



# BIBLETRACK 1

## TALK 2 THE PENTATEUCH (PART 1) DR ANDREW EMERTON

### Talk Outline

#### Introduction to the Pentateuch

- Books of the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy
- Text is familiar, unusual and difficult
- Does it have any relevance to us as Christians today?

#### i. Significance of text

- Moral influence of Ten Commandments on societies throughout world and throughout history
- Sacred text for Jews and Christians
- Always the first and in same order in both Jewish and Christian sacred texts
- Jews call these five books Torah
- Five-fold division of book of Psalms is thought to be based around division of Pentateuch

#### ii. Origins of the text

- Christians and Jews assumed that Moses was the author
- Deuteronomy 34:5 – Moses could not have written about his own death
- Some of text hints at Moses as author

*'Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua" ' (Exodus 17:14).*

*'And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord' (Exodus 24:4).*

*'Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord and to all the elders of Israel. Moses commanded them: "Every seventh year, in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing" ' (Deuteronomy 31:9–11).*

*'Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face' (Deuteronomy 34:10).*

*'... being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you... This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth.... so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is*

written in it' (Joshua 1:7-8).

'... They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel' (Nehemiah 8:1).

'For it is written in the law of Moses: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain"' (1 Corinthians 9:9 – cf. Deuteronomy 25:4).

- Pentateuch purports to be of period of Ancient Near East – between period of 3000-1000 BC

## Old Testament Historical Timeline

| ERA (B.C.)                     | MAJOR FIGURES                 | ISRAELITE HISTORY  | LITERATURE                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 2000-1500?<br>Patriarchal      | Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph | Call of Abraham  | Genesis 12-50                            |
| 1400-1200?<br>Mosaic           | Moses, Joshua                 | Egypt, Exodus, Sinai, Conquest of Canaan   | Exodus and Joshua                        |
| 1200-1000?<br>Judges           | Deborah, Gideon, Eli, Samuel  |  | Judges, 1 Samuel 1-7                     |
| 1000?<br>Monarchy              | David, Solomon                | United Kingdom   | 1 & 2 Samuel                             |
| 933-721<br>The Divided Kingdom | Kings in Israel and Judah     | Israel = Northern Kingdom<br>Judah = Southern Kingdom<br>721 Israel falls to Assyria (exile) | Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah 1-39          |
| 721-587 Kingdom of Judah       | Kings: Ahaz, Hezekiah, Josiah | 587 Babylon captures Judah   | Jeremiah                                 |
| 586-538 The Exile in Babylon   |                               | 538 Cyrus (King of Persia) liberates the Jews from Babylon                                   | Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-55                    |
| 536-333 The Persian Empire     | Ezra, Nehemiah                | King Darius & Xerxes   | Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah, Isaiah 56-66 |

## Dominant people groups in the Ancient Near East



- If Moses wrote Pentateuch it could be dated around 1200 BC
- Diversity of scholarly position on dates
- Significant unity in the text

## Theological themes in the Pentateuch

- Pentateuch contains instruction
- Pentateuch can be seen as story of Israel's beginnings

### i. God is one

- People groups of that time in Mesopotamia – for example Assyrians and Babylonians
- Genesis 1–11 has similarities with creation texts of these other early civilizations but key difference is view of God
- In Genesis:
  - Sovereignty of one God rather than many gods
  - Order and peace rather than chaos
- This same God of creation speaks to the Patriarchs

*‘That very night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid for I am with you and I will bless you” ’ (Genesis 26:24).*

*‘... “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and your offspring” ’ (Genesis 28:13).*

- Moses and the one God

*‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’ (Exodus 3:6).*

*'... "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said "I will be with you and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt you will worship me on this mountain. But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me what is His name, what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." This is what you are to say to the Israelites. "I am" has sent me to you. The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you"' (Exodus 3:11–15).*

- Explicit call to monotheism

*'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3).*

- Biggest danger to Israel is to fall back in to polytheism
- The Shema:

*'Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God. The Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).*

*'Do not follow any other gods; any of the gods of the peoples who are around you' (Deuteronomy 6:14).*

## **ii. God is relational**

- Relationship is understood in terms of covenant
- Fracture of relationship with God in Genesis
- Always a sense of hope for humanity
- Covenant with Noah in Genesis 9
- Covenant is a bond or agreement between two parties – in the Bible between God and humanity

*'Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you, the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you, every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth"' (Genesis 9:8–11).*

- Sense of re-creation after the flood although covenant doesn't resolve the underlying threat of curse in Genesis 3
- Refocused blessing through Abraham and nation of Israel from Genesis 12

## **iii. God of promise**

- Genesis 12:1–3 forms backdrop to the rest of the Pentateuchal narrative

*'Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"' (Genesis 12:1–3 NIV).*

- Threefold promise of people, blessing and land
- Some scholars believe fourfold promise: blessing to the nations
- As Abram steps out in faith, more of promise is revealed: giving land to Lot in Genesis 13, rescuing him from captivity in Genesis 14

*'On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, "To your descendants I give this land. From the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites"'* (Genesis 15:18–21).

- God reiterates promise after Abraham has shown himself willing to sacrifice his son

*'... "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore. And your offspring will possess the gates of your enemies, and by your offspring shall all nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice"'* (Genesis 22:16–18).

- Remainder of Pentateuch is an outworking of these promises to the Patriarchs
- Tension in text between promises and problems

#### **a) Descendants**

*'I will not drive them out from before you in one year or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out before you until you have increased and possessed the land'* (Exodus 23:29–30).

#### **b) Blessing: relationship**

*'Then Moses went up on the mountain the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights'* (Exodus 24:15–18).

#### **c) Land**

- By the end of Genesis:

*'The only pieces of real estate owned by the Israelites in Canaan were a burial plot, a few wells and a piece of ground near Shechem.'* (Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament*, p.155.)

- Tension in the promises:

*'The partial fulfillment – which implies also the partial non-fulfillment – of the promise.'* (David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, p.29.)

Very little realization of the blessing to the nations in the Pentateuch

*'The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you and you shall dispossess them'* (Deuteronomy 31:3).

*'Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world'* (Genesis 41:57).

### **iv. God of Grace**

- Relationship between law and grace in the Pentateuch

*'Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve numerous people, as he is doing today'* (Genesis 50:20).

- Law follows rescue from slavery – redemptive grace comes first

a) Salvation: Exodus 1–18

b) Surrender: Exodus 19–40

*'Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called him from the mountain saying 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on*

*eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites'* (Exodus 19:3–6).

c) Test of Grace: Exodus 32–34

- God's grace is not to be presumed upon
- Implications for Israel's lack of trust

*'Then the Lord said, "I do forgive, just as you have asked; nevertheless, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord – none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors. None of those who despise me shall see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me whole heartedly, I will bring him into the land into which he went and his descendants shall possess it"'* (Numbers 14:20–24).

- Danger to the promise

*'Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going or it will become a snare among you ... (for you shall worship no other god)'* (Exodus 34:12, 14).

- Blessings and curses

*'If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today; the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God'* (Deuteronomy 28:1–2).

*'But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses will come on you and overtake you'* (Deuteronomy 28:15).

- Responsibility to live well in response to Grace

## **Acknowledgments**

Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament – Volume 1: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (SPCK, 2003), p.155.

David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (University of Sheffield, 1978), p.29.

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