WAITING FOR THE LAND

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The Story Line of the Pentateuch

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To
Stanley D. Walters
1 Samuel 2:9a

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Preface

This study reads the individual books of the Pentateuch as contributions to its overall theme: Waiting for the Land. The book argues this theme understanding that the narrative problem of the Pentateuch is humanity's exile from the presence of God, that this problem is fundamentally resolved at Sinai where God instructs Adam and Eve's descendants through Abraham to walk perfectly before him, and that thus instructed and indwelt by the divine presence, Israel moves toward the land fully prepared to enter it and enjoy life there according to divine instruction. Because the problem of exile from the presence of God is resolved at Sinai, and because Israel does not enter the land, the Pentateuch reminds its audience that life in the presence of God is primary, and that possession of the land is secondary. The end of Kings supports this when it describes Israel's exile from the land, for desecration of the temple, as banishment from God's presence.

Many are the contributors to this work; I mention only a few: José Severino Croatto, whose article "Una promesa aun no cumplida" ("A Promise Not Yet Fulfilled") on the shape of the Pentateuch was formative for my understanding of the structure of the Pentateuch; Samuel Terrien, whose *The Elusive Presence* convinced me of the crucial role of the divine presence; and David

J. A. Clines, whose *The Theme of the Pentateuch* contributed the notion of partial fulfillment and partial non-fulfillment.

I dedicate this study to Stanley D. Walters, *Doktorvater*, colleague, and friend. Stan was Professor of Hebrew Literature and Languages at Knox College, University of Toronto, a vocation he exercised with deep respect for and careful reading of the biblical text. He loves the book of Samuel as a scholar and preacher. His study of Scripture, he once said, compelled him to preach. A short month after I graduated in May 1992, Stan left Knox College to serve Rosedale Presbyterian Church in Toronto as its minister. Knox's loss, the church's gain. He continues to preach and teach to this day. Thank you and blessings, Stan.

I am grateful to the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary for providing generous sabbatical and publication leave opportunities, and to the staff of the Hekman Library. I also thank my colleagues who read chapters and made valuable suggestions. What you read is my responsibility. Finally, to my wife Olga, for her support and patience—it was always there when most needed—*¡muchas gracias!*

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
ANETSup	*Supplement to ANET*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
DH	Deuteronomistic History
EstBib	*Estudios Bíblicos*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Supplement to *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NT	New Testament
OAC	Orientis Antiqui Collectio (Rome)
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library

SBTh	Studies in Biblical Theology
SEÅ	*Svensk Exegtisk Årsbok*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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The Story Line of the Pentateuch

Although the Pentateuch is not a novel like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, it would be helpful to read it like a novel: a narrative that depicts a problem, places readers into a plot structure complicated by conflicts and cul de sacs, and that provides a resolution of the initial problem. Such a reading would disclose that the "old, old story" has a beginning, middle, and ending, that certain events happen before Sinai and others after Sinai, and that Israel never enters the Promised Land. This unsatisfying ending begs for a better solution. Joshua continues the story with great promise: Israel enters the Promised Land and receives its inheritance; but it ends badly in Kings: God exiles Israel from his presence. Thus the reader learns that the Genesis–Kings story begins and ends with exile and that this exile from God's presence is the reason for telling this old, old story.

Devotional literature and homiletical practices tend not to focus on the story line, but on smaller units, often without attention to context or connection to the story line, thereby

encouraging a fragmentary reading of the biblical text. Knowledge of the story line is assumed.[1] But no one reads a novel this way, nor a letter from a loved one. A beloved novel is read through from cover to cover, time and again; similarly, love letters from one's youth or that hurried scribble from a battlefield casualty.

Should studies of the Pentateuch today assume audience knowledge of its contents? Do readers listen to the Pentateuch as a narrative with its own story line? By default, it seems, the pentateuchal story line has become unimportant to hearing the text. Even though contemporary readers are centuries beyond the Reformation's placing of Scripture in the hands of the faithful, might it be that, except for isolated cases, our knowledge of the content and the story line of the Pentateuch is not qualitatively better than that of those who received the Bible shortly after the Reformation?[2]

1. Since the Enlightenment the received story line itself has become problematic. Critical introductions to the Pentateuch have ignored the received story line and required readers to learn the similar, but still different, story lines of the Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomist writers. Commentary literature followed suit by placing sigla indicating these new story lines in the margins of the traditional text, or textual tools were developed to guide the reading of these new texts. See for example, J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby, eds., *The Hexateuch according to the Revised Version, Arranged in its Constituent Documents by Members of the Society of Historical Theology, Oxford* (London: Longmans, Green Co.: 1900); S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version with Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: The University Press, 1929). More recently, Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Recent literary readings of the Pentateuch focus on the received text's story line, but even these begin with commentary on and about the text. The story line is assumed or referred to with a brief outline. See, for example, Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), and Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). A notable exception is the story line of the Pentateuch in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 31–33.

