

Part 1: Jesus in the Pentateuch—God and his People

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As we begin this morning, I wanted to read a story from our local newspaper that you might find has direct application to your life today:

"When Frenchtown athlete Addy Lewis began swimming in the first grade, she never imagined she'd become an NCAA Division I signee. She said she is no longer a member of the House of Representatives and has yet to be sworn into her new seat in the Senate. Such is the case around western Montana, where multiple different avalanche problems overlap. Unless you're a glutton for punishment, it's not a good day to be wandering around the backcountry. That's what made dedicating herself to the sport so easy."

Does that story make any sense to you? What would happen if I told you this was the highest read newspaper in the area? What if everywhere you went from grocery stores, to online posts, to hotels you saw people reading and sharing this paper? Would you perhaps wonder if either you were ignorant, or if other people were crazy?

I wonder if you would continue to read that paper, or if you'd decide it's not really helpful to your own life?

Well, it's true, every word of that story is from the same paper. But they are portions and passages from three different articles. Most of us would intuitively know that this is now way to read a newspaper. If you read one paragraph here, and another there, and didn't understand the context that connected each story, you'd find it to be the most poorly written and unhelpful resource you've ever encountered.

But I wonder if what keeps us from reading the Bible, God's own word to us, is a similar problem? How many of us read a chapter here, and a chapter there, and find ourselves just as lost and confused as we did in my opening story. But maybe, just maybe, there's a better way to read the Bible.

As we start our new Bible reading plan here at Sovereign Hope, we are endeavoring to read together the whole of the Bible over the course of two years. But if we want to read faithfully, we must learn to read as we read other books: in context, in light of the story itself.

Many of us want to read God's word and we make it for a little bit and then we feel lost and confused and give it up. So what we are going to do to help with that is take eight weeks together and walk through the context and story of the Bible, as well as discovering read some of the different genres inside of it.

When looking at the box score of the basketball game, you naturally read it with different rules and expectations than you do when reading an editorial piece. And likewise when reading an article on new taxes as you would a profile piece of the owner of the new bakery.

The Bible is just as diverse as any other piece of literature, but behind all of its diversity is a single story that we must learn to identify to keep us on track. That story is the story of a creator God who seeks to

redeem a broken people by the work of Jesus Christ. Where we are in that story, and how the story is advancing is important to us if we want to understand the Bible in a way that actually makes sense.

If you're new to Sovereign Hope, this sermon series is a little different than what we normally do. For instance we are on pace to slowly preach through the 24 chapters of Luke in just over two years. But in two short months we are going to fly over the two testaments, sixty six books and nearly 1,200 chapters of the whole Bible.

Therefore to even call this an overview sermon series is a bit of a reach. We can't possibly dive into all the details in such a time frame so I have three simple goals for us over the next eight weeks. 1. To help us understand the story of scripture as it relates to Jesus Christ. 2. To help us study scripture faithfully, giving us an awareness of how the context of the story and the style of writing helps us discover God's meaning in the text. 3. To help us savor and apply our scripture reading in a daily and devotional manner.

So for each of these sermons we are going to do just that. We will together **Survey the Story, Study the Story, and Savor the Savior of the Story.**

Today we are going to begin by **Seeing Jesus in the Pentateuch** where our primary theme is going to be **God and his People**, or to put it another way creation and recreation.

Today we are going to examine the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, all of them written as a unity by Moses.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, these books were simply referred to as the Torah (which is the Hebrew word for law), in the Greek Old Testament it was called the Pentateuch (which is Greek for "five books").

The name is of lesser importance for us than the content as these five are foundational to the whole of scripture. Just as a basketball team places its best five players on the court to start any game, the Pentateuch is God's starting five.

Of the four major covenants which help us understand the Bible, two of them (the Noahic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant) are explicitly included in these books. While the other two (the Davidic and the New covenant) are clearly foreshadowed in these books.

In other words these five books are the seed out of which the whole of scripture grows. In fact one of these books, Deuteronomy, is the book Jesus himself quotes most frequently in his earthly ministry.

