

THE PENTATEUCH

Genesis · Exodus · Leviticus
Numbers · Deuteronomy



Tremper Longman III



introduction

The Pentateuch

Genesis through Numbers

remember fifty years ago when my father took my sisters and me to the movies. He didn't check when the movie started. We just went to the theater and started watching. Quite often that meant we began watching in the middle or at the very end of the story. Sure, we would stay and watch the beginning of the movie when the next showing started, but I have to say (and I think most will agree) that the middle and the end of a movie make a lot more sense when you start at the beginning!

The same is true for the Bible. For good reasons, we are attracted to the end of the story—the New Testament—because there we learn about Jesus, the object of our faith. But

when we start in the New Testament, it is like going to the movies toward the end of the show.

I don't mean to suggest that we can only read the New Testament after we read through the Old Testament. We rightly tell new readers of the Bible that they ought to go right to the New Testament, perhaps starting with the gospel of John where they come face-to-face with Jesus. We can certainly come to know Jesus and have a personal relationship with him without reading the Old Testament. But, of course, like all our most important relationships, we want to know as much as we can about Jesus. We understand Jesus much more clearly if we know the whole story, and that story starts with Genesis.

This series of booklets helps us understand the first three-quarters of the story, the Old Testament, and encourages us to become lifelong readers and students of the first part of God's Word.

In this booklet, we begin with the beginning of the beginning, the Old Testament Law.

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one

In the Beginning: Reading Genesis and Exodus

The **Old Testament** puts off many Christians. It seems long and difficult to understand at times. Further, since Jesus fulfilled much of the Old Testament (think, for instance, of sacrifices¹), many sections of the Old Testament seem irrelevant to us.

But let's remember that Jesus told his followers that all the Scriptures (by which he meant what we call the Old Testament) anticipated his coming. For example, after his resurrection, he spoke to two confused disciples and showed them "beginning with Moses [another way to refer to the Law] and all the Prophets . . . what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (LUKE 24:27).

If we want to know about Jesus fully, we can't ignore the beginning of the story. The books of the law or,

as Jewish tradition has it, the Torah, are the opening scenes and events of the story of Jesus. As we turn to the five books of the Torah, we will see that law has a very broad meaning. While it does contain many commandments, Law as it refers to the first five books of the Bible has the more general sense of instruction. The Torah does contain laws (most famously the Ten Commandments), but these five books instruct us about God and our relationship with him largely through recounting stories about how he created the world, how humans rebelled against him, and how he passionately pursues restoration with his wayward creatures.

When we open the Bible and start from the beginning, we find the book of Genesis, which appropriately means “beginning.” But what many modern readers don’t realize is that Genesis is not really the first book, it is the first part of the first book of the Bible. In other words, the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) is really a single book that has been divided into five parts. That is why the Torah is sometimes referred to as the Pentateuch, or five scrolls. This one composition was divided into five parts because an ancient scroll could not hold the entire story.

Sitting down to read Genesis through Deuteronomy is like opening a book to where the plot begins and we are introduced to new characters and situations. The stories in these chapters help us understand later parts of the Bible. We wouldn’t pick up an exciting new novel and start reading in the middle or near the end. (Okay, sometimes we cheat and read the end of an exciting mystery, but then that spoils the anticipation.)

We start at the beginning² in order to understand the story and really appreciate the ending.

The purpose of this booklet is to orient us to get the most out of reading the Torah and to appreciate how it fits into the message of the whole Bible. We will begin by identifying its main message and showing how the story presents that message. We'll sketch an overview of the plot as we move from the beginning (creation) to the end (the death of Moses). And we'll see that one of the central features of the Torah story is God giving Israel his law.

Christians often wonder how we are to understand the role of law, not just in the life of ancient Israel but also in our own lives, so we will give special consideration to that question. Finally, we will see how the Torah fits in with the rest of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, looking at the question: How does the Torah anticipate Jesus and the gospel?

What Is the Main Message of the Torah?

Jesus saves!

True, but from what?

