

LECTURE 1
PENTATEUCH OVERVIEW
COVENANT PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

The Septuagint called the first five books of the Bible “The Pentateuch”. This was derived from the Greek *pente* (five) and *teuchos* (scroll). The biblical evidence for considering these five books as a literary unit is found in verses which refer to them as the “Book of the Law of Moses” (2 Kgs.14:6), the “Book of the Law” (Josh.1:8), and the “Law” (Lk.16:16).

The Jewish name for these books is the Hebrew word *Torah*. This noun is derived from a root *yārāh* meaning “to throw” or “to shoot” and means “direction, law, or instruction”.

As a designation of the first five books of the Bible, the word is employed in a more restricted sense to stress the legal element which forms so great a part of these books. This usage does not exclude the narrative or historical sections, but rather includes them, since they form the fitting background or framework for the legislation.¹

Torah is thus an appropriate tag for these first five books of the Bible, because they contain instructions for life. Together these five books establish the historical and theological foundations for the rest of the Bible, and they also teach us how to live faithfully.²

The five books of the Pentateuch are foundational to all of Scripture and rank as one of the most important sections in God’s Word. Just as a knowledge of the four gospels is essential for understanding the New Testament, so the content of the Pentateuch is crucial to the rest of the Old Testament and for that matter the whole Bible.³

I. AUTHOR

Although the Mosaic authorship had been widely accepted by both Jews and Christians, liberal scholarship in the 19th century challenged this. We will briefly look at the liberal argument against Mosaic authorship and then consider the continued evangelical case for Mosaic authorship.

A. LIBERAL ARGUMENT

In *The Composition of the Hexateuch* (including Joshua), the liberal scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) wrote to identify what he saw were the four authors or sources of these books. In addition to some basic Mosaic material he argued that there were four redactors/editors who in later years contributed their own material for their own ends. This is generally known as the “Documentary Hypothesis” and the case for it is set out below.

1. Four redactors (editors)

(J) Yahwist: the J document was written by a pro-Davidic monarchy scribe in Judah around 850 BC and used the divine name “Yahweh”. In J, God is presented in a simple narrative style with human-like qualities.

(E) Elohist: This document was written by a pro-Northern Israel author about 750 BC to correct the J document. It uses the less intimate word “Elohim” for God, and does not use anthropomorphic language.

(D) Deuteronomists: The J and E documents were combined to reflect the theological convictions resulting from the 722 BC Assyrian victory over Israel. In 650 BC the D document was written to reinforce the cultic purity of Judah’s worship and so reinforce Josiah’s reforms. This new source stressed the importance of worshipping the LORD God (combining Yahweh and Elohim) at a central shrine, Jerusalem. Most of the material is restricted to Deuteronomy.

¹ E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 47.

² B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 64.

³ H.Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

(P) Priestly writers: The JE and D documents were then fused into the JED source after 587 BC. At some point during the middle of the fifth century BC, the P document was written to address the priestly concerns of the postexilic community. Wellhausen believed that P contained the majority of the Levitical material.

Around 400 BC these two final documents (JED and P) were combined into a JEDP complex of materials that comprise the Pentateuch as we know it today.

2. Evidence

You may ask: "How do Liberal scholars know this?" Well, they claim that they can differentiate the sources from each other by distinguishing:

- a. Doublets: two accounts of the same story in different words (e.g. Genesis 1 and 2).
- b. Divine names: different Divine names used by each source, particularly Yahweh (J) and Elohim (E).
- c. Theological themes: the identification of different "theological themes" like sacrifice/priesthood or Davidic kingdom etc.

Different theologies. For instance, J is commonly characterized as portraying God anthropomorphically; D presents a form of retribution theology; P is replete with priestly concerns and tends to emphasize the transcendence of God. The differing viewpoints in the putative documents are often alleged to show progression in Israel's theology from animism, to henotheism, and finally to monotheism. Furthermore, traditional critical scholars see a chronological progression among the sources in terms of form of worship, e.g., the issue of centralization of worship. According to traditional criticism, J is unaware of centralization (Ex. 20:24-26); D calls for it (Deut. 12:1-26), and P assumes it (Ex. 25-40, Numbers, and Lev. 1-9).⁴

- d. Stylistic differences: differences of style including the use of two different names to designate the same person, tribe, or place (e.g., Ruel/Jethro, Jacob/Israel).

