

The first five books of the Bible – an overview

The first five books of the Bible are a united set of writings. They are really one set of books in three sections. Genesis tells the story of creation, sin, and salvation by faith. The three middle books (Exodus–Numbers) tell the main story of Israel's redemption by the blood of a lamb. Deuteronomy is a record of Moses' preaching just before Israel went into the land of Canaan. It presses home some lessons that arise from the central story in Exodus to Numbers.

It will help us if we get an overview. The first five books of the Bible unfold like this:

• *The Prehistory of Israel's Redemption (Genesis)*

Part 1. The Prehistory of Israel's Redemption (Genesis)

- The Creation of Everything (1:1–2:3)
- The Offspring of Heaven and Earth (2:4–4:26)
- The 'Book' of the Offspring of Adam (5:1–6:8)
- The Offspring of Noah (6:9–9:29)
- The Offspring of the Sons of Noah (10:1–11:9)
- The Offspring of Shem (11:10–26)
- The Succession of Terah (11:27–25:11)
- The Offspring of Ishmael (25:12–18)
- The Offspring of Isaac (25:19–35:29)
- The Offspring of Edom (36:1–43)
- The Offspring of Jacob (37:1–50:26)

• *The Redemption of Israel*

Part 2. The Redemption of Israel (Exodus–Numbers)

- Redemption by the Blood of a Lamb (Exodus 1:1–15:21)
- Establishment of Israel as the People of God (Exodus 15:22–40:38)
- Law and Ordinances of the Sinai-Covenant (Leviticus)
- Journeying From Sinai to Moab (Numbers)

• *Moses' Reminders and Exhortations*

Part 3. Moses' Reminders and Exhortations (Deuteronomy)

- Preamble (1:1–5)
- Historical Prologue (1:6–4:49)
- Stipulations: Covenant Life (5:1–26:19)
- Sanctions and Covenant Ratification (27:1–30:20)
- Arrangements for the Future (31:1–34:20)

How Genesis to Deuteronomy came to be written

Everything in Genesis 1:1–11:26 goes back to the days before Abraham. The stories of Genesis 1–11 may have been family tradition brought by Abraham from Mesopotamia where the family originally lived. Genesis 11:27–50:26 are the family traditions of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Some time later Moses did a lot of writing. He wrote accounts of the doom of Amalek ^{□1} and the documents of the covenant at Sinai. Much or all of the legislation of Leviticus comes from this period. Records of the journeys of the Israelites were kept. So at about the time of the entry of Israel into the land of Canaan, most of what we call the first five books of the Bible was already in existence. They became known as 'the books of Moses'.

□1
Exodus
17:14

• *Editors and compilers*

This does not mean that Moses produced them in the precise form that we have them. There is evidence that the first five books of the Bible, Genesis–Deuteronomy, were edited and compiled somewhere between the days of Moses and the days of the kings of Israel. They were certainly put together after Moses' death. And Genesis 36:11 clearly was written after kings reigned in Israel, that is, after the days of Saul and David. Solomon's times were days of literary work and it is likely that during these days Genesis reached its present form. It seems then that our Genesis was drafted around 1300 BC from earlier materials but came to its final form, as we have it in Hebrew, about 950 BC. We notice that Genesis has ten 'markers' or internal headings ^{□1}. These headings are quite deliberate and were placed there by the editor of this material, to divide the book into sections in the way analysed above.

□1
2:4
5:1
6:9
10:1
11:10
11:27
25:12
25:19
36:1
37:1

The first eleven chapters dealt with creation, the fall into sin and the calamity that came upon the human race. God brought into being a new world out of the waters of the flood and re-started the world under different conditions. Sin and death were still present but God spread the nations throughout the ancient world and got ready to introduce Abraham.

The remainder of Genesis shows us how faith works by exhibiting the life of faith in the stories of Abraham (), Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Esau (25:12–36:43), and then in the story of Joseph which is given special attention (37:2–50:20). Joseph's story shows us how the life of faith works out in one more of Abraham's descendants, but at the same time explains how Israel came to be in Egypt and so in need of salvation by the blood of a lamb.

11:27–25:11
11:27–25:11
11:27–25:11

The story of Abraham

- A model of saving faith
- A model of diligent faith

- A model of freedom from the law

- A model of hearing God's voice

- A model of living under a high priest

- A model of experiencing God's oath

We are ready, then, for the story of Abraham. The main point is this: **Abraham was a model of faith.**

He is the model of saving faith. We are 'justified', that is declared righteous before God, in the same way that Abraham was justified. Abraham was the model of justification for the apostle Paul.

Abraham is the model of diligent faith. It is by persisting in faith that we inherit God's promises. Initial faith brings us into being right with God. Persistent faith inherits God's promises.

Abraham is the model of freedom from the law. He lived before the Mosaic law existed. He did everything that he did without the use of the Mosaic law.

Abraham is the model of hearing God's voice. Abraham did not have the law and he did not even have the Bible! Yet he heard from God. He had a personal experience of God and knew that God was speaking to him. Abraham is the model of justification by works. Decades after he was justified he reached a high level of obedience and became pleasing to God. After his obedience was severely tested God said to him 'I know that you are righteous'. James calls this 'justification by works'. It has nothing to do with our first salvation. It has nothing to do with Paul's phrase 'justification by faith'. It refers to the highest level of pleasing God. Once again, Abraham is the model.

Abraham is the model of living under a high-priest. In a time of great conflict, when he was supremely weary, he found blessing from a great high priest, Melchizedek. He represents to us our living under a great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Abraham is the model of what it means to experience God's oath. 'I swear that I will bless you', said God to Abraham. It all began when Abraham heard God's call and started believing God.



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