

Introduction to the Pentateuch

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I. Name: "Five Books"

The Jews call the first five books of the Bible are called "the Torah." This word originally meant "to shoot," but it eventually came to mean "direction." To the Jew the word became a technical name meaning "the law." Genesis through Deuteronomy are sometimes called "The Five-fifths of the Law."

II. Authorship:

A. Traditional View:

The Jews and the Christians have believed, since earliest times, that Moses was the substantial author or giver of the Law (John 1:17).

This needn't mean that Moses wrote every word or sentence, nor that he created the final draft as it has come down to us (this may have been completed by Joshua, or some later editor). It only means that Moses was the leader and chronicler of the events from the Exodus until just before the children of Israel entered the promised land.

That Moses wrote substantial portions of the Pentateuch is claimed repeatedly within the books themselves (Exodus 17:14/ 24:4/ 34:27/ Num.33:2/ Deut.1:1/ 31:9).

B. The Documentary Hypothesis: (the Vatican estimates that 90% of scholars accept it)

1. Foundational argument:

It once seemed necessary to reject the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch upon the grounds that scholars claimed that writing was not yet invented in the time of Moses (this was before the discovery of the laws of Hammurabi, in 1901-02, and Ras Shamra tablets in 1958, which proved that writing was in use long before Moses);

2. Supporting arguments:

- a. Names of God: sometimes "Elohim;" sometimes "Yahweh" (or "Jehovah") suggest different sources/authors
- b. "Canaanites were then in the land" (Genesis 12:6; 13:7)
- c. "They ate manna until they came to the border of the Canaan" (Exodus 16:35)
- d. Sequence argument: some stories appear to be inserted out of chronological order
- e. Repetition argument: similar stories may be variant accounts of same story

3. The four interwoven oral traditions: Jehovist (850 BC); Elohist (750 BC); Deuteronomist (650 BC); Priestly (450 BC) [dates suggested by Graff-Wellhausen theory]

- a. Jean Astruc, French physician of Jewish extraction, anonymously wrote a book (1753) that first proposed multiple sources used by Moses in the writing of Genesis;
- b. Building upon the work of scholars before them, Professors K.H. Graff (1866), and Julius Wellhausen (1895) in Germany, "identified" four separate traditions—J, E, D, P;
- c. Israeli historian, Yehezkel Kaufmann (1950s) disputed the order, advocating J, E, P, D

4. **Internal evidence against this hypothesis:**

- a. Mention of Sinaitic (not Palestinian or Babylonian) fauna and flora (Leviticus 11/ Deuteronomy 14) suggests mosaic period;
- b. Egyptian frame of reference (Genesis 13:10/ Numbers 13:22) suggest readers familiar with Egyptian geography;
- c. Egyptian loan words (not as likely in later Israelite history);
- d. Fascination with the tabernacle (irrelevant after David's time);
- e. No mention of Jerusalem as religiously significant (suggests pre-Davidic period of writing);
- f. No mention of Davidic worship forms in Leviticus (ditto)
- g. No use of the term Yahweh Sabaoth (the most common name for God in the prophetic writings from later period)

5. **Additional considerations:**

- a. Moses had the competence to write the material in the Pentateuch
- b. As Israel's leader, Moses had the incentive to write the Pentateuch
- c. Jesus' affirmation of Mosaic authorship: Matt.8:4 (Leviticus); 19:8 (Deuteronomy); Mark 7:10 (Exodus); General: Luke 24:44/ John 5:46; 7:19
- d. Apostolic affirmation of Mosaic authorship: Acts 3:22 (Deuteronomy); Romans 10:5 (Leviticus)

III. Contents and theme of each book:

A. Contents:

- 1. Genesis:** History from the creation to the migration of Israel into Egypt
- 2. Exodus:** From birth of Moses, through the exodus, to the erection of the tabernacle
- 3. Leviticus:** Laws concerning the priesthood
- 4. Numbers:** Wanderings in the wilderness for 38 years
- 5. Deuteronomy:** Moses' final sermons and death

B. Themes:

- 1. Genesis:** The sovereignty of God
- 2. Exodus:** The power and saving grace of God
- 3. Leviticus:** The holiness of God
- 4. Numbers:** The goodness and the severity of God
- 5. Deuteronomy:** The faithfulness of God

The following is from Wikipedia (article: Documentary Hypothesis"):

In recent years a small number of critical scholars have also questioned the validity of the documentary hypothesis. R. N. Whybray *The Making of the Pentateuch* offers a critique of the hypothesis from a critical (liberal) perspective. Biblical archaeologist W.F. Albright stated that even the most ardent proponents of the documentary hypothesis must admit that, like the Book of Jasher, and Book of the Wars of the Lord, there is no tangible, external evidence for the existence of the hypothesized J, E, D, P sources that the documentary hypothesis supposes to have once existed. Dr. Yohanan Aharoni, in his work *Canaanite Israel during the Period of Israeli Occupation* states that archaeological discoveries show that later authors or editors could not have put together or invented these stories hundreds of years after they happened.[3]

Some studies claim to show a literary consistency throughout the Pentateuch, such as a 1980 computer study at Hebrew University in Israel, which concluded that the Pentateuch was most likely written by a single author. This study has been rejected by the majority of modern Bible scholars for a number of reasons, including the problem that one later editor can rewrite a text in a uniform voice.