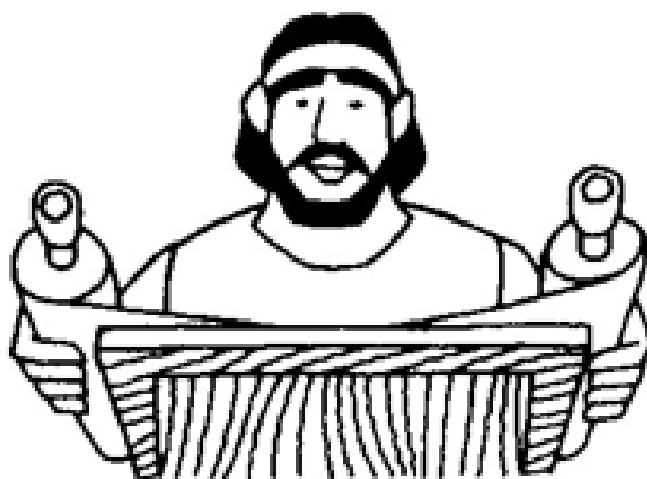


Introducing.....the Penteteuch



A Pilgrim's Guide to the Bible

No. 9

What is the Penteteuch?

The Penteteuch is the name given to the first five books of the Bible. It derives from two Greek words, 'penta' meaning five, and 'teuchos' meaning book.

Together these books are known as the books of Moses, or the books of the law. Moses makes his appearance at the beginning of the book of Exodus, and his story dominates

the narrative. Although they contain many graphic stories, and describe the formation of the nation of Israel, they are collectively known as the books of the law because the story of God giving the law and its implementation within the nation is at the heart of the narrative.

This process of law begins in Genesis, with the establishment of the covenant, first with Noah then Abraham, before moving on to Exodus where Moses receives the law on Mount Sinai, continuing with the complex detail of the moral, religious, national and personal law and its implementation, and its subsequent reiteration and application in later books.

So what are these books of the Pentateuch?

Genesis – the book of origins. (*See Pilgrim guides 3, 5 & 7*). Undoubtedly, these stories would have been known to Moses, even if they weren't entrusted to papyrus until a later date.

Exodus continues the story as God deals with His people, by this time, not just a family, but a nation. It traces events from the time that Israel entered Egypt as guests, until they were eventually delivered from the bondage of slavery into which they had been brought by "*...a new king...who knew not Joseph*". Moses leads the people into the wilderness, and is given the Ten Commandments, along with the rest of the law. The journey continues despite the sin of the people.

The key word in the early chapters of Exodus is **redemption**. Chapters 12 – 14 record the salvation of Israel through God's intervention in the events of the Passover, and subsequent escape by the crossing of the Red Sea. The Exodus is the central event of the Old Testament, and pre-figures the redemptive work of Christ in the New Testament. The imagery used in the Exodus offers an understanding of the work of Christ. (e.g. The lamb of God; journey to the Promised Land; freedom from the slavery of sin; the importance of baptism; the role of the High Priest.)

The other great theme of Exodus is **revelation** from God. Having been brought to freedom, the people must be taught what God expects of them: the Law, which is built upon the Ten Commandments, provides moral, civil, religious and ceremonial instruction.

The purpose of **Leviticus** is to build upon the teaching of the Law which begins in Exodus, and to provide instructions which will guide a redeemed people in their relationship with a holy God. It is primarily a handbook for the priests in the performance of their duties. Sin must be atoned for through the offering of proper sacrifices (chapters 8-10). Topics also include dietary laws (clean and unclean foods), purification after childbirth, and diseases that are carefully regulated (chapters 11-15). Chapter 16 describes the Day of Atonement, when an annual sacrifice is made for the cumulative sin of the people. This

was the most important day in the Hebrew calendar. Furthermore, the people of God are to be circumspect in their personal, moral, and social living, in contrast to the practices of the heathen nations around them (chapters 17-22). The seasons and festivals of the annual religious cycle are also described in great detail.