3. Criticisms

- a. Our main concern should not be with how the books were put together but, rather, what do the final documents say?
- b. The Liberal hypothesis is dependent on speculative historical reconstruction.
- c. There is great disagreement even among liberal scholars as to the number of sources and their relevant contributions.
- d. Jewish traditions and the Bible itself contradict the theory.
- e. The result is that the Pentateuch has no historical veracity.
- f. The theory is dominated by anti-supernaturalism and philosophical evolutionary thought. The theory makes no allowance for divine intervention in history, or for unique divine revelation.

Virtually no one today accepts Wellhausen's idea that in the pages of the Old Testament one could trace a religious evolution from animism to henotheism to monotheism. His Hegalian presuppositions are all too well recognized and rejected by contemporary critics.⁵

- g. Late 20th century research into literary forms and archeological evidence shows that each of the alleged documents, JED and P contained much older material than was originally thought.

⁴ R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 41.

⁵ R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 45.

h. The use of different divine names (particularly Elohim and Yahweh) may result from stylistic practice rather than the presence of sources. A different name may be used for different theological purposes and contexts. Also, the use of multiple names for a god in a single text is reasonably common in extra-biblical Near Eastern texts.

i. Regarding doublets, the repetition of similar stories, recent study on Semitic literary style suggests that such repetitions were consciously employed in the literature to achieve a certain effect. Robert Alter's studies show:

j. The differences in style between the story-like J and the more formal P may reflect a different subject matter rather than a different author.

k. The fact that two names are used for the same places or people has been noted in single-authorship extra-biblical texts.

B. EVANGELICAL ARGUMENT FOR MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP

1. Allowances

a. Moses may have used oral or written sources.

This may answer the question as to how Moses could reliably write about events which occurred up to 2,500 years before his birth. However, God may have revealed the contents of Genesis to him directly (Num.12:6-8).

While materials which the author used for the composition of this book no doubt came to him from five to six centuries before his time, prior to Jacob's migration into Egypt, nevertheless Moses seems to have served as a Spirit-guided compiler and interpreter of the pre-existent material which had come to him from his forebears in oral and written form.⁶

b. While retaining overall control Moses may have used others to write the documents.

c. There may also have been minor inspired additions/revisions after the time of Moses.

Under divine inspiration there may have been later minor additions and even revisions. Substantially and essentially, however, it is the product of Moses.⁷

This is all consistent with the idea of authorship and literary practices in the ancient Near East.

2. Evidence for Mosaic Authorship

a. Old Testament

There are numerous references to Moses' writing activity in the Pentateuch (Ex.24:4,7; Ex.34:27; Num.33:2; Deut.31:9, 19, 22, 24).

In addition to these references to Moses' writing, there is the centrality of Moses' life and ministry in the Exodus to Deuteronomy narratives. God's speeches are often introduced by phrases such as "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying..." (Lev.4:1).

The Law is connected with Moses dozens of times in the Old Testament. Three examples of this are 1 Kings 2:3, 2 Kings 14:6 and Ezra 3:2 .

b. Jewish Tradition

⁶ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1998), Electronic Edition.

⁷ E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 51.

The Talmud refers to the first five books of the Bible as "the Books of Moses." The Mishnah and the Jewish historian Josephus both accepted Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

c. New Testament

Jesus also connected Moses' name with the Law. He told the cleansed leper to offer the gift which Moses commanded (Matt 8:4). He associated the name of Moses with the divorce law (Matt 19:7-8). He quoted two specific laws regarding respect for parents and attributed them to Moses (Mark 7:10). He directed the Sadducees to consult the "book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). After his resurrection he explained how all the Scriptures "beginning with Moses" pointed to him (Luke 24:24, 27). He rebuked the unbelief of his listeners by claiming "Moses wrote about me" (John 5:46).

Despite the most confident denials of a rationalistically controlled literary and historical criticism, the majority of Christians throughout the world continue and will continue to believe and maintain that the Pentateuch is not a late, anonymous, untrustworthy composite, but is correctly described as "The Five Books of Moses, the man of God".⁸

The genuineness and unbroken continuity of its history, the consistency of its plan, the sublimity of its purpose, the universality of its appeal, the omni-temporality of its message, the coherence of its subject matter, the naturalness and beauty of its literary quality and the spirituality of its meaning bind it together and demonstrate it to be the work of one great mind in vital contact with God.⁹

II. DATE

Earliest date: Moses could not have written until after his divine call at the burning bush in Egypt.

Latest date: The latest possible date is just before his death in Moab (Deut.34:5).

