

Preaching from the Pentateuch

Evangelical Library Lunchtime Lecture – Monday 21 October 2014

May we have a desire to handle the Word of God responsibly; to expound the truth in a manner that will glorify God.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Orthodox evangelical attitudes to Pentateuch are more acceptable today than previously. For many years, a belief that Moses was the author was ridiculed by academic critics. But now many are accepting that critical theories are breaking down. One helpful book is the second edition of “From Paradise to the Promised Land” by T. D. Alexander.

The Pentateuch is a coherent literary work. Here are five books that are linked together in such a way that while they may be viewed as separate entities, it is clear that they are dependent upon one another and also on the wider canon of Scripture.

The term “Pentateuch” has been used from at least the third century AD. The Jewish title is Torah – law, instruction. These books have been accepted as the five books of Moses from earliest times. Yet during the last 250 years or so Pentateuchal research has cast doubt on the authorship of the Pentateuch. Four methods have been used: source criticism, form criticism, historical criticism and literary criticism. From this developed the documentary hypothesis of Graff-Wellhausen and the concept of J, E, D and P as sources.

When I was a student at London Bible College in the early 1970’s much emphasis was placed on critical approaches to the Old Testament and especially the Pentateuch. The LBC correspondence course on Genesis took a theistic evolutionary view of creation. Bernard Ramm’s book “The Christian View of Science and Scripture” was considered essential reading by those who wanted to be thought “well educated”. But even then there were those of us who objected to his theistic evolutionary approach.

Denis Alexander wrote an article in the London School of Theology (formerly LBC) magazine a few years ago saying that no-one accepted young earth creation 50 years ago! Yet 50 years ago every preacher and Christian leader that I knew and respected who claimed to be evangelical accepted and taught young earth creation – not that they called it that – they were simply Bible-believing Christians!

When I did some post graduate research in the 1990’s there were many academics who claimed to be evangelical who still accepted critical views of the authorship and accuracy of the Pentateuch. Some of the books that I studied at that time included, “Introduction to the Pentateuch” by R. Norman Whybray and “The Pentateuch” by Terrence E. Fretheim that promoted the documentary hypothesis and source and form criticism. Another was “Handbook on the Pentateuch” by Victor P. Hamilton. This is more helpful, but Hamilton avoids dealing with the critical theories in any detail.

2. AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

There is still considerable debate about the authorship, date and origin of the Pentateuch. The Oxford Companion to the Bible, published in 1993 can still claim:

“Although the Pentateuch has in most centuries been known as ‘the five books of Moses,’ perhaps because he is the major human figure in the narrative, it

has long been recognised that he cannot have been the author, and that the Pentateuch is in fact anonymous.”¹

Therefore, we first need to discuss what is meant by the statement, “Moses wrote the Pentateuch.”

Firstly, we are not saying that Moses wrote or dictated every single word of the first five books of the Bible. Deuteronomy records Moses’ death and it is extremely unlikely that this was written before the event. However, the record of someone’s death in a work attributed to them is not without precedent. Many works today are published posthumously with a note added giving information of the death of the author. No-one seriously questions the correctness of attributing the whole work to the deceased author. Nor does this in any way remove the probability that there have been some added comments to various parts of the narrative, which in modern times might well be placed as ‘footnotes.’ For instance, Exodus 11:3 is such an explanatory ‘footnote.’ *Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.* Numbers 12:3 is another such comment: *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.* It is significant that in some translations this verse is placed in parenthesis – showing that the translators accepted that this was an explanatory comment in the text.

Secondly, we are not arguing that Moses received every word of the first five books of the Bible by dictation from God. That is to confuse the processes of revelation and inspiration. There is no difficulty in supposing that Moses could have used various sources for the composition of the book of Genesis, for instance. Some may have been oral sources, but equally, some may have been written sources. Writing was well developed by Moses’ time. Consideration of all the available evidence would not detract from the essential Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In fact, modern critical scholarship has even posited the possibility of envisioning large blocks of the Pentateuch having been written at one time, rather than the entwining of many documentary strands.²

