The Pentateuch I: Genesis

Week 1

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Outline

Course Description

It's tempting to blow off the Pentateuch, especially Genesis. Francis Schaeffer challenges this position:

> *Some people assume that one can spiritualize the history of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. They assume they can weaken the propositional nature of these passages where they speak of history and the cosmos, and that nothing will change. But everything changes. These chapters tell us the "why" of all history man knows though his studies, including the "why" of each man's personal history. For this reason, Genesis 1-11 is more important than anything else one could have. (Genesis in Space and Time, 159)*

Course Description

William Henry Green says that, the Pentateuch “is not only [the Old Testament’s] initial portion, but the basis or foundation upon which the entire superstructure reposes; or rather, it contains the germs from which all that follows was developed.” (Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch*, vi)

Course Expectations

- **Attendance** You must attend 5 of 6 classes to receive credit.
- **Readings** You must turn in 4 of 5 of the reading "journals."

Course Goals

1. Clear away some of the polemical debris that has accumulated around such a valuable text.
2. Help students see that Genesis is not a crazy patchwork of unrelated stories, but exhibits great literary care in conveying its message(s).
3. See how God's relationship with these (often sinful) individuals can mirror deep theological lessons for us.

Course Outline

Date	Week	Topic	Homework Due
1/4	1	Overview, Critical Theory	–
1/11	2	Evolution and the Seven Days	Gen 1:1-2:3
1/18	3	Humanity: Its Creation and Fall	Gen 2:4-4:25
1/25	4	History of Adam-Terah	Gen 5:1-25:11
2/1	5	History of Ishmael-Isaac-Esau	Gen 25:12-37:1
2/8	6	History of Jacob	Gen 37:2-50:26

Outline

The Literary Genre of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch Exhibits Numerous Genre Types:

1. Prosaic: Historical Narrative
2. Legal: Moral, Ceremonial, Civil; Treaty, Covenant
3. Annalistic: Genealogy, Census Records
4. Poetic: Songs, Blessings, exhibiting parallelism, meter and alliteration

Most of these are embedded within an extended narrative form.

Outline

Poetic Joints of the Pentateuch

John Sailhammer argues that the Pentateuch has hinges at each major song.

Partition	
1	Origins and Patriarchs: Emergence of God's Nation
	Jacob's Blessings—Genesis 49:1-28
2	Exodus: God's Unique Claim on the Nation
	Song of Moses and Miriam—Exodus 15:1-21
3	Wandering: God's Provision, Nation's Rebellion
	Blessings of Balaam—Numbers 23,24
4	At Canaan's Gate: God's Spokesman Addresses Nation
	Blessing of Moses—Deuteronomy 33

Concentric Format

The narrative sections of the Exodus and Wilderness years form a surprising palistrophe with Sinai at the center.

A	Ex 15:22-25	Provision of Water (Marah)
B	Ex 17:1-7	Water from Rock
C	Ex 17:8-16	Amalekite Battle
D	Ex 18	Relief for Moses
E	Ex 18:27	Moses' In-Laws
F	Ex 19:1-2	Enter Sinai
X		Sinai
F′	Nu 10:10	Exit Sinai
E′	Nu 10:29-32	Moses' In-Laws
D′	Nu 11	Relief for Moses
C′	Nu 14:39-45	Amalekite Battle
B′	Nu 20:1-13	Water from Rock
A′	Nu 21:16-18	Provision of Water (Beer)

Ten Toledots of Genesis

The book is broken into 11 stages, beginning with creation and running through 10 generations, "toledot."

1. Of the Heavens and Earth (2:4 – 4:26)
2. Of Adam (5:1– 6:8)
3. Of Noah (6:9 – 9:29)
4. Of Noah's Sons (10:1 – 11:9)
5. Of Shem (11:10 – 11:26)
6. Of Terah (11:27 – 25:11)
7. Of Ishmael (25:12 – 25:18)
8. Of Isaac (25:19 – 35:29)
9. Of Esau (36:1 – 36:43)
10. Of Jacob (37:1 – 50:26)

Dating and Authorship

Mosaic No later than the Canaanite conquest; 15th C. BC

Late The Pentateuch is split into (at least) four documents (JEDP). The earliest (J) was composed during the Southern Kingdom ($\sim$9th C. BC) and the latest (P) during post-exilic period ($\sim$5th C. BC). (Details to Follow)

Outline

Who Wrote the Pentateuch? Who Cares?

What supports the claim that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (using your present knowledge)?

