THE PLAN OF THE PENTATEUCH: IS IT FIVE BOOKS OR A FIVEFOLD BOOK, AND DOES IT MATTER?

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0. INTRODUCTION

One of the remarkable and fascinating features about the Bible’s canonical self-consciousness is the manner in which it sometimes mentions by name its own constituent members. For example, when referring to those writings traditionally attributed to Moses (i.e., Genesis-Deuteronomy), the rest of Scripture is careful to refer not to the books (plural) of Torah or Moses, but to the book (singular) of Torah or Moses. Passages like Joshua 1:8, 2 Chronicles 25:4, and Mark 12:26 illustrate the point. This observation invites the question whether the designation “Pentateuch” is best understood as five books or as a five-part book, and the further query whether that differentiation even matters or significantly affects how we read and understand this portion of the Bible.

With origins at least as far back as Josephus,¹ the widespread assumption that the Pentateuch consists in five books, each separately titled and each registering its numerical presence in Bible quizzes (“How many books are there in the Bible?”), at least has the distinction of enjoying a long history. Just the same, this fivefold division has discouraged serious reflection on an even more historical assessment of the Pentateuch as an intended unitary composition—a singular book, meticulously shaped into a grand structure of meaning. One negative effect is that the continuous flow of the narrative and its influence on understanding every constituent part is easily obscured. Such has long been the situation at both general and specialist levels, in both the church and the academy. Occupied with individual trees or threads, we have tended to miss the Pentateuchal forest or fabric.

Happily, a veritable avalanche of thoughtful attention has fallen on our question in recent years.² These studies expose the Pentateuch as a carefully constructed composition with a comprehensive plan that exhibits meaningful cohesion and thoughtful direction reflecting an authored strategy from Genesis 1 through Deuteronomy 34. This is evident in both the organizing framework which defines the literary contours and the embedded patterns which fill out that framework, thereby displaying how the whole and the network of relations among its constituent parts are fashioned into a grand design for a desired effect. By means of its macro- and micro-structure, the book of Torah guides readers effectively to an authored goal—a goal seriously threatened when we read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy as individual “books.” In fact, the broad literary landscape does not even coincide with these five at all, so that a study, say, on Leviticus must surely fail in getting at the meaning and message unless it respects the larger context in the book of the Pentateuch.

Against this background, let me sketch in broadest strokes the contours of a proposed structure of the Pentateuch that attempts to take seriously the overlapping and converging lines of evidence that bind Genesis-Deuteronomy into a single book.

1. THE PLAN OF THE PENTATEUCH: OVERVIEW

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I. Introduction to the Early Story of God’s Universal Blessing Plan (Gen 1:1–11:26)

The Pentateuchal introduction consists in (A) a Prologue narrating first things, i.e., Creation (1:1–2:3), and (B) the story from Creation to Terah/Abraham in five sections (2:4–11:26) marked by the catchword *toledot* (“what is brought forth,” hence, “generations,” “ongoing story/account,” or simply “what became of”) as a framing device in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, pivoting on the central panel which focuses on Noah (6:9–9:28).³

II. Development in the Early Story of God’s Universal Blessing Plan (Gen 11:27–Num 36:13)

The unfolding drama of the Pentateuchal story consists in (A) pre-Sinai narratives, recounting how the people of the blessing plan were elected and preserved (Gen 11:27–Exod 18:27); (B) the Sinai narratives, reporting how the provisions for the blessing plan were delineated (Exod 19:1–Lev 27:34); and (C) the post-Sinai narratives, rehearsing how the prospect of the blessing plan was threatened and awaited (Num 1:1–36:13).

III. Conclusion to the Early Story of God’s Universal Blessing Plan (Deut 1:1–34:12)

Deuteronomy offers a retrospective and prospective review of what precedes, highlighting (A) what God has done (1:6–3:29), (B) what God requires (4:1–28:68), and an epilogue pointing to last things, i.e., (C) what God promises in a “new covenant” (29:1 [MT 28:69]–34:12).⁴

2. THE PLAN OF THE PENTATEUCH: WHY IT MATTERS

At first blush all of this may not appear unremarkable. However, many profoundly significant and far-reaching insights emerge when the Pentateuch is read on its own wavelength as a thematically

³The story from Terah/Abraham to Jacob/Joseph will follow in five *toledot* sections (Gen 11:27–50:26; see 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2), pivoting on the central panel of Isaac/Jacob (25:19–35:29).