The Torah starts from creation to tell us about God and our relationship with him. We learn that God created humans to live in intimate fellowship with him, but we rebelled against him and he judges us for our sin. Even so, God did not give up on humanity. He pursues us passionately to restore relationship with him. The Torah even anticipates God's ultimate reconciliation of his people.

Let's start from the beginning of the Torah to see how this story of creation, sin, redemption, and

reconciliation develops as we move from Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Reading Genesis

Genesis is indeed a book of beginnings. Here we learn about the beginning of the cosmos, the beginning of humanity, the beginning of human sin, the beginning of redemption, and the beginning of Israel.

Genesis opens with two accounts of creation (1:1–2:4a; 2:4b–25). The first account focuses on the creation of the cosmos in seven days. For our purposes, we do not have to get hung up on whether this describes creation in a literal seven-day period or whether the language is figurative. There is no doubt about the fact that the first creation account proclaims that the God of the Bible is the one who created everything! Nothing exists and no one is alive apart from God's creative activity. The second creation account makes the same point, but here the focus is on the creation of human beings (2:4b–25).

The message of both creation accounts is that God created the cosmos and humans in a blessed condition (GENESIS 1:22, 28). As described particularly in Genesis 2, this blessing meant there was harmony between God and Adam and Eve, between Adam and Eve, and between Adam and Eve and the world in which they lived. Humans, as created, were morally innocent and capable of choice.

The next episode explains why, though God created everything and everyone in a blessed condition, we experience a world full of evil, pain, and suffering. In Genesis 3, the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion

against God reveals why the condition of our current world isn't the result of God's creation, but is our responsibility. In a word, we all rebel against God, starting with Adam and Eve in the garden. As the New Testament writer Paul later points out, the original human rebellion against God introduced sin and death into the world (ROMANS 5:12–21). The result of sin meant that we no longer live lives blessed with harmony in our relationship with God, with each other, or with creation itself.

Even so—and here is the exciting message of the rest of the Pentateuch, indeed of the rest of the Bible—God did not destroy his human creatures nor did he simply abandon them.³ Instead he passionately pursues us in order to redeem and bring us back into relationship with him. He wants to bless us once again, so we can live in harmony with him and enjoy flourishing lives.

The first part of Genesis (CHAPS. 4–11) describes how humans kept sinning against God (think of it, Cain murdered Abel [4:1–16]), eventually “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (6:5), and humans attempted to build a tower “that reaches to the heavens” (11:4). But as you read Genesis, you'll see that God's response to sin is never restricted to only judgment. Each and every time God judges sinners he also extends grace. For example, in 4:15 he puts a “mark” on Cain to preserve him from violence, and in 6:22–7:5 he tells Noah to build an ark, and in chapter 10 he allows humans to continue to communicate through diverse languages and continues to pursue reconciliation.

It's with this background we are to understand an

important chapter in God's story. It's the momentous call of Abram, who later is called Abraham:

Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (12:1–3).

God's call to Abraham is important because it helps explain much of the rest of the Bible. In response to Abraham's act of faith, God promised to make him a great nation. This meant Abraham would have many descendants who lived on land they called their own. Not only that, but God would bless him and his descendants and "all the peoples of the earth." Adam and Eve were blessed in the garden, but they lost that blessing because of their rebellion. God promised to restore that blessing through the promises to Abraham!

Abraham obeyed God's instruction to go to the land, but the promises did not come to fulfillment immediately. Far from it! Abraham was a pilgrim in the land, and he and Sarah did not have a child for many, many years. For his descendants to be a great nation, he had to start with at least one son!

That Abraham and Sarah did not have a child became a test of faith as they got older and older. How did Abraham respond to threats and obstacles to the fulfillment of the promises? Honestly? Not so well.

He didn't trust God to take care of him when he

fled to Egypt to avoid a famine. He lied about Sarah in order to save his own skin (GENESIS 12:10–20), and he showed he hadn't matured much in his faith when he lied about her again many years later (GENESIS 20).

