

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—Introduction to the Torah (Pentateuch)

Pentateuch

--The “Pentateuch” and the “Torah”

--“Pentateuch” is from the Greek & means roughly “five scrolls” or “five volumes.” This refers to the five portions of the Pentateuch, namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

--“Torah,” traditionally translated “law,” is the Jewish designation of the Pentateuch. Is this a good designation? Not by critical standards, because the Pentateuch is incredibly diverse. The student should recognize that Hebrew *Torah* (תּוֹרָה) could also mean “teaching” or “instruction,” a category which could better apply to the Pentateuch.

--Note that the Pentateuch includes stories, laws, rituals, ceremonies, calendars, judgments, etc. Thus the designation of “law” is less than totally accurate. Thus we should see “Torah” as the name of the work, not a classification of its contents.

--Theological Themes of the “Pentateuch” (Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *OT Survey*, 4-5)

--Promise—God’s promises to Abraham are the centerpiece of this category, but also note His promise to Cain & Noah for examples.

--Election—God chose Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Israel among others. God’s choice of His people is a major theme in the Pentateuch & the remainder of the OT.

--Deliverance—The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is the primary deliverance of the Pentateuch, but one must also remember His deliverance of Noah & Moses.

--Covenant—God chooses to live in relationship with His people, and this relationship is defined by covenant, a binding agreement. Covenants between numerous people in the Pentateuch also point out the importance of this concept in the OT and the ANE.

--Law—The Law represents the constitution of God’s people, the stipulations upon which the covenant rests.

--Land—The promise and granting of the land as an inheritance is central to the Pentateuch and the OT. Thus the promises of the Pentateuch are left unfulfilled until the Book of Joshua. [This, as well as other factors, has led to a discussion of Hexateuch by some scholars. Of course, other scholars have argued for a Tetrateuch, with Deuteronomy as the beginning of a historical document usually called the “Deuteronomistic History,” including Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.]

--Critical Study of the Pentateuch

--Authorship/Composition

--Who wrote the Pentateuch?

--Tradition says that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Certainly this was also true in the NT as well, where the “Law of Moses” is mentioned numerous times. So it would seem fair to say that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

--However, “Who wrote the Pentateuch?” may be an unfair question. Why?

--Much of the material is older than Moses, i.e. Genesis. While Moses could have received this material through revelation, most scholars would suggest that other sources were used, probably oral history, by Moses or someone else.

--The last chapter (Dt. 34) contains the record of Moses’ death. He probably did not write his own obituary; rather someone else probably added this account!

--Many of the editorial accounts in the narratives are fairly obviously secondary (i.e. Gen. 12:6, 13:7, 14:14).

--Genesis 12⁶ “Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. **At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**” This verse was obviously written when the Canaanites no longer lived in the land, i.e. after Israel was in the land.

--Genesis 13⁷ “And quarreling arose between Abram’s herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. **The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.**” The verse also was written after Israel was in the land and the Canaanites and Perizzites no longer inhabited it.

--Genesis 14¹⁴ “When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as **Dan.**” Dan did not exist as the name of a city until the period of the Judges (See Judges 18).

--Lasor, Hubbard and Bush, in *Old Testament Survey*, use the term “complexity” to describe the Pentateuch. This is a good term because it recognizes that the statement “mosaic authorship” may be too simplistic. Even if much of the material came from Moses, most scholars would recognize that it has been restructured and adapted.

--“Composition” is probably a better term for the origin of the Pentateuch. Beginning with a core by Moses, the material was probably adapted and reused in various contexts (i.e. family, education, worship). This does not discount inspiration from God, or the leadership of the Spirit in the formation of the OT. Nor does it negate the role of Moses as “author” of the Pentateuch.

--Documentary Hypothesis

--This theory¹ is associated with Julius Wellhausen, who wrote *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, in the late 1800s. He was simply putting an existing theory into a coherent whole and brought it to a fairly completed stage.

--Wellhausen argued for four distinct sources in the OT:

--J = Jahwist (Yahwist) because of its use of Yahweh as the name for God. J was supposedly written in Judah between 950-850 BC. It runs from Genesis 2-Numbers 24, although there is no absolute consensus.

--E = Elohist because of its use of Elohim for God, at least until Exodus 3. E was supposedly written in Israel (northern kingdom) between 750-700 BC.

¹For a brief but thorough review of the Documentary Hypothesis and subsequent methods of criticism, see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 109-135.

--JE—A combination supposedly taking place in the 7th century.

--D = Deuteronomist because it makes up the bulk of Deuteronomy. The style & language of Dt. is distinctive, suggesting a different source, although it could just as easily be an adaptation of existing material. D was supposedly written in the 7th century, perhaps in connection with Josiah's reform.

--P = Priestly source, supposedly written after the exile in the 6th and 5th centuries.

--The Documentary Hypothesis has been under scrutiny in recent years, and much of the earlier scholarly consensus has been eroded, although the basic theory of sources still holds sway in most scholarly discussion of the Pentateuch. Problems leading to new types of study include the atomization of the Pentateuch by source critics, lack of consensus concerning the division of the sources, and a general doubt about modern critical presuppositions forces upon ancient texts.

--Form Criticism—

Associated with Herman Gunkel, this type of critical study looks at individual sections rather than the whole, seeking out the genre or form (German *gattung*) of the individual passages. By looking at forms in their proposed original contexts, biblical interpreters can better understand the meaning of the text. Form Criticism is especially helpful in study of the Psalms and prophetic texts.

--Tradition History—

Associated with Gerhard von Rad, this type of critical study looks at the various traditions in the Pentateuch (i.e. Patriarchs, Exodus, Sinai, Covenant, etc.), seeking to understand the origin and use of each tradition in the Pentateuch and beyond. The argument is based upon a supposed liturgical use of various Pentateuchal traditions after Israel's entry into the land. Von Rad, Noth, and others theorized that different traditions were used at different cultic sites in celebration of certain festivals and holidays.

--Canonical Criticism—

Brevard Childs argued that his "canonical approach" to the study of the OT is a "post critical alternative" to the previous approaches. He stated that the canonical approach "seeks to take seriously both the successes and the failures evident from this history of scholarship, while at the same time mounting a case for a very different approach to the study of the Pentateuch and to the full range of problems"² of interpretation. He argued that other critical approaches ignored the canonical shape of the text to focus on other critical matters, such as authorship and redaction. He sought to address the particular issues of the canonical development and shape of the Pentateuch, including the Jewish and Christian interpretation, since these two communities of faith preserved the OT as their scripture.³

²Childs, *Introduction*, 127. For the full discussion of the Pentateuch studied canonically, see pp. 109-135.

³Childs wrote his Exodus commentary as something of a test case for his approach. See, Brevard Childs, *Exodus*, in *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974). His latest significant work furthers his approach. See Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, in *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).