

Road Trip: Journey Into the Bible

Midweek Part 1: How to Read the Old Testament Pentateuch

I. Defining the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch is the name given to the first five books of the Hebrew and Christian Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The name derives from the Greek word meaning 'Five Books'. In Judaism, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible are known as "Torah" which means 'teaching or instruction' in Hebrew.

Other designations for these books are:

- The books of Moses (with Moses being attributed as the traditional author),
- The Book of the Law (emphasizing the covenant stipulations as its defining feature),
- The Law, or the Law of Moses
- Or simply "Moses" as in the phrase "Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 16:29).

II. Overview of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch covers events from the creation of the world to the death of Moses and mainly dealing with the patriarchal history of Israel and the law. The Pentateuch covers a timespan of approximately 2500 years (over 2000 of which takes place in Genesis). The Pentateuch describes the origins of creation and early world history (Genesis 1-11), the origins of the Jewish patriarchs and people (Genesis 12-50), and the origins of the Jewish nation (Exodus-Deuteronomy).

Themes

- Creation and Fall:** God's creation, human sin, and the consequences.
- Covenant and Promise:** God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel.
- Law and Holiness:** God's laws given to Israel at Mt. Sinai and the call to be a holy nation.
- Divine Presence:** God instructs the building of the tabernacle to dwell among His people.
- Redemption and Deliverance:** God's Deliverance of Israel from Egypt and guidance to the Promised Land.

B. Main Characters

- Adam and Eve:** First humans and their fall into sin.
- Noah:** Righteous man saved from the flood.
- Abraham:** Father of the nation of Israel.
- Isaac and Jacob:** Patriarchs continuing God's covenant.
- Joseph:** His story of betrayal and rise to power in Egypt.
- Moses:** Leader of the Exodus and receiver of the Law.

C. Story Narratives

- Genesis:** Creation, fall, flood, and the patriarchs of Israel.
- Exodus:** Moses, the plagues, the Exodus, and the giving of the Law.
- Leviticus:** Laws on holiness and worship.
- Numbers:** Wilderness wanderings and census.
- Deuteronomy:** Moses' final speeches and the restatement of the Law.

III. The Genres of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch contains a mixture of genres (different types of literature) including: Narrative (Historical, Theological), Genealogies, Various Instructions, Law Codes, Poetry, and Speeches/Discourses.

- **Narrative:** A storytelling genre that presents events, characters, and settings in a sequential manner.
- **Historical Narrative:** Stories w/character, plot, etc. based on historical events - in this case to tell the story of ancient Israelite origins.
- **Theological Narrative:** Stories that emphasize theological truths or teachings about God through the historical depiction of events and characters.
- **Genealogies:** Lists of ancestral lineages that trace the descent of individuals or groups, showing family relationships and heritage.
- **Law Codes:** Prescriptive texts outlining moral, religious, and civil regulations intended to govern behavior and guide communal life.
- **Poetry:** Expressive and often rhythmic language used to convey deep emotions, worship, or prophetic messages, often found in blessings or songs.
- **Speeches/Discourses:** Extended addresses or teachings, typically given by a leader like Moses, aimed at instructing, exhorting, or reminding the community about laws, history, and their covenant with God.

PENTATEUCH GENRES

COMPARISON CHART

GENRES	GENESIS	EXODUS	LEVITICUS	NUMBERS	DEUTERONOMY
NARRATIVE	1-4, 6-9, 11-50	1-14,16-18, 32-35	8-10	7-14, 16-17, 20-25, 27, 31-32	
GENEALOGIES, CENSUS, LISTS, ETC.	5, 10			1-4, 26, 33	
VARIOUS INSTRUCTIONS		25-31		34-36	
LAW CODES		19-24	1-7, 11-27	5-6, 15, 19, 28-29, 30	5-28
POETRY		15			32-33
SPEECHES, DISCOURSES					1-4, 29-31, 34

IV. Outline of Genres in the Pentateuch

Each book of the Pentateuch contains a mix of genres, including narratives, laws, genealogies, and poetry. Here's a general breakdown:

1. Genesis:

- **Narrative:** The creation account (Chapters 1-2), the fall of man (Chapter 3), various other accounts (e.g., the Flood, the Tower of Babel – Chapters 4-11), and the stories of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph Chapters 12-50).
- **Genealogies:** Several genealogical lists (e.g., Chapter 5, Chapter 10).

