

Title: Assignment 3 – Essay (3000 words)

Write an essay of 3000 words on ONE of the following topics:

- a. How does the Pentateuch (Torah) form the foundation of the Old Testament? How does it relate to the New Testament?
- b. Discuss the various covenants in the Old Testament. How do they relate to each other and to the New Testament?

Course: Introduction to the Old Testament

Lecturer: Dr Siew Woh

Student: Scott Thong Yu Yuen

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

a. How does the Pentateuch (Torah) form the foundation of the Old Testament? How does it relate to the New Testament?

Introduction:

When one opens a copy of the Bible, the first books of canon they will read in subsequent order are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. And this is naturally and thematically fitting, for tradition holds that these were the first five books of the Old Testament penned – hence the namer Pentateuch, meaning ‘five books’. As tradition also holds that the hand which penned them belongs to Moses (at least for the most part, since he is supposed to be dead in Deuteronomy 34:5-12), they are also called the Books of Moses.

Chronologically too, it makes sense to place them at the beginning – for they cover the earliest time periods spanning the very formation of the universe, to human pre-history, to the era of the forefathers of the Jewish people, to the founding and earliest years of the Israelite nation.

But perhaps these five books are also placed at the start of the Jewish Bible because of the foundational role they play for every other book of the Old Testament that proceeds sequentially after. Not only that, but they even form the foundation of the New Testament penned more than millennia later!

Torah in the Old Testament: The Foundation of the House of Israel

Consider who the Hebrews are – genetic descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, as narrated in Genesis chapters 12 to 50. Or trace the origin of the national identity of the Israelites – to the Exodus, when they were birthed as an independent people who pledged loyalty to YHWH as their sole sovereign and god.¹ Examine the religious rites, legal codes and daily lives of

¹ L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (MN/USA: Fortress Press, 2020), Perlego Edition, Chapter Three.

the Jewish people – all listed out in exacting detail in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. For this reason the Books of Moses are also called the Torah, which means ‘instruction’².

Moving out of the Pentateuch into the rest of the Old Testament, we feel the impact of by the foundation stones in every book following. The Book of Joshua follows Moses’ appointed successor as he leads the Israelites to claim the land promised to Abraham. Judges laments the repeated failings of the people once in the land, beginning with the Angel of YHWH chiding them for not heeding the warnings given in Exodus 23:23-33 & 34:11-16. Ruth invokes the kinsmen redeemer law of Deuteronomy 25:5-10 as well as calling back to the deception of Judah by Tamar³ in Genesis 38.

The two books each of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles detail the period of monarchic rule by the Israelites – again ignoring the many Torah warnings against idolatry and polytheism, thereby bringing destruction upon themselves and giving the land its Sabbath rest from their evil (2 Chronicles 36:21 in reference to Leviticus 26:34-35). Ezra and Nehemiah follow the returned exiles of Judah and their struggle to avoid breaking the Laws of Moses all over again. Esther tells the story of an existential threat to the remnants of Abraham’s lineage, with the antagonist being a descendant of Agag (Esther 3:1) who was an Amalekite (1 Samuel 15:7-8), enemies of Israel from the start (Exodus 17:8). The book of Job is reminiscent of the language and setting of the Patriarchs in Genesis⁴, perhaps intentionally⁵ on the part of the composer.

The remainder of the Old Testament consists of prophetic messages and flowing poetry – in Hebrew called Nevi’im (prophets) and Ketuvim (writings). It is for this reason that the Jewish Bible as a whole is sometimes referred to as the Tanakh, taking the first syllables from Torah, Nevi’im and Ketuvim⁶. The latter compilations contain phrases, language and reflections upon the people, events and promises from the Torah.

² Holman Bible Editorial, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary* (TN/USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2011), Perlego Edition, Pentateuch.

³ James Bejon, “Ruth, Boaz, & the Redemption of the Past”, *Academia*: (accessed 17-Jul-2022): https://www.academia.edu/39775654/Tweets-turned-Notes_on_Ruth

⁴ Michael L. Brown, *Job: The Faith to Challenge God--A New Translation and Commentary* (MA/USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2019), 13.

⁵ Ryan M. Armstrong, “How Job Used Genesis @Bible and Culture with Dr. Armstrong”, *What Your Pastor Didn’t Tell You* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s127iwJQGOk>

⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Tanakh”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tanakh>

The post-exilic Jews had a similar understanding – heeding the chidings of the prophets, they attributed the destruction of the Temple and the exile to YHWH’s righteous judgment of their centuries of idolatry, disloyalty and disregard for YHWH’s Torah. Hence the returned Jews had a renewed emphasis on “fierce monotheism”⁷ and Torah observance in order to “win back God’s favour by adherence to the rules of his covenant”⁸.

