

The Pentateuch

The term "Pentateuch" is derived from a Greek word which means "the five-volume book." The term is used to describe the first five books of the Old Testament which from ancient times have been regarded as five parts of a single work. Because these books are mainly legal in character, the Jews refer to them as the "Torah" which means "instruction" or "law."

The Pentateuch contains the foundational revelation of the Bible. These books depict God as Creator and man as fallen creature. They narrate the first stages in the Creator's scheme of redemption; the call of Abram, the Exodus from Egypt, and the covenant at Sinai.

The importance of the Pentateuch hardly can be overstated. This section of God's Word is important historically, for here is an accurate record of the most primitive periods of the human adventure. The Pentateuch is important theologically, for here is the explanation of the predicament of the race. These books reveal the origin of sin and necessity of redemption through shed blood. The Pentateuch is also important scientifically, for here the Creator reveals details about the formation and filling of the earth which empirical investigation could never discover. The Pentateuch is important legally, for herein contained one of the oldest, and certainly the most influential, law codes known to man. The Pentateuch is also important sociologically. These five books reveal origins of the basic unit of society, the family.

The names of the books of the Torah in the Hebrew Bible are taken from the first words of each book as follows:

- *Bereshith* - "in the beginning" (Genesis)
- *Shemoth* - "names" (Exodus)
- *Wayyigra* - "and he called" (Leviticus)
- *Bemidbar* - "in the wilderness" (Numbers)
- *Devarim* - "words" (Deuteronomy)

The Themes of the Books of the Law

In Genesis God chose Abraham, his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons to be the channel through which He would bless the whole world (Gen 12:1-3).

In Exodus the chosen nation was in bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt. God delivered them under Moses and redeemed them by blood to teach them His love and power (Ex 12:21-26).

In Leviticus God instructed the people how to be holy in both soul and body. "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:45) is repeated over and over again. Israel was taught that they must be sanctified (or set apart) to God.

In Numbers the people were guided through the wilderness on their way back to the promised land. Despite their disobedience, God directed them day by day using a cloud which moved before them.

In Deuteronomy Moses gave his farewell speech to Israel. They included a repetition of God's commandments. These commandments were to be the key to spiritual success in the promised land.

In the pages that follow are outlines of each of these books. They will be the basis of our study for the summer quarter of 2009, auditorium class on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

- Jeff Carr

Bibliography

- * "A popular Survey of the Old Testament" by Norman L. Geisler
- * "Exploring the Old Testament" by Samuel J. Schultz & Gary V. Smith
- * "Old Testament History: An Overview of Sacred History & Truth" by Wilber Fields
- * "The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis-Deuteronomy" by John H. Walton & Victor H. Matthews
- * "The Pentateuch" by James E. Smith
- * "The Pulpit Commentary" (various authors)