⁴MT refers to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. In this instance the English Bible versification varies from the Hebrew.
cohesive single book. Let me highlight the following, beginning with some general observations before moving to more of the particulars.

2.1 First, a general observation. Read in the light of its beginning (Gen 1:1–11:26) and ending (Deut 1-34, esp. 29-34), the apparently particularistic heart of the Pentateuch (i.e., the story about God’s dealings with Abraham and his descendants leading to and from Sinai [Gen 12–Num 36]) in fact participates in a larger strategy that advances a plot truly cosmic and ultimately eschatological in scope. The fact that the story of the Pentateuch begins with Genesis 1-11 means that the rest of the Pentateuch and the rest of the OT— we could say the rest of the Bible—is not particularly and primarily for and about Israel, but is for any reader who begins at Genesis 1 and is about Creator God’s purposes for ‘adām, which God will effect through the new ‘adām, Abraham and his seed/posterity. The principal focus of the OT fixes on the fulfilling of God’s program introduced in its first eleven chapters, for which program Israel is but the chosen instrumental agent. Any construal of the biblical witness then in terms of the OT’s being about and for Israel and the NT’s being about Christ and for the Church reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how the whole Bible from its earliest chapters to its last bears consistent testimony to God’s cosmic plan. The hermeneutical implications regarding the relevance of the OT and the complete dependence of the NT on the OT are far-reaching. In sum, the Pentateuch fixes and articulates the thematic story of the Bible, which the Historical and Prophetic books focus and elucidate, which the Psalms and Wisdom books further and anticipate, which the New Testament fulfills and culminates—each division a divine commentary of sorts upon the one(s) that precede. The Pentateuch enjoys pride of place in this grand canonical march, and its first eleven chapters get to ride in the front seat!

2.2 Numerous indications suggest that the Pentateuch as a whole is meant to be read as messianic prophecy. For example, the very first word of the Bible, bere’šīt, “in the beginning,” opens a narrative occupied with God’s creative activity over a period of yāmîm, “days.” This special, almost technical, term bere’šīt receives an echo in three Pentateuchal passages containing the rhyming expression be’aharīt, “in the end,” also associated in these three passages with yāmîm, “days.” Moreover, all three appear in or around narratively inset poetic passages (a significant feature in the strategy of the Pentateuch), and all three contain the following: a central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses), who calls together an audience, and proclaims what will happen “at the end of days” (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; and Deut 31:28-29).

Now for the point: All three of these appear in highly charged messianic contexts: Genesis 49, with its spotlight on a conquering king who will come forth from the tribe of Judah and establish universal dominion (vv. 8-12); Numbers 24, with its anticipation of a distant future deliverer, “a star [who] will come out of Jacob;//a scepter [who] will rise out of Israel,” one who will conquer all the foes of his people (vv. 15-19); Deuteronomy 31ff., with its forward look to a time of blessed restoration following a time of disciplinary judgment—the time of a new heart (Deut 30:1-20), a new creation (33:26-29), and the distant anticipation of a new prophet like Moses (34:5-12; cf. 18:15-22). The overall effect of these phenomena gives the entire Pentateuch from its very first word a highly charged eschatological-messianic orientation as it awaits the echo fulfillment of 1:1—deliverance, king, blessing administered through one who comes “at the end of days” to fulfill the Creator’s plans and purposes announced “in the beginning of days.” Alas, the Creation account does not exist merely for the purpose of informing readers about the origin of the universe (much less for equipping them to debate the same), but to introduce a story that points to Jesus at the conclusion. The entire Pentateuch will be structured in a way that advances this point of view, shared by the rest of Scripture.

