

Understanding the Bible

OLD TESTAMENT



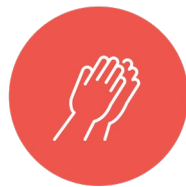
PENTATEUCH



HISTORICAL



WISDOM



PROPHETIC

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Judges	Ruth	1 Samuel	2 Samuel
1 Kings	2 Kings	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Ezra
Nehemiah	Esther	Job	Psalms	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations
Ezekiel	Daniel	Hosea	Joel	Amos
Obadiah	Jonah	Micah	Nahum	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi	

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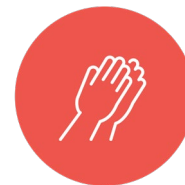
GOSPELS



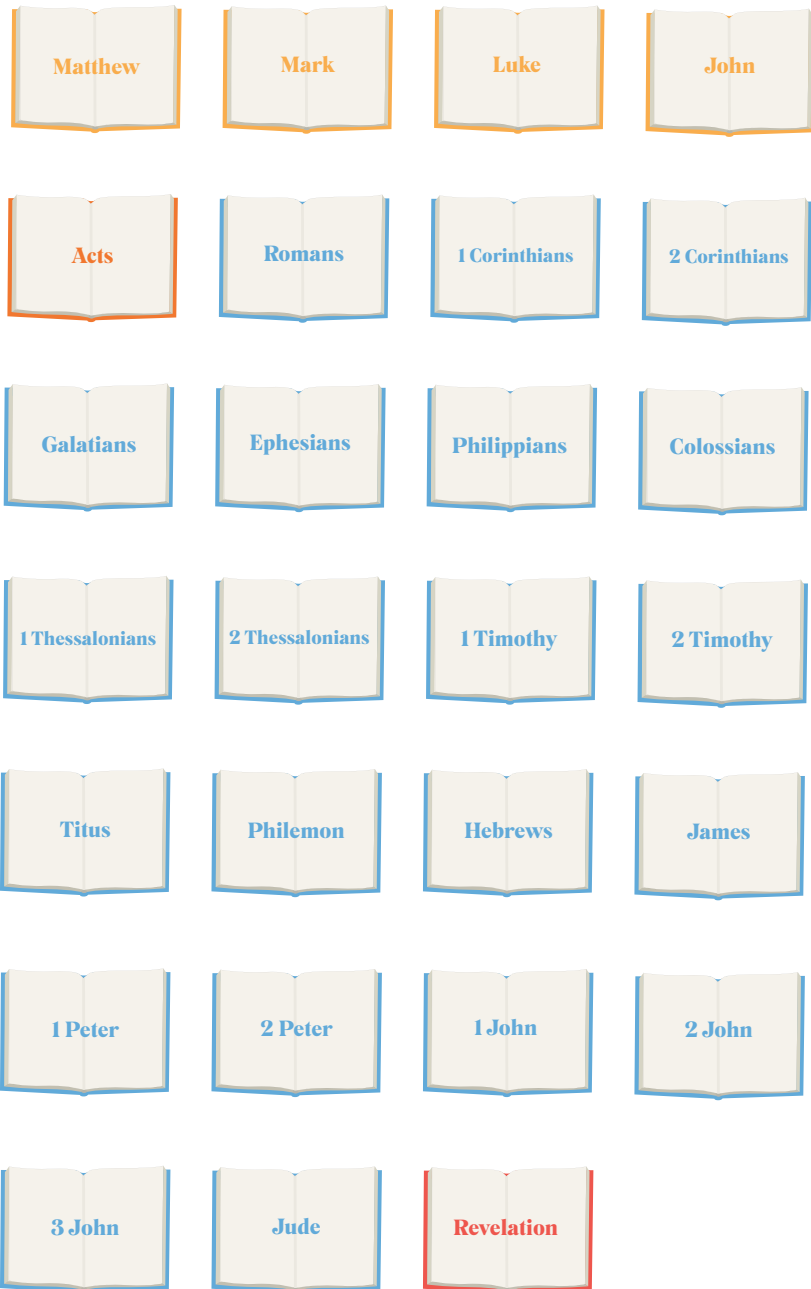
HISTORICAL



LETTERS



PROPHETIC



The Pentateuch

OLD TESTAMENT



GENESIS
Creation



EXODUS
God rescues the Israelites



LEVITICUS
Instructions for Israelites
on how to live



NUMBERS
Reminders of God's
holiness and sovereignty



DEUTERONOMY
How to live in relationship
to God and others



**The Law
is also called
the Pentateuch**

The First Five Books of the Bible

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 4:7

Bible Readings:

Psalm 19:7–10;
Romans 4:16

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are organized into five sections. The first five books are the books of Law, also called the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Moses is traditionally accepted as the author of all five books, and the Pentateuch has an essential role in how we understand the rest of Scripture. This week, we will explore the content of these books, looking first at their backgrounds and context and then at how to interpret and apply them to our lives.

A BEGINNING WORTH READING

Sometimes we can skip over the beginning pages of a story, dismissing them as boring bits of exposition. However, as the story progresses, we realize that the introductory details are key to understanding the rest of the story. The books of the Law introduce us to key figures, events, and themes that are referenced throughout both the Old and New Testaments. What distinguished Israel from all of the other nations was their relationship to God. Not the size of their population. Not the skills of their musicians or architects. God chose this small nation to model what it looks like to be the people of God. He established a covenant, or promise, with them and entrusted to them his laws and instructions so the nation would reflect his holy character and proclaim his glory. No wonder David, the most well-known king in Israel's history, extolled the beauty, truth,