Occasionally, he responded with faith and not fear (SEE CHAP. 13), but it wasn't until after the birth of Isaac when Abraham was one hundred years old (21:1–6) that he showed real and utter faith in God. We see this when he is willing to trust God's promise and follow God's command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice even though Isaac is the only son born to Abraham and Sarah (GENESIS 22). The story of Abraham encourages us because, like him, we struggle with our faith in the promises of God. In Abraham's story we see that God stays faithful to those of us who deal with doubt.

Abraham is a pivotal figure in the biblical story of redemption. He was the recipient of the promise that God would make his descendants a "great nation," and that God would bless him, his descendants, and even "all peoples on earth." While the birth of Isaac shows God's commitment to honor his promises, it is only the beginning. Once Abraham died, the promises passed on to Isaac (not his half-brother Ishmael),⁴ and then when Isaac died, Jacob (and not his twin brother Esau) was the one to whom the promises came. To be the chosen heir of the promises did not mean a pampered life. Far from it! Isaac and Jacob's lives were filled with struggle, disappointment, and pain. Despite this, and sometimes through it, they were used to bring blessing to others (including Ishmael and Esau and the people who came from them).

Joseph's Place in God's Story

The final story of Genesis focuses on Joseph, the youngest and favorite son of Jacob (CHAPS. 37–50). For a variety of reasons, Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt. But God was with Joseph, and everywhere he went, prosperity followed. Even so, he was framed for rape and thrown in prison. In prison, he met two high-level Egyptian officials whose dreams he interpreted. His reputation as a dream interpreter eventually landed him in front of Pharaoh, whose dreams revealed a horrible famine would hit the region.

Put in authority, Joseph prepared Egypt for the famine. Meanwhile, in the Promised Land, Jacob and his other sons had no food. So, to survive, the brothers traveled to Egypt. Of course, Joseph did not trust them, and so he hid his identity and tested them to see if they had changed since selling him into slavery. When Joseph threatened to throw Benjamin (Jacob's new favored son) into jail, Judah, the spokesman for the brothers, offered himself in his stead. The brothers had indeed changed. Their relationship with Joseph was healed, and Jacob and his family moved to Egypt.

What do readers learn from the Joseph story?

First, we learn how the chosen family came to live in Egypt, which prepares the reader for the story of the exodus to follow. Second, we begin to understand the relationship among the twelve sons of Jacob. God had earlier given Jacob a second name, Israel (32:22–31), and these sons would become

the fathers of the future tribes of Israel. Among other things, we learn how important Joseph and Judah (who at the end of the story had become a leader among the brothers) are among the sons of Jacob. The tribes that descended from them—Ephraim (named after one of Joseph’s sons) and Judah—would become the most powerful tribes of northern and southern Israel. But finally, and most dramatically, this story teaches that not even powerful, wicked people can stop the plan of God. At the end of his life, Joseph tells his brothers “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (50:20).

From Genesis, we learn about our beginnings as humans. Today, we understand that we are sinners in need of saving, but that was not the way God created us. Our rebellion led to judgment but also to God’s great acts of redemption in which his choice of Abraham plays a central role.

Reading Exodus

At the end of Genesis, Abraham’s descendants were an extended family living in Egypt; the rest of the Torah (Exodus through Deuteronomy) carries forward the story from there—beginning several centuries later. The book of Exodus can be divided into three parts: the story of God’s rescue from Egyptian bondage (1–18), the account of God giving the law to Israel at Mount Sinai (19–24), and the description of the building of the tabernacle (25–40).

As the curtain rises on the action again, we learn

that Abraham's descendants had "multiplied greatly" (EXODUS 1:7). So much so that Pharaoh felt threatened by their presence in Egypt and subjected them to forced labor and issued a shocking decree: All baby boys should be killed at birth. But God had plans for the people through whom he meant to reach the world. Baby Moses should have been killed at birth, but through the actions of some brave women, God preserved him so he could eventually lead the Israelites out of bondage and into the Promised Land.