To put this in the simplest of terms, if we wish to learn the full story of Jesus, we must begin with the very first word in the Bible. Everything from that point on is about him. By the time we arrive at the Gospels, we are already three-quarters of the way through the gospel, with effects on our understanding of Jesus not unlike showing up at a theater three-fourths of the way through the movie.

2.3. The use of tôlêdot ("what is brought forth," hence, "generations," "the family history of," or simply "what became of") as a catchphrase framing device in Genesis is widely recognized. Genesis 1:1–2:3 precedes the first tôlêdot and so functions as a prologue to the ten tôlêdot sections that follow (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,29; 36:1; 37:2), and in fact to the whole Pentateuch. These ten consist in two pentads, defining the structural contours of 2:4–11:26 and 11:27–50:26, respectively, which division is further supported by the transparent shift in focus and narrative flow beginning in 11:27. Each pentad pivots on its central panel—the tôlêdot of Noah (6:9–9:29) and the tôlêdot of Isaac/Jacob (25:19–35:29)—with numerous indications of artistry supporting the symmetry.

Besides its role as a structural catchphrase, as a genuine Leitwort (theme) the tôlêdot formulary hinges the narrative sections, narrows the focus, and intensifies the anticipation. Working in tandem with the genealogical lists and the zera’ ("seed/offspring") trail, the tôlêdot superscriptions set the entire Pentateuchal story in motion by focusing on “the ongoing account of” a narrowing elect line of promise with a providentially preserved “seed” which will play a vital role in mediating God’s blessing to all the nations. This “seed” will be linked to a royal dynasty descended from Abraham through Judah, and this “seed” will rule the nations in majesty (cf. Gen 49:8-12). This “seed,” of course, fulfills the hope of a wounded but winning warrior promised to the first woman (Gen 3:15); or as Waltke puts it, “The ten tôlêdot sections function as cycles in Genesis, marking the book’s major divisions in tracing God’s program of bringing the seed of the Serpent under the dominion of the elect seed of the woman.” (It may be more than coincidental that the opening words in Matt 1:1, Βιβλίον γενεαλογίας, “The book of the genealogy,” precisely echo the LXX rendering of the tôlêdot phrase in Gen 2:4 and 5:1.) Tôlêdot serves then not to define Genesis as a discrete book (the term occurs 16 additional times in the Pentateuch), but to render programmatic a focusing and forwardly-directed orientation to the whole. This proleptic function, clearly established in the first pentad (2:4–11:26), continues into the second (11:27–50:26), which opening movement in the actual Pentateuchal body (Gen 11:27–Num 36:13) successfully fixes the reader’s perspective for the whole.

2.4. The unfolding drama of the Pentateuch consists in a triadic development of material focused unmistakably on its middle and major element—Sinai/Horeb, the mountain of God—which, accordingly, occupies not merely a central place, but becomes “the Mount Everest” of Pentateuchal theology (Smith). This is evidenced especially in the disproportion of narration time (the time and space the narrator devotes to each event, i.e., the time it takes to tell/read a story, best measured by word count) to narrated time (the length of time events are said to have taken in the space-time world, i.e., the period of time covered by or described in the story). The exodus story exhibits an amazing manipulation of “compression” and “expansion,” leaving no question that the Pentateuch has an absorbing preoccupation with Sinai.

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<th>Israel in Egypt</th>
<th>Exod 1-18</th>
<th>7,318 (Heb) words</th>
<th>Covers c. 430 extremely eventful years, most actually surveyed in just 584 words in 1:1–2:25</th>
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<td>Israel at Sinai</td>
<td>Exod 19:1-Num 10:11</td>
<td>26,586 (Heb) words</td>
<td>Covers c. 11 relatively uneventful months, with 7,363 words devoted to the highly repetitious tabernacle narrative alone (chs. 25-40)</td>
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While Moses indeed figures prominently in the Sinai pericope, his role remains subservient to YHWH’s larger purposes for the nation as medium of a universal plan of blessing—which plan involves a people, elected and preserved (Gen 11:27–Exod 18:27), who are made recipients of certain provisions delineating the path to blessing (Exod 19–Lev 27), which prospect is both threatened and, beyond the end of the Pentateuchal itself, awaited (Num 1-36). It should be apparent that the story of the exodus deliverance (1:1–18:27), that is, the narrative of God’s removing Israel from Egypt, is the necessary means to a greater end. The end God has in view in electing and redeeming a people for himself does not focus so much on what they have been delivered from (bondage), but on what they have been delivered to (blessing). If we miss this point, it will probably continue to affect the way we view the Bible, and salvation itself.