and goodness of God's laws, statutes, and judgments contained in these first five books. Their value far outweighs gold, and God promised his presence to the ones who delighted in his words (Deuteronomy 26:16-19).

The plot of Genesis through Deuteronomy revolves around one group of people, Israel, but it lays the foundation for the broader narrative of God's plan to provide salvation for all people from every nation. Through Jesus, we are children of Abraham by faith (Romans 4:16). The true people of God are those that accept his gift of salvation, whether we're part of Israel or not. We are family, not because of bloodline, but because of Jesus. That means that our story doesn't begin in Matthew: it starts in Genesis! The timeless truths captured in these books transcend culture and traverse time.

AN ENDING WORTH THE WAIT

As we study the Pentateuch, we see a God who wants to be near his people and known among them. As he revealed himself in different ways to Israel, he reveals his Word to us in fresh and exciting ways today. In spite of their failures, God promised Israel a future in which nothing will separate them from him. Not sin, not enemies, not death. We are included in that promise.

Our story will get a new chapter, in which we receive new, glorified bodies to enjoy God's presence forever. Until then, we pray for the light of his Word to shine in the dark and broken places of our lives.

Before this study, how have you interacted with the books that make up the Pentateuch, especially Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy? As we start exploring these books this week, what expectations do you have?

_____ is traditionally accepted as the author of the books that make up the Pentateuch.

Genesis and Exodus

“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies . . .

GENESIS 22:17

Today, let's dig a little deeper into the first two books of the Bible: Genesis and Exodus.

GENESIS

Moses wrote the first book of the Bible to give Israel a history of their origin, from the creation of the world to the time of the patriarchs. The first section of Genesis reports the story of Adam and Eve and their failure to obey God's instructions. Their disobedience brought sin upon themselves and the entire human race.