2. James D. Smart referred to this problem in the mainline churches. In his *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia:

Post-Reformation commentary literature recognized the importance of helping readers gain knowledge of the content by inserting an "argument," whether of the whole book or of the individual chapter, before the commentary proper.[3] By laying out clearly the major features of the story line in the "argument" and introducing the reader to its "scope" or central meaning, the commentator provided an outline of the content and a theological framework within which to hear the subsequent commentary.[4] Such reviews of the content and discussion of scope were clearly Christian: the saving of Noah's family indicates the reestablishing of the church; prophecies concerning the Messiah; Pentateuchal authorship by the Holy Spirit. The arguments in such commentaries point to Jesus Christ as the scope of the text; they provided a churchly, not an academic, reading of the Pentateuch.[5]

Westminster, 1970), 21, he writes: "the language and thought forms of Scripture as a whole are alien to them" (i.e., theological students).

3. As in Theodore Haak's translation of the *Statenvertaling*—the version of Scripture, with commentary, authorized by the Synod of Dort, 1618–19—*The Dutch Annotations upon the whole Bible, or, All the holy canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testament together with, and according to their own translation of all the test, as both one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618 and published by authority, 1637, now faithfully communicated to the use of Great Britain, in English: whereunto is prefixed an exact narrative touching the whole work, and this translation. 1657*. Henry Ainsworth (*Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms* [Ligonier, PA.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1991]) inserts a "sum" of the book before the commentary proper, and also provides a summary for each individual chapter. Similarly Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. 1.: Genesis to Joshua* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.).

4. For a discussion of these matters, see Gerald T. Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modern Commentary: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard, Pilgrim Classic Commentaries (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), xlviii–lxxvii.

5. This was not a novelty. Irenaeus, for example, retold the story of the Pentateuch in Christian terms, largely from a christological viewpoint. See Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, eds., *St. Irenaeus: Proof of Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J. P. Smith, Ancient Christian Writers 16 (New York: Newman, 1952), 54–67.

With the Enlightenment churchly readings began to be distinguished from academic readings of the text. Similarly, faith and belief from reason and science; each was assigned its own area of competence and authority. The distinction became an operational separation so that Scripture was studied and taught in universities separate from the church, or, in some church schools, as if they were not servants of the church. Objective scientific study of Scripture for the sake of recovering universally acceptable meanings was the goal and task of the academy; faith that of the church. Contemporary biblical research in its postmodern literary critical mode has moved beyond that position to where it denies the possibility of universal truth. There are no objectively right interpretations, only those legitimized by communities of interest, of which the church and the academy are only two. And who is to say these have greater authority than other interpretative communities, such as women's groups, or the poor indigenes of the Amazon basin, whether they belong to the church or not? David J. A. Clines writes:

> If there are no "right" interpretations, and no validity in interpretation beyond the assent of various interest groups, biblical interpreters have to give up the goal of determinate and universally acceptable interpretations, and devote themselves to producing interpretations they can sell—in whatever mode is called for by the communities they choose to serve.[6]

Such relativism is self-defeating. Why read Scripture at all, or any text for that matter, to seek instruction or wisdom? For some, as Clines argues, it is a matter of producing interpretations

6. David J. A. Clines, "A World Established on Water (Psalm 24): Reader-Response, Deconstruction and Bespoke Interpretation," in J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 87.

that will sell, whatever the market will bear for whatever interest group will buy. From that point of view the reader is privileged not Scripture, and it becomes the task of the commentary to help readers see themselves and their particular group interest values reflected in the text. Historically, however, the church has sought to help the reader hear the Lord and the values of the kingdom of God. For that reason the church has privileged the text and not the reader. With respect to the Old Testament the church has historically understood Christ as the scope of these Scriptures (Luke 24:27). From that point of view the task of the commentator is to enable the reader to acknowledge the scope of Scripture as addressed by the book under consideration. In this case that is the Pentateuch.

It is the aim of this chapter to describe the story line of the Pentateuch and to define its scope in the Old and New Testaments. I will do this by retelling the narrative twice: the first retelling will use the narrative's own vocabulary to establish the basic story line; the subsequent retellings will assume it and employ vocabulary typical of the church's reading of Scripture.