The critics have made much of the fact that the Pentateuch itself never claims Mosaic authorship. But there are explicit references to Moses’ role in the writing of the history. For instance, Moses is expressly told to write the details of the battle of Rephidim in a book as a historical record for future generations. (Exodus 17:14.) In Exodus 24:7 we are referred to the Book of the Covenant which Moses is to read aloud to the people. In Exodus 34:27 the Lord expressly instructs Moses to “*write these words.*” They were the words of the renewed covenant. Number 33:2 tells us that Moses wrote down the starting points of each part of their journeys. What is more, in Deuteronomy 31:9 we find that Moses wrote “*this law and delivered it to the priests.*” In the context this reference applies at least to the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy and could quite easily refer to much more of the Pentateuch. These references are hard to ignore, unless we assume that they are deliberate lies, inserted into the text. If they are lies, then we can have no confidence in the veracity of *any* part of the Pentateuch.

Thirdly, the rest of the Old Testament bears witness to the authorship of the Pentateuch. The many references to “The Law” are often a reference to these first five books. Sometimes they are called simply “The Law,” but at others they are called “The Law of Moses.” There is no evidence in the Scriptures of any other collection of writings that are called “The Law.” The New Testament is also unanimous in its testimony to the Mosaic authorship of the

¹ “The Oxford Companion to the Bible.” Page 580.

² See last paragraph of comment on “Origins and Date” in “The Oxford Companion to the Bible.” Page 581.

Pentateuch. Our Lord refers to it when He said, "*Moses wrote of Me.*" (John 5:46) He opened up the Old Testament when He "*began from Moses... to expound in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself,*" to the two on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:27 and also verse 44.) Yet some would want to exclude the book of Genesis from these statements, arguing that our Lord must have simply meant the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Genesis, reminds us that

"Such a distinction would have occurred to none of the original readers of the Gospels."³

Fourthly, until about 1700 AD the authorship of the Pentateuch was never seriously questioned. It seems incredible that all these thousands of years after the events that they describe, when there is no real evidence to doubt the claims of the Bible, that the authorship of the Pentateuch should be called into question. Moses is undoubtedly one of the outstanding heroes of history. Even John Bright, who is not known for his conservative sympathies, has written: "*The events of Exodus and Sinai require a great personality behind them. And a faith as unique as Israel's demands a founder ... To deny that role to Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name!*"⁴

Moses had a training and background that would more than adequately prepare him for the task of authoring the Pentateuch. His education in Egypt would have involved learning to read and write hieroglyphic scripts, administration skills and leadership training. In fact there was probably no one else better prepared for this great work.

There is also much internal evidence that the Pentateuch does not date from the period of the exile or just after the exile, which is the favoured date of the critics. For instance, there are a number of Persian words found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah but none in the Pentateuch which is supposed to date from that period. Professor A. S. Yahuda has shown that the Pentateuch shows marks of Egyptian influence which would be consistent with Mosaic authorship.

Many archaeological discoveries in recent years have all combined to show that the Pentateuch is accurate in its account of history. The books carry such an accurate picture of the times that they purport to describe it is hard to maintain that they were written so far after the events. The Nuzi documents are especially helpful here as a number of treaty arrangements are closely paralleled with the Pentateuchal narratives. The story of Joseph is set in Egypt and even some of the words used are direct Hebrew equivalents of Egyptian words, for example, the term "chief butler" in Genesis 40.

The rituals and sacrifices described in Leviticus are also well attested in the Ancient Near East from the third millennium onwards.

In the light of these facts it is surprising that modern writers, such as Whybray, take so little note of them in their writings. Time and again he pours scorn on the Mosaic authorship and on the traditional date and origin of the Pentateuch. In discussing the opening chapters of Genesis he declares that

"...these chapters ... can obviously not be based on any record of what actually "occurred."⁵

³ D. Kidner. "Genesis." Tyndale O.T. Commentary. Page 15.

⁴ John Bright. A History of Israel. SCM Press. Page 116.

⁵ Whybray. Page 29.

Why not? It is not “obvious” at all! He calls them universal stories and legends. He talks about God being “nervous” about what He has done at the beginning and concerned about His supremacy over His creatures.⁶ By the time of the events of the Tower of Babel, the record now “balances – and corrects – chapter 1 with its insistence that what God created was “very good.” ” He calls this “a parable” and “a timeless narrative akin to a fairy story.”⁷ Mortality is not a punishment for human disobedience.⁸ He does not accept that the Pentateuch can be from the pre-exilic period and tells us that there is no reference to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob with the exception of Hosea 12 in the pre-exilic parts of the Old Testament.⁹ He has a strange theory which he posits on page 50 that the historian

“considered it part of his function to arrange, embellish and embroider the material to make it more attractive and exciting to the reader ... This would necessitate at least a degree of invention, which in modern terms would be called fiction.”