2.5. The dominance of legal material in the Sinai pericope (Ex 19–Lev 27) does not alter the fact that the Law is narratively framed and inset as a constituent part of a larger story. The Pentateuch, in other words, is not a legal document per se, but a story in large part about such a document and its one-time enactment. Leviticus, for example, is not commanding the reader to offer the stipulated sacrifices any more, say, than Genesis is commanding the reader to build an ark to sustain a coming deluge. The addressee within the event-world (Noah, the children of Israel) and the implied reader of the narrative are not the same. In this differentiation lies the warrant for distinguishing OT laws as regulatory covenant stipulations addressed to the Sinai community and the OT Torah as revelatory instruction about those laws intended for readers in any age. This crucial distinction goes a long way toward explaining the NT perspective on the Law and its relevance to the Christian. It helps to explain, for example, how Jesus and the NT can supersede certain OT laws while upholding the OT Law (the Torah of God) as eternally binding and as relevant to Christians as anything that Paul writes in his letters to the Church.

2.6. The Sinai narratives (Ex 19–Lev 27) themselves reflect a triadic structure in which three provisions for blessing are delineated: (a) the enacting of YHWH’s covenant, which defines Israel’s vocation (Ex 19:24; esp. 19:3-6); (b) the erecting of YHWH’s Tabernacle, which locates Israel’s sanctuary (Ex 25-40); and (c) the exacting of YHWH’s worship, which provides the means for maintaining Israel’s holiness (Lev 1-27). Central to this schema and therefore lying at the precise structural heart of the Pentateuch is the highlighting of YHWH’s dwelling among a covenant people set apart from the nations to be holy. This analysis suggests, in other words, that Exodus 25-40 provides the deeply embedded literary-thematic center of the Pentateuch. The upshot of this is that when the details are examined, the Tabernacle is depicted as a return to the Garden of Eden and YHWH’s indwelling presence as the location and essence of Creation’s blessing or, in other words, as both the means to and the meaning of God’s blessing plan—a veritable New Creation! The heart of the Pentateuch, in other words, fixes on YHWH’s sanctuary (miqdâš) as the place of YHWH’s residence (miškân) and relationship (‘ôhel mö‘âd, “tent of appointment/meeting”) with a called-out people of blessing (cf. Exod 25:8-9; 40:34-38). The messianic and eschatological implications of such a reading are apparent. With the Tabernacle, Moses the mediator’s multiplied trips up and down the mountain come to a halt, and YHWH’s “coming down” to dwell marks a descent that will climax in a distant day (cf. Jn 1:14; Rev 21:1-3).7

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6 Many factors confirm this conclusion, among them: the volume and conspicuous detail devoted to the Tabernacle instruction and construction accounts (see table above); the function of the apparently intrusive golden calf story (see below); the conscious echoing of Gen 1-2 in Exod 25-40, depicting the Tabernacle as a return to the Garden of Eden and YHWH’s indwelling presence as the location and essence of Creation’s blessing or, in other words, as both the means to and the meaning of God’s blessing plan—a veritable New Creation! (see table below); and the explicating of the rescue from Egypt as having its goal in the Tabernacle residence of YHWH with a holy people (e.g., Exod 29:44-46).

2.7. This triadic pattern persists into the very heart of the Pentateuch, where another unmistakable threefold development emerges around Tabernacle instruction (Exod 25-31), Tabernacle destruction (32-34), and Tabernacle construction (35-40), corresponding to Creation, Fall, and re-Creation in Genesis 1-11. We must linger here a little longer.

