



## Editor's Note

Among other things, ESN articles are intended to be a resource for busy elders. Last issue, Dr. Robert Spender introduced a series providing an overview of the Old Testament. Many commentaries provide detailed verse by verse expositions of the text, but sometimes it helps to take a step back and look at the big picture. What message is God

sending to His people through the Old Testament? What contribution does each book make to that message?

We hope to publish occasional installments on this series right through the Old Testament. In this issue, Dr. Spender takes a look at the first five books, the Pentateuch. We hope you enjoy them all.



### Practical Ministry

#### Growing in the Ground of the Pentateuch by Robert Spender

The Pentateuch, or five books of Moses, set the stage for the Old Testament as well as the whole Bible.

When new believers begin to read through the Bible, Genesis and Exodus usually hold their attention because of the colorful stories and events. Leviticus, however, becomes a challenge with its emphasis on laws and regulations. Numbers can then appear to be a bit repetitive with all the complaints, while Deuteronomy just seems to echo earlier material. So what is going on with the Pentateuch? Where should our emphasis for reading and teaching be and how do we best present the material of these important books?

##### Genesis: Beginning with God

Genesis is about beginnings so becomes foundational in many discussions whether historical or topical. How can you

have a complete presentation of topics like marriage, sin, Israel, humanity or the like without including material from Genesis? We are quickly introduced to the sovereignty of God with the days of creation as well as His orderliness (cp. 1 Cor. 14:33). Early on in Genesis we also learn about the origin of sin and how God reveals His plan in stages. Nothing catches Him by surprise. The Lord's response to the sad, degenerated state of hu-

manity was global judgment that affirms His authority and prepares us for Isaiah's new heavens and earth (66:22), and Peter's reminder of a fiery end (2 Peter 3:5-10).

The Lord then chooses three men and their wives to found a nation using the well-known ancient Near Eastern covenant structure to package the relationship. Their struggles and faith reveal how closely the Lord watches over His plan and how much a walk by faith means to Him. For example, the ascending and descending angels that Jacob saw revealed to him that God's presence was protecting him even before he knew it (28:12-13). But this is the way God works. When the Lord Jesus drew attention to His being the way (or bridge) to heaven it was within the stream of how the Lord works (John 1:51).

##### Exodus: Worshiping a powerful and majestic Lord

Exodus opens with the redemption of Israel from years of oppression in Egypt by a mighty display of God's powerful hand.

Moses led the people to Mt. Sinai where they entered into a covenant with the Lord marked by the Ten Commandments and a manifestation of the Lord's presence. Further, Israel's worship was centralized in a place (the Tabernacle) guided by chosen officials (priests) revealing the Lord's desire for orderly, heartfelt worship and the cost of spiritual freedom. Unfortunately, believers still struggle with the nature and use of OT Law today. Israel saw the Law as a gift from the Lord even though they struggled to keep it.

Christ fulfilled the Law so why do we need it? While the Law could never save us it continues to be a testimony of God's per-

(Continued on page 3)

*Time taken to understand each moment of the Pentateuch in context and how the Lord related to His people can generate a greater appreciation for His plan and our relationship with Him today through the Lord Jesus Christ.*

If you have been following along in this short series of articles, hopefully you have been challenged to take an honest look at the meetings of your local assembly as regards to “alive-ness.” Perhaps it has raised some questions about whether this author “understands” some things clearly. And that’s OK!

But if our basic premise is correct, that the content (what the meetings are about) must be relevant and edifying as well as orthodox, that the structure (the physical setting for where things take place) must help and not hinder the process of the people receiving the content, and the climate (the intangible environment in which all this takes place) must be winsome and not withering—then, terminology aside, whatever work of God results from genuine heart exercise will have made it worth the effort.

True, we still have two more items to consider, “breaking of bread,” and “prayers,” but by now the thought process being followed will be grasped, and with some brief suggestions about these remaining two functions or “meetings,” the matter can be brought to a conclusion in the next and final installment.

### **Communion: the Stewardship of Careful Preparation**

Some brief observations will help us think about the content of this precious time for the church.

