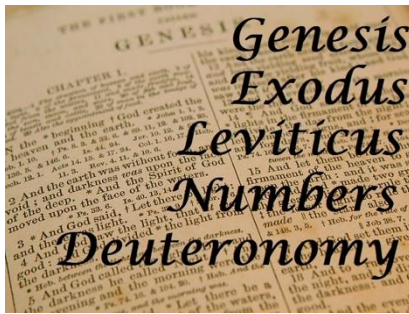


# Episode 1: The Pentateuch



The Pentateuch is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. As part of the Old Testament, they tell the story from the Genesis of Creation to the final days of Moses and the Israelites as they enter the land that God has promised. For the most part, both Jewish and Christians credit Moses as the primary author of these texts. These five books contain the “law” or “instruction” for God’s people. They lay the foundation for wrestling with and understanding God’s actions in the world, the power and brokenness of sin, and the never-ending challenge of living in relationship with God and with one another.

## Genesis:

“In the beginning...” like any good story, one must set the stage for what will play out in the coming chapters. The world begins in darkness, and God creates order from chaos. With words, God gives boundaries to the sea and order to the disorder. Out of the dust (*Adamah*), God creates man (*Adam*), thus connecting humanity to creation and establishing our role as caretakers of creation (Gen 1:15,1:19). Yet, God takes notice of man's loneliness and invites man into a relationship with creation, naming the animals and creating a helper as God uses words to create order and boundaries, stirring creation for a good purpose, so to do words become the catalyst for destruction, brokenness, and inbreaking of disorder. The words of the serpent and the words of *ish* (man) and *isha* (woman) turn to blame and deception. Thus, what was created for good, would be ruined by human sin, creation would be broken, and human to human, and human to divine relationships would be destroyed.



The rest of Genesis plays out the brokenness of humanity and God’s covenant for creation.

- Cain and Abel: The first recorded death was a homicide.
- Noah and the flood. God’s anger with creation (Gen 6:5-6) comes to a head. Yet, God still cares for God’s creation. (Gen 6:18-21, 9:8-13) “Never again would a flood destroy the earth.” (Gen 9:11)
- The Tower of Babel: The people, using their common language, turn their focus to making a name for themselves and elevating themselves to

the heavens. God confuses their words.

- Abram and Sarai- (Abraham and Sarah) The promise of God that Abram would become a great nation through his descendants, numbering as the stars in the sky.
- Jacob and Esau: A feud between brothers that begins over stealing a blessing and a birthright. (Gen 27-36)
- Joseph and His Brothers: A story of deception and redemption. (Gen 37-50)

Along the way, each of these stories wrestles with our human condition, the brokenness of relationships, and points us to the faithfulness of God often despite those circumstances.



## Exodus:

The book of Exodus chronicles the journey of the people of Israel from slavery into the promised land.

The Exodus narrative begins where Genesis left off. The sons of Jacob (Joseph and his brothers) head to Egypt and eventually die. The Israelite people, their descendants, grow in number and a new Egyptian king who doesn't care for the Israelites comes to power. Fearful the Israelites will join their enemies; the new king quickly works to make slaves of the Israelites.

Here we encounter Moses' part in liberating God's people from the Pharaoh, changing a hardened heart with the plagues, culminating in the parting of the Red Sea and the dramatic beginnings of wandering in the desert. Yet, God's people, despite the miracles and freedom, imagine that slavery at times would be better than this desert wandering. It is here we catch the dramatic moments of Mount Sinai and God's desire to remind the Israelites of relationship (Exodus 19:4-6). God remains faithful to God's promise, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2) and what follows is the 10 commandments, laws for living in right relationship with God and one another.



Human nature quickly enters the story, and a golden calf is built because of their impatience with Moses taking too long on Mount Sinai. Despite these moments of irrational thinking, God still remains faithful and promises to lead the Israelites into the promised land. As a sign to the Israelites, Moses builds a Tabernacle.

The tabernacle served to ensure people knew that God was not bound to a place, but to a people. When the presence of God moved, they moved to ensure that the Israelites knew that God journeyed with them. Thus moving the covenant of God to worship that traveled with them.



## Leviticus:

The book of Leviticus contains 613 commandments for God's people concerning the nature of holiness and how one could remain in right relationship with God. Its central focus is shaped around the idea of sacrifice both for joys and atonement for wrongdoing. We can often think of sacrifices as a gift. Gifts today celebrate the goodness of relationship, and they also serve as a means for seeking forgiveness or reconciliation. Throughout Leviticus, we see how gifts take on the physical expression of relationship with one another.