As is well known and obvious to any reader, Exodus 32-34 appears on the surface to interrupt an otherwise seamless narrative, wherein the detailed instructions for the Tabernacle and its furnishings (chs. 25-31), concluding with regulations on Sabbath observance (31:12-17), and the construction report according to those instructions (chs. 35-40), commencing with Sabbath regulations (35:1-3), are separated by chapters 32-34. The otherwise continuous narrative about the Tabernacle breaks off in the middle, suspended by a story about an incident which nearly proved fatal to the nation. In fact, the intrusion is only apparent. On closer reading, Sabbath regulations are but the penultimate (next to last) concern of the instruction narrative, anchoring, as we have noted, the analogy between Creation and Tabernacle. What actually concludes the instruction narrative, however, is this important detail: “And [YHWH] gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the covenant, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (31:18). That notice appended to the Tabernacle instructions returns our attention to ch. 24 (note v. 12) and to the scene at the foot of Mt. Sinai which Moses had left behind when he ascended into the mountaintop glory of the LORD (vv. 13-18). But it does much more than return us to the scene at the foot of the mountain in preparation for the events of chs. 32-34. By means of enveloping the Tabernacle instructions with references to the divinely inscribed tablets of stone containing the covenant commands (24:12; 31:18), the narrator has drawn an unmistakable association between the two. Tablets and the Tabernacle go hand in hand. No tablets, no Tabernacle; no Tabernacle, no keeping of the tablets—in either sense of keeping, spiritually or physically (cf., 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut 10:1-5!).

Then comes the story of the golden calf and Moses’ symbolic shattering of the inscribed tablets (32:15-19). In the narrative strategy this detail highlights a crucial point: “The real crisis, for which the story of the golden calf is only the cause, consists of the destruction of the tablets that were given by Yahweh in conjunction with his instruction for the sanctuary.” The message of the golden calf story is completely missed when the accent falls, as it frequently does in popular preaching, on “hard lessons in leadership”—lessons about impatience, peer pressure, and bad judgment. This is not principally a story about Aaron’s folly and lapse, nor is its purpose fulfilled in a kind of entertaining or convicting shock-value attached to “Israel’s paradigmatic apostasy,” “whose significance is somewhat akin to adultery on one’s wedding night.” Rather, Exodus 32-34 interrupts the Tabernacle instruction and construction narrative with a story about an incident that threatens Tabernacle destruction (represented symbolically in Moses’ smashing of the tablets at the foot of the mountain). This is a story, in other words, about the seriousness of misunderstanding who YHWH is and worshiping a misrepresentation (cf. Exod 20:4-6)—whether manufactured in people’s heads or by their hands makes no difference—and so threatening the indwelling presence (Tabernacle) of the Lord.

Reading through the golden calf narrative, the real questions that force their way upon the reader are these: Will there still be a Tabernacle for YHWH’s dwelling, and will YHWH actually take up residence among such a people? If so, by what means, on what grounds, at what cost, through what priestly mediation? The remainder of Exodus and Leviticus next will answer these questions. And as for Aaron, yes, he and his sons will after all serve as priests just as God had previously determined (Exod 28-29), but they will do so only on the merits of amazing atoning grace which they obviously need as much as anyone (Lev 1-7; 8-10). It will be grace after all, mediated through blood sacrifice, that equips them—

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any of us—for ministry.\textsuperscript{10} YHWH’s plan will be accomplished through sinners; but people who are by nature disobedient and rebellious need more than laws. They need YHWH’s faithful mediator, indwelling presence, forgiving grace, and revelatory word—all Tabernacle themes, all prominently displayed in Exodus 32–34, and all awaiting a still grander fulfillment beyond the border of the Pentateuch’s final page, in a future Moses figure.

