

The Torah: The Foundation of All Things

Class One

Deuteronomy 32:46–47 (NKJV): 46 and he said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. 47 For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess.”

The Torah (the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), also known as the Pentateuch, holds a foundational role in the Bible and is deeply significant for both Christians and Jews. Christian readers must recognize that these books serve as the bedrock upon which the rest of Scripture, including the Old and New Testaments, is built.

Here’s why the Torah, the first five books of the Bible is the foundation of all things and the entire Bible:

1. The Foundation of God’s Revelation

- The Torah is the beginning of God’s revelation to humanity. It reveals the nature of God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, introduces God’s relationship with His people, and establishes the covenants that are fundamental to understanding the rest of the Bible.
- Genesis tells us about the creation of the world, the fall of humanity, and the beginning of God’s plan for **redemption** through Abraham and his descendants.
- The rest of the Bible continues to unfold God’s plan of **redemption**, which begins in these foundational books.

2. The Covenants and God’s Promises

- The covenants God made with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in the Torah form the basis for the rest of Scripture. God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17) sets the stage for the development of the nation of Israel, through which Jesus Christ would ultimately come.
- ***Deuteronomy 7:9 (NKJV): “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”***

The promises and covenants made in the Torah are expanded and fulfilled in the rest of the Bible, particularly in the New Testament through Jesus Christ.

3. The Moral and Legal Foundation

- The **Ten Commandments** and other laws in the Torah form the ethical and moral code for God's people. These laws lay the foundation for God's call to holiness and righteous living.
- ***Leviticus 19:2 (NKJV): "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"***
- In the New Testament, Jesus affirms and fulfills the moral teachings of the Torah. In His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus builds upon the moral and ethical principles first introduced in the Torah, such as loving God and loving one's neighbor.

4. Understanding the Rest of the Old Testament

- The events, laws, and covenants in the Torah provide the historical and theological framework for the rest of the Old Testament. The stories of the Exodus, the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and the formation of Israel as a nation are repeatedly referenced and built upon throughout the Prophets and Writings.
- For example, the prophets continually call the people of Israel back to the covenant established in the Torah, urging them to return to God's ways and reminding them of the blessings and curses outlined in Deuteronomy.
- The entire sacrificial system described in Leviticus is referenced throughout the Old Testament and becomes crucial to understanding the atonement of sin that Jesus later fulfills.

5. Jesus and the Fulfillment of the Torah

- Jesus Christ Himself affirms the centrality and lasting importance of the Torah. He stated:
 - ***Matthew 5:17-18 (NKJV): "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."***
- The Torah points forward to Jesus, and many events and rituals foreshadow Christ's second coming, His sacrificial death, and the New Covenant. For instance:
 - The Passover lamb in Exodus foreshadows Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), whose death brings redemption.

- The Day of Atonement and sacrificial system in Leviticus prefigure Jesus' sacrifice for sin, as explained in Hebrews 9.

6. The Foundation for the New Testament

- The Torah provides the context for understanding the New Testament. The story of redemption that begins with God's call to Abraham and the Exodus from Egypt culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Without understanding the Torah, it's difficult to grasp the full significance of Jesus' role as Messiah, the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God.
- The Apostle Paul often refers to the Torah to explain Christian theology, such as in Romans and Galatians, where he discusses faith, the law, and justification.

7. The Torah's Eternal Significance

- Christians understand that Jesus fulfills the law, but the Torah still holds eternal significance as the Word of God. Its teachings on God's character, the nature of sin, and His plan for redemption remain crucial for understanding who God is and how He interacts with humanity.
- ***Isaiah 40:8 (NKJV): "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."***
- *This speaks to the unchanging and eternal nature of God's word, including the Torah, which is seen as essential for the ongoing sustenance of all things.*

References in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

1. Question 2: What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

- Answer: "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him."
- The Torah, as part of the Old Testament, is included in this reference to the Scriptures. It is considered part of the "rule" that guides Christians in how to live a life that glorifies God.

2. Question 39: What is the duty which God requires of man?

- Answer: "The duty which God requires of man is obedience to His revealed will."

- God's "revealed will" is primarily found in the Scriptures, including the Torah. The Ten Commandments, for example, which come from the Torah, are specifically cited later in the catechism as central to Christian ethics.
 - The 10 Commandments are referred to as the moral law because they establish fundamental ethical principles that reflect God's eternal standards of righteousness and govern human conduct in relation to both God and others.
3. ***Questions 41-81 focus on explaining the Ten Commandments*** (from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) in great detail. These commandments come directly from the Torah and are presented in the catechism as foundational moral laws that all Christians are to obey.

Conclusion:

For us, the Torah is not just an ancient set of laws, but the foundation for all of Scripture. It contains the origin story of God's people, the moral law, and the covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By understanding the Torah, we gain a deeper understanding of the entire Bible, including the New Testament. Jesus Himself affirmed the importance of the Torah, and it continues to provide the framework for faith, ethics, and the relationship between God and His people.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith affirm the Old Testament's foundational role (including the Torah) in Christian doctrine, faith, and practice. The Torah's teachings, especially the moral law, are fundamental to the Reformed understanding of Scripture as the ultimate authority for guiding the Christian life. In both documents, the whole Bible is seen as the Word of God, with the Torah forming an essential part of God's revelation.