In March 2021, an article appeared in the New York Times with the following tendentious remark:

> *Ironically, Deuteronomy itself has been described as a "pious forgery," as scholars call works created to justify a particular belief or practice. The Hebrew Bible states that during the reign of Josiah, around 622 B.C.E., priests discovered an ancient "Book of the Law" in the Temple in Jerusalem. Since the 19th century, scholars have held that Deuteronomy (or its nucleus of laws) was that book, which in fact had been composed shortly beforehand to justify the centralization of worship at the Temple and other priestly reforms.*

Such unqualified reporting shows the extent to which the Documentary Hypothesis is still the default "textbook" treatment of the composition of the Old Testament.

Key Features of Documentarian Hypotheses

- Has its origins in the European Enlightenment period (anti-supernaturalistic philosophical bias; dim view of Scripture; Cf. Modern Cartesian Doubt)
- Divides the Pentateuch into multiple sources, none of which are Mosaic.
- The sources (Jahwist-Elohist-Deuteronomist-Priestly) trace the development from primitive pseudo-polytheism, through monotheism towards a sophisticated cultus.
- The sources were assembled for political purposes by a sequence of "clever" redactors by the 5th C. BC.

$\leq$ 2nd C AD	Testimony of Scripture: Moses (Covered in detail later)
2nd C AD	"five [books] belong to Moses" (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.)
200 AD	"Moses wrote his book . . . " (Baba Bathra, *Babylonia Talmud*)
1670	Not Moses, Use of Third Person (Spinoza, *Tractatus*)
1753	Divine names (J & E) as Criterion of Source Division (Astruc)
1783	Division of all of Genesis and Exodus into J & E (Eichhorn)
1805-06	Pentateuch dates from 1000BC; Hilkiah wrote Deuteronomy for political solidarity (Cf. 2 Kings 22) (De Wette)
1847	Moses! (Hengstenberg)
1853-1869	Sources Multiply to include D & P (Hupfield, Graf, Keunen)
1876	JEDP developed cumulatively over centuries; Links with Darwinian evolution and Hegelian dialectics (Wellhausen)

The Current Situation

In the 20th Century, innumerable responses were generated against JEDP, from liberal and conservative camps.

> *New data and approaches, however, have seriously disrupted this consensus. . . After almost a century of research, [source critical] practitioners have failed to reach any consensus. (Waltke and Fredericks, 25-6)*

Many liberal bible scholars march forward undaunted.

> *For want of a better theory, most nonconservative institutions continue to teach the Wellhausen Theory. . . as if nothing had happened in Old Testament scholarship since the year 1880. (Archer, 96)*

Such scholars and their departments are justly the objects of academic scorn.

Outline

An Indirect Argument

From the standpoint of a devoted Christian, we must believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Mild editorial work is acceptable (Moses' death, etc.)

Consider this argument:

1. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus makes at least ten references to 'the Law,' and cites it as authoritative.
2. 'The Law' and 'the law of Moses' were contemporary short-hand for the Pentateuch; indeed, sometimes just 'Moses' was used to to refer to the Pentateuch (Luke 16:29, 24:27)
3. The universal view of Jesus' day was that Moses wrote the Law.
4. Therefore, it is *very* likely that Jesus believed that Moses authoritatively penned the Pentateuch.

Cf. Discussion of prophetic redaction in *The World and the Word*.

More Direct References

Here are examples of Jesus connecting the Pentateuch to Moses:

- Matthew 8:4 (NIV) Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift *Moses commanded*, as a testimony to them.”
- Mark 7:10 (NIV) “*For Moses said*, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’
- Luke 24:44(NIV) He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the *Law of Moses*, the Prophets and the Psalms.”
- John 7:19a (NIV) “Has not *Moses* given you the law?”

More Direct References

Jesus connects Moses to each of the books of the Pentateuch as well:

Gen	John 7:22—"...Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs)" cites Leviticus 12:3, but likely the more detailed Genesis 17.
Exo	Mark 12:26—"... have you not read in the Book of Moses..." refers to Exodus 3:15.
Lev	Matt 8:4—"...offer the gift Moses commanded..." refers to Leviticus 14.
Num	John 3:14—"Just as Moses lifted up the snake..." refers to Numbers 21:8,9.
Deut	Matt 19:8—"Moses permitted..." refers to Deuteronomy 24:1

Outline

Difficulties for the Documentarian Hypothesis

We will examine two problems with the Documentarian Hypothesis in its own terms:

1. The methodology of source criticism is neither spiritual nor scientific.
2. The biblical data do not support the criteria for source division.

Ultimately, even if we lacked positive evidence for Moses (covered next), source critical techniques only lead to confusion and ignorance.