However, one item of particular interest is that the later books often reflect on the Exodus and Israel’s failings as YHWH’s servant (Isaiah 42:18-25) – as well as foretell a future, truer Servant to lead a new Exodus (Isaiah 40:1-5, Jeremiah 16:14-15, Ezekiel 11:16-21, Malachi 3:1).

Could this really be the case? Would the Torah not only be the foundation that came before the rest of the Old Testament, but also somehow the fulfilment that comes after the prophecies uttered in the rest of the Scriptures? Torah as the foundational cornerstone, yes – but one day future, also as the capstone that rests atop the mighty arch of the Tanakh?

Torah in the New Testament: Christ as the Fulfilment of Torah

It is undeniable that Jesus operated upon the Books of Moses, surrounded by a culture steeped in Torah. He regularly cited the Law of Moses when making a theological point (Matthew 5:21-48, John 3:14 & 6:32); debating opponents on matters of legality and religious observance (Mark 7:10, Matthew 19:8, Luke 20:37); and even rebuffing the Devil (Luke 4:1-13, where all three of Jesus’ quotations of Scripture come from Torah – Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13 & 6:16).

Jesus proclaimed that the whole of the Old Testament pointed toward Himself (Luke 24:25-27 & 24:44-47; note the three categories of the Tanakh cited) – in particular, the words of Moses (John 5:39-47). He is the ‘prophet like Moses’ (Acts 4:22-23) whom the children of Israel had long been awaiting (John 1:45) since the time of the wilderness wandering (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

Jesus is not merely portrayed to *be like* Moses, however – over and over in the New Testaament, He is shown to *surpass* Moses. Just as Moses had once led the Israelites in an Exodus out

⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (MI/USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 36.

⁸ David Novak, “Judaism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism/The-Babylonian-Exile#ref35184>

of Egypt – from slavery to freedom – YHWH promised a future greater Exodus⁹ for all peoples – from death to everlasting life.

The New Testament plainly states that Jesus is the same YHWH who carried out the first Exodus (Corinthians 10:1-4 & 9, Jude 5 ESV). Hence, it really should come as no surprise that Jesus Christ as the incarnate YHWH would be the one to carry out the new Exodus. The life and ministry of Jesus indeed represents a greater Exodus. For example, Hosea 11:1-2 in its literary context clearly refers to the past history of Israel – YHWH saving them out of Pharaoh’s hand through the Exodus, but followed by their ungrateful response by worshiping Baal once establishing themselves in the Promised Land. Yet Matthew 2:13-15 cites this same passage from Hosea as prophecy – future to Hosea’s lifetime – and tells us that this greater fulfilment is found in the story of Jesus.

The Gospel accounts draw intentional parallels between the events in Jesus’ life and the Exodus narrative in the Torah.¹⁰ For example, after his birth Moses came under threat of death as commanded by the ruler of the land, but was saved from this danger (Exodus 1:22 – 2:10). Jesus experienced a similar threat after His own birth (Matthew 2:13-16). YHWH calls Israel His ‘firstborn’ (Exodus 4:22), and Jesus Himself is called ‘firstborn’ over all creation (Colossians 1:15). Just as Moses spent forty years in the wilderness before returning to Egypt to challenge Pharaoh (Acts 7:29-34), Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before starting His public ministry (Mark 1:12-13).

Immediately preceding the Exodus out of Egypt, YHWH instituted the Passover ritual whereby a lamb is killed and its blood saves the Israelites from death (Exodus 12:1-28). Jesus is called the Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) whose blood saves us (Ephesians 1:7) by taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Just as the Plagues on Egypt were a sign of YHWH defeating the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12)¹¹, Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection marked the final defeat of all spiritual powers and

⁹ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, Perlego Edition, Chapter Nine.

¹⁰ Anthony Rogers, “Dr. Dale Tuggy Vs Anthony Rogers: The Book of Mark Teaches Jesus is the One True God? EP 158”, *The Gospel Truth* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6vH3G0kf-c> [9:39 to 24:42]

¹¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 150.

principalities (1 Corinthians 2:8, Ephesians 1:19-23 & 4:8, Colossians 2:10 & 15, Hebrews 2:14, 1 Peter 3:18-22)¹².