He proceeds to say that

“As is generally recognised, a large part of the narrative books of the Old Testament are literary fiction. This is true of the prologue and epilogue of the book of Job, the books of Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Daniel 1-6, and large parts of the books of Chronicles and probably of other narratives as well.”¹⁰

He further tells us that

“The story of Job is of particular relevance to our present enquiry because Job, who is *universally recognised* to be a wholly fictitious character, is portrayed as a patriarch similar to the Abraham of Genesis.” (My italics.)¹¹

In one stroke, he demolishes any confidence we might have in much of the Old Testament. The seriousness of this charge is far reaching, because the critics who adopt such views seem incapable of realising that if their theories are true, then we can have no clear knowledge from any early historical documents from any source. All are fiction and we can never have any hope of knowing the truth of the times to which they refer. Is this why many today have lost confidence in preaching powerfully from the Pentateuch?

Whybray is convinced that the man Moses is the creation of a late literary construction. He says that “on any reckoning” the Pentateuch is a document written many centuries after the time of the events that it describes.¹² But he fails to give any real evidence for such a statement and never attempts to answer the archaeological evidence that exists of writing and alphabets from long before the time of Moses.

He further tells us that the evidence for the book of Deuteronomy being a history from the time of Josiah is “indisputable.”¹³ We are told that “It is neither the work of a single person nor of a single period.”¹⁴ He speaks of the Deuteronomist’s “Mosaic fiction.”¹⁵ He assumes that the Israelites must have been influenced by the surrounding nations as their understanding of God developed, because it is only from them that they could have developed the notion of a holy nation. It seems to me far more likely, given the appalling

⁶ Whybray. Page 33.

⁷ Whybray. Page 35.

⁸ Whybray. Page 38.

⁹ Whybray. Page 49.

¹⁰ Whybray. Page 50.

¹¹ Whybray. Page 50.

¹² Whybray. Page 68.

¹³ Whybray. Page 85.

¹⁴ Whybray. Page 86.

¹⁵ Whybray. Page 93.

immorality of the surrounding nations, that the Children of Israel influenced them. Holiness is not natural to pagan nations. It seems incredible to suggest that the Canaanites could have taught the people of God anything about holiness.¹⁶

It is true that historians will write about those things that are of significance for them. They are essentially selective – they must be. But that is one of the advantages of the history of the Old Testament. Through its pages we have an insight into the daily life of the nomadic Abraham. We find out about the Children of Israel, who while they were wandering in the wilderness would not have left great archaeological remains. Footprints in the sand and desert encampments will have been obliterated long ago. But that does not mean that the records are any the less reliable. The Old Testament gives us insights that no other ancient narrative does. But at every point, its authenticity has not been impugned by archaeological or textual evidence.

Time and again, while reading Whybray's book I found myself asking the question about the many problems he finds with the documentary hypothesis and with the critical approach. Why not accept that the Bible could be right? If the Bible came first – and the other stories are corruptions of it – then many of the problems are solved. If you accept that Moses wrote the bulk of the Pentateuch (he was well instructed and educated in all the ways of the Egyptians – so perfectly able to do so), then again, most of the critics' problems melt away.

It is time to assert the accuracy and dependability of the biblical records and to be unashamed of the archaeological and textual evidence which all stack up in favour of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

3. THE THEME OF THE PENTATEUCH

David J A Clines entitles his monograph, "The Theme of the Pentateuch". He argues that the Pentateuch is to be regarded as a unity, not in its origin but in its final shape. But then he proceeds to follow much of the critical research in his development. He begins by arguing against two extremes of Pentateuchal study.

(i) Atomism. Our accumulation of knowledge about the Pentateuch must proceed scientifically, whereby a case is built up from many small details – the smaller the better! He gives some examples such as a ten page article on a word that appears only once in the Hebrew Bible.