First: although we proclaim or “show” the Lord’s death (I Cor. 11:26), we should always remember that our primary focus is not a doctrine or a deed, but a Person—Him! “This do in remembrance of me.” (Lk. 22:19). Worship involves whatever is lovely and worthy about Him, even if what is shared is not specifically about His death. We must not allow the symbols and benefits we receive to overshadow the Person Who is present in our midst.

Second: although sometimes referred to as the chief or main meeting of the church, it is third in the list of Acts 2:42, and for good reason. In doctrine (#1) God speaks to man; in remembrance and resulting worship, (#3) man speaks to God. All meetings, and indeed the entire life of the church

flow from the Word of God, which must have the primary place, not chronologically, but logically. And of course, the Lord is present whenever we meet in His Name, not just for communion.

Third: even though the meeting is “Spirit led,” elders must nevertheless be watchful. Overly long prayers, brothers who use the time to teach the saints, and those who cannot be heard or understood can have a discouraging effect on the heart, and must be graciously corrected.

*Worship involves whatever is lovely and worthy about Him, even if what is shared is not specifically about His death.*

As to structure, the physical setting for the Lord’s Supper must (as always), serve the purpose. The first Lord’s Supper is instructive, not toward legalistic requirements, but to highlight a setting that befits the content. According to Luke 22:12, the disciples were to prepare “a large upper room, furnished”... Large, enough to meet the need; upper, or away from distractions; and furnished, suitably equipped for the purpose.

The elements on the table being symbols, are simple in any culture; bread and the fruit of the vine. How much strife could be avoided if the church preserved the simplicity intended! Thankfully, restrictive terms like “leavened bread,” or “unleavened bread,” “grape juice,” or “wine” are not used. Scripture says “bread,” and “the cup.” Nor is involvement limited to certain persons as officiating clergy. But ordinary believers gathering in humble homes the world over, on remote mission fields, even prison cells and hospitals, all believers may honor the Lord in the breaking of the bread.

Another helpful point of structure is (where possible) to sit in a circle

around the table. This brings to life the repeated truth of the Lord “in the midst” of His people. It also provides a welcome contrast to groups where the clergy officiates from the front, while the “laity,” or persons not qualified to perform “holy communion” look on.

If hymn books are used, there should be careful attention to both words and music. God has given a beautiful range of voices to man, and musical harmony illustrates the spiritual harmony brought out in the truth of the lyrics. One wonders to see men who are meticulous about accuracy in words, careless about musical pitch, raising the tune off key so that the intended harmony is impossible. This is not the only reason young people seek modern music and clamor of instruments in all meetings of the church, but it is one.

As to the climate, or spiritual atmosphere of the meeting, we must be careful not to quench the leading of the Holy Spirit, as the heart and its workings are God’s domain. Yet, it was the Spirit of God Who inspired words to guide those who lead in the church, that everything be “done to edifying” (I Cor. 14:26), so that elders cannot afford to allow poisonous words or attitudes to cripple the church.

Are young men reluctant to participate? Let the older men lead into the sanctuary in a tender and gracious manner, and others will follow. Are new believers lax about coming on time, or appropriate dress, or fitting participation? Instruct them privately with a smile, giving ten words of praise for every one word of correction, and they will want to please. Are some inclined to teach or exhort during the meeting? Provide good teaching on the nature of worship, and then allow time for the saints to ask questions or interact on the subject.

Cultivating a spiritual atmosphere of grace and kindness takes time, but pays large dividends in building the church.

### **The Joy of Heart-warming Oneness**

This last point about spiritual climate is worthy of serious thought. We are often reminded that the Lord Jesus was “filled with compassion” as He looked on people, and we cannot forget

*Continued on page 3*

fection, of human sinfulness and it ultimately leads us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). That the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law and brought to light God's ultimate plan of grace and truth should motivate the heart of every believer in their worship of Him.