The account of the exodus from Egypt is one of the most exciting stories in all of Scripture. After God called Moses into service through a burning bush (EXODUS 3), Moses confronted the stubborn Pharaoh, who only increased the suffering of the Israelites. God, in turn, brought a series of plagues on Egypt, culminating in the death of the firstborn (commemorated by the Passover to this day) that finally led the Egyptian king to let Israel go. However, once they were gone, the embarrassed and angry Pharaoh pursued the Israelites intending to wipe them off the face of the earth. Near the Red Sea, God parted the waters allowing his people to escape and then closed the waters in judgment on the pursuing Egyptians.

Beyond the threatening reach of Egypt, Moses led the Israelites to Mount Sinai, near where he first encountered God in the burning bush. Here God entered into a covenant (a legal agreement between two parties, similar to a treaty between a great king and his subjects) with Israel and gave them his law, headed by the Ten Commandments (EXODUS 20:2-17). Other laws, many of which are case laws,⁵ follow these

famous commandments (20:22–23:19). Much of the remainder of the Torah contains law, so much so that it warrants looking closely at law in the next section.

Besides the exodus and the giving of the law, the book of Exodus also describes the building of the tabernacle, an ornate portable structure where God made his presence known. The tabernacle was also the site of sacrifices and worship to God (some of the laws in the rest of the Pentateuch set up the requirements for these sacrifices and worship ceremonies), before the Israelites settled in their new land. God initiated its construction (25:1–8) and even provided the plans (25:9, 40), the materials (12:33–36), and the skill (31:1–11) to build it! The tabernacle was the tent of Israel’s divine king and housed the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s presence among his people.

With all of these blessings, we might think that God’s people must have fallen on their knees and worshiped him constantly. But they didn’t. Instead they grumbled and complained and, like Adam and Eve in the garden, rebelled against their Maker and Savior. They did not trust him, so he condemned that first generation to die in the wilderness. Thus for forty years they wandered—until everyone from that first generation had died—before they finally reached the border of the Promised Land.

Before moving on in the story of the Torah, we might ask why we should read the book of Exodus. In each of the three major parts of the book we are introduced to truths that remain important to Christians today. Later we’ll talk about the specifics, but here let’s just recognize that the first part (CHAPS.

1–18) is about salvation, the second part (CHAPS. 19–25) is about law, and the third section is about how God makes his presence known among his sinful people (CHAPS. 25–40). This final section prefigures Jesus, the Word who became flesh and lived among us (JOHN 1:14).

The last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, is the record of Moses's final sermon before he died and the people went into the land. His audience is the second generation, the children of those who died in the wilderness, and the subject of his sermon is the law of God. After rehearsing all the good things God had done for them in the past (CHAPS. 1–4), he then reminded them of the Ten Commandments (5:6–21) followed by an even lengthier list of case laws (CHAPS. 6–26). Moses was leading the second generation into renewing the covenant their parents had made with God at Mount Sinai. Through Moses, God reminded them that keeping the covenant leads to blessing—restoration of relationship with God that results in good relationships with others and a flourishing life (CHAPS. 27–28).

The Torah starts with creation, tells the story of the fall into sin and death, and then informs us about God's pursuit of us to redeem us. That story ends with Moses's sermon on the Plains of Moab, but we know the story will continue as the people enter into the land of promise. You can think of these books as the exciting beginning of God's story—a story that culminates in Jesus!



two

Reading Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy: How Does the Law Fit into the Picture?

“Y

ou are not the boss of me!”

Let’s face it. None of us like to be told what to do, but without rules and laws life would be chaos. Imagine driving in a place where there were no speed limits or other rules governing our behavior when we got behind the wheel of a car. We would be lucky to survive!

We observed earlier that the Torah is filled with law, including the Ten Commandments and the case law that flows from it. When Christians today think about law in the Bible, we often think it isn’t relevant for our lives. It’s so easy to think of Leviticus as a quagmire of ancient rules, or to get lost in the numbers of

Numbers. After all, we are saved by grace, not by keeping the law. We don't earn our salvation; it is given to us. We wrongly think that this is what makes the New Testament different than the Old Testament.