So with that said let's dive in with our first goal today: **Survey the Story.**

To put it simply and clearly again, the big picture survey of the first five books is **God and his People** and that is played out through the themes of creation and recreation.

This is seen most clearly in the first three chapters of the whole Bible in which we encounter the creation story and subsequent fall of man.

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a perfect garden. And it is here we I want to introduce you to three themes that you can always use as a reference point for where we are in the story. These three themes are God's people, in God's place, in God's presence.

Eden illustrates this perfectly: God's ideal creation was God's people (Adam and Eve), in God's place (the Garden of Eden), in God's presence (God created them and walked with them in perfect relationship).

Those themes of people, presence and place run rampant throughout the whole Old Testament, but the Pentateuch shows how easily it was made, how quickly it was lost, and how God himself set forth a plan to reunite all three again.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and their sin caused them to be removed from God's presence, and kicked out of God's place. They were no longer God's people because their sin was rebellion against God, there were no longer in God's presence because their sin could not dwell in the presence of a sinless God. In three chapters man fell as God's people, rebelled against God's presence and were removed from God's place.

What God created sinful humanity had ruined. But God is going to begin a recreation program so that he will again be their God and they will be his people.

God is going to covenant to save his people and win them back into his presence and bring them back into his place. That place is going to be called Canaan, or the Promised Land. It is where God is going to attempt to rebuild all that was lost in Eden and that's really the thrust of the first five books. From Eden to Canaan, and all the trials in between, that's the story of the first five books.

God is going to fix what sin broke by making his people his, by dwelling among them, and by bringing them back into a perfect world.

If there's one key text which captures this, it would be **Deuteronomy 4:32-40**.

Because of God's love for his people, he's going to bring them out of nothingness and he is going to be their God. What then must God's people know? "Lay it in your heart that the Lord is God in the heavens above and on earth beneath and there is no other."

If humanity is every going to be free from the corruption of sin, and the death and pain that accompanies it, if we ever want to find what we were truly made for, then we must cling exclusively to the God who made us. This is the story of God and his people, and his plan to create and recreate according to his mercy.

This leads us into our second point this morning: **Studying the Story**.

As you read these books you will find some poetry, some songs, and some legal writings. But for the most part what we are reading in this portion of the Bible is narrative. It's a story which means you have to pay attention to characters.

Often these characters are introduced by genealogies. Why is that? Because while this is a story, it is not merely a story—it's real history! It's our story.

This is the point of Genesis (the book of beginnings!). Genesis 2 actually makes the case that the whole of what follows is simply a genealogy of all of human history: **Genesis 2:4**. This story is our story. We are made in the image of God, we are made as God's children so if we are going to understand who we are we cannot simply rediscover the garden, or rediscover each other, we need to rediscover God. Just as understanding your own parents helps you make sense of life, understanding God as our creator and our God makes sense of who we are.

Sometimes these genealogies are burdensome to us to read, but as we read it Moses will land the plane in places where we need it. Often he's wanting us to see the beginning and the end of these genealogies. If there's two genealogies back to back, most times first genealogy is meant to be a contrast to the second one in which the new primary character is going to be introduced.

If you were with us in our Advent series you saw this in Genesis 4 where the genealogy of Cain is meant to be a contrast to the genealogy of Seth. Where Cain's grandson boasted in his name, Seth's offspring introduced a time where people called on the name of God.

But there seems to be a problem, as each generation grows, so too does sin. God is less known, perfection is less seen, and wickedness abounds. So much so that in Genesis 7, God brings a flood on the whole earth to wipe out all of his creation with the exception of Noah and his family.

But God makes a covenant with Noah afterwards in **Genesis 9:7-17**.

God uses the same language he used with Adam to communicate this new recreation: be fruitful and multiply. But God knew that as long as man remained the problem of sin would remain. So God made a promise—he would never destroy all of humanity again on account of sin. Even if sin continued to be a problem, and it would, God would make a way for people to be spared from the death sin deserved. God would somehow make his people dwell in his presence and live in his place by dealing with sin.

This is the promise God made to Noah.