Therefore the Pentateuch could have been written any time between Moses' call at the burning bush and his death. This would give an approximate date of 1446-1400 BC. From internal evidence of the Pentateuch it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of it was after the 40 years in the wilderness and just before the entry into and conquest of Canaan.

III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Historical Analysis is a chronological survey of the events of the Old Testament with a focus on dates and facts.

1. Chronology

A vast amount of time is covered in the Pentateuch. However, rather than get sidetracked into detailed discussion of the overall chronology it is best at this stage to use a broad brush and describe simply five eras as follows.

4000 BC	Primeval Age: Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel
2000 BC	Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
1500 BC	Mosaic Age: Moses, Joshua
1000 BC	Davidic Age: David, Solomon
500 BC	Restoration: Ezra, Nehemiah

2. Theological History

The Pentateuch explains where God's people, Israel, came from, how God redeemed them, and how their relationship with God ebbed and flowed.

⁸ O T Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1949).

⁹ M F Unger, quoted in *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

The Pentateuch is not simply a “history” of Israel. It contains much that we would not expect in a national history, and omits certain details that might ordinarily be considered historically pertinent. The Pentateuch is not just a document to provide us with important and true information, but also to strengthen our faith. It was originally meant to encourage ancient Israelites to believe and trust in God because of his faithful relationship with their ancestors. So without presenting a complete “history of Israel,” it traces the actions of God and Israel *in history*. For over two millennia, believers have found important historical, religious and theological truths in these books.¹⁰

Ancient Eastern religions used myths to communicate their theology. These myths describe events which took place outside space and time. But Old Testament theology is founded and expressed in divinely controlled historical events. Therefore, Israel came to know God by studying his acts in history.

3. Archeology

As mentioned above, twentieth century archeology has served to confirm the history of the Bible and the early authorship of the biblical documents.

In 1941 the most eminent archeologist of his time, W E Albright said:

Archaeological and inscriptional data have established the historicity of innumerable passages and statements of the Old Testament; the number of such cases is many times greater than those where the reverse has been proved or has been made probable.¹¹

20 years later John Elder commented along similar lines.

It is not too much to say that it was the rise of the science of archaeology that broke the deadlock between historians and the orthodox Christian. Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of archaeologists.... Contemporary records of Biblical events have been unearthed and the uniqueness of Biblical revelation has been emphasized by contrast and comparison to newly discovered religions of ancient peoples. Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history.¹²

4. Moses

Moses dominates the canvas of the Pentateuch. His life was marked by unique revelations, miracles, special closeness to God, and a central covenantal role.

From a Jewish perspective, the dominant figure in the Pentateuch and the entire Old Testament is Moses. Abraham plays a key role in Genesis, but his stature and accomplishments do not match those of Moses. Although Abraham was the founding father of Israel, Moses was the one who organized the nation, promulgated their laws, and, under God, led them for forty years through the wilderness. He was a prophet, a priest, and almost a king as he directed every facet of national life. The New Testament highly praises both Abraham and Moses, but it was Moses who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Elijah, to talk with Jesus (Matt. 17:3–8).¹³

IV. LITERARY ANALYSIS

Having established the facts of the text, using Historical Analysis, Literary Analysis is then used to study the literary form, structure, and characteristics of the text.

¹⁰ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 64

¹¹ W Albright, “Japheth in the Tents of Shem,” in *The American Scholar*, 42:692–94 (1941), 181.

¹² Elder, *Prophets, Idols and Diggers* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1960), 16.

¹³ H Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), Electronic Edition.

1. The Unity of the Pentateuch

The books of Genesis through Deuteronomy present a coherent picture of the origins of mankind and the birth and development of Israel as a nation.

The books are bound together into a continuous narrative. As we shall see, each book's ending is taken up in the next book and each book builds on the previous book. In Deuteronomy, Moses summarises Israel's history from Exodus to Numbers.

2. Literary Genre

Although it is true that the most common designation for the Pentateuch is "law" (Hebrew, "*torah*"), the overall composition of these five books is much more complex. The Pentateuch also contains historical narratives, laws, hymns, personal archives, epics, treaties, genealogical records, poems, proverbs and credos.

3. Original Meaning

It is unlikely that the five books of the Pentateuch were written at the same time, for the same audience, or for the same reasons. As we consider each book of the Pentateuch we will consider the original time, audience and meaning of each book. However, overall we can say that the Pentateuch as a whole answered some general questions concerning Israel's past, present and future relationship with God.

