

*The Sower* · Lesson 1 · The Pentateuch  
**THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES**

*The Story: Primary*

Turning the pages of the Bible (turn them carefully), we find it made up of many smaller parts of books. These are grouped into the Old Testament, which tells about the Lord's care of people before his coming and the getting ready for his coming, and the New Testament, which tells of his coming and his life on earth, and of the church that he began. Starting at the beginning of the Old Testament, as you turn the pages notice the names of the different parts or books. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Stop here; these are the five books of Moses, and our stories this year will be from them.

In these stories we shall learn more about Moses, whom the Lord made a great leader of the children of Israel, to lead them from Egypt to the Holy Land, and to teach them commandments and laws. (Were the Ten Commandments written? On what? And how?) Many other laws Moses wrote in a book at the command of the Lord, and also the story of the Lord's care of the people during the time that Moses was their leader. The story of the very ancient times Moses copied from a much older Scripture called the Ancient Word that had been written long before in a beautiful ancient style. The first seven chapters of Genesis were taken precisely from the Ancient Word, and also the substance of the story through the eleventh chapter—that is, up to the beginning of the story of Abram. Other laws were also added after the time of Moses, in the days of Jerusalem and the temple (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* #103; *True Christian Religion* #279; *Coronis* #52). So the Lord has given us the books of Moses as we find them in our Bibles.

Books, you know, were not printed in the time of Moses, but were written carefully by hand. The pages, too, were not bound as in our books, but were fastened together edge to edge, making a long strip that was rolled up on a stick, or on a stick at either end, so that any chapter could be found by unrolling from one stick and rolling on the other. The Lord has made the stories still more convenient to us in our Bibles, and has made it possible for every one of us to have a copy.

*Junior*

You must help me look up some things about these books of Moses. First, the names by which we know them. "Genesis" means "beginning," and it tells about creation. "Exodus" means "going out." Why is this name given to the second book? "Leviticus" reminds us of the Levites, who were the priestly tribe; and the book is mainly laws of religious ceremonies. "Numbers" tells a part of the story of the wilderness journey, including two numberings of the people. "Deuteronomy" means "a copy of this law," the phrase occurring in Deuteronomy 17:18. We shall think more about these names as we take up the separate books.

Does anyone know the meaning of the word "Pentateuch"—a name sometimes given to the five books of Moses? We have "penta" in other words, such as "pentagon," a figure with five angles and five sides. Yes, Pentateuch is the five books, or the book in five parts.

As for the writing, we must look at some old scroll if we can, so neatly written, and at the writing on clay tablets, done with a sharp instrument when the clay was soft, and then baked hard. We are taught that the Lord provided the art of writing and the art of printing

largely for the sake of his Word, that it might be kept in fixed form and might be distributed (*Arcana Coelestia* #9353, 9793).

And more about the Ancient Word from which Moses took the first seven chapters of Genesis precisely, and the first eleven chapters in substance. It was the Word of the Church called in the Bible “Noah and his descendants.” It was written wholly in beautiful parables describing heavenly things. We can see that the early chapters of Genesis are of a wholly different style from the history of Abram that follows. In more worldly and evil days, in the Lord’s providence, the Ancient Word dropped out of use, though stories from it lingered in the legends and the art of many nations. In Swedenborg’s latest references to the Ancient Word he gives “this news”: that it still exists in Great Tartary—central Asia—and may some day be found. We may be grateful that the Lord has preserved for us a part of the beautiful Ancient Word in our own Bible, and that he has now taught us how to read its parables and learn its heavenly lessons (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* #101–103).

#### Spiritual Study: *Intermediate*

“Which way is it true?” the children used to ask of a new Bible story: true as a parable is true, or true also as literal history? We may be very thankful that knowledge of the character and style of writing of the early chapters of Genesis gives us assurance of their divineness, that they are true, and lifts them out of reach of conflict with natural science.

Swedenborg’s first great expository work, *Arcana Coelestia*, is an unfolding of the deeper meaning of Genesis and Exodus. It must be our constant guide in spiritual study of these books of Scripture. The first eleven chapters are unfolded as the spiritual history of the early churches in this world, with very many cross-references to the spiritual development and experience of an individual man. (See especially the story of creation.)

But with the story of Abram, and continuing for many chapters, *Arcana Coelestia* unfolds the story in its relation to our Lord’s life in the world, especially to his childhood, making these pages of the *Arcana* a most precious part of the New Church writings. For a series of chapters we are allowed to read directly of the Lord’s life and saving work, and at the same time are made to realize that the early chapters of Genesis in their deepest sense must relate to the beginnings of the incarnation, and to the infancy of the Lord—that there is always this inmost application of Scripture to the Lord making it supremely sacred, although this inmost application may usually be too profound for us to follow. (Students of the spiritual sense will find help in addition to *Arcana Coelestia* in the outlines of interpretation given in *Lectures on Genesis and Exodus*, by John Worcester.) The Lord said that Moses wrote of him (John 5:46). He also opened to the apostles the things concerning himself in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:27, 44).