2.8. Leviticus constitutes the third and final panel of the Sinai narratives. Even with the Tabernacle sanctuary in Israel’s midst and the distance between YHWH’s and the people’s locations thereby removed (cf. Exod 19-20), Leviticus is meant to be read as part of the Sinai pericope, subject to the limitations of that earth-bound paradigm (cf. 7:37-38, 25:1; 26:46, 27:34). The Leviticus portion of the Pentateuchal narrative, in other words, depicts a system and practice of worship appropriate to the Sinai model whereby both priests and people are instructed on how they might conduct themselves in a manner befitting a community centered in the Tabernacle and so ensure the blessing of YHWH’s indwelling presence. Leviticus effectively brings to a close, then, the Sinai narratives which began back at Exodus 19:1, in which, as we have noted, three provisions for the blessing plan are delineated: a vocation-defining covenant (Exod 19-24) fulfilled in a God-indwelling sanctuary (Exod 25-40) preserved by a holiness-maintaining worship (Lev 1-27). In this connection it becomes apparent that the Tabernacle exists less in the interest of worship than worship in the service of the Tabernacle, providing a means whereby God’s people could abide in God’s presence (cf. Exod 40:34-38). It is for this reason that Tabernacle concerns remain central in the post-Sinai narratives (Num 1-36), where the essential Pentateuchal vision of YHWH’s dwelling in the midst of a people encamped around the sanctuary continues.

2.9. At least some of the issues which make Numbers notoriously defiant to structural analysis (see the introductions and commentaries) evaporate when the narrative in its entirety is read from the perspective of a post-Sinai prospect—the aftermath of Sinai following on the heels of a deeply ingrained future orientation established in the pre-Sinai narrative promises. Numbers takes up the story line: Will YHWH’s elected and delivered people—vocation enacted, sanctuary erected, worship exacted—enter the fullness of their heritage in Covenant and so discharge their raison d’être in Creation? In this light, the framework of the two census reports enables the spotlight to fall upon the overarching issues—the effects of disobedient unbelief (first generation, Num 1-25) and the prospects of obedient faith (second generation, Num 26-36)—thereby setting before the Pentateuchal reader a twofold paradigm which compels a decision between faith-obedience-blessing and unbelief-rebellion-forfeiture of blessing. Moreover, the dominant focus of Numbers on the nation’s organization around the Tabernacle and its concerns (esp. chs. 1-10) continues the conviction of the earlier narratives on the heart of the matter: Israel’s place and participation in God’s blessing plan is to be fulfilled in a campaign mobilized around the sanctuary, with YHWH front and center.

2.10. Deuteronomy adds an interpretive retrospect and prospect to the Pentateuch, a commentary of sorts which lays also a foundation to what follows. Following a short introduction (Deut 1:1-5), which details the time and place of Moses’ farewell messages and clarifies their purpose (“Moses undertook to expound this Torah,” v. 5), Deuteronomy consists in three major blocks of material: a retrospective survey of key narrative developments in Exodus-Numbers (Deut 1:6–3:29); an interpretive application of various tôrôt (“laws, instructions”) for the new generation (Deut 4:1–28:68); and a prospective orientation

\textsuperscript{10} The connections between Exodus 28-29; 32-34; and Leviticus 8-10 make this last point abundantly clear, not least the fact that “calf” (בָּוִי) occurs 11x in the Pentateuch—6x in Exod 32 and elsewhere only in Lev 9:2, 3, 8 and Deut 9:16, 21, all of which latter (Lev and Deut) associate priestly atonement and sanctification with the earlier incident.
to things future—the vision of “new covenant” blessings following a period of apostasy and exile (29:1–34:12).\(^{11}\)

By engaging the Pentateuchal reader to focus on the message of the Pentateuch as something that is meant to be heard and lived and awaited, Deuteronomy provides for the whole a kind of ending that transitions to the unfolding story in the following books. These observations confirm earlier suspicions that the Pentateuch is structured along theological-thematic lines that point beyond its own shores to the fulfillment of a yet unrealized blessing plan that will include, among other things, a new heart (Deut 30:1-20), a new creation (33:26-29), and the distant anticipation of a new prophet like Moses (34:5-12). In this way, Deuteronomy brings an ending to the Pentateuch that is decidedly open-ended. Moreover, in Deuteronomy the ending wraps around to the beginning, as multiplied verbal and thematic links forge an inclusio or bracket around the whole (e.g., Gen 1:2//Deut 32:10-11; Gen 1:26-27//Deut 4:32; Gen 2:15-17//Deut 30:15-20; Paradise Lost//Promised Land anticipated; et al.), which becomes, then, the canonical segue to what follows. It will be for the following books to sharpen the Pentateuchal vision of God’s universal blessing plan by projecting it on an eschatological screen that awaits apostolic interpretation.