But guess what. Things got worse again. At Babel the whole world seemed to forget about God, but one of Noah's faithful sons, Shem, had a great, great, grandson named Abram. As it seemed the natural lineage of man was broken, God entered into a covenant with Abram when he said this: **Genesis 17:4-8**.

God's covenants show us the real story of scripture. Scripture is not an account of man's attempts to redeem themselves, but God's zeal to enter into our mess and save us by his mercy.

God was going to be Abraham's God, his offspring was going to be God's people, and God was going to bring them into his promised place. By God's mercy the curse of sin was being reversed.

The rest of Genesis tracks this promise to Abraham's offspring as we are introduced to the life of Isaac, Abraham's son. Then Isaac's son Jacob who is given the name Israel, and his 12 sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel.

The book concludes by leaving the question of place at the forefront of our minds. By the end, Abraham's line is flourishing, they are many people, but they are a people not in God's place. They are in Egypt.

But God's promise remains, a specific promise to the family line of Judah in **Genesis 49:9-10**. Even though God's people are in Egypt, a ruler will come from the line of Judah and the scepter will not depart from him—he will be a forever ruler of a forever place over God's forever people.

By the end of Genesis we see God's family has grown, but in Exodus we meet a new problem: slavery.

God's many people are enslaved, but God brings about a new deliverer named Moses.

God comes to Moses, and sends him to Pharaoh to bring God's people out of slavery—proving that the validity of God's promise is backed by the might of God's power. Almost every miracle God does in Egypt is something that in context was a direct reproof of all of Egypt's gods. God's point was therefore not only that he was going to bring out his people, but that "The Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath it" all other gods are nothing. At the end of human history all the false hopes, idols and gods of man will be mocked by the saving power of the true and living God.

But after God shames the Egyptian gods and delivers his people an interesting thing happens. God brings his freshly saved people to Mount Sinai where he reveals himself to his people in fire and word. But it's actually here the problems grow worse. The story of the crisis with the physical power of Egypt lasted only 14 chapters in the book, but the rest of the 40 chapters chronicles Israel's greater crisis in their response to the spiritual reality of a Holy God.

The author Stephen Dempster so beautifully pointed out the problem this way: **"These texts show that Sinai, not Egypt, is Israel's largest roadblock to Canaan."**

Israel's biggest issues in Exodus are not the slave drivers of Egypt, it's their own response to the God who saved them—it's the sin that lay in their own heart. Almost immediately the people set up idols to false gods. Having heard God speak, they fear him, they grumble against him, they wrestle to obey him.

This is so important because we often think our biggest problems are external and outside of us. But what you will discover about your own heart in the book of Exodus is that the biggest roadblock between you and the life you want is actually your relationship to the God who has revealed himself to you in his word.

We can be delivered from slavery to man, but slavery to sin is the greater problem. So what does God do to help with this?

He gives them his laws. Why does God do this? Because he wants them to be his people! Israel's problem is that they fear God because he's holy, God's solution is to make them holy as he is holy!

The book of Leviticus goes to show in intricate details the length through which God is going to recreate his people by making them holy. As you read God's laws in Exodus and Leviticus it's important for us to note that each law stresses how we as Christians are to be distinct. If God saves us, God changes us.

God didn't give Israel the law while in Egypt and say, "Do this and I'll save you." Instead he gave the law after he saved them so that they might enjoy and walk in his continued salvation and mercy! Our lives should look markedly different if we are God's people.

Where does this show up in your life today? I was talking to someone last week who said he can discern the Christians in his workplace because they have kids! In his field the pay is great and travel is abundant so most people opt to not have a family and just travel for their own pleasure. But to see someone who self-sacrificially gives their lives to the service of others was counter cultural.

But if we are made in the image of God, our lives should look other oriented like God's life! We would take God at his word and pursue holiness not out of an obligation but out of elation! Look at how Moses puts this in **Deuteronomy 4:6-8**.

God's law is life changing and joy producing.