"Somewhere someone is interested in writing, and perhaps also reading, articles on "Apocryphal Cats" or "Seating arrangements at Divine Banquets in the Ancient Near East". These are extreme examples, to be sure, of journal literature ..."¹⁷

(ii) Geneticism. This he calls the study of the origins and development of the extant Biblical text, quoting both Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth – both hardly representative of evangelical scholarship!

He then says that he "*cannot be bothered to be sidetracked by delicate questions of what precisely is its final form...*"¹⁸ but then proceeds to develop what he means by its final form. A few quotes will put his argument in context:

"It is legitimate to treat the Pentateuch as a single literary work." (Page 11)
"...in the case of a work like the Pentateuch, which is self-evidently a

¹⁶ Whybray. See page 97 and also his extended discussion in chapter 7.

¹⁷ Clines, page 7

¹⁸ Clines, page 10

composition from other works, the possibility exists that it has no unity and no unified theme.” (Page 20). “So there is a progression, both temporal and local, throughout the Pentateuch, a progression ... that is prepared and anticipated and that is purposive and not directionless.” (Page 26)

In chapter seven he develops a number of approaches to the theme of Genesis 1-11 as a preparatory theme, developing the ideas of Claus Westermann and Gerhard von Rad. One of the suggested themes is that of “Sin – Speech – Mitigation – Punishment”.

But I want to suggest that a development and refinement of this theme gives us a key to the Pentateuch in the revelation and purposes of God.

Let me give you his structure as demonstrated from Genesis 1-11:

	1. Sin	2. Speech	3. Mitigation	4. Punishment
1. Fall	3:6	3:14-16	3:21	3:22-24
2. Cain	4:8	4:11-12	4:15	4:16
3. Sons of God	6:2	6:3	? 6:8, 18ff	? 7:6-24
4. Flood	6:5, 11f	6:7, 13-21	6:8, 18ff	7:6-24
5. Babel	11:4	11:6f	? 10:1-32	11:8

God’s acts of judgement always follow man’s sin. But they are often preceded by mitigation (grace) – God’s forgiving will to save.

He then speaks about the “Spread of Sin: Spread of Grace” as a theme. But there is something more significant going on in these early chapters of Genesis.

God speaks: God acts. In all that happens God is revealing Himself – this is His Word. So, rather than Sin – Speech – Mitigation – Punishment, I suggest the following: Speech – Action – Grace – Judgement. This fills out what is happening in the early chapters of Genesis and reveal to us how God deals with His creation and mankind in particular. This pattern is seen even before the Fall in God’s action in creating the world. Grace is in evidence before the Fall. Grace was not an afterthought, but is part of God’s very nature.

	1. Speech	2. Action	3. Grace	4. Judgement
1. Creation	1:3	1:3b-4	1:3-25	1:25b (good)
2. Creation of Man	1:26	1:27	1:28	1:31 (very good)
3. Fall	2:16-17	3:6-7	3:14-15	3:16-24 (punishment)
4. Cain	4:6-7	4:8-9	4:15	4:11-12, 16
5. ... (and so on)				

Not every aspect is there in every case, but a pattern develops. God is showing grace right from the start. God is the God who speaks and acts. God is dealing with men from the very start of creation. Progressive revelation begins – not with Genesis 3:15 – but with the very first verse of the Bible.

God prepares a world, a universe, for mankind; mankind made in His image. God deals covenantally with mankind. God’s judgements are not always punishments. He judges the world in righteousness. He is the just judge.

Let me repeat what I have said in another context (with regard to Biblical Theology).

God cares for His good world that He has created. God comes and speaks to mankind and reveals Himself to them. God is already revealing the framework of His dealings with mankind. He gives us a view of what things are to be like under His sovereign and benign and loving rule. God is no tyrant. He is already revealed as a God of grace even before Adam has need of that grace. As Gerard Van Groningen has said in his lectures,

“Without the pre-redemptive revelation, there would be no framework in which redemptive revelation could come and be meaningful. Redemptive revelation is a restoring revelation. It tells us what we are restored to and in this sense, the pre-redemptive revelation gives us God’s original order, intent and plan for humanity and the cosmos.”¹⁹

Because we are part of creation we have an undeniable testimony built into our very beings to the reality of the Creator God. Sinful man may suppress that – as Romans 1 describes – but it is there and cannot be denied.