The Story Line of the Pentateuch

Interpretation of any text begins with learning *what* it says, and *how* it says what it says. This is essentially an exegetical, not a hermeneutical, task.[7] An outline of the content can be useful, but it cannot re-present the genre. Reducing a narrative to the declarative propositions typical of an outline converts the text

7. See, for example, Jean Louis Ska, "*Our Fathers Have Told Us*": *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990); and J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999).

into an alien literary phenomenon. It is possible, for example, to convert the Joseph account into a Pauline-like, dogmatic restatement of the doctrine of providence. But that would overlook the narrative character of the account and what Joseph's actions contribute to the meaning of the text. For that reason I will retell the narrative in story form, using its own verbs wherever possible. I will maintain the plot lines as they develop, are complicated by a variety of events, displayed by the principal characters in these events, and reach their *dénouement*. Instructional and other texts will be retold descriptively, with close attention to their own vocabulary, but as part of the narrative.[8]

> **[Genesis]** In the beginning God creates the heavens and the earth, and all creatures in them; he blesses them and commands the man and the woman to fill the earth. When Adam and Eve disobey God's instructions not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God expels them from the garden. Later, their firstborn Cain kills his brother Abel and becomes a wanderer upon the earth. Cain's descendants increase. When Seth is born to Adam, people begin to call on God's name. Adam and Seth's descendants increase on the earth. Noah's birth brings hope for rest among Seth's descendants. When people fill the earth with wickedness, God determines to destroy them, but he acknowledges the righteous Noah. God designs an ark for Noah and his family, along with many animals, clean and unclean. All these escape the worldwide flood and leave the ark when the ground dries up. Noah sacrifices burnt offerings to God, who promises never again to destroy the earth with a flood. God blesses Noah and his descendants, and makes a

8. James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch*, The Biblical Seminar 59 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 29, writes: "Narrative invites, almost enforces a strategy of sequential reading, of starting at the beginning and reading the text in order to the end. The placement of law within narrative conforms (at least in part) the reading of law to the conventions of narrative."

covenant with him and all living creatures. Some time later God scatters Adam's descendants from the city and tower of Babel which they built.

After this, Terah, his son Abram, and Abram's barren wife Sarai move out of Ur of the Chaldeans. God speaks to Abram, telling him to leave his family behind and go to the land God will show him. God also promises to bless Abram with children and to bless the families of the earth through him. Abram and Sarai wait a long time for the promised heir; God eventually secures his promises to Abram with a covenant. Later, Abram promises God obedience with a covenant of circumcision. God renames him Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Abraham wanders through the Promised Land for 25 years before Isaac is born. Although Ishmael, the son of Hagar, Sarah's maid, is Abraham's firstborn, Isaac inherits the blessing. When Sarah dies, Abraham buries her in a cave in the field of Machpelah, which he buys from the Hittites. He then sends his servant to find Isaac a wife from among his own relatives in Paddan Aram. The servant returns with Laban's sister, Rebekah, whom Isaac marries. When Abraham dies, Ishmael and Isaac bury him in Machpelah.

Some time after Abraham's death Isaac prays the Lord to open Rebekah's womb, whereupon she gives birth to Esau and Jacob. Jacob, the younger, deceives Isaac to receive the blessing of the firstborn and flees to Paddan Aram to escape Esau. On the way, God appears to Jacob and promises to be with him. Jacob sets up a stone and calls the place Bethel. In Paddan Aram, Jacob's father-in-law, Laban, deceives Jacob by giving him his first-born daughter Leah in marriage, and not Jacob's choice, the younger Rachel. Laban requires Jacob to work an additional seven years before he may marry Rachel. Firstborn Leah is blessed with many children; Rachel has no children by Jacob, becomes jealous, and offers him Bilhah, her maid, to have children by her. Leah then offers Jacob her maid,

Zilpah. Jacob becomes the father of many children. Jacob also increases his flocks by astute management of Laban's herd. Laban becomes suspicious. The Lord tells Jacob to return to the land of Abraham and Isaac. Laban pursues Jacob. When Jacob satisfies Laban that he has stolen neither his herds nor family, they make a covenant and build a heap of stones as a witness. When Jacob nears the land, he discovers that Esau is on the way. That night Jacob struggles with God at Peniel. When Jacob meets Esau, he offers him a gift and Esau accepts it. After Esau leaves, Jacob moves to Shechem, where his sons Simeon and Levi eventually kill the Shechemites because of their treatment of Jacob's daughter Dinah. When Jacob arrives at Bethel, God blesses him. Rachel gives birth to Benjamin and dies. Isaac dies, and Jacob and Esau bury him.