God saved his people by his grace in the Old Testament. They didn't earn their way to a special relationship with God. After all, Abraham "believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (GENESIS 15:6), which is Paul's banner passage to prove to those who insist that we have to earn our salvation that salvation is only by God's grace (FOR EXAMPLE, ROMANS 4:2-3; GALATIANS 3:6). Paul also points back to the choice of Jacob rather than Esau to receive the covenant promises to prove that relationship with God does not "depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (ROMANS 9:16). Not only that, but note what God says immediately before giving Israel any law: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (EXODUS 20:2). God didn't require that they obey the law to earn deliverance from Egypt; he rescued them and then called them to a life of obedience.

God wants his New Testament people who are saved by grace to live in a lawful way through the power of the Spirit. The law, after all, expresses God's will for how his people should live their lives.⁶ And this is true not just for the Old Testament people of God but also for Christians today. We don't earn our salvation or even maintain it by keeping the law, but we do demonstrate that we actually have faith by living in a way that honors the One who saved us; and we honor him by living the way God created us to live. Yes, Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (GALATIANS

3:6), but it was because of his willingness to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah that God grants the fulfillment of the promises of Genesis 12:1–3, “because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son” (22:16). In the New Testament, James points back to this story in order to illustrate that “faith by itself, if is not accompanied by action, is dead” (JAMES 2:17). In Galatians, while Paul speaks against those who believe we earn our salvation by keeping the law, he urges us “to walk by the Spirit, and . . . not gratify the desires of the flesh” (5:16) and to “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25) by demonstrating in our lives the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22).

What Is the Law?

God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat “from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (GENESIS 2:17). Adam and Eve broke this first law and thus introduced sin and death into the world (see Paul’s comments in ROMANS 5:12–21).

Though God punished Adam and Eve for their rebellion, God did not destroy his human creatures. He pursued them! As we commented above, God wanted to reach the world through Abraham’s descendants. Thus, when he saved them (by grace) from Egypt, he gave them the law so that they might live in gratitude according to his will.⁷ God gave them the law—the expression of his will—on Mount Sinai (EXODUS 19–24). The law begins with the Ten Commandments and the case laws⁸ follow. Other case laws are found in Leviticus (CHAPS. 1–7; 11–27) and Numbers (FOR EXAMPLE, 15:7–21; 27:1–11). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the second

generation of Israelites of the Ten Commandments and introduces more case laws before they enter into the Promised Land (DEUTERONOMY 5–26).

There are a lot of laws in the Torah! Indeed, according to one count there are 613 laws in all.

How Are We to Think of These Laws?

The Ten Commandments are statements of general ethical principles. Take the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder,” (EXODUS 20:13) as an example. This clearly prohibits all illegitimate taking of human life. However, it raises the questions: Are there legitimate reasons for taking life? What are they? (After all, the law allows for certain divinely commanded wars and the death penalty.) Here is where the numerous case laws come into play. As the name implies, the case law gives specific cases to help Israel understand how the Ten Commandments apply to actual situations. So when you’re reading through these sections of the Bible you are seeing God, who is holy and loving, describe what a flourishing human community looks like in a sin-scarred world. The laws prescribe how Israel was to get as close to God’s original creative intentions for human living as possible.

One quick example comes from Leviticus 19:33–34: “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD.”

While it may not be immediately obvious, this case law is an application of the sixth commandment

prohibiting murder understood through the lens of the tenth commandment that prohibits coveting. The tenth commandment makes all the commandments a matter of the heart. Jesus recognized this when he reminded his hearers that those (contemporary teachers of the law) who restrict the sixth commandment to only murder do not understand the intent of the law, which also prohibits hatred, anger, and mistreatment of others (MATTHEW 5:21–22). In the case law of Leviticus 19:33–34, the mistreatment of immigrants is prohibited. Not only is Israel to refrain from hating them, they must love them and treat them like those born in Israel. They are not to be like the Egyptians who mistreated them.