**Leviticus: Approaching a Holy God**

Leviticus is a special book with its focus upon priestly service. Enumeration of sacrifices, festivals and guidelines for being clean, staying clean and moving away from what is unclean seem remote to a twenty first century believer. Yet this too is God's revealed word. By teaching Israel the importance of special times, places and situations, the Lord showed the people how best to approach Him, how best to walk with Him and how best to celebrate His presence with them. The relationship was that important to the Lord. Our boldness of approach in Christ can blur both the price of our relationship with the Lord and how much it means to Him. When we select a festival or sacrifice for meditation, we remind ourselves of how comprehensive God's plan is and how full the work of Christ is in fulfilling that plan. Examination of the free will offering (one of the three peace offerings) images the peace Christ brings but also shows how the Lord provided a way for individuals to fellowship with Him for no other reason than expressing their love and gratitude for who He is. Different from a thank offering or votive offering it simply expressed one's devotion. I often wonder how many of these were ever offered! Yet how wonderful it is

when believers come together to adore the Lord Jesus for who He is.

**Numbers: Valuing God's Presence**

Numbers chronicles the wilderness period and provides so many lessons on why we should not complain. At the same time it reminds us of the grace of our Lord when we do. While the grumbings of Exodus received no reprisal, each one in Numbers was met with an escalating judgment. The Lord is patient but just and we see that clearly in Numbers. The simplicity and grace of salvation was illustrated by the lifting up of a bronze serpent (21:9), a picture used by the Lord Jesus to make the same point to one of Israel's leaders (Jn 3:15), while His patience with Balaam illustrates His sovereign control of the nations, protection of those He loves, and resolve to send the Messiah (24:17). In many ways the book of Numbers shows us the patience and grace of God as He seeks and stabilizes His relationship with people.

**Deuteronomy: The Heart of the Matter**

The book of Deuteronomy is a covenant-related document and sits well in a time when covenant structures were a prevalent form for agreements. However, the book contains Moses' last messages to his people. Israel was crossing Jordan but Moses was not allowed to go with them. So the book merges a covenant structure, complete with historical prologue and blessings and curses, with Moses' preaching his heart out to a stubborn people. Strong challenges are given to

remember the Lord and flee idolatry that was so prevalent in Canaanite religion. In reading this book, then, one needs to appreciate the way the Lord wanted to preserve a close relationship with His people as they moved into a new but stressful environment. The relationship, clearly guided by the Law, needed to come from the heart. Emphatic statements like loving the Lord with "all your heart" (6:5) and circumcising one's heart (10:16) provide that emphasis and stand behind Jesus' use of Deuteronomy more than any other OT book. Believers today can profit from observing how the Lord wanted His relationship with Israel to grow in a new environment. His election of Israel through love (7:7-8) and adjustment of the Law for a more sedentary lifestyle (14:24-26) enhance our understanding of the way the Lord cares for people and sets the stage for the coming of a greater prophet (18:15 & Acts 3:22).

In summary, time taken to understand each moment of the Pentateuch in context and how the Lord related to His people can generate a greater appreciation for His plan and our relationship with Him today through the Lord Jesus Christ. Our interpretation of the text in context will ultimately provide a firm foundation for teaching and preaching that glorifies the Lord and generates relevant applications that stand the test of time. With this approach, we see the Lord as He reveals Himself, His plan as it unfolds and the emphasis He places on seeking a relationship with people.



**Thoughts on Local Church "Alive-ness" (part 6)**

(continued from page 2)

that He is still the same today in our midst! Tender grapes are easily wounded, and harsh words can cause young believers to withdraw and remain silent. Picture the Lord in the meeting looking upon the saints with compassion. The world tears apart relationships; let the assembly be a place of healing and drawing hearts together through kind words.

Elders must be tireless disciplers in the matter of Christian courtesy! If during the meeting, a brother shares a thought about the Lord from Scripture,

mature brothers should ask themselves, "How can we best respond to the Lord in this?" Perhaps the Spirit of God will lead a brother to express collective thanks to God in prayer, or perhaps a hymn will unite the hearts in collective praise. Insensitive contributions, as if to say, "That may have been your thought, but I had different thoughts..." thus launching off into a new subject, will not mark brothers who "tarry for one another."

Some have questioned the idea of a theme in the Lord's Supper, and such

should never be artificial or manufactured. But if the men will listen to one another, and esteem others better than themselves, it will become evident that the true "Worship Leader" in the assembly, the Spirit of God, will be painting a lovely picture of the Lord Jesus for us to enjoy. He, too, "will not strive nor cry," His voice is ever the still, small one, but He will lead the saints toward Christ in the midst, and nothing will draw them closer to one another than drawing closer to the Lord.