Some time after Jacob returns to Bethel, his sons seek to kill their youngest brother, Joseph the dreamer. They sell him to traders who bring him to Egypt, but deceive Jacob into believing Joseph is dead. Judah commits adultery with his son's widow, Tamar. In Egypt Joseph becomes a steward over Potiphar's house. There God blesses him so that he prospers. But when Joseph rejects the advances of Potiphar's wife, she accuses him of wanting to sleep with her, and Potiphar throws him into prison. Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker, fellow prisoners. Two years later, when Pharaoh has troubling dreams, the cup-bearer remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh of his wisdom. Joseph is released to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. After Joseph tells Pharaoh that Egypt will enjoy seven fruitful years and seven barren years, Pharaoh makes Joseph governor over Egypt and instructs him to prepare Egypt for the times of plenty and famine. When the famine strikes the whole world, it brings Joseph's brothers to Egypt and into Joseph's presence, though they do not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies but they deny it, telling him they have a younger brother at home and one who is no

more. To test their truthfulness, Joseph requires Simeon to stay behind while the rest return to Canaan. When they return for more grain they must bring Benjamin, he says. When they find silver in their sacks of grain, the brothers become afraid. Jacob does not want them to return with Benjamin; he has already lost Joseph and Simeon. But when the food is almost gone, Jacob sends his sons, with Benjamin, back to Egypt. They return the silver and bring additional gifts. They appear before Joseph, who asks about their father. They eat with Joseph and then return, not knowing that Joseph has instructed his servants to put his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack. After the brothers leave, Joseph sends his steward after them. When the steward finds the cup in Benjamin's sack, the brothers are astounded and afraid for him, but they all return with Benjamin to Egypt. There Joseph tells them to return home and leave Benjamin, but Judah offers to take his place. The brothers explain that their old father cannot bear the grief of losing the youngest. Joseph then reveals himself to his brothers and explains that their selling him was God's way of sending Joseph ahead of them. He invites them to bring his aged father Jacob and the rest of the family to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan. On the way to Egypt, God reveals himself to Jacob and promises that Egypt will be the place where his descendants will become a great nation. Jacob is joyfully reunited with his son Joseph. Afterward, Jacob blesses his children and dies. His sons bury him in the cave at Machpelah. Before Joseph dies, he tells his brothers that selling him to the traders was God's purpose, and asks that they take his remains to the Promised Land when God brings them out of Egypt.

[Exodus] Jacob arrives in Egypt with 70 descendants. After Joseph and his brothers die, Israel grows so much that they fill the land. Fearing Israel's enormous growth, a new Pharaoh enslaves them to build his cities, but Israel continues to grow. Pharaoh then instructs the midwives to murder all newborn

males, but the midwives keep them alive. Then Pharaoh orders his people to throw every newborn boy into the Nile. Moses' mother places the newborn Moses in the Nile in a little ark; Pharaoh's daughter draws the baby out of the water, takes him home, and brings him up as her own. When he is older, Moses kills an Egyptian and flees from Pharaoh. God acknowledges Israel's oppression.

Some time later, God appears to Moses in a burning bush at Mt. Horeb and sends him to Pharaoh to demand that Israel be set free to serve the Lord. Moses pleads his own weakness and declares that Israel will not believe he is sent of God. God shows Moses signs and sends Aaron to speak for him before Pharaoh. After the first encounter, Pharaoh increases Israel's work. Moses and Aaron return to confront Pharaoh, but his stubbornness brings the Lord's terrible signs on Egypt: blood, frogs, gnats, flies, plague on livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and deep darkness. On Passover night, after God slays Egypt's first-born, Pharaoh lets Israel go, but recants and pursues them into the sea. The Lord moves the waters to defeat Egypt, but allows Israel to pass through on dry ground. When the people of Israel see the dead Egyptians on the shore, they fear the Lord and trust Moses. Then Moses and Israel sing praise to the Lord for his triumph over Egypt.

After this Israel enters the desert, where she complains to Moses about bitter water at Marah. God shows Moses wood which sweetens the water. Later, when Israel complains about not having food, God miraculously supports them with manna; he also defends her from Amalek's attack. Jethro, the Midianite priest, visits the camp, praises God when he hears about Israel's escape, and helps Moses in the judicial administration of the people. The Lord brings Israel to Sinai, where, in his terrifying presence, he makes a covenant with her and Israel promises him loyalty. The Lord gives Israel many instructions and laws and prohibits Israel from serving

other gods. Afterward God calls Moses to meet him at the top of Mt. Sinai.