It is true that Moses and many of his forebears had learned of the purposes of God either by direct revelation or by oral tradition and that they had communicated these divine intentions to their contemporaries in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, up till now there had been no systematic elaboration of the historical and theological building blocks that had resulted in the structure of a people united in covenant with God and charged with the awesome privilege and responsibility of functioning as his people in line with his redemptive design. Who indeed were these people? What was the meaning of Israel? How had Israel come to be? What, specifically, was she to achieve as one member among the family of peoples and nations? Beyond all that what was the meaning of creation? Of the heavens and earth? Of humankind? What object did the Creator have in view for his creation and if Israel was a sovereignly elected servant people, how was that servanthood to be employed in implementing the great saving purposes of God? Universal Jewish and Christian tradition clearly and unequivocally teaches that Moses, the covenant mediator and spokesman for Yahweh to his people, set out to answer these very questions as the last great ministry of his long and productive life. The form which these answers took is what is known to Judaism as the Torah and to Christians as the Pentateuch, the five books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.¹⁴

V. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Historical and Literary Analysis lay the groundwork for thematic (or theological) analysis. Having established the **facts** and the **form** in which the facts are presented in, the **meaning** of the facts can then be more closely considered.

1. Individual Book Themes

Although the Pentateuch is a literary unity, each book has its own emphasis and theme.

Genesis: The *beginnings* of the universe and of God's people

Exodus: The *salvation* of helpless people

Leviticus: Call to *holiness* in response to God's grace

Numbers: *wanderings* caused by unbelief

Deuteronomy: *renewal* programme

¹⁴ E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 22.

J E Smith outlines the themes of the different books as follows:

BOOK	THEME	LESSON
GENESIS	THE ELECTION OF ISREAL	SALVATION ESSENTIAL
EXODUS	THE REDEMPTION OF ISREAL	DELIVERANCE ESSENTIAL
LEVITICUS	THE SANCTIFICATION OF ISREAL	HOLINESS ESSENTIAL
NUMBERS	THE DISCIPLINE OF ISRAEL	PERSEVERANCE ESSENTIAL
DEUTERONOMY	THE INSTRUCTION OF ISRAEL	OBEDIENCE ESSENTIAL

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The Nelson’s Book of Maps and Charts sets out the contents of the Pentateuch below:

Book	God’s Command
Genesis	“Let there be!”
Exodus	“Let my people go!”
Leviticus	“Be holy!”
Numbers	“Go in!”
Deuteronomy	“Obey!”

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2. God the Creator

The Pentateuch begins with God creating heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1), and it ends with a reference to God as the Father and Creator of Israel (Deut.32:6, 15).

3. God the Redeemer

The greatest example of salvation in the Old Testament is God’s redemption of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 12-15). Redemption is also found in Leviticus 25 which explains how a man may recover/redeem his property and freedom. Another example of redemption is in Numbers 35 where someone who avenges the death of a relative is called “a redeemer of blood”. Deuteronomy states repeatedly that God redeemed Israel from slavery (7:8; 13:5).

4. God’s Attributes

All of God’s attributes are displayed in the Pentateuch. For example:

¹⁵ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed.). (Joplin, Mo: College Press Pub. Co, 1993) Electronic Edition.

¹⁶ *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps and charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), Electronic Edition.

God's holiness is seen at Sinai when His presence makes the mountain holy ground (Ex.19:11-13). The holiness of God is especially seen in Leviticus, where Israel is commanded: "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy" (19:2). The nation was to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". The only proper response to God's grace and love is personal holiness. In the Pentateuch, as elsewhere in the Bible, God's grace is followed by God's law, not to enslave God's people but to protect them and guide them to God's image.

God's sovereignty is seen in continually defeating and thwarting the evil purposes of men. For example God turned the intended harming of Joseph into a blessing for his harmers and others (Gen.45:7; 50:20). He brought plagues and humbled a mighty Pharaoh to show that He alone was Lord (Ex.15:11). Unlike other ancient Near Eastern creation stories which speculate about the origin of the gods, the Pentateuch assumes the pre-existence and eternity of God. Again, in contrast with other ancient literature, God created without assistance from anyone and without using pre-existing matter. Another contrast is that in the ancient literature the gods had limited and localised jurisdiction. However the God of the Pentateuch has an unlimited and worldwide sovereignty as demonstrated in the flood and Babel judgments, as well as in His calling Abraham out of Mesopotamia, Israel out of Egypt and guiding them throughout their wilderness wanderings.

