What stood out to you?
2. What do you learn about God, about humanity, about salvation from the Pentateuch and the first video?

God is the Creator. He is holy and other (as opposed to humanity who is mired in brokenness). He pursues people even though they don't deserve it (e.g. Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses). He establishes his standard.

3. After watching this initial video, how would you explain the main message of the Pentateuch?

The one true God is forming a people for himself. They will be a special nation that is governed by God, known by God, and blessed by God. Through the blessing of the "seed", all peoples on earth will be blessed. The "story of the Seed" is the story of the Messiah himself. It begins in Genesis 3:15 ("offspring") and goes through Seth to Abraham (Gen 15:4; 17:7) and Isaac and Jacob and his sons. The Pentateuch is also the story of God revealing himself; he distinguishes his nature and character from the other gods so that his people might know that he is holy.

4. Describe how the video understands the role that law plays in the Pentateuch.

The original covenant only had a skeleton of "laws" (the ten commandments). The law comes in response to human hard heartedness. God introduces new laws in order to form his people so that they can relate to him. For example, laws about the tabernacle indicate "Here's where I'll meet with you"; laws about priests—"I want people to meet with me"; holiness code—"Follow this lifestyle to separate yourselves for the presence of God is among you. Consider reading Exodus 29:38—30:10; focus on the words' meaning: to meet with, your God, to be with you, etc., which all emphasize the purpose of God being with this people in relationship. The law is also the legal contract of the covenant, its terms and conditions. It is the marriage contract that specifies expectations for the relationship; it is the national constitution that instructs the people how to live under God's rule.

5. How does the main message of the Pentateuch enrich your understanding of your own faith?

Putting This Session into Practice

Meditate on how the Lord continues to separate a people for himself on the earth. He brought you out of darkness into light. He also has gathered your church to be his holy representatives on earth. This week, mark out special times in prayer specifically to thank God for distinguishing the church as his people. Ask the Lord to continue refining them so that they will represent him well. You may conclude this session together by praying along these lines.