Psalm 19; Psalm 33:6ff, Isaiah 40 are a few OT references that speak of the doctrine of Creation. John’s gospel goes back to the beginning. Paul often in his preaching goes back to creation – see Acts 14:15; Acts 17:24; Romans 1:20. Hebrews 1 refers to the creation.

Genesis 1 is full of specific acts of God in the creation; not simply in the three uses of the Hebrew word *bara* (create). God’s creative activity is all over Genesis chapter 1!

Verse 1 – God was there at the beginning. There was no beginning for God. The first time God reveals Himself to us in verse 1 He reveals that He creates. He brought everything into being.

God spoke – verse 3. He is at work. He speaks and He acts. He speaks and it is done. But much more than that: God does not simply speak and create. He orders things as He wants them to be. He ‘interferes’ with what takes place. As specific action He separates light from darkness – verse 4. He speaks again in verse 6 and then again with specific care He orders and controls what happens – verse 7. Note the verbs used (verbs are ‘doing’ words): verse 4 – saw, divided; verse 5 – called; verse 7 – made; verse 9 – gathered; verse 10 – called, saw. God, in seeing, superintended the creation according to His perfect plan.

Verse 11 – bring forth; verse 12 – yield. Verse 16 – made; verse 17 – set; verse 21 – created; verse 24 – bring forth; verse 25 – made. Verse 27 – created man, male and female.

But God has not finished yet. He gives to the man and the woman strict instructions. They are to fill the earth, to subdue it – to rule and have dominion. They are left in charge.

Then God rests 2:2 (notice the verbs again). He blesses and sanctifies the day of rest 2:3. It is done (another verb). It is complete. It is perfect. And it is good, very good – 1:31.

Here is God at work at first. God, the triune God, not simply from 1:26, “Let us...” but from the context and the rest of Scripture. God, the great God (Elohim) creates. But this is more than the Father. Genesis 1:2 speaks of the Spirit at work. Scripture makes it clear that God the Son was there as well. For example: Proverbs 8:27ff and Hebrews 1 – just to quote a couple of references.

Here is God’s wisdom in the perfection and accuracy of what He creates. But here is God’s holiness in the purity and goodness of what He creates. The Scriptures also reveal that God loves the world – the cosmos – the created world. In John 3:16 the word ‘*cosmos*’ is used – the whole created universe. He made the world, He loves the world, He redeems the world.

¹⁹ Covenant College Bib Theol Lecture 3 page 1.

So, even before the Fall, we learn some fundamental things about God and His dealings with men and women.

Here, in embryo, a pattern, a plan, is revealed. Like the acorn which will grow into the oak.

What is God doing? He is creating a world. He is creating a people for Himself. He is giving them a land – a special place to live. He is giving them His law for them to obey. He is commanding them to rule – the work of the king. And He is putting them on probation.

Here in the Garden of Eden God is establishing the way in which He deals with mankind. God is consistent. God is precise. God does not change. Already we are being introduced to these great gospel truths – all utterly Scriptural, Biblical, from the very beginning.

Here is the type, the pattern, that will be evidenced in God's dealings with His own people throughout the ages. God creates a people – Adam and Eve. He gives them a land – the Garden of Eden. He gives them laws – all except one are positive – see 1:28. Only one is prohibitive – see 2:17. They are told to rule over creation: they are set as kings to keep the kingdom and rule over the creatures. But they rebel against the Law of God and disobey Him. They are banished from their kingdom and exiled from God. Yet in their punishment there is the origin of hope – the Seed of the woman who will triumph and restore the people and the kingdom.

God deals with mankind in the same way after the Fall. He gives to His own people a land, a Kingdom. He makes a Covenant with them – a more detailed and more comprehensive covenant than the original command to Adam and Eve. But He also supplies the way back to Himself through a Redeemer, a Mediator between God and man.

Here, in Genesis 3:15-21 are the signs of redemption and salvation. Here is the outline of forgiveness and restoration. Here is already the foreshadowing of the turning of the curse into blessing. Notice 3:17 – the ground is cursed, the serpent is cursed, but Adam and Eve are not cursed.

God continues to care for His good world. He continues to provide for mankind. He continues to speak to mankind and now adds to His providential works the way of deliverance and restoration. In the perfect world that God created at the first there is the promise and assurance that the Fall of mankind can never be the final word; the end of God's plan for mankind.