But the book of Numbers shows that God's people still don't trust God. They can't get out of their own way. Despite God's presence leading them, despite his miracles feeding them, despite his word to bring them into the Promised Land they fear man more than God. God supernaturally carries this reluctant people to the door of the Promised Land, but when the Israelites send in spies they see nations with big people and tall walls and they don't trust God will deliver the land to them. They refuse to go in.

Unless God changes our hearts towards him, you can lead a horse out of slavery, but you can't make him drink Canaan's milk.

So in Numbers, God judges unbelieving Israel and we see another act of creation and recreation. With the exception of some faithful leaders, the whole generation that was brought out of Egypt dies while wandering in the desert.

And when the book of Deuteronomy begins, after 40 years of discipline in the desert, Moses address this new crop of Israelites and gives them a sermon reminding them of God's faithfulness, warning them of faithlessness, and inspiring them to enter into Canaan with a renewed commitment that God would be their God, and that by following God's law they would themselves flourish as God's people in his promised place.

We are left with a cliff hanger: Would they listen? Moses actually prophesies at the end of the book that God's people will fall away again into sin, even in the land. Why? Because the problem isn't the land, the problem is their hearts which refuse to trust in God. The problem is sin.

But this is where one specific chapter in the book of Leviticus is helpful. In Leviticus 16 God spells out a law called "The Day of Atonement."

On this day, once a year, a special sacrifice was made for the sins of the people. Read with me **Leviticus 16:20-22, 34**.

This is God's forever statute. Where on account of the sins of the people, a goat was to bear their sins away from them. Why? So that God could dwell in their midst. If sin remained, problems remained. If sin remained the fear of Sinai remained. If sin remained they could dwell in the land but they would never fully be God's people because they could never have God's presence.

But this goat, who would bear away the sins of the people as an act of atonement, would make a way for God to be with them.

This is where we can turn our attention to our final point this morning: **Savoring the Savior of the Story**.

Where is Jesus in the Pentateuch? He is everywhere. He is the greater Moses who intercedes on behalf of a sinful people. He is the bronze serpent raised up in the wilderness so that all who are dying might look on him and live. He is the manna from heaven, the bread of life, food for all who are hungry, water from the living rock. But he is primarily here in the Day of Atonement.

We need more than a change of politics, perspectives or landscape we need a change of heart. We need to be freed from sin. To be God's people we need a special recreation, a spiritual one.

Moses knew this. The law required that God's males be marked off by physical circumcision, but look at what he says is ultimately needed: **Deuteronomy 30:6**. We needed more than an external mark, we needed our hearts to be marked off.

Look at how Paul speaks of Jesus in **Colossians 2:9-11**.

It is in Jesus that our hearts are marked off as a spiritual people. It is in Jesus that change comes not from the outside in, but from the inside out. Jesus frees us from slavery to sin so that we can respond to God rightly.

How does Jesus do this?

Look at what Paul says in **Romans 8:3-4**.

He fulfills the law for us. He meets God's perfect righteousness in himself. He was faithful where none of us could be. As you read the Pentateuch you will read stories of spectacular and devastating sins. And as you read that, read it in light of our sacrificial King who refused to give into sin like the rest of human history. And being perfect, he became the scapegoat of sacrifice. **1 Peter 2:24**.

Jesus fulfilled the law and circumcised us in our hearts. He makes us God's people because he was God's perfect person in the flesh! If we want to make it past the Sinai experiences of our life, we must submit ourselves to the work of Jesus to make us holy by faith. The author of Hebrews says that the promise of an eternal place still stands, a greater Canaan, a better Eden is held out for us in Heaven.

But before any of us get there, we come to the mountain of God. We come face to face with God in all his holiness and how will you respond? Will you grumble at him, will you run from him? Or will you stand in the confidence of a one whose sin was removed, and perfection granted, through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

This becomes the basis for our new living, this is where obedience becomes life giving and joyful. When we learn to trust God exclusively we live joyfully in his presence as his people.

Where the Pentateuch ends, today begins. Here in Jesus is what God has done to save you—will you trust him and give your life wholly over to him. Will he be your God, and will you be his people by faith through grace in Jesus Christ?