Suspicious Method

Like many Enlightenment thinkers, source critics relied almost exclusively on their own modern methodological innovations and individualized investigations. Ancient authors (forget about the *Bible!*) were disdained as superstitious and primitive.

David Hume, a member of the Scottish Enlightenment, famously wrote:

> *If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, §12)*

Suspicious Method

If we take Hume at his word, then we would be required to commit his own volume, the *Enquiry*, to the flames!

More to the point, source criticism is rooted in a skeptical method with the following problems:

- Source critics presuppose an anti-supernaturalistic standpoint.
- Source critics are disproportionately intolerant of Biblical evidence. The same skepticism applied to any other text or body of literature would be laughable at best. We read this indictment in a nearby discussion:

  In practice, deconstructive approaches to language therefore look very much like nitpicking at words in order to deliberately miss the point. (Pluckrose, Lindsay, 41)

- Source critical claims are tolerant of very thin evidence, which really amounts to sophisticated speculation. There is also not a shred of archaeological evidence.

The Divine Name Criterion

The entire enterprise of fastidiously dividing the Pentateuch began with the names used for God. Here are some problems with that criterion for source division:

- According to current understanding, *every* ancient near eastern religion used more than one name for its gods. (Cf. *Enuma Elish*, Ugartic Myths)
- The names Yahweh and Elohim occur together in numerous of places; likewise, 'Elohim' occurs in some allegedly J passages and vice versa.
- The Septuagint does not reflect a one-one translation of these two names. But the documentary hypothesis depends on stable manuscript transmission.

The Doublet Criterion

Another major criterion for source division was the existence of so-called Doublets: parallel accounts that are alleged to be evidence of diverse traditions.

- Two Creation Accounts- The two accounts serve distinct purposes; origins of the universe versus origins of mankind
- Two Episodes of Sarah-as-Sister- Do people never repeat the same mistakes?
- Two sales of Joseph- Midianites are connected to Ishmaelites in numerous places. Two names for the same people group is, again, found in Egyptian literature.

These examples expose the source critics' shocking ignorance and/or lack of imagination.

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Internal Evidence

There is some (but not much) direct testimony from within the text.

- Exodus 17:14-Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll. . . ”
- Exodus 34:37-Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write down these words . . . ”
- Numbers 33:2-At the Lord’s command Moses recorded the stages in their journey. This is their journey by stages:
- Deuteronomy 1:1-These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan . . .

Eyewitness and Circumstantial Evidence

The author appears to be personally familiar with the events and customs described:

- Exhaustive Detail given concerning the Tabernacle in Exodus 26-31; 35ff. (Cf. Source Critics claim that the Pentateuch post-dates Solomon's temple.)
- Detailed laws and descriptions given concerning a nomadic camping network (Numbers 2) [Cf. Ramsses II's Camp.]
- The author knows how many springs and palms there were at Elim (Exodus 15:27)
- The author knows what manna tastes like (Numbers 11:7).

Familiarity with Egypt and Sinai Desert

- The author uses Egyptian loan words.
- The author is intimately familiar with Egyptian, Sinaitic geography, flora and fauna. Notably, certain materials of the tabernacle are not native to Palestine. (Cf. Exodus 9:31,32; Leviticus 11:16; Deuteronomy 14:5)
- The author (or at least the original audience!) is somewhat unfamiliar with Palestian geography. (Genesis 13:10, Genesis 33:18)

Other Evidence for Mosaic Authorship

Criterion of Embarrassment: Moses is exhibited as flawed.

- He kills an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15)
- He refuses to speak (Exodus 4:13)
- He failed to circumcise his sons (Exodus 4:24-26)
- Due to disobedience, he was prevented from entering the promise land. (Numbers 20:12)

Deuteronomy Exhibits Special Treaty Structure.

- Hittite Suzerain-Vassal Treaty
- The author was highly educated in a very powerful society
- The specific structure was only in use in during the 2nd Millennium BC.

Concluding Thoughts

Although it's *possible* that it was not Moses, he does fit this description extremely well; likewise, there is a striking lack of alternatives. Combined with the more direct evidence makes for a very strong case for Mosaic authorship.

Delitzsch writes:

> *As the mediator of the law, [Moses] was a prophet, and indeed the greatest of all prophets: we expect from him, therefore, an incomparable, prophetic insight into the ways of God in both past and future. He was learned in all the wisdom of Egyptians; a work from his hand, therefore, would show, in various intelligent allusions to Egyptian customs, laws and incidents, the well-educated native of that land. (Quoted in BCOT, 20)*

That is exactly what we find in the Pentateuch.

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