

Unit One

Pentateuch

In the Beginning...
Introduction to the Pentateuch

The word *pentateuch* comes from a Greek word meaning “five scrolls.” It is the name Christians have given to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

One of the concepts that we will be working on developing in this Sunday School unit is the understanding that the Bible is not just a single book, but more like a library. Within the Bible are a total of 66 books by different authors and of different styles of writing. Many books themselves have more than one author and style of writing even within the same book. These books have been compiled from scrolls and writings in ancient languages that were passed from generation to generation, sometimes edited, copied and re-copied to more clearly convey God’s truth, and treasured by God’s people for many, many years.

As we begin in Genesis (which means, by the way, “*origin*” or “*beginnings*”) we will first hear the story of creation. Right off the bat, the point of the Bible being a compilation of writings by people of various times and places is pointed out in the fact that there are actually two stories of creation in the book of Genesis. If you haven’t ever had the chance to do this before, now is a good time to make a comparison of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25. What is similar in the accounts? What is different?

Even if your students are only reading one of the creation stories, this is a good time to consider about how we think and talk about the truth of the Bible. It’s happened more than once that a child has gone all the way through Sunday School only to arrive at college and be shown this kind of “discrepancy” and think that everything they’ve been taught about the Bible was wrong. When you are teaching about creation as well as any other portion of Scripture, it is important that we are teaching about the writing style and habits of the culture in which the Bible was written. The Bible was written to convey the Big Story truth about God and God’s activity in the world. It was not written to be a science handbook or history textbook. Details, descriptions, orders and numbers all convey truth but not in the literal way we are used to reading in books written in our own time. Listen with your students for what the Big Story Truth is in each lesson and emphasize this.

We will also in this unit, learn about sin. The relationship between humanity and God, between us and God, has been shattered by sin. Yet, in spite of human sin, God has been faithful. God established a covenant with Abraham and Sarah that through their family all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God kept this covenant even when they tried to take matters into their own hands. And when their descendant, Joseph, was sold off to slave traders by his brothers, God made a way for Joseph to raise to power and favor in Egypt so that when the well-being of the whole family was threatened by famine, Joseph could provide for them. And when the family of Joseph grew so powerful in Egypt that they were enslaved by a Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph, God raised up Moses as deliverer to lead the people out of Egypt. Even after God's faithfulness was demonstrated powerfully in the people's exodus from Egypt, the people sinned. God again was the one to be faithful. God forgave.

The theme of God's faithfulness in spite of human unfaithfulness appears over and over again throughout the readings in this unit. The "Great Big Words" for this unit are:

Sin- When we do something we know we shouldn't, and it hurts another person or God.

Righteousness- Being "right" with God, or being in step with God, or being on the same page as God, or being at one with God.

Reconciliation- Giving and receiving forgiveness for hurts we have caused or that have been done to us.

Deliverance- God freeing the Israelites from slavery and freeing us from sin and death... it means nothing can separate us from God.

Intercede- Standing up for someone when they can't stand up for themselves.