If you look at them closely, all the case laws of the Torah are applications of the Ten Commandments to specific situations within Israel's culture. The Old Testament people of God were to obey all these laws. But what about Christians? Are the laws now irrelevant?

Not according to Jesus: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (MATTHEW 5:17–18, SEE ALSO VV. 19–20).

Notice the laws are still relevant for our observance until they reach their fulfillment. As every New Testament reader knows, Jesus fulfilled many of the laws of the Old Testament so that we don't observe them like God's people did during the Old Testament period. Many of these laws are what we call ceremonial laws, laws that had to do with the religious practices

of Israel. One clear example is the law of sacrifice. We don't offer sacrifices today because Jesus is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system (HEBREWS 7:27).

Remember too that the foundation of the law is the Ten Commandments and that the case law applies the Ten Commandments to specific situations that are tailored to the time period of the Old Testament. That means our focus should be on the Ten Commandments, and our question should be, how do the ethical principles of the Ten Commandments apply to our lives today? (Often the Old Testament case laws help us figure that out.)

As an example, let's go back to the case law from Leviticus 19:33–34 that instructs God's people to love and not mistreat foreigners who have moved into Israel. While we might debate immigration policy, one thing is perfectly clear. When foreigners come into our country, we should love them and certainly not mistreat them—no matter their country of origin.

The law, most clearly the Ten Commandments, expresses God's desire for how we are to live. As Christians, we are saved by God's grace, and in response our hearts yearn to please the One who has given us such a gift. We please God by living, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, as closely as possible to the way he created us to live.

That said, Paul reminds us that now that Christ has come the law is no longer our guardian (GALATIANS 3:25). We live in the Spirit and follow the law of Christ that teaches we are to love God and our neighbor (MATTHEW 22:37–39). As we follow Jesus's law of love and live in the power of the Spirit, we fulfill the law.⁹



three

How Does the Torah Point to Jesus?

If reading the New Testament without knowledge of the Old Testament is like watching a movie starting at the end, then reading the Old Testament, and in particular the Torah, without considering the New Testament is like watching a movie from the beginning but then walking out before the exciting conclusion of the story.

Jesus himself said he was the One whom the Torah (and the rest of the Old Testament) was pointing toward. According to the gospel of John, he tells his hearers, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you

refuse to come to me to have life” (5:39–40; SEE ALSO LUKE 24:25–27, 44–45).

How does the Torah anticipate Jesus? We will have to be selective as we answer this question.

First of all, we have seen that the Torah initiates the story of redemption. God created humanity innocent, and they enjoyed a harmonious relationship with God (GENESIS 1–2) until they rebelled against him (CHAP. 3). They lost the blessings that are the results of a healthy relationship with God.

We also saw that God does not give up on humanity but pursues them for reconciliation. A key moment was when God entered into a covenant with Abraham and promised him, “You will be a blessing . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (12:2b–3).

The New Testament points to Jesus as the fulfillment of this promise. Paul comes right out and says it in Galatians 3:16, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.” When Paul said of Abraham that the promises were spoken to him and his seed that ultimately meant Jesus! Not only that, speaking to us through the church at Galatia, he said, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (GALATIANS 3:28–29). We are sinners, but because of Jesus we can enjoy a blessed relationship with God.

Our second example is the exodus, where God saved his people from slavery so that they could journey to the Promised Land. Jesus saves us from bondage—bondage to sin and guilt and death. No

wonder the Gospels point out how Jesus's life and work mirror the exodus and wilderness wanderings!

Think about it. Jesus's baptism can be compared to the crossing of the Red Sea. (First Corinthians 10:1–6 shows that the people of his day thought of the crossing as a kind of baptism.) This was followed by forty days and nights in the wilderness, where Jesus resisted the temptations to which Israel succumbed (MATTHEW 4:1–11). These are just a few of the many parallels we could name, but they culminate with Jesus dying on the eve of Passover, the festival that celebrates the exodus. As Paul says, Jesus is our Passover Lamb (1 CORINTHIANS 5:7). He is the ultimate exodus!