At the top of Sinai, Moses receives instructions for Israel to collect offerings and to build a sanctuary for the Lord to dwell in their midst, and for the construction of the ark, other tabernacle furniture, the curtains, and other liturgical items. While God speaks to Moses, Israel organizes a corrupt worship of the Lord with a golden calf. Aaron helps in this. Thus provoked, the Lord determines to destroy Israel, but Moses intervenes. Although Israel deserves the Lord's punishment because of her stubbornness, Moses argues that God should forgive them for his own name's sake. Although many die at the Lord's hands, he promises to lead Israel to the Promised Land, and renews the covenant. After this, Israel voluntarily brings gold, silver, and other materials necessary for the tabernacle; she obediently manufactures the various elements of the tabernacle complex and brings them to Moses, who inspects Israel's work and blesses them. On the first day of the new year, Moses assembles and consecrates the tabernacle and the priesthood. Then the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle; the fiery cloud would guide Israel on all her journeys.

[Leviticus] Then God calls Moses and speaks to him from the tabernacle at Mt. Sinai and gives him instructions for Israel's sacrifices: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering. The priests receive permission to take specified portions from the sacrifices for their sustenance. These are the instructions the Lord gives Moses on Mt. Sinai. The Lord instructs Moses in the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Moses ordains Aaron and his sons, and they begin their ministry before the Lord. When Aaron brings the burnt offering, fire from the presence of the Lord consumes the offering and the people shout with joy. When Nadab and Abihu bring an improper sacrifice, the fire of the Lord consumes them.

The Lord then instructs Moses and Aaron in the laws of cleanliness: the foods Israel could and could not eat; the priestly declarations of cleanliness and uncleanness for skin diseases, mold, and the emission of semen and menstrual blood. By keeping these instructions, Israel will be clean before the Lord. The Lord then instructs Moses in the matter of the Day of Atonement and the scapegoats, whose sacrifices would cover all of Israel's uncleanness in the Lord's presence.

The Lord requires all sacrifices to be brought to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and he forbids the eating of blood. Then the Lord instructs Israel to live by his decrees, and lists prohibited sexual relationships. Israel may not do these detestable things, subject to being expelled from the land for defiling it. Israel must distinguish herself from the nations. There follow various laws and then more decrees about prohibited sexual relationships. Obedience will demonstrate that the Lord is Israel's God; disobedience will result in defilement of the land and Israel's expulsion. Israel must distinguish herself from the nations. There follow specific rules for the priests' holiness, unacceptable sacrifices, and the feasts. When the son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father blaspheme the name of God, the Lord instructs Moses that such blasphemy deserves death by stoning. The Lord then instructs Moses from Mt. Sinai about Sabbath care of the land and the year of jubilee. Afterward the Lord teaches Israel that if they live by his decrees he will look with favor on the land, cities, and the home, and that he will set his face against them if they are hostile to him. These are the Lord's instructions from Mt. Sinai. Finally, the Lord instructs Israel to keep her vows. These are the commands the Lord gives Moses on Mt. Sinai.

[Numbers] In the Sinai desert Moses takes a census of all men ready for war, except for the Levites. The Levites are commanded to encamp around the tabernacle so that the wrath of the Lord will not come upon Israel. The Lord instructs Moses

to tell Israel to organize the camp in military fashion: all the tribes in their places around the tabernacle, which is in the midst of the camp. In all its affairs Israel is taught to keep herself undefiled in the presence of God. Through Moses, the Lord instructs the people about keeping the special Nazirite vow, and Aaron is taught how to bless and place the Lord's name on his people. Then Israel follows the instructions concerning the dedication of the tabernacle. After the consecration of the Levites, the celebration of the Passover, and the appearance of the glory cloud, the army of the Lord begins its march.