There are times in marriage when a wife may ask herself, "What would he do without me by his side?" Well, have you considered the question, "What is he better able to do with me by his side?" I confess I almost never ask that question, so I am presuming other elders' wives may struggle to answer it as well. If we consider all the possible scenarios an assembly may experience, and the weight our husbands actually do carry, it should give us pause as to how to best "...bear one another's [my husband's] burdens." Galatians 6:2

The stress of being in leadership in a modern-day assembly ranges from comforting families who have lost a loved one to having to impose church discipline on an erring yet beloved saint, not to mention dealing with criticism, opposition and divisiveness. It can sometimes feel like a punch in the gut. Let's face it, assemblies are under siege and things are not likely to improve.

So what is a wife's responsibility as she seeks to stay afloat herself while trying to serve her hurting husband? First, let me say that I fall short in this area, but am challenged as many of us may be, to sacrifice licking our own wounds, preferring rather to uplift one of God's chosen leaders. Here are some practical suggestions for leaders' wives which I have observed in other godly

women.

First, we should never assume our husband isn't suffering just because he is not complaining or wringing his hands. Two verses from Proverbs may help us. The first is, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out." Prov. 20:5 (KJV). If we are feeling defeated, defenseless, discouraged, etc. because of a situation at the assembly, we must know that our husbands are feeling those things as well. Don't let him off the hook! At the opportune time, gently prod, pray, dig, for those feelings he may not know how to express. In short, cry together.

*"What is he better able to do with me by his side?"*

The other verse expresses the opposite. "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." Prov. 17:28. When crisis or strife breaks out in the assembly, we can bring our own pain to the Lord and not continually talk about it. I can be a millstone around my husband's neck, sometimes looking for

his comfort when God has charged me to help him with emotions he doesn't even know he has.

Further, being a quiet support may include practical things like rubbing his shoulders and neck or preparing meals that will not "linger" in his stomach, which is already knotted up. Maybe drawing a warm bath or inviting him for a drive in the country. My biggest challenge personally is to keep the house in order, for keeping order in the home may help keep mental chaos at bay. I know for my husband, just holding his hand helps. Of course, the ultimate help in the process of conquering circumstances is prayer. Praying together in a spirit of unity and oneness is a powerful tool to encourage and strengthen our weary husbands.

Our husbands need to know we understand, we feel it too, and most of all, we care about and support them. Often we cannot change the circumstances, but we can be that ally our husbands are looking for. Ecclesiastes 4 has some wisdom for us: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."



## THE SMALL PRINT

**Elders' SHOPNOTES** is published bi-monthly in English and Spanish. We seek to serve elders by publishing short articles that can be read in brief sittings and that are intended to provide practical teaching from a biblical perspective.

**E-mail subscriptions:** visit our web site at: [www.eldersshopnotes.com](http://www.eldersshopnotes.com). Issues will be sent via e-mail as an attachment which can be printed down or read online. Feel free to pass ESN on to others. E-mail subscriptions (as opposed to "postal-mail") help us reduce the costs in publishing ESN.

**Postal-mail subscriptions:** If you are unable to access the internet conveniently, write us at the address below and

we will send it via postal-mail. Group subscriptions are also available via postal-mail. Please indicate how many your group wishes to receive.

**Spanish subscriptions,** go to [www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org](http://www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org).

**Subscription fee.** We trust the Lord for the funds to publish ESN. If you would like to be one of the instruments God uses to support this ministry, please mail your gifts to the address below, payable to: Jack Spender. Feedback/comments are welcomed.

**Back issues** of ESN can be found in the online archives at [www.eldersshopnotes.com](http://www.eldersshopnotes.com).

**Contact Info:** *Elders' ShopNotes*, c/o 112 Doolittle Dr. Bethany, CT. 06524 USA; email: [alan7s@yahoo.com](mailto:alan7s@yahoo.com) Phone: 203-393-0078.

Publisher/Editor: Jack Spender  
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger  
Layout, Deborah Kichar

Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.