EPILOGUE:

Things to Keep in Mind

Hopefully now we can see just how interesting and important the Torah is to our Christian faith. It's important, after all, to know the beginning of the story that leads to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. The Torah tells us about creation (who we are), the fall (why there are deep problems in God's creation), and God's passionate pursuit of our redemption.

Blessing is the central theme of this story.

Adam and Eve lived blessed lives, but forfeited their blessing when they rebelled against God. God chose Abraham and his descendants as the instruments through which he would bring blessing to the world. And Joseph's life reminds us that God can use even bad things in our lives for his good purposes.

God shows his ability to save his people through the exodus from Egyptian bondage, showing us that God can save us even from the most impossible of situations. As the Israelites traveled to the Promised Land, God gave them the law not so they could earn their way into a relationship with him, but so they could live flourishing lives.

As we read these five wonderful books, we know that Jesus is the ultimate descendant of Abraham who fulfills the promise of blessing the world. He is the ultimate exodus who leads his people out of bondage to sin, guilt, and death. In the New Testament we also learn how Jesus kept the law on our behalf and suffered the penalty of the law to free us from guilt and death. The law no longer condemns us, but we can now live in a lawful way through the Spirit. Reading the Torah deepens our love for Jesus and leads us to worship him. 🌿

Appendix

[1]

JESUS—THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE: Sacrificial offerings were an integral part of Old Testament worship. We learn about five key types of sacrifice in Leviticus 1–7. Through these offerings, the Israelites presented their gifts to God (grain offering: LEVITICUS 2; 6:14–23) and also shared fellowship together (fellowship offering: LEVITICUS 3; 7:11–34), but most critically Levitical priests offered animal sacrifices on behalf of Israelites in order to restore their relationship with God (burnt offering, sin offering, guilt offering: LEVITICUS 1; 4:1–5:13; 6:24–7:10).

Sacrifices reminded the Israelites that God took their sins seriously. Sin separates people from their holy God. Sin deserves death, but God in his grace allowed his people to substitute an animal in their place. To offer such a sacrifice showed that sinners acknowledged their sin and recognized the consequences of sin. The sacrifice was an outward symbol of an inward repentance that led to atonement, in other words the making right or restoration of God's relationship with the repentant sinner.

These sacrifices were not magical rituals. They were symbols of an individual's heartfelt repentance; otherwise, as the prophets reminded Israel, they meant nothing (ISAIAH

1:10–15; JEREMIAH 6:20). Even more, they had no power in and of themselves. They pointed to something in the future, and that is to the death of Christ on the cross.

The book of Hebrews tells us that sacrifices are “only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (HEBREWS 10:1). After all, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (V. 4). They pointed to the death of Christ on the cross. Jesus died on our behalf. He is the once-and-for-all sacrifice, and by his “one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (V. 14).

[2]

READING FROM THE FRONT AND FROM THE BACK:

Many different people composed the sixty-six books of the Bible over about fourteen centuries (roughly 1300 BC–AD 100), but the end result has a unity that reads smoothly from the beginning to the end. The story has a beginning (creation), a middle (the fall and redemption), and an end (the restoration).

When reading the Bible for the first time, we usually start in the middle by reading the story of Jesus’s ministry and his death and resurrection. That is the heart of the message of the Bible.

God can speak to us through this story even if we don’t know much about the beginning of the story (the Old Testament), but we have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the gospel when we know what led up to the crucifixion and resurrection.

The Bible is God’s word to us, and our love for God should lead us to be constant readers of his Bible from the beginning to the end. After we get to know the whole story, we can read both from the front (the New

Testament) in the context of the Old Testament and from the back (the Old Testament) with the knowledge of where this story is heading.

