



## Session Five

# THE BOOKS OF THE LAW

*Leader to life, Path to truth, our Lord Jesus Christ; you led Joseph to Egypt, and the people of Israel through the Red Sea; and Moses to Mt. Sinai, and his people to the land of promise...Now I pray you, Lord, lead me and my companions to travel in peace on the journey before us...For you are our way and our truth and our life...Amen.*

Hovhannes Garnetzi (13th c)





### The Armenian Angle

When asked what He should be called, God said to Moses "I am who I am." This entire phrase is caught in a single Armenian letter "ի". The seventh letter of the alphabet, it literally means "he, she, it is." You can see this letter etched on church walls; it is also often worn on a chain like a cross.



### Word Watch

**Pentateuch**  
(Greek: 5 scrolls):  
The first five books of the Old Testament  
**Torah:** the common Hebrew word for "law," the first five books of the Old Testament



## The Torah

### Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

This group of the first five books of the Old Testament has several names. We noted in an earlier session the name *Pentateuch*, which means "five scrolls." These books are also called by some the "Books of Moses" but that isn't because he wrote every word of them, though he did write some things. The books carry his name because his leadership of the Hebrew people and his close association with God are central to what the books tell us. In fact, the life and work of Moses constitute most of what appears in the four books following Genesis.

You may have heard the word *Torah*, which is another name given to these books by the Jewish people. This word has come to mean "law" but it more broadly means "instruction." In the four books after Genesis, this law is laid out in detail. It is a huge compilation, which was written and edited over time from the tenth century B.C. to the fifth, by Hebrew priests and scribes. These books, besides containing the law, also give us the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt and eventual return to the land of Canaan (also called Palestine). The story begins during some hard times for the Hebrew people in Egypt.

### The Book of Exodus

When Joseph's brothers and their father Jacob (Israel) joined him in Egypt and settled there, a long period of prosperity for the Hebrew people began. The descendants of Jacob "multiplied and grew exceedingly strong," as Exodus puts it. But the Hebrews were still different from the Egyptians among whom they lived, and many years later "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." (*Exodus 1:8*) He was fearful of this fast-growing group of strangers in the midst of his people, and decided that the best way to keep them under control was to enslave them and order their male babies killed.

### Two Courageous Women

This was the terrible situation into which Moses was born. He was able to survive and grow up thanks to the courage of two women and one little girl. Read about the two women, Puah and Shiphrah, in *Exodus 1:15-22* and about the little girl (who was Moses' sister Miriam) in *2:1-10*.

So Moses grew up in the luxury and power of the court ruled over by the Egyptian king (whose title was Pharaoh) while his fellow Hebrews labored as slaves. Somehow Moses discovered or felt his true identity, because when he saw an Egyptian beating a helpless Hebrew slave, his outrage was so great that he killed the man. This deed was made known to Pharaoh, and Moses had to flee across the desert to Midian (now Saudi Arabia). There he married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest and settled down to work as a shepherd.



## God Calls Moses to Lead the Exodus from Egypt

Moses' peaceful life was not to last very long. One day as he was tending the flock in the wilderness near Mount Horeb, God appeared to him in a bush that "was burning, yet it was not consumed." (3:2) God told Moses that he was to return to Egypt, confront the omnipotent Pharaoh, and deliver his people from their bondage. How would you react to such a call? Moses made many excuses, and you can read about one (and about God's response) in *Exodus 4:10-16*.

Despite all excuses, Moses did return to Egypt, and many of us know some details of his encounters with Pharaoh: the king's repeated refusals to release the Hebrews, the plagues God sent on the Egyptians, and the result of the tenth plague—the death of the first-born of Egypt, after which Pharaoh allowed the people to leave.

So the great exodus began, and Israel moved eastward from Egypt toward the Sinai peninsula. Pharaoh regretted his decision and the loss of his slaves, and pursued the people to the Red Sea or Sea of Reeds. The east wind blew all night and parted the waters, allowing the Israelites to cross. But their Egyptian pursuers were drowned. Read the song of triumph sung by Moses' sister Miriam in *Exodus 15:21*.

### The Desert Journey

The mood of the people did not always remain triumphant. The journey across the desert of Sinai was a taxing and difficult one, and often the people complained against Moses, even wishing they were back in Egypt, where at least they could have counted on getting a drink of water when they needed one! Yet just when things seemed worst, God would provide what the people needed—water, meat, bread, or help against the marauding Amalekites, a tough desert tribe that tried to attack and steal from the Hebrews.

### The Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle

Finally they reached the wilderness of Sinai, where they set up camp in the shadow of Mount Sinai. On the third day, the mountain was enveloped in smoke, and the Lord called Moses to the summit, where he received the law of God—the Ten Commandments. God also gave Moses other laws to help the people live in harmony and peace. Then God called Aaron and some of the other priests to the top of the mountain. He instructed them to make a tabernacle—a tent that would travel with them and be a place of worship for them wherever they were. The tabernacle would house the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden chest in which would be kept the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them.

### Did You Know?


*Passover is the great Jewish feast that marks when the angel of death "passed over" Jewish homes – known by the smear of lamb's blood over their doorways – in taking the lives of first-born Egyptian males. That very night a commemorative meal was initiated and eventually featured such food items (all with a symbolic value) as: a lamb shankbone (sacrifice), haroset, a relish of*



*crushed apples, nuts, cinnamon, red wine and ginger (the bricks the Hebrews made for building), bitter herbs or vegetables such as endive and radishes (the bitterness of slavery), salt water (the sweat and tears of the slaves), and three matzoh sheets, the unleavened bread made hastily as the Jews fled Egypt (the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob).*

### Looking In

*If you had to get out of your house in 30 seconds, what one thing would you make sure you got out (other than family members and pets)? Explain.*



The people became impatient waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain. They said, “As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” They persuaded Aaron to build an idol they could worship—a golden calf, made from the melted-down golden jewelry they had been wearing.

What a terrible disappointment these people were to God, and also to Moses, who had worked so hard to bring them this far. Yet Moses begged God not to be angry with the people, though his own anger when he saw them worshipping the idol was so strong that he smashed the tablets with the Commandments on them.

God renewed His covenant with His disobedient people, though He warned them that, because they were such a “stiff-necked people” (meaning proud and arrogant) they would have a good deal of trouble. He gave Moses two new tablets with the Commandments written on them, and sent him back to continue leading the people.

The rest of the Book of Exodus describes how the artisans among the people constructed the Ark, the tabernacle, the altars and tables and chairs and lampstands, the clothing for the priests when they led worship, and all the other things that God had told them in detail how to build. And despite their disobedience, the Lord didn’t abandon them. The very last words of Exodus are these: “Throughout all their journeys the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel.”

## Quick Quiz #5

① to ⑤ **Which statements are TRUE about Moses?**

1. He grew up as a slave in Egypt.
2. He married the daughter of a priest.
3. He worked as a shepherd.
4. God spoke to him through a sacrificial lamb.
5. He was a very eloquent speaker.

⑥ to ⑩ **Put the correct letter next to each name below.**

Miriam \_\_\_\_\_

Shiprah \_\_\_\_\_

Aaron \_\_\_\_\_

Pharaoh \_\_\_\_\_

Puah \_\_\_\_\_

a Hebrew midwife

b Moses' sister

c a priest

d a king



