

BEGINNING WITH MOSES

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And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. -- Luke 24:27

Most people do not begin with Moses when they look for the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Instead, they start with the prophets and move forward. Sometimes, Christians are guilty of ignoring the Pentateuch altogether, thinking that the Law of Moses is past tense and not relevant to New Testament people. Luke alludes to another view in 24:27 as he states that the resurrected Christ expounded the Scriptures beginning with Moses.

Jesus himself stated that he came to fulfill the law – not to destroy or do away with it. For me, this makes the books of Moses vital study material for unveiling the mysteries of our faith. Approaching the Pentateuch with such expectation (a good Advent word), has opened a treasure trove of spiritual truth. The great themes of life and death, mortality and immortality, God and humankind, covenants and journeys, the exaltation of the lowly, deliverance from sin and death, the nation of priests, a light to the nations, the God who leads and sustains, the God who is there, and the hope for future deliverance, all point back to the heart throb of the Pentateuch.

I have a theory about the Torah (Pentateuch). In the Torah can be found all the themes of our faith. The rest of the scripture is commentary on these themes. Of course, this statement is difficult for those who force each passage of the bible to stand on its own or those who discount the Hebrew bible as being secondary to the Christian scriptures in the New Testament. For me, the themes and their repetition (commentary) become an affirmation of God's providential care through the ages.

Take one simple theme – rather one theme, for none of them is simple – the theme of Shabbat’ (Sabbath). Genesis 1 introduces the seventh day of creation. This chapter also introduces the role of humanity within creation in contrast to the role of the sun, moon and stars. The luminaries are to rule the heavens. Humans are to subdue the earth. According to the scripture, from Psalms to Romans, the heavens declare the glory of God. That is their job.

In like manner, humans are created in the image of God – a reflection. And what is our task? To proclaim Sabbath. According to the Law of Moses, we observe Sabbath one day in seven, one year in seven, one year in fifty (year of Jubilee) as well as a host of other declared festival day Sabbaths. But when is Sabbath if these are merely observances? Why, it is today (see Hebrews 6). We live in the seventh day of creation – a distinct difference between today and the first six days. Sabbath is the day of God’s rest – the day when God is present in creation, not creating as ‘holy other.’ In other words, on the seventh day, God enters into creation to be present (at rest). As humans learn to acknowledge and recognize the presence of the living God, the glory of God is spread throughout the earth. In God’s presence, there is life abundant (check it out in Torah).

That brings things together for me. We live in the seventh day of creation, the day when God entered into creation and is present – God with us, or, in the prophet’s song, Emanuel.

It is no wonder then that Jesus calls himself the *Lord of the Sabbath*. When the Lord of the Sabbath is present, Sabbath *observance* becomes secondary. Proclaiming the glory of God, making God known, being witnesses (telling God’s story), all fulfill humanity’s role in Sabbath. Why else would Exodus 19 describe the role of God’s chosen as a nation of priests? The role of the priest is to represent God to the people. In like manner, Paul calls the Christians at Corinth (2 Cor. 5:20), ambassadors for Christ while I Peter speaks of us as a royal priesthood.

Because of the Torah themes, it is impossible to consider the Messianic prophecies without asking, *Where are the foundations of this in Torah?* When the resurrected Christ expounded the scripture to his disciples, he begins with Moses.

Think about John 1 in relation to the Torah. Suppose, as many Hebrew University scholars now attest via the Dead Sea scrolls, that John is the most Jewish of all the gospels. That the koine Greek of John is simply *lingua franca*. Suppose that the thought process of John is Hebrew and not Greek. Then the logos, word (Gk. ο` lo, goj) of John 1 is perhaps better-translated *torah*. It would read something like this: *In the beginning was the Torah, and the Torah was with God, and the Torah was God.*

Jews believe that the Torah was let down from God and given to Moses. They used to say: "With whom did God consult when God created the world? God consulted Torah like a master builder consults his plans." Actually, the primary difference in John 1 and traditional Jewish belief about Torah is verse 14: *And the torah became flesh and dwelt among us* This is commentary – the explanation.

This approach to Messiah seems to beg the affirmation: Now we understand. This is that which has been from the beginning, which the Lord has made known to us. And, with that statement, we are back at the beginning indeed. From the beginning – or, was it, in the beginning, God revealed the word to us.