The people complain about their hardships and the Lord hears it. Fire breaks out at the edge of the camp and people die. Israel complains about the lack of food and the Lord sends them an overabundance of quail; some die with mouths full of quail meat. Miriam and Aaron oppose Moses. The Lord explains Moses' special position. Miriam becomes leprous but is healed when Moses intercedes for her. When Israel arrives at the border of the land, Moses sends spies to explore Canaan; they report that the inhabitants are too strong. Against Caleb's advice the spies spread bad reports about the land. When Israel grumbles and muses that it would have been better to stay in Egypt, or better to die in the desert than to enter the land and fall by the sword, the Lord replies that they will all die in the desert—with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who disagreed with the report—and that their children will enter the land. Those who spread a bad report about Canaan die. Against Moses' command another group goes into the land to conquer it, but they die. As Israel wanders about the desert, it receives instructions of holiness. The Levite Korah and others rebel against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of lording it over the people. The Lord determines that Korah and his followers will die for their rebellion. The earth swallows them. The Lord gives Moses and Aaron instructions for the priests' and Levites' service in his presence. He also instructs

them in the preparation and use of the water of cleansing. At Kadesh, where Israel grumbles about the lack of water, Moses and Aaron sin at the rock that gave water. God tells them they will not enter the land for their disobedience. Edom denies Israel passage, Aaron dies, and Israel destroys the Canaanite king of Arad. Israel then complains about the manna and the Lord sends venomous snakes. Only those live who look at the bronze snake Moses elevates on a pole. After military victories against Sihon and Og, Israel arrives at the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho. There Balak, king of Moab, who is afraid of the multitudes of Israel, seeks to curse Israel using the seer Balaam. But God prohibits Balaam from cursing Israel; he allows him only to bless Israel. Later Israel herself is cursed for her sin with the Baal of Peor.

On the plains of Moab, Moses takes a census of the generation not counted in the desert of Sinai. The daughters of Zelophehad receive permission to receive the inheritance of their father, who died in the desert and has no sons; Joshua is appointed as Moses' successor; Israel receives instruction in the various feasts and in the keeping of vows. Israel takes vengeance on the Midianites and divides the spoils. Moses tells the Gadites and Reubenites, who are receiving their possession, not to repeat the rebellion of the first generation. After a list of the stages of Israel's journey and a description of the boundaries of Canaan, Israel receives instructions concerning the distribution of the land, the inheritance of the Levites, and the cities of refuge. Then the Lord commands Moses to allow Zelophehad's daughters to keep their inheritance if they do not marry outside of their tribe, for each tribe is to keep the land it inherits. These are the regulations the Lord gives Israel through Moses on the plains of Moab across from Jericho.

[Deuteronomy] In the fortieth year and the eleventh month of their wanderings, Moses tells Israel all that the Lord has commanded him. He is east of the Jordan, in Moab, when he

gives Israel this instruction (*torah*): Beginning with their stay at Horeb, Moses tells Israel that at that time God told them to break camp to go to the land of the Amorites according to his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that God appointed leaders to help Moses. Moses then reminds Israel of the spies, their rebellion against God, his punishment, the defeats Israel suffered, and their victories against Sihon and Og. He also reminds them that Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh inherited their possessions on the east side of the Jordan; and that God did not permit him, Moses, to enter the land, but did let him see it from Mt. Pisgah. He then urges Israel to hear the law (*torah*): How Israel suffered God's punishment at Baal of Peor, that God's decrees are Israel's wisdom among the nations, that when God spoke to them Israel saw no form, that Moses would die outside the land for his rebellion, that they ought to refrain from idolatry but know that besides the Lord there is no other. Moses then recites the covenant words to those who are alive (on the plains of Moab), reminds Israel to serve the Lord alone with all their heart, mind, and soul. Furthermore, he teaches Israel to observe the law so their children may inherit the land; that will be their righteousness. They should not serve the gods of Canaan nor allow their children to intermarry with the Canaanites. Doing so will bring God to withhold the rain from the land. When they get to the land filled with all good things they will remember the Lord and his care in the desert, and not forget him, or they will disappear among the nations. Moses reminds Israel that they are entering the land because of the wickedness of the nations, not her own righteousness. They should remember the golden calf and then how God did not destroy Israel. Israel should fear the Lord, and love and obey him alone.

When Israel possesses the land, she must worship the Lord at the place he chooses and worship no other gods. She must remember to eat foods declared to be clean, pay her tithes,

cancel debts according to the law, and regularly celebrate all her feasts. Israel's king is to rule according to the law. The Lord will raise up a prophet for Israel, one like Moses. He teaches them to keep various and sundry laws when God gives them the land.

Moses then tells the people that when they get into the land they must gather on Mt. Ebal and pronounce the curses of the covenant. He also instructs them in the blessings that will come upon her if she obeys the Lord, and the curses if she disobeys.