Adam and Eve, created in the image of God, and with all the blessings of their unfallen state, could not keep the Law of God. One single command of prohibition given in the garden paradise of Eden was enough to show mankind's inability to obey the God who created him. What hope is there for anyone after the Fall? But God has already shown that He is utterly trustworthy and reliable. He keeps His Word and He does what is good. He demonstrates His love for His world and for His highest created being – Man.

Only an omnipotent God who has already revealed the perfection of His grace can give any hope to mankind. Here is a covenant-keeping God. Here is a God who makes provision as soon as man fell. Here is a God who is utterly consistent and reliable. Here is a salvation which can and does restore mankind to the glory which was lost at the first. But the wonder of the Bible's revelation is that God will restore mankind to a greater and more wonderful state than even that which He created in the beginning.

The end of the story is more wonderful than the start.

4. THE MESSAGE OF THE PENTATEUCH

As we preach from the Pentateuch these matters should be at the forefront of our thinking:

(i) Revelation and Salvation

In the Pentateuch, as in all the Scriptures, God is revealing His character. He is demonstrating that He is the holy God. This separates Him from mankind – especially since the Fall. But God has not left us in our fallen state. Even at the Fall He brings a message of Salvation – Genesis 3:15. His holiness separates us from Him, but His gracious love draws us back to Himself.

Also, in the Pentateuch God reveals His methods of the government of the world: the natural world and the spiritual world. He reigns over all, over nations, peoples, lands, and individuals. No-one can escape from His all-seeing eye and all are answerable to Him at the last.

Our sin has separated us from God. But God has also revealed His redemptive purposes. Grace is fundamental to the creation itself. As God makes man (male and female) in His image so he demonstrates His grace. As He comes to Adam and Eve in the Garden after the Fall, He demonstrates His grace. As He calls Abraham from idolatry and paganism out of Ur of the Chaldees He demonstrates His grace. And as He makes a covenant with Abraham to bless all the families of the world through his Seed, God demonstrates His grace. In the deliverance of His rebellious people from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his armies, God demonstrates His grace.

All of these events point forward to the greatest act of God's grace for all time – the sending of His Son, the promised Seed, to be the Saviour of the World.

(ii) Prophecy and the Pentateuch

Abraham is the first person in the Bible to be called a prophet (Genesis 20:7). But Moses is the prophet who is singled out to be the representative prophet of the Old Testament. He is the standard by which all prophets are to be judged. But he points forward to the Great Prophet. Yet both Abraham and Moses acted as priest as well. The prophet called the Israelites to repent; the priest called them to believe. The Levitical sacrifices encompassed both aspects and pointed forward to the great High Priest who would also be victim and sacrifice once and for all.

Isaiah 53 is the great Old Testament prophetic announcement and Isaiah 55 the great gospel call. This was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ who came preaching and calling men to repent and believe the gospel.

While prophecy has an element of prediction, the primary purpose of the prophets was to call men and women back to God. They were to declare the Word of God to the people. This is what we are to do when we preach.

(iii) Typology and the Pentateuch

The Old Testament is full of types and shadows – things that point forward to something and Someone who is much greater than anything else. Without going into a great discussion of typology, the greatest example held up to us through the rest of Scripture was the Exodus itself. It is THE great event that illustrated the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and pointed forward to Him.

Consider the following five matters (developed from Geerhardus Vos, "Biblical Theology" pages 110-114):

1. Deliverance from bondage

This was deliverance from an objective realm of sin and evil. This is not simply some kind of internalisation of sin as an abstract concept. God's people have to be cut free from the chains of sin and from a world that is opposed to God and His ways. They needed deliverance from their own original sinful nature that would drag them back to corruption.

The Israelites were held in bondage, slavery. They were exploited by the Egyptians for their own selfish ends and they had no regard for the welfare of their slaves. Redemption is always described in this manner – see John 8:33-36, Romans 8:20-21.