In the second section of Genesis (Genesis 12–50), Moses biographed the lives of Israel's ancestors, highlighting key moments in their lives. In Genesis 12, God instructed Abram (his name was changed to Abraham later) to move to Canaan. He promised that he would bless Abram with a great number of descendants, along with other blessings. God promised that, through Abraham's descendants, the people of the world would be blessed. Later

Bible Readings:

Genesis 12:1–3;

Deuteronomy 33–34;

Galatians 3:8

on, it is evident that Jesus Christ, from the line of Abraham, would be the answer to this promise (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8). Isaac, the son of promise, was born to Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Isaac's son Jacob, whom God renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28), had twelve sons. From these twelve sons grew the twelve tribes of Israel. At the end of Genesis, Jacob and his growing family had moved to Egypt. God promised Jacob that his descendants would return to the Promised Land, the land of Canaan (Genesis 28:15).

EXODUS

Eventually the twelve men of Israel grew into a mighty nation, one the Pharaoh of Egypt feared and eventually enslaved. Exodus tells the story of Israel's miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In chapter 3 of Exodus, God reveals his name to Moses—I AM WHO I AM. His name is translated "Yahweh" in Exodus 3:15. God used ten plagues to sway Pharaoh into letting the children of Israel go. However, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the nation until his army cornered them at the Red Sea. God divided the waters so that the Israelites could pass through. Pharaoh and his army drowned.

In Exodus, God established his covenant with Israel, engraving his commandments on two stone tablets. Unfortunately, the nation continued in their sinful rebellion and commit idolatry even as Moses received the law from God. However, God is faithful and eventually led them back to the Promised Land. Though God proved himself in this book over and over again, we find out in the book of Numbers that Israel was fearful of the people living in Canaan and refused to enter the land (Numbers 13–14). Because of their sin, God sentenced them to wander in the desert for forty years. Still, God refused to abandon them, and he gave them evidence of this truth through his presence in the tabernacle—the temporary temple where God's glory dwelt.

Genesis and Exodus captivate us with epic stories of creation, torrential rain that led to global flooding, and massive seawaters that divided in half. As these accounts introduce us to new characters and exciting plot twists, they set in motion the overarching narrative of God's redemptive plan for Israel and the world. They also build anticipation in us to read the rest of the story as it unfolds throughout the Bible.

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Where do you see evidence of God's redemptive plan in your own life? What stories particularly stand out? Although we are centuries and cultures apart, how are the ways God is working in your life similar to how he acted during the times of Genesis and Exodus?

**Genesis and Exodus set in motion the overarching narrative of
God's _____ for Israel and the world.**

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

SCRIPTURE:
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-6

Bible Readings:
Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 31-34

Let's continue our study of the last three books of the Pentateuch: Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

LEVITICUS

The events recorded in Leviticus, the third book of the Bible, took place between the completion of the tabernacle (in Exodus) and Israel's departure from Mount Sinai. Leviticus was important to the nation of Israel. In it, the Levitical priesthood was established, and it contains instructions regarding temple worship and service as well as the moral obligations of the Israelites to God and to each other.

Through all of the rituals and offerings and sacrifices, Leviticus communicates God's holiness and the way Israel was to worship him (Leviticus 19:2). This response was to be reflected in their daily interactions with God and each other. God's people are to faithfully obey the Lord and live holy lives according to his Word in order to reflect his character.

NUMBERS

As the title implies, the book of Numbers includes various statistics, including census counts, priest counts, and tribal counts. In Numbers 13-14, we also discover the reason why the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years before reaching the Promised Land. As they neared Canaan, Moses sent twelve spies to scout the land. When the spies returned at the end of forty days, all except Joshua and Caleb gave a negative report. The ten spies expressed disbelief that they could conquer a land filled with such powerful people. However, Joshua and Caleb disagreed and expressed faith that God would help them conquer the land. However, the people believed the report of the ten spies and began to fear the people living with the land. As a result, God punished the people by making them wander in the desert. The years corresponded to the number of days it took the spies to scout the land. The rest of the book of Numbers recounts the events that occurred during this season of wandering.