These are the terms of the covenant the Lord makes with Israel through Moses, in Moab. Joshua will succeed Moses, the people are instructed to read this law (*torah*) every seven years. The Lord tells Moses that Israel will rebel when they get into the land, and Moses sings a song as God's witness against Israel. Moses prepares for his death. He pronounces a blessing on Israel, is allowed to see the land, and dies in Moab. Joshua receives the spirit of wisdom because Moses laid his hands on him. Since then there has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

The Scope of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament

From the call of Abraham in Genesis through Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch narrates the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, none of whom enters the land to possess it. Although Abraham arrives in Canaan, he remains a total stranger to and in it; he has to buy property to bury his beloved Sarah. Abraham roots his life in God's promise of land, not in the land itself. The patriarchal family receives the surety of the promise only in their burial in the cave at Machpelah. When

Abraham's post-Egypt descendants reach the plains of Moab, they remain there. Like Abraham and his household, they are a pilgrim community who await the fullness of the promise of land. There, as they have since Egypt, Israel receives Moses' instructions. But he will not lead them into the land.

Moses is Israel's supreme catechist. With divine instruction, he sculpts Israel into the people God desires: one awaiting God's future in his gracious presence. From Sinai, Moses mediates the covenant between God and Israel, and discloses the design for the instrument of God's presence, the Tent of Meeting, from which God reveals his will for holy and clean living. When Israel does what Moses commands, they do God's will; when they rebel against him, they speak against the very voice of God (Num. 12). When they believe in him, having seen the mighty works of God (Ex. 14:31), they trust the one who is uniquely God's servant chosen to reveal God's will upon earth and bring his people out of bondage. When Israel does enter the land, Joshua reminds her to live there according to the "law my servant Moses gave you" (Josh. 1:7). If Israel lives according to Moses' law, she will fully enjoy the promises of God. Moses, the prophet than whom no greater arose in the Old Testament, is the scope of the Pentateuch (Deut. 34:10–12).

A Christian Rereading of the Pentateuch

Anyone reading the Pentateuch wants to know why this ancient story is relevant for redeeming and shaping human life and conduct in the twenty-first century. Christians acknowledge the privileged role of the Old and New Testaments, that these texts have created and molded them as a people, and that they read them not as a *novum*, but as texts that have shaped their

ancestors in the faith, texts that now also direct them as members of the same community. The Christian church, in all times and places, believes that these Scriptures are unique among all written texts, sacred and secular, because they reveal the will of God, without which no one can truly live in the presence of God. And since Jesus Christ is the fullness of this revelation, Christians cannot read any of the Scriptures without hearing him. For that reason Christians read the Pentateuch as part of the Christian canon.

When the church reads the Pentateuch in this way, it does not neglect the books' historical context, that is, that before Christ's coming these words were addressed to Abraham's descendants. For that reason, we defined the scope of the Pentateuch as Moses: in the Old Testament there was no one else who so clearly revealed God's will for his people. After God's self-disclosure in Christ, however, we read the Pentateuch as part of Christian Scripture, which testifies to what God has done through his people and is doing through Jesus Christ.

A Christian reading assumes that the biblical text belongs to and shapes an interpretative community, the church of Christ, and that the Christian interpreter does not stand objectively over against this community, nor as a representative of an interest that is alien to this interpretative community.[9] Thus the following synopsis of the *Dutch Annotations*, which uses vocabulary typical of the church, is recognizable by Christians everywhere.[10]

9. Reflecting Gadamer, A. D. H. Mayes writes, "The 'anticipation of meaning' or the preliminary projection of the sense of the text as a whole derives not simply from the interpreter but rather from the tradition to which both the text and interpreter belong." "On Describing the Purpose of Deuteronomy," *JSOT* 58 (1993): 20. Postmodern studies stay within this framework, but redefine the tradition to which the interpreter and the text belong as interest groups.

10. Haak, *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible*. I have left the original orthography.

In the beginning God created all things visible and invisible through his word, out of nothing. He made man in the image of God. Here we find the original rise of sin and death in Adam and Eve, the first promise of grace concerning man's redemption, and the rudiments of sound doctrine of the true religion, and of the worship of God. The history of the true church from Adam through Noah, and through Noah after the flood. Moses shows the re-establishment of the church, its preservation through Shem, and after Shem fell into idolatry out of grace God singled out Abraham that the Messiah should be born of his seed. God maintained this chosen generation by his word and Spirit, forgave the patriarchs' sin for the Messiah's sake, whom they embraced with true repentance. When they die, Joseph being the last, they leave behind excellent testimonies of their faith in God's promises. This history comprises more than 2300 years.