Pharaoh's heart was hardened. His refusal to listen to the Voice of God is characteristic of all who are opposed to God and His ways. The hardening of his heart was a judicial process – Pharaoh sets his heart against God as an act of his own will and God confirms that in the punishment of being hardened by God. As Vos says, *“It is a well-known Scriptural law of sin being punished by irretrievable abandonment to sin, a law by no means confined to the Old Testament, but found in the New Testament as well.”*²⁰

Pharaoh is not alone. All the elements of paganism are here. The Egyptian gods are involved in the conflict. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The plagues are inextricably linked with Egyptian idolatry that included nature worship. But Jehovah Yahweh upsets their preconceived notions. He disrupts nature and demonstrates His sovereign superiority over all evil and over nature itself. Hence Exodus 12:1: *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement: I am the LORD”*.

In the same way the Lord Jesus Christ triumphed over death and the Devil when He defeated all the powers of Hell on the cross.

2. Deliverance from Sin

While it seems likely that the true religion had not entirely vanished from the Israelites, they had become corrupted by the idolatry around them. There were those who feared God – for example the midwives and of course Moses' parents. But many had compromised and lost the pure worship of God. See Joshua 24:14 and Ezekiel 23:19-21 for example. The worship of the golden calf was a sign of the religious decline that had occurred in the years they were in bondage in Egypt.

They needed to be saved from their sins. They needed to be made pure and holy to serve the living and true God. They deserved to be punished. They deserved to die. What made the difference?

3. The Provision of a Substitute

The Passover Lamb was to be the substitute. God had threatened Pharaoh at the first with the death of his firstborn if he did not obey Jehovah Yahweh. None of the other plagues had touched the Israelites but now they are drawn into the events as the last plague was about to strike. They are not innocent. They deserve to die. Punishment is due. How shall they escape?

The Word of God is very specific. Exodus 11:4-5. No-one will escape this judgement. Sin must be punished. Each Israelite's sin must be punished. There is no escape from the

²⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, pages 110-111

judgement of God. Unless the Israelites believe God and act in obedience to His command they also will face the death of their firstborn. But God Himself supplies the substitute to die in their place. Justice must be satisfied. If not, God would cease to be the Holy God. At this most crucial moment God is still teaching His people the significance of who He is and what He is doing. And when they understand that their worship will be all the more glorious and significant.

The lamb is prepared. The blood is taken and sprinkled on the doorposts and the lintel of their houses. The flesh is to be roasted and they are to eat of the sacrifice ready for the journey. This is a make or break situation. There is no turning back.

How could they be sure of the blood? The wooden doorposts and lintel would soak up the blood. There would be very little sign left. Would the Angel of death see it or not? Would He make a mistake? How could they be sure? It took faith – God-given faith to believe the Word of God.

This was the covenant principle evidenced, as by households they trusted in the saving significance of the blood that was shed. Deliverance from slavery was also escape from judgement through the means of the substitute.

4. A Display of Divine Omnipotence

God promised that He would smite the Egyptians with all His wonders – Exodus 3:20. He gives Moses a share in those wonders – Exodus 4:21. He redeems His people with an outstretched arm and great judgements – Exodus 6:6. This becomes a repeated phrase to glorify the power of God through the rest of Scripture. Even the hardening of Pharaoh's heart will serve to glorify the omnipotence of God – Exodus 7:3-5. What a devastating word is that of Exodus 9:13-17! How can any right thinking man turn away from such a terrible warning? If the solemn word of God directly given to a man still cannot generate repentance how great is that man's sin! The phrase, "...*I have raised you up*..." indicate that God kept him on the stage of history when otherwise he would have already fallen. He was raised up in order to show that no mortal man can defy the living God. Pharaoh will go down in history as an evidence and testimony to God's power and omnipotence. See Romans 9:17.

5. A Demonstration of Sovereign Grace

The Egyptians were judged for their idolatry and cruelty. The Israelites were spared and rescued by sovereign grace alone.

The source of Israel's privilege lay in the grace of God alone. Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:4-6. God calls them His sons – Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 32:6. You cannot earn sonship. You have no say about your parents. God's choice of sons and daughters is all of grace. No wonder that when they saw the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea they worshipped – Exodus 15. Sovereign grace had saved them. God confirms the covenant with blood in Exodus 24:1-8.

Later God will reveal that as well as deliverance from bondage and sin and the need for a Substitute, there is a price to be paid for redemption. Salvation is costly. Redemption may be free but it is not cheap.

Here is the great Old Testament type of the work of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Preach Christ. Preach Christ in all the Scriptures. He is there in every type, every event. He is being revealed through all the pages of God's Holy Word.

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