[3]

GOD'S JUDGMENTS: THE CASE OF THE FLOOD: God created humans morally innocent and capable of moral choice. The story of Adam and Eve tells us that right from the start humans rebelled against God, and right from the start we learn that God judges sinners when he removes Adam and Eve from Eden and death becomes a part of our human experience.

But the story of the Bible does not center on human sin or God's judgment, but rather on grace. God shows his sinful human creatures unmerited favor—again and again.

God sent the flood (GENESIS 6–9) as his judgment against humans who had achieved a new depth of sin (“The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time,” GENESIS 6:5).

The story of the flood demonstrates God's intention to judge sin. But the most amazing line of the flood account is “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). God does not annihilate humanity. The message of the story is that God judges sin, but he also reveals his magnificent grace to humans in order to restore an intimate relationship with them.

[4]

In the ancient Near East, **THE FIRSTBORN SON** was the main heir of a father. He would normally inherit twice as much as the other sons and would control the distribution

of the inheritance. Thus, according to the human customs of the day, Ishmael should have been Abraham's main heir, not Isaac. Then later in Genesis, Isaac's main heir should have been Esau the older of the twins, not his brother Jacob.

The choice of Isaac and then Jacob reminds us that God does not always follow human conventions. God chose the unexpected son to carry forward the covenant promises into the next generation. Isaac and especially Jacob well illustrate the teaching of Paul that "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (1 CORINTHIANS 1:27–29).

[5]

CASE LAWS: The foundation of the law in the Torah is the Ten Commandments (EXODUS 20:1–17; DEUT. 5:6–21). These express God's will as general ethical principles ("You shall not murder," EXODUS 20:13).

Many laws follow the Ten Commandments and are found in Exodus through Deuteronomy. These case laws apply the general principles of the Ten Commandments to specific situations to help Israel know how to apply them to their everyday lives. For instance, in Deuteronomy 22:8 we find a law that requires the Israelites to build a parapet (or fence) around their roof. This applies the commandment not to murder since Israelites used their roofs as living space; without such a parapet someone could fall off and kill themselves. Such an instruction may still guide people today if they have houses with roofs

that serve as living space. For most of us though, this law helps us think through danger spots in our homes (fences around swimming pools, protective plugs in electrical sockets, etc.).

[6]

God did not give the Israelites random laws to see if they could obey them. They weren't laws designed to show that Israelites were suddenly something more than human because of their relationship with God. In fact, it was their relationship with God that made them truly human. Remember we were created in a blessed state—right relationship with God, each other, and the land.

Beginning with Abram, God began to restore humanity's relationship with himself. The laws that God gave were intended to continue restoring what was lost in the Garden of Eden. The laws reflect how God intended humanity to live in the first place. In other words, the law reflects what life would have looked like if Adam and Eve had never sinned. Living according to the law would have been a full and flourishing life. Understood in this way, the law itself is a gracious act of God.

[7]

THE LAW DRIVES US TO CHRIST: The Law is an expression of God's will for our lives. For that reason, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (ROMANS 7:12). But the law also condemns us because we are sinners who cannot keep the law ("all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," ROMANS 3:23). We cannot save ourselves from sin, guilt, and death. What are we to do? Paul raises this question when he asks, "Who will rescue

me from this body . . . of death?" And almost in the same breath he answers it with "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24–25). The law would condemn us, but it also drives us to Christ who kept the law and suffered the penalty of the law on our behalf.

[8]

CEREMONIAL LAWS: Among the many case laws of the Torah are those that concern the religious rituals or ceremonies of ancient Israel. These are laws that concern special holy days (Sabbath and annual festivals), holy people (priests), holy actions (sacrifice), and holy places (the sanctuary).

These were all shadows of the coming of Christ (SEE COLOSSIANS 2:16–17). They anticipated Christ; and when he came all time, all places, all people, and all actions become holy. Thus, Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law and therefore no longer has the force of legal requirements.

[9]

GOD HAS NOT CHANGED. His desires for humanity have not changed. Jesus did not call for a life that was different than what God had prescribed for Israel. He did present a new way of relating to God and the law—through his sacrifice and through his Spirit.



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