In Exodus the Holy Ghost shows the increase of Israel under Pharaoh's oppression and the wonderful birth and preservation of Moses. He shows how God with great plagues delivers his people by Moses after they had eaten the Paschal Lamb, guided and provided for them through the wilderness, where at Sinai they received the Ten Commandments and instructions for the tabernacle. Moses' intercession saves Israel from God's destruction for having built the golden calf. God renews the covenant, the people make offerings for the making of the tabernacle. After the tabernacle was assembled it was anointed and filled with God's glory. This history took place during some 142 years.

Leviticus contains God's ordinances for the maintenance of God's public and holy worship. These are for the most part ceremonial laws; to them are joined various moral laws and civil ordinances punishable by the magistrate. Narratives of the ordination of priests and the punishment of a blasphemer are also included. All this happened during one month.

Numbers tells of the organization of the camp through its journeys through the wilderness; it speaks of the offices of the priests and Levites, describes ceremonial, moral and civil laws, and describes events which yield many instructions and warnings for all men, for civil and ecclesiastical affairs. It tells of Israel's murmurings and their punishments. Moses receives the help of 70 "ancient men (or Senators)" to govern Israel, suffers opposition, and Israel's refusal to enter the land leads to their wandering until the 40th year after they leave Egypt. Numbers conceals neither Israel's sin and punishment nor the virtues and good works of godly and pious men together with their promised reward. Preeminent is Moses' intercessory prayer for the rebellious generation. God shows his spiritual favor by maintaining pure religion and worship, and temporal mercy in delivering them from their enemies. Last, Israel prepares itself for entry into the land. This book contains historical acts of 38 years and nine months.

In the two last months of the fortieth year Moses, knowing he will soon die and not enter Canaan, repeats the laws recorded in the foregoing books to instruct those who had grown up in the wilderness in their duty. First he recounts God's mercies over the forty years to prepare them for obedience to the commandments. Then he repeats the moral law of the ten commandments together with ceremonial, civil, and military ordinances, including some new laws, and a remarkable prophecy concerning Jesus Christ. He promises blessings upon obedience and curses upon those who depart from the law. He charges Israel to read the Book of the Law regularly and then teaches them a prophetic song foretelling what will happen to them until the coming of Christ and the calling of the Gentiles. Moses views the land, dies, and Joshua takes his place.

The Scope of the Pentateuch as Christian Scripture

This churchly reading, clear to any seventeenth-century Christian, was not academically naive. An examination of exegetical works such as Henry Ainsworth's *Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms* discloses that the authors were acutely aware of historical distance and linguistic, textual, and hermeneutical issues. Nevertheless, they do not treat the text as an historical antiquity, but as Christian Scripture, an ancient text that is theologically transparent to the readers of the *Dutch Annotations*. This is clear from the language typical of the Christian theological tradition: God created "all things visible and invisible," he did so "through his word, out of nothing," and he endowed man "with the image of God." Although ancient, these depicted historical events speak eternal truths to present realities: the church, its public worship and sound doctrine, temporal as well as eternal blessings, and punishment for behavior not consonant with God's law; above all, they point to the Messiah.

Central to this reading of the Pentateuch is the pure doctrine by which God shapes his people in worship and conduct, and the hope represented by Jesus Christ, the prophet greater than Moses, who discloses the fullness of God's will, and who mediates between God and the people awaiting the fullness of divine promises. Christ, who comes from the Father, shapes that waiting with his instructions. A Christian reading holds Christ to be the scope of the Pentateuch. This reading comports with the Pentateuch's scope: divine instruction for God's people, delivered centrally at Sinai in the Lord's presence, for the shaping of a people of his own selection. Even as the voice of the Lord through Moses is

central to the Pentateuch, so the incarnate voice of God in Jesus Christ is central to the gospel (Matt. 17:5).

Waiting for the Land

In the following chapters we will read the Pentateuch, paying attention to its story line and that of the individual books. We will note that Adam's descendants, exiled from God's presence, are aimless wanderers, that from among them God redirects Abram and Sarai, instructing them to go to the Promised Land, but that neither they nor their descendants enter the land in the Pentateuch. God does bring them into his presence at Sinai. This solves the fundamental problem of the exile from God and changes the shape of waiting for the fulfillment of the land promise, for they wait in the presence of God. At the conclusion of each of the books, we will briefly reflect how that book contributes to the theme of waiting for the land in God's presence. The final chapter will reflect on waiting for the land in God's presence today.