The central theme of the book is **holiness (11:45, 19:2)**: both the holiness of God and the call to His people to be holy. A corresponding theme is "atonement" - a right relationship with God. Holiness must be maintained before God. This can only be attained through a righteous relationship with our Lord. Many of the ritualistic practices of worship foreshadow the person and work of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The message of the Book of **Numbers**, is universal and timeless. It reminds believers that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Numbers is a book which focuses upon the obedience and walk of God's people. The title comes from the Lord's instruction to Moses to take a census of the people. Sadly, it could equally as well be entitled 'Mutterings', as a constant refrain in the story is the rebellion and failure of the people to heed God's word. This is most explicit in the failure of the nation to enter the Promised Land when twelve spies are sent to reconnoitre the land, and whilst the report they bring back is good, ten of them recommend that the nation is incapable of conquering it, thus condemning the people to forty years of wandering in the desert (chapters 13 -14). The Book of Numbers bridges the time period between the receiving of the Law (Exodus and Leviticus) and preparation for entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy and Joshua).

The importance of the Book of Numbers is seen by numerous references to it in the New Testament. See 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. The words "*all these things happened to them for examples*" is significant.

Romans 11:22, speaks about the "*goodness and severity of God.*" That, in a nutshell, is the message of Numbers. The severity of God is seen in the death of the old generation in the wilderness, the goodness of God in His faithfulness to the new generation. God protected, preserved, and provided for the people until they possessed the land, reminding us that the justice and love of God, are always in harmony.

The book of **Deuteronomy** was given to remind the people of God's law and power. We have a reiteration of the law. A new generation of Israelites was about to enter the Promised Land. This multitude had not experienced the miracle at the Red Sea or heard the law given at Sinai, and they were about to enter a land with many dangers and temptations. It consists of a series of sermons delivered by Moses on the threshold of the Promised Land.

The Israelites are commanded to remember four things: God's faithfulness, God's holiness, God's blessings, and God's warnings.

The first three chapters recap the trip from Egypt to their current location, Moab (in modern day Jordan). Chapter 4 is a call to obedience to the God Who was faithful to them.

Chapters 5 to 26 are a repetition of the law. The Ten Commandments, the laws concerning sacrifices and special days, and the rest of the law are given to the new generation. Blessings are promised to those who obey the law (5:29; 6:17-19; 11:13-15), and famine is warned for those who break it (11:16-17).

The theme of blessing and cursing is continued in chapters 27-30. This portion of the book ends with a clear choice set before Israel: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing." God's desire for His people is found in what He recommends: "choose life" (30:19).*

The theme of Deuteronomy can be summed up by two verses (10: 12 – 13).

'And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD'S commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?'

In the final chapters, Moses encourages the people; commissions his replacement - Joshua, records a song, and gives a final blessing to each of the tribes of Israel. Chapter 34 relates the circumstances of Moses' death. He climbed Mt. Nebo, from where the Lord showed him the Promised Land, even though he could not enter the land. At 120 years old, but still with good eyesight and the strength of youth, Moses died in the presence of the Lord. The book of Deuteronomy ends with a short obituary to this great prophet.

Highlights of the Pentateuch

Creation

The fall of mankind

The Flood and scattering of the nations

Abraham and the Patriarchs

Joseph

Moses and the burning bush: his commission

Ten Plagues

Passover

Crossing the Red Sea

Mount Sinai Law

Levites and Priests

Offerings and Feasts

The Golden Calf: the people's rebellion

Census

Twelve Spies

Wanderings

Moab
Second Law
Moses dies

Why were these books written?

Some essential biblical themes are introduced in these books:

Redemption and Salvation. The Passover narrative provides the background for our understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He becomes our 'Passover Lamb', and through His blood, we are set free from slavery. The crossing of the Red Sea offers a picture of salvation.

Covenant: The covenant between God and the people takes on a deeper meaning as its terms are spelled out in the Law.

Worship: the centrality of worship is expressed through the construction and use of the sacred tent of meeting with its furniture, sacrifices, and ceremonies. (This tent was also referred to as The Tabernacle).

By **God's self-revelation**, the Israelites were instructed in the sovereignty and majesty, the goodness and holiness, and the grace and mercy of their Lord, the One and only God of heaven and earth (Exodus 3, 6, 33, 34).

Substitution: Because of Jesus' death on our behalf, we no longer have to offer animal sacrifices. Leviticus is all about substitution. The death of the animals was a substitute penalty for those who have sinned. In the same way, but infinitely better, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the substitute for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Verses to reflect upon

Exodus 6:6

'Therefore, say to the Israelites: `I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.'

Numbers 6:24-26

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."