DEUTERONOMY

The events of Deuteronomy occur at the end of the Israelites' forty years of wandering. They were ready to enter the Promised Land. By this time, all those who had seen the signs of God in Egypt had died (Numbers 14:22–23). Before this new generation crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses retold the Law to them to remind them of the covenant that God had established with the nation years earlier. The covenant was conditional. This meant if Israel kept God's commandments, they would be blessed. If they failed to keep his commandments, they would endure the curses that were recorded in the Law. The final chapters of Deuteronomy record Moses's preparation for his death and his appointment of Joshua as his successor (Deuteronomy 31–34).

“
**God's people
are to faithfully
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to his Word.**
”

What are your thoughts after reading today's overview of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy? Are they different than before reading . . . are they the same?

_____ **communicates God's holiness and the way Israel was to worship him.**

What do you Observe?

On days four and five of each week, we're going to pull a passage from the books we've covered and walk through one method of studying that passage. As we talked about in week one, if we know all these facts about the Bible, but never apply the truth of it to our lives, we have missed the point. Let's use the steps we learned in week one, day five to study Genesis 1:26–28 today: Pray, Observe, Interpret, Apply (*Note: We'll do the "Apply" step tomorrow*).

STUDYING THE PENTATEUCH

When we play the game of Clue, we gather as many facts as we can to arrive at the right conclusion. Who committed the crime? In what room? What weapon did they use? No doubt, there is usually a player who tries to prematurely guess these answers without gathering all clues.

As later readers of the Bible, we realize that we are centuries removed from the languages, cultures, and backgrounds of its writers and original readers. Through inductive Bible study, we want to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. However, Bible study resources like commentaries will provide us with clues that will help bridge those cultural and language gaps. With these resources, we can more accurately understand the author's intended meaning rather than inserting our own assumptions and ideas into the text.

“

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

”

GENESIS 1:26

Bible Readings:

Genesis 1:26

OBSERVE: GENESIS 1:26-28

Placing these verses in the context of the chapter, we are in day six of the creation narrative. What information do our practice verses give us? Here are a few observations:

- **Verse 26:** God is speaking, choosing to create humans in his image and giving them dominion over the birds in the air, the beasts on the Earth, and the creatures in the sea. God uses a plural pronoun to refer to himself instead of a singular. In addition, God uses a plural pronoun when referring to humans instead of a singular pronoun. “Let us make man in our image . . . and let them . . .”
- **Verse 27:** God followed his statement with an action. He created male and female in his image. A singular pronoun for “man” is used versus the plural pronoun used in verse 26.
- **Verse 28:** God blessed them. “Them” refers to the male and female he created. He also spoke to them, giving them instructions to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, and every living thing on the Earth.

What other observations do we get from this passage?

As we move towards interpretation, how do we understand these verses in the context of Genesis 1? Remember the singular and plural pronouns that we noted in verse 26? Let's investigate why the pronouns seem mismatched. Why do you think verse 26 uses a plural pronoun instead of a singular one? Read the notes in your study Bible or look up commentary on this verse (there are resources listed at the end of this book) to find out what scholars have said about this passage.

Once we have done our due diligence to arrive at an interpretation that is consistent with the context and agrees with the rest of Scripture, we are ready for application.

What Does it Mean for You?

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

GENESIS 1:26

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

In Leviticus, Moses wrote, “. . . but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18). In Deuteronomy, he wrote, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:5). Thousands of years later, Jesus referenced these two commandments, declaring, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

When we apply the Word of God found in the books of the Law to our lives, our goal isn’t to make a to-do list of things that do and don’t apply to us. Although our culture is vastly different from that of the original audience, our purpose for learning God’s Word is the same. We study the Scriptures so that we might love God with all of our heart and love those around us.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God created man and woman in his image. As his image bearers, he appointed them caretakers of God’s created beings: birds of the air, fish of the sea, and beasts of the fields. This stewardship also included filling the earth with more image-bearers through procreation.

**What does Genesis 1 teach you about God? About his creation?
How does it motivate you to love him? To love those in your life?**

In what specific ways can you apply Genesis 1:26-28 to your life?