God's love is portrayed in his compassion and grace throughout the Pentateuch (Ex.34:6, Num.14:18). This is seen toward individuals like Noah and Abraham, and also toward the nation of Israel groaning in slavery (Ex.2:24).

God's justice is seen in the punishing of sinners at the fall, at the flood, at Babel, at Sodom and Gomorrah, in the plagues on Egypt, in the wilderness wanderings (Num.11:1).

5. God's Names

God reveals Himself to the patriarchs and to Moses through His actions and also through His names, which in the Old Testament express the nature and essence of a person.

a. Elohim (God)

"Elohim" is the word used throughout Genesis 1, where it stresses God's work as Creator. The Hebrew form is a plural, but it is usually used with a singular verb. Some scholars have explained this as a plural of majesty or of respect. Others have said that while it does not prove the doctrine of the Trinity, it does allow for its later development.

b. Yahweh (LORD)

The personal name for God was "Yahweh," better known as "Jehovah". The exact pronunciation of this name is not clear as only the four consonants YHWH are given in the Hebrew Bible. The vowels are not given because the Jews refused to pronounce the name, not wanting to take the name of Yahweh in vain. When this sacred name appeared in a verse the Jews pronounced it "Adonay", the other word for "Lord". The vowels of "Adonay" were merged with YHWH to produce "Yehowah" (Jehovah). The correct pronunciation was probably closer to "Yahweh".

God commanded Moses to say to the Israelites that "I AM" has sent me to you (Ex.3:14). Since "I AM" is spelled almost like "YHWH," this may be the key to the meaning of this most intimate name for God. "I am He who is there (for you) – really and truly present, ready to help and to act," especially in a time of crisis.

The name is often used in covenantal contexts (Gen.12:1–9; 15:1–19; Ex.19:7–10; 20:2; 24:1–18; Deut.28:58–59). When Jesus claimed the name "I AM" in John 8:58, He clearly identified Himself with the God of the Old Testament and in doing so was nearly stoned for blasphemy.

c. Adonay (Lord)

This other word for Lord has the basic idea of "master". When applied to God Himself, "Adonay" is usually combined with "Yahweh" and is rendered "Sovereign Lord" in the NIV. This combination is often used in contexts of prayer.

d. El Elyon (God Most High).

This name is made up of the short version of Elohim, plus an adjective which means "high, most high". Twice the name is coupled with "Creator of heaven and earth" and usually occurs in passages which mention God's sovereignty over the nations. Perhaps this is because both names were associated with Canaanite deities

e. Shaddai (God Almighty)

This occurs eight times in the Pentateuch and in six of those times it is preceded by the word "El", (God). *El Shaddai* may mean "God of the mountain". The power and strength of the age-old mountains belongs to God. Again the name is associated with covenantal contexts (Gen.17:1; 35:11).

f. El Olam (Eternal God)

The name only occurs once in the Pentateuch (Gen.21:33), but the idea of God's eternity is also found in Ex.15:18 and Deut.32:27.

Other names occur such as "The Fear of Isaac" (Gen.31:42), "The Mighty One of Jacob" (Gen.49:24), "The Rock" (Deut.32:4, 15, 18), "Father" (Deut.32:6).

6. Salvation

As we shall see, the sinfulness of man, the need for blood sacrifice, and the exercise of faith all feature largely in the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch simply, painfully, and systematically portrays humanity as fallen and beyond self-help. God saw humanity's fallen condition, but nobody and nothing forced him to intervene to help. Rather, in supreme love, mercy and grace we see him reaching down to perform saving and redeeming acts in the salvation of Noah, the call of Abraham, the Exodus, etc.

7. The Covenants

We shall notice how God deals with man by covenant. From the covenant of works with Adam in Genesis 1 through the gradual unfolding covenant of grace in its various administrations – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses – through to the covenant renewal of Deuteronomy we see the centrality of this concept.