2. Exodus:

- **Narrative:** The story of Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, and the journey to Mount Sinai (Chapters 1-18).
- **Law Codes:** The Ten Commandments and various laws given at Mount Sinai (Chapters 19-24).
- **Instructions for the Tabernacle:** Detailed instructions on constructing the Tabernacle and its furnishings (Chapters 25-31, 35-40).
- **Poetry:** The Song of the Sea (Chapter 15).

3. Leviticus:

- **Law Codes:** Detailed laws regarding sacrifices, priestly duties, purity, and holiness (Chapters 1-7, 11-27).
- **Narrative:** Gives the accounts of Aaron, his sons, and the beginning of the priesthood as well as the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Chapters 9-10)

4. Numbers:

- **Narrative:** The continuation of Israel's journey from Sinai to the plains of Moab (Chapters 1-10, 13-14, 16-17, 20-21, 25, 31-32).
- **Census Lists:** Two major censuses of the Israelites (Chapters 1-4, 26).
- **Laws and Instructions:** Various laws and instructions for the community (Chapters 5-6, 15, 18-19, 27-30, 33-36)

5. Deuteronomy:

- **Speeches/Discourses:** Moses' final speeches and the recounting of Israel's history (Chapters 1-4, 31-34).
- **Law Codes:** A restatement and expansion of the law, often referred to as the Deuteronomic Code (Chapters 5-28).
- **Poetry:** The Song of Moses (Chapter 32) and the Blessing of Moses (Chapter 33).

This division highlights the major genres within the Pentateuch, though many sections combine elements from multiple genres.

V. Principals for Interpreting the Genre of Law Codes

The genre of Pentateuch referred to as is 'law', refers to the covenant stipulations that God gave to the nation Israel. The purpose of the law was to govern the **Moral, Ceremonial** (Religious), and **Civil** life of Israel. The idea of law was not unique to the Hebrews in the Ancient Near East. Law collections were published in the Ancient Near East as early as 2000 BC (five centuries before Moses).

Here are two main help to consider when approaching the genre of 'Law':

1. Principles to Interpret Biblical Law Codes

Here are several principles for reading and interpreting biblical law codes effectively:

1. **Understand the Context – The Old Testament Law is a Covenant:** Recognize that the law codes were given within the context of ancient Israel's covenant relationship with God. This context includes historical, cultural, and theological dimensions.
2. **Purpose of the Law to Israel:** Understand that the law was a gift to Israel and it served multiple purposes, including defining Israel's identity as God's people against the other nations, establishing justice and social order, and providing guidance for living in a way that reflects God's character.
3. **Know the Various Kinds of Laws:** 3 Categories: Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil. There are laws that govern sacrifices, priests, ritual purity, moral purity, dietary issues, civil matters, calendar days, etc.
4. **Look for the Principles Behind the Laws:** Look for the underlying principles or values that the laws embody. These principles can often be applied to contemporary situations even when the specific cultural practices are no longer relevant.
5. **Understand that The Old Covenant Law Is Not *Our* Law:** The Law was given to national Israel, not any other Gentile nations and not to the church. While there may be good things to apply in the law, we have to assume that none of its stipulations are binding upon us unless restated in the New Testament. It's the Holy Spirit that will "write God's law on our hearts" and lead us to fulfill the 'righteous spirit' of the law.
6. **Progressive Revelation – Interpret the Old Testament Law In Light of the New Covenant:** Recognize that God's revelation is progressive. The New Testament provides a fuller revelation of the law in Jesus Christ:
 - 1. By the law no one will be justified (Romans 3:20)
 - 2. By the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:19-20, Romans 7:7)
 - 3. The law was a guardian/schoolmaster to lead to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25)
 - 4. Christ fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17)
 - 5. Christ is the end of the law to those justified by faith (Romans 10:4)
 - 6. A person is justified by faith apart from the law (Romans 3:28)

2. Some Final Do's and Don'ts

- Do** see the OT law as God's fully inspired word *for* you.
- Don't** see the OT law as God's direct command *to* you.
- Do** see the OT law as the basis for the Old Covenant, and therefore for Israel's history.
- Don't** see the OT law as binding on Christians in the new covenant except where renewed.
- Do** see God's justice, love and high standards revealed in the OT law.
- Don't** forget to see that God's mercy is made equal to the severity of the standards.
- Don't** expect the OT law to be cited frequently by the Prophets or the NT.
- Do** remember that the ethical life of a believer comes primarily through the Holy Spirit
- Do** see the OT law as a generous gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed.
- Don't** see the OT law as a grouping of arbitrary, annoying regulations limiting people's freedom.