## Numbers:

Numbers outlines the two censuses taken of the people of Israel. The first as a means of knowing the strength and power of the Israelite army both for defense and conquest. The second census is a list of those people not born in Egypt but in the desert who would ultimately enter the promised land. Numbers takes us from birth to death of an entire generation.

Somewhere along the way, the people of God begin to grumble. Having success in battle and knowing that God goes with them is not enough for the people of Israel. They grow tired of eating manna from heaven and dreaming of a past of their imaginations. Instead of moving forward with God, they keep their eyes focused on the past. (Numbers 11) Even after they get an eyewitness account of the promised land flowing with milk

and honey, they still cannot move forward. (Numbers 13-14) Instead of moving forward, they turn back to Egypt. Their complaints get the better of God, and Moses steps in to quell God's anger. (Numbers 14) God's people are rejecting the future that God has promised them. Eventually, with continued success in battle, the people of God begin to move forward until they decide to once again worship a false god as an act of rebellion.

Here is where the second census is taken. (Numbers 26) The generation that wanted to die in the wilderness rather than enter the promised land is allowed to do so. In those final days, the book of numbers says the people of God moved forward into the promised future that God had planned for them.

## **Deuteronomy:**

The book of Deuteronomy starts as the people of God are right on the edge of the promised land. While the book rings with hopefulness for God's people, it is also known as Moses' farewell address. Moses, like the others in his generation will not enter the promised land but will have a moment of being able to glimpse what is on the other side. Deuteronomy reiterates the promise of God to the people of Israel and gives direction and instruction for the people of God moving forward and emphasizing that the promise made in the past still moves God's people into the future.



Moses charges all people to teach the “10 commandments, laws and decrees to your children, and children’s children, so we may enjoy a long life.” (Paraphrased Deut. 6:2-3) The emphasis of Deuteronomy connects us to the promise and faithfulness of God and unites us as people to the story of God moving forward. (Deut. 6:20-25)

Deuteronomy does little to resolve the tensions of a nation called to conflict with other nations and yet still calls for devotion and love of outsiders. The complexities of human relationships, of national relationships, and living faithfully into God's promised future exist as a means of underlying both the humanity and the challenge of life in the community. Deuteronomy ends with Moses' final blessing and death, sitting in this tension of both promise and hopefulness for God's people.

## **Episode 1: The Pentateuch (Genesis/Exodus/Leviticus/Numbers/Deuteronomy)**

### *Weekly Reading*

Monday: Genesis 1- 3:

Genesis opens with God creating order from chaos, relationships between man, woman, God, and creation. The opening dialogue of Genesis sets the tone for all the stories that follow. What do these texts tell us about God's connection to God's creation?

Tuesday: Genesis 12:1-8, Genesis 15.

Genesis 12-25 narrates God's promise to God's people. Promise shapes expectations and actions. What word of promise do you hear in these texts?

Wednesday: Exodus 1, 3, 5:22-6:8,

Moses' encounter with the pharaoh and the plagues that follow feel familiar. Yet, these texts are full of relationship dynamics between God and God's people. These texts invite us to wonder about what freedom and liberation look like when we are forced to be in a relationship with one another. How do you see those relationships, 10 commandments, and God's role carried out today?

Thursday: Leviticus 6:1-7

Leviticus, as a whole, deals with regulations, but the central focus is on what it takes for a person to live in holiness. The way we treat one another has a direct impact on a person's relationship with God. These regulations set a standard for the way in which the Israelites should live. How do these differ from the laws and regulations we live by now?

Friday: Numbers 1:1-4, 9, 11,

Numbers is derived from the two censuses' that Moses took for the people wandering in the desert. The first was the Israelites who would protect the people. The second census comes after the Israelites grumble and complain that God isn't doing enough. The second census is the generation of God's people who will enter the promised land. What has been your experience with the book of Numbers?

Saturday: Deuteronomy 6

Deuteronomy is set as God's people are on the edge of the promised land. It is most often known as Moses' farewell address to the people of Israel. It is a reminder that God has brought them to this point and a reiteration of God's laws for living faithfully with one another and with God. What word of hope do you hear in these texts?