Just as during the climax of the Exodus YHWH ‘rebuked’ the sea allowing His followers to cross over safely (Psalm 106:9), Jesus ‘rebuked’ the wind and waves for His followers to cross over safely (Mark 4:35-41). Whereas YHWH fed the Israelites with bread from heaven (Exodus 16:4 & 13-21), Jesus declares that He is the true bread from heaven sent by the Father (John 6:30-35).

Just as Moses climbed to the mountaintop where he entered God’s presence and returned with a shining face (Exodus 34:29-35), Jesus on the mountaintop shone with light (Matthew 17:1-5) – greater than Moses who attended Him, and of whom God commands “Listen to him!” (in an echo of Exodus 23:20-21¹³).

The list could go on and on, from the Israelites being ‘baptized’ in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2) to the Law, tabernacle and sacrifices being but a shadow of Christ’s final and completed work (Hebrews 8:4-5 & 9:22-24 & 10:1 & 10:12-14). None of these things would make any sense without the backdrop of Torah to compare against.

Jesus cast Himself as the very same God of Moses, YHWH who promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars – the same descendants who wanted to stone Jesus instead of receive Him as Abraham did! For in John 8:40, Jesus declares: *...but now you seek to kill me ... This is not what Abraham did.* As Anthony Rogers points out: “This can refer to no other occasion than Genesis 18 when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham to announce the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-33) and to announce the coming birth of a son (18:9-15). On that occasion, rather than try to kill him, Abraham received the Lord in all hospitality (18:1-8)”¹⁴ Michael Heiser concurs that Jesus identifies Himself as the same YHWH who visited Abraham, with respect to John 8:58: “Only Genesis 12 and 15 provide the coherent backdrop to this claim.”¹⁵

¹² Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 330.

¹³ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 142.

¹⁴ Rogers, “THE “HEAVENLY” & “EARTHLY” YAHWEH: A PROTO-TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 19:24 Part II,” in *Our God is Triune*, 93.

¹⁵ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 130.

The above incident is just one of many occasions where John makes reference to the Torah to draw comparisons to Jesus. For example, John starts his gospel account by echoing the words found **in the beginning** of the Torah:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:1-5

The parallels to God, creation and light from Genesis 1:1-4 are even clearer in the Aramaic language rendering that the Jewish commoner would have been familiar with. For in the Targums, it is through God's Memra – the Word – that all creation was accomplished:

In the beginning and in great wisdom, God created and finished the heavens and the earth.

... God saw that the light was good, and he separated (by word) between light and dark.

– Genesis 1:1,4 (Targum Neofiti)¹⁶

As Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin explains:

The conclusive evidence for the connection of the Targumic *Memra* and the *Logos* of John appears in the Palestinian Targumic poetic homily on the “Four Nights,” ... when the Lord was revealed above the world to create it. The world was unformed and void and darkness was spread over the surface of the deep; *and through his Memra there was light and illumination* [italics added], and he called it the first night. This text matches the first verses of John's Prologue, with its association of *Logos*, the Word, and light.”¹⁷

¹⁶ The Sefaria Library, “Targum Neofiti”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Neofiti.1.1?vhe=The_Vatican_Manuscript_of_the_Targum_Neofiti&lang=bi

¹⁷ Daniel Boyarin, “Logos, a Jewish Word: John's Prologue as Midrash,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (NY/USA: Oxford University Press, 2011), 546–549.

Making the case that Jesus is the one same YHWH of the Torah was crucial to the authors of the New Testament. After the debacle of the exile, the Jews were especially stringent in adherence to the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*. They would surely refuse to follow, obey or bow the knee to a mere human, or a created angel, or some other divinity besides the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses.

No Torah-observant Jew would risk the wrath of God (and the religious leaders) by pledging loyalty and worship to merely *the carpenter's son* (Matthew 13:55). Yet as Michael Heiser points out: "...it's amazing how first-century Jews could embrace Jesus as Yahweh and not feel as if they were betraying the God of Israel. In fact, these same Jews were willing to die instead of worshiping the gods of the Greeks and the Romans."¹⁸

Alister McGrath similarly notes: "Within the Jewish context in which the first Christians operated, it was God and God alone who was to be worshiped. Paul warned the Christians at Rome that there was a constant danger that humans would worship creatures, when they ought to be worshipping their creator (Romans 1:23). Yet the early Christian church worshipped Christ as God—a practise which is clearly reflected even in the New Testament."¹⁹

But if Jesus were indeed the very God of Israel, then not only is it permissible – it is *expected* and *demanding* that devout Jews loyal to YHWH would embrace the commands of Jesus. It was not unthinkable or a violation of the First Commandment to worship *the man Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 2:5) – because this man was also YHWH incarnate. "There's a reason why a Jew who loved God in the first century could be willing to be put to death rather than say 'Caesar is god' and then in the next breath say 'I'm going to pray to Jesus' and not feel at all like he violated monotheism."²⁰

The concept that the infinite, immaterial, incomprehensible Creator of the universe could take the limited form of a human was not a First Century invention of Jesus' followers, something wholly

¹⁸ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 134.