Through the study of the Pentateuch we can learn who God is and what He requires of mankind. God is concerned about the whole world, though He chooses to work mainly through Israel and enters a covenant relationship with her. Sadly, Israel and the nations often choose to rebel against God, but Yahweh will not abandon His covenant promise and seeks to restore and redeem mankind. God is patient and merciful, but He is also holy and righteous, and those who disobey Him are eventually judged. But the Pentateuch also looks forward to the Lamb of God who will pay the ultimate price for sin.¹⁷

8. The Promise

Related to the idea of covenant is the theme of promise. The Pentateuch narrates the movement of God's people chronologically, geographically and spiritually toward the fulfillment of the Patriarchal promise of progeny, position, and possession. The individual books of the Pentateuch are seen by Clines to focus particularly on one of these three ingredients of that promise. Each book concludes with a thematic pointer indicating that faith in the Promise, though tested by circumstances, was still alive. Genesis focuses on the *progeny*. Exodus and Leviticus focus on the *position* of Israel in covenant with God and obliged to God. In Numbers and Deuteronomy the focus is on *possession* of the land

¹⁷ H Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), Electronic Edition.

Deuteronomy is virtually a handbook of do's and don'ts to be observed once the entrance into Canaan has been effected. As Deuteronomy closes, the Promise still has not been realized. With the death of the great lawgiver one could even say that the Promise was in jeopardy. Thus the Pentateuch is a masterpiece of literature, carefully crafted by its author to underscore how faith in God's original Promise survived every challenge. Though full of accounts of false starts, failures, and reverses of every sort, the Pentateuch is basically optimistic. However slow and painful, progress toward the realization of God's Promise was ongoing.¹⁸

VI. NEW TESTAMENT ANALYSIS

Through Historical, Thematic and Literary Analysis we will study the Old Testament text as it was given to its original and ancient audience. But we cannot stop there without going on to highlight the relationship between Old Testament themes and the New Testament.

1. God's People

The Pentateuch contains the story of God's people. But, there is much more here than an account of his dealings with an ancient people.

As is true of all Scripture, God intends that this story – a story of his saving grace poured out freely on needy humans – should become our story as well. For indeed, this is the story of all who follow Christ. For Christians, personal salvation is very similar to the story of the Pentateuch. God, the Sovereign of the universe, breaks into our personal history and provides a solution for our brokenness. Because of his love and grace, he provides salvation by his own revelation in history (incarnation). God gives us prophets and teachers to interpret his historical acts and help us maintain our relationship with him. The rest of the story is one of growth in grace, or the imitation of our Saviour. So the gospel of Jesus Christ was also the gospel of the Israelites.¹⁹

2. Jesus Christ

Christ himself says that Moses spoke of him and witnessed to him (Jn.5:39-40; 45-46; Lk.24:27). Indeed except for Psalms and Isaiah, the books of the Pentateuch are the most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Deuteronomy is a close third over all, followed by Exodus, Genesis, and Leviticus. This Christ-centred view of the Pentateuch has been confirmed throughout the ages. For example:

Christ ... is the end of the *history* as well as of the *law* of the Old Testament (emphasis added).²⁰

Everything found in the Old Testament has relevance at some point to the incarnation, humiliation, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification, triumphant return or future kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God (cf. Luke 24:27). Without undermining the literal and historical sense of Old Testament Scripture, this principle will be applied throughout this entire book...Our principle is, that having once found the literal sense, the exact meaning of the terms, and the primary application...we are then to ask what the Holy Spirit intended to teach in all ages by this formula...This principle of looking for Christ will be basic to this overview of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.²¹

In asking the question, 'Where does the story of Jesus Christ begin?' we must travel back with Matthew to Abraham (Matt.1:1-16), further back still with Luke to Adam (Luke 3:23-38) and with John to the eternity before time and creation (John 1:1-3). The Old Testament is then

¹⁸ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

¹⁹ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 68.

²⁰ P Fairbarin, *The Typology of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 72.

²¹ Gareth Crossley, *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (England: Evangelical Press, 2002), 38.

seen as the unfolding of a carefully prepared plan for the coming of his Son into the world which the Master Architect slowly and painstakingly reveals.²²

As William Hendriksen asserts, no Old Testament book is “interpreted fully until it is viewed in the light of New Testament revelation”.²³

Genesis focuses on God’s covenants with its fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which promise that God will make of their family a great nation. The narrative in Exodus through Deuteronomy deals with the nation’s founder, Moses, and God’s covenant mediated through him to make Israel a holy nation. That story and these covenants find their fulfillment in Christ and the new Israel as the sovereign God directs history toward its ultimate destiny.²⁴

VII. THE MESSAGE OF THE PENTATEUCH

Original Message: The God of Israel creates, calls and covenants with His people in order to make them a blessing to the world.

Present Message: The God of the Church creates, calls and covenants with His people in order to make them a blessing to the whole world.

²² Ibid, 35.

²³ W Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible* (Evangelical Press, 1976), 298.

²⁴ *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 2.