

# The Pentateuch: The Torah

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Dear parishioners,

I am pleased to join you on our journey through the Bible. In this article, I will share some important theological insights about the first five books of the Bible. This topic will be discussed in two parts, each in a separate article. Here is the first part.

## 1. Definition of the Torah

The word Torah (תּוֹרָה) comes from the Hebrew verb *arah*, which means to teach, guide, or show the way. Therefore, in Jewish tradition, the Torah doesn't primarily mean "law," but rather a teaching, divine instruction, and way of life. As a result, simply translating the Torah as "law" or "commandment" is too simple.

## 2. The Books of the Torah

In Judaism, the Torah primarily refers to the five books attributed to Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They are known as the Torah of Moses.

## 3. The Torah: Covenant and Jewish Identity

In Judaism, the Torah is God's greatest gift, the tangible sign of the Covenant, and the living presence of God among His people. That is why the Torah influences daily life and shapes the calendar (Sabbath, holidays). It guides justice, prayer, and family life. "The Torah is not in heaven... it is very near you" (Deuteronomy 30:12-14).

## 4. Definition of the Pentateuch

The word Pentateuch comes from the Greek word *pentateuchos*: *penta* means "five," and *teuchos* means "scroll or book." The Pentateuch refers to "the five books."

Christians received Scripture through the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, called the Septuagint. In this Greek tradition, the Torah is referred to as the Greek word *Pentateuchos biblos*, meaning "the book in five parts." Therefore, the word "Pentateuch" should be understood descriptively. The five books of the Pentateuch are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

### 4.1 The Pentateuch in the Life of Christians

In Jewish tradition, the focus is on teaching, the lived experience of the Law, and the Covenant. Without dismissing or competing with Judaism, the Christian tradition is more open to understanding these five books of the Bible (Pentateuch: Torah).

In Christianity, these books form the foundation of all Scripture, as they describe the origins of the world, the birth of the chosen people, the Covenant, the Law, God's progressive revelation, and prepare the way for Christ.

## **4.2 Christ: The Pentateuch / The Torah**

Jewish tradition shows great respect for the practice of the Torah; however, its limitation is that it did not recognize Christ, the awaited Savior. Still, this remains the core truth that Christians affirm: Christ, the Savior, is foretold by the Law and the prophecies. Therefore, Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus himself said, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for Moses wrote about me” (John 5:45-46). The Torah serves as a teaching tool, and Christ is the Word made flesh. Saint John states, “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Consequently, the Torah points to Christ, who fulfills and embodies it.

## **5. The Pentateuch and its Author**

Traditionally, the Pentateuch is attributed to Moses as its author. However, modern Catholic exegesis recognizes that, while Moses is the main figure, the Pentateuch is the product of a long tradition.

### **5.1 The Pentateuch and Traditions**

The Church thoughtfully embraces the study of the traditions found in the Pentateuch. There are four of them: Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomic, and Priestly.

#### **5.2 Yahwist Tradition (YHWH) (Y)**

In the Bible, YHWH is the name that God Himself reveals to Moses. “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ You shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever” (Exodus 3:14–15). In ancient biblical Hebrew, only consonants were written. YHWH comes from the Hebrew verb *hâyâh*, which means “to be.” Therefore, God is not defined by function, but by His living presence.

Its profound meaning can be expressed as: “I am,” “I am with you,” “He who is,” and “He who brings into being.”

In the Yahwist tradition, the Pentateuch presents a God who draws near, speaks, walks, shapes, and builds relationships. God is shown as a personal and relational being, highlighting the Covenant rooted in divine faithfulness. Read Genesis chapter 2.

#### **5.3 Elohist Tradition (E)**

In this tradition, a transcendent God is often depicted. He communicates through dreams, angels, and intermediaries. God is regarded as just and demanding, highlighting moral faithfulness and obedience. Read Genesis 22.

#### **5.4 Deuteronomic Tradition (D)**

A God who teaches through repeated words is described, emphasizing the one true God. His covenant is based on listening and obeying, as shown in Deuteronomy chapter 6, Shema Israel. We receive blessings when we stay faithful and face curses when we are unfaithful. God calls us to choose life, as stated in Deuteronomy 30.

### **5.5 Priestly Tradition (Priest) (P)**

In this tradition, God is called Elohim and YHWH. We see a God who is transcendent, holy, and the Creator of everything in existence, such as the creation of the world in seven days (Genesis 1). It also includes cultic laws (Leviticus) and the structure of worship and priesthood.

In short, the Pentateuch is not a book dictated all at once but an inspired work, carefully transmitted and harmonized. None of these traditions dismisses divine inspiration, but they show how God communicates through history. The Church recognizes these sources as pathways of Revelation.

Thank you to everyone who agreed to read the parish bulletin. See you in another article for the second part of the Pentateuch/Torah.

Your brother, Frantzcy Mahotiere,

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