3. A CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Read as a single composition, the Torah/Pentateuch introduces an unmistakable biblical story about God’s universal blessing plan centered in a coming Messiah. The entirety of Scripture agrees with this reading, advancing the story toward its climactic finish.

The Historical\(^ {12}\) and Prophetic\(^ {13}\) books build on the message and vision of the Pentateuch by paving the way to David and to his later Son-King who will sit on God’s throne forever as the fulfillment of the Pentateuchal promises and conditions of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. In a predominantly prose narrative style, the Historical books recount the story that leads to and from David, ultimately showing how, as a consequence of their rebellion, Israel forfeited the promised blessing, incurred the judgment of God, and was exiled from the land. In a predominantly poetic oracular style, the Prophetic books retrace much of the same ground, showing how God’s inviolable promise would ultimately succeed through his Davidic Son-King yet to come by way of a remnant of restored Israel, and through a New Covenant whose provisions of the Holy Spirit would supersede the Old Covenant and thereby bring to fulfillment God’s purposes in the awaited Messiah. In his redemption and righteous rule, embodying God’s ideals for Israel, God’s blessing plan for Israel, the nations, and all Creation would come to fulfillment.

\(^{11}\)These divisions bear more than a superficial correspondence to the principal concerns of the pre-Sinai, Sinai, and post-Sinai narratives: a people of blessing elected and preserved (so 1:6–3:29; cf. Gen 12–Exod 18, with new threats and glimmers of hope in Num 1-25), provisions for blessing (so 4:1–28:68; cf. Exod 19–Lev 27), and the prospect of blessing following disaster (so 29:1–34:12; cf. Num 1-36).

\(^{12}\)In Greek and English Bibles these include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and 1-2 Maccabees. Hebrew canonical tradition regards Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings as the Former Prophets.

\(^{13}\)In Greek and English Bibles these include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the twelve Minor Prophets (Hosea-Malachi). Hebrew canonical tradition designates Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings as the Former Prophets, and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (as one book) as the Latter Prophets.
The books of *Psalms and Wisdom* build on the Pentateuch, fleshing out its vision in a variety of ways, illustrating and illuminating some of the aspects of life lived in anticipation of a hope and a future for God’s people mediated through the awaited Davidic descendant. These books, like all the others, point toward the Messiah, and as they guide God’s covenant people on the way of life and liturgy appropriate to his coming.

The *New Testament* confirms that the Pentateuch and “all the [Old Testament] Scriptures” concern Jesus (Lk 24:27, 44-45). According to Jesus himself, “[Moses] wrote of me” (Jn 5:46). Paul tried to convince his Roman audience about Jesus “both from the law of Moses and from the prophets” (Acts 28:23). For him, “Christ is the telos [“end, goal”] of the Law” (Rom 10:4), and “the law was our custodian until Christ came” (Gal 3:24). According to a famous story in Luke 16, a reading of the Pentateuch and the Prophets has even more persuasive power than does the miracle of someone’s rising from the dead! (v. 31).

In short, to know the full story of Jesus we must “show up at the theater” on time, not well into the movie. Those who really want to know the Jesus of Scripture and what it means to be the people of God now brought near through the promised Son will begin where God does—*bere’shit*, “In the beginning.”

V. J. Steiner  
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*In Greek and English Bibles these include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach, and they precede the Prophets. Hebrew canonical tradition locates these books (excluding Wisdom and Sirach, but including Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles) in a final division (the *Ketubim* or Writings) after the Prophets.*