

A Study Guide to the Entire Bible

Part I

The Law and the History

Introduction to Part I

Part I consists of the study guides to the five books of The Law, followed by the 12 books of History; thus Part I consists of study guides to the first 17 books of the Bible: Genesis through Esther.

Introduction to the Five Books of the Law

The first five books are called The Law, or “The Law of Moses.” They are also called The Torah (Hebrew, "to teach or direct"), and the Pentateuch (Greek, "five tools"). The Books of the Law are generally believed to have been one writing originally, separated into five sections. The division into five separate books, and assignment of the separate names for the books, probably occurred at the time of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek in Alexandria, about 300 BC¹.

Who Wrote the Books of the Law?

“Liberal,” or “critical,” scholars usually teach that there was no single author of the Books of the Law. Rather, they say, the first 5 books of the Bible are merely the collection of accumulated tribal traditions, myths and fables, told and retold over many centuries, and thus containing error. Most say that none of it was put into writing until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (the time of the return from Babylonian captivity), about 400 BC. They also usually take the position that Moses could not have been the author of anything for, they say, he was just an illiterate sheep herder who could neither read nor write².

¹ The Old Testament probably has the distinction of being the first book in human history to be translated from one language to another--that is, from Hebrew to Greek--when the (Greek) Septuagint Old Testament was translated at Alexandria, about 300 BC.

² Generalizations, such as I have just made, are almost always imprecise, are fraught with the potential for error, and I don't like them. There will be times such as this, however, in this Study Guide to the Bible, where they are unavoidable.

Actually, however, Moses was reared in the Egyptian palace as Pharaoh's privileged grandson when Egypt was the center of learning for the entire World. Thus he would have received the very best education possible then, and could probably read and write in 5 languages³. All internal evidence (that within the Bible) declares that Moses was the writer⁴. The unbroken Hebrew rabbinic tradition identifies the writer as Moses. Jesus recognized Moses as the author of the entire Pentateuch, which in His day was referred to as "The Law⁵."

A growing mountain of evidence declares the liberal scholars wrong; but they persist in what I consider to be their irrational position, for to admit that a supernatural God inspired a supernatural Book, describing actual miracles and containing supernatural prophecies, would be an insult to their humanistic, intellectual pride. It would also contradict what they have been taught, have sincerely believed, and have taught to others.

***NOTE:** As I have said in the Introductory Material, referring to "liberal" scholars presents difficulties for me. The matter of the two basic approaches to interpretation of Scriptures (liberal" and "conservative") is an inescapable reality, and at times it is necessary to refer to it. When doing so, I must be honest; yet I wish very much not to be (or appear to be) dismissive or adversarial when referring to the scholars who take the liberal approach.*

An approximate synonym for "liberal" is "critical" and it will also be used when referring to non-traditional scholars who study and interpret the Scriptures with a critical, skeptical approach.

For a more thorough explanation of the different approaches see "The Vexing Problem of the 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' Division" in "A Personal Word from the Author" (Introductory Material). For a still more thorough explanation of the differences in approach to the Scriptures, see "The Debate over the Authority of Scripture" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

A Personal Note to the Reader about the Books of the Law

For most of us, I think, the New Testament is more appealing, in a general sense, than is the Old Testament. And, of all the Old Testament books, the least appealing for most of us are the first five--the Books of the Law. It all seems so harsh, so legalistic and unforgiving, so filled with "thou shalt nots," and with meticulously detailed and complicated requirements.

³ Acts 7:22.

⁴ Exodus 17:14; Exodus 24:1-7, John 1:45, et al.

⁵ John 7:19-23.

So it was for me for most of my life, even after I became a serious student, and teacher, of the Bible.

Then, about 20 years ago, I was strongly impressed that I should make a study of the Pentateuch, the five Books of the Law. It would probably not be inaccurate to say simply that the Lord required it of me. There was no audible voice speaking to me; but **I knew that I had to do it**, and that there was no avoiding it⁶. It was made inescapably clear to me that I was not just to read those first five books of the Bible; I was to **study** them. I obeyed; but, to put it mildly, I obeyed reluctantly. And as I did, to my utter amazement, in the months that followed, I discovered that the Books of the Law are filled with repeated revelations of the loving tenderness of the heart of God! In the midst of all that legalistic harshness, which was apparently necessary in order to keep those rebellious, ungrateful, unfaithful, wandering Israelites out of irreversible trouble, I found, over and over, how much God cares for the poor, the defenseless, and the unwanted. I also learned how strongly He feels about this, and how dangerous it is to fail to protect the defenseless, let alone to victimize them!

It is my prayer that the study of these first five books, the Pentateuch, the Holy Torah, will give you the same surprising pleasure, and the same new revelation of our loving YHWH, the compassionate God of the Old Testament, that they now give to me.

Introduction to the 12 Books of History

The 12 Books of History are just that. Although the five Books of Law also contain the history of man, from Creation through the Exodus from Egypt, they have, from the beginning, been considered a separate group of books. Beginning with the death of Moses and the succession of Joshua to his leadership position, the next 12 books record the history of God's people to the end of the Old Testament period.

The Bible is not chronologically arranged. The books of Poetry and Prophecy (Part II of this study guide) will take us, many times, back into the period covered by the Books of Law and History; but the 12 Books of History are essentially chronological, and will provide the framework for all the rest.

These 12 books tell the story of the entrance to the Promised Land, the assignment of the tribes to their allocated portions of the land, and the wars of conquest with the Canaanites already living in the Promised Land. They also tell

⁶ This kind of internal nudging can be called by a number of names. Some would call it an impression; others call it a prompting of the Holy Spirit. Augustine, 4th/5th Century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, simply called it "the voiceless voice of God."

of the period of the period of the Theocracy, with God as the unseen King, with human judges to direct temporal affairs. They will tell us of the people's demand for earthly kings like those of the pagan nations around them, of the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, and of the dividing of the kingdom into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah), their eventually being conquered and carried into captivity, first by Assyria and then by Babylon.

The books of History end with the story of the captivity, the return to the Promised Land, and the restoration of the Israelites there, the re-building of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, with its walls.

Part I

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And now we begin the study of the Books of the Law and the Books of History.