¹⁹ Alister McGrath, "Christian Theology: An Introduction," Oxford: Blackwell (1994): 280, quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (TN/USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 144-145.

²⁰ Michael S. Heiser, "The Jewish Trinity - Dr. Michael Heiser - A Walk Through The Old Testament Concerning The Trinity", *A Victorious Church* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS22MPVFngs> [3:30:53 to 3:31:13]

alien to the Jewish religion. Jewish scholar Benjamin Sommer states that “The only significant theological difference between Judaism and Christianity lies not in the trinity or in the incarnation”²¹ and that Judaism allowed the possibility of an embodied God up until the medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides (who spent about 75 chapters of his tome trying to explain away all evidence of such from within Judaism²²). As a major influence on modern Judaism, Maimonides himself was strongly influenced by the surrounding (strictly unitarian) Islamic thinkers²³. In fact, several modern Jewish scholars conclude that Ancient and Second Temple Judaism held the concept of a multipersonal, embodied God²⁴ – long before the establishment of Christianity, which is today synonymous with these doctrines.

The Torah – the Laws of Moses – formed the foundation of Jewish religion, legal guidelines and daily life. Yet no one under the Law could ever fully keep it (Acts 15:10, Romans 2:23 & 35, Galatians 3:10, James 2:10). Jesus arrived and proclaimed Himself to be the fulfilment of Torah (Matthew 5:17). In a particularly bold example, Jesus proclaimed that the Torah would outlast even heaven and earth (Matthew 24:35) – yet Jesus’ own words would never pass away (Luke 21:33)! That is to say, Jesus’s words will outlast even the Torah – which while penned by the hand of Moses, ultimately come from God Himself. And who else would have the right declare Torah surpassed, but its very utterer? The honoured and respected Moses was but an attendant *amanuensis* to Jesus Christ who is YHWH.

It is as the giver of the old covenant that Jesus has the right to establish a new covenant for His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13). The Law-giver provided the Torah that forms the foundation of the Old Testament – He is the mighty cornerstone (Psalm 118:22 cited in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:6; and Isaiah 28:16 cited in 1 Peter 2:6). The

²¹ Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 136.

²² Benjamin D. Sommer, “The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel”, *Sentinel Apologetics* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtSm-InTLoA> [4:38 to 9:15]

²³ Sommer, “The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtSm-InTLoA> [1:35:38 to 1:36:56]

²⁴ Scott Thong, “Modern Jewish Scholars on the Embodied, Multipersonal Old Testament God,” *THE SCOTTTCAST* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): <https://scottthong.wordpress.com/2020/05/29/modern-jewish-scholars-on-the-embodied-multipersonal-old-testament-god/>

Law-fulfiller declares that the Torah of Moses is fulfilled in Himself – He is also the glorious capstone (Matthew 21:44, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4).

Conclusion

It is clear from even a cursory examination of the contents of the Old Testament that they hinge upon the initial promises, warnings and workings of God found in the first five of its books. Without the Pentateuch, we are left reading the rest of the Old Testament faced by intractable mysteries such as who the Jewish people are; where they came from and how they came to live in the land called Israel; why they follow peculiar religious and legal precepts; and why their God was angered by their conduct to the point that He scattered them to the four winds. Without the Torah of God, there *is* no people of God.

Similarly, reading the New Testament without the backdrop of Torah leaves the serious student scratching their head in puzzlement. Why the constant appeals to this person called Moses, or what is this Temple and sacrificial system that Jesus Christ is supposed to replace? Why such oblique references to divinity instead of a blunt “Jesus is YHWH?” – if anyone even knows who YHWH is in the first place? In order for Jesus to be the fulfilment of Torah, there would need to *be* a Torah to fulfil.

Hence the Torah is fundamental to the rest of the entire Bible – it is truly the foundation on which the structure of God’s promises are erected.

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