

Pentateuch
Lecture Notes
Introduction

❖ **TEXTS & MANUSCRIPTS**—The Pentateuch (like the OT) was originally written in Hebrew. Various manuscript traditions exist, although the majority of manuscripts are “Masoretic” in orientation. The 3 major textual traditions are MT, Sam. Pent. & LXX.

I. *Masoretic Text*—This is the primary tradition of Hebrew Scripture that has survived. After the destruction of Jerusalem and Judea in 70 A.D (C.E.), Judaism became much more organized. Normative Judaism (which was basically Pharisaic, as contrasted to prior domination by Sadducean Judaism) gave us the Mishnah, Talmud, and Masoretic Text. The masoretes were a group of scribes who protected & preserved the Hebrew Scriptures. They organized the text and normalized it. Practically all of the Hebrew mss of the OT which were known before 1948 were MT mss. Our Hebrew Scriptures are still based upon MT. The suggestion has been made that this normative text was edited in Babylon, perhaps returned to Palestine by Ezra during his reform movement of the 5th century BCE. Thus, the MT is often referred to as the “Babylonian textual family.” When you read your OT, the English translation is based on the MT unless it’s noted to be something different.

II. *Samaritan Pentateuch*—The Samaritans were a hybrid group created when the Assyrians brought exiles from a foreign land to replace those exiled after the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE. (Although the exact origin of the Samaritans as a people is a fairly hotly debated topic.) Upon return from the exile, the Jews refused to accept the Samaritans as a part of the rebuilding of Judah. A schism resulted in the 5th/4th century. (A group of Samaritans still live near Nablus and worship on Mt. Gerizim.) The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch, called the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, and had their own texts, written in archaic Hebrew characters. This textual tradition is different in many respects from MT (and LXX) (about 6000 variants, according to Livingston, *The Pentateuch*, a third of which agree with the LXX). Some significant differences are inserting Mt. Gerizim as the place of worship in Dt 27:4 & Ex 20:17.

III. *LXX*—The translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek took place about 250 BCE. (Other translations include Aquilla, Symmachus, Theodotion, & Lucian in Greek, Peshitta in Syriac, and Targumim in Aramaic.) The LXX became normative for the Christian church. This is seen in the preference for the LXX in OT quotations in the NT. During the Reformation, emphasis was returned to the MT. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some focus has returned to the LXX. The translation took place in Alexandria, Egypt.

IV. *Dead Sea Scrolls*—Many manuscripts: 17 of Gen., 15 Ex., 9 Lev (mostly archaic paleo-Hebrew), 6 of Num., 26 on Deut. The texts were written between 3rd century BCE & 1st century AD/CE. The Dead Sea Scrolls biblical texts show affinities with all three textual

traditions mentioned above, which shows the eclectic nature of the OT text in the formative period.

❖ CANON

The Pentateuch was obviously accepted early as canonical, as seen in the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX containing the same books as the MT & the Sadducee/Pharisee controversies concerning other books. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Pentateuch makes up the first of 3 major divisions: Torah, Nebi'im, & Kethubim (=Tanak). This division remains unchanged in Hebrew & other translations because it was canonized so early, while other sections of the OT have significant differences in order & division.

I. Authorship, Inspiration, & Editorial Processes

--“Pentateuch”=“five scrolls”

a. Authorship—By “authorship” we mean that a person (or persons) set down & wrote a document. Thus Mosaic authorship means that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch (some even include the account of his death in Dt. 34). **Some important questions: Does suggesting that Moses did not write Dt. 34 mean that he did write the rest of the Pentateuch? Does the “Mosaic Authorship” require that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch? Could Moses have used outside sources?*

b. Inspiration—The Bible claims to be inspired by God. What does this mean? It’s not as simple as we would like it to be. 1. Verbal Inspiration—God spoke the Word directly to the biblical authors. They wrote exactly what they heard, w/o input from their own minds, thoughts, or cultures. 2. God used the biblical writers, giving them words at times, ideas at times, inspirations at times, but they used their own minds & abilities, & their cultures impacted what they wrote. 3. Inspiration is “after the fact,” i.e. inspiration from God was invented after the writings were considered to be Scripture.

c. Editorial Processes—Later editors worked in collecting, copying, and organizing the OT at some level, at least in updating place names (Philistines/Pithom/Ramses) & organizing material. At the most, I would argue that the editors collected prior writings & oral stories, put them together, organized them w/editorial connections, & updated them for use of the current generations (along w/the theology & practices of the editor[s]). I would suggest that a position in the middle is probably near the truth, although drawing conclusions is very difficult. The question is, when does editorial process take away from inspiration. I would say that it does not.

II. History of Criticism—

a. Pre-19th century—In the NT & following for 17 centuries, Mosaic authorship was accepted by almost all. Those who said that Moses did not write the Pentateuch believed primarily that Ezra wrote it. In 1753, Jean Astruc set into motion a concept that would change this consensus. He believed Mosaic authorship, but argued that there were several sources that Moses used, primarily one with Elohim for God & the other with Yahweh/Jehovah for God. Eichhorn moved the debate along with the addition of style & thought content to the E & J sources. He also gave up the idea of Mosaic authorship. By the end of the 1700s, most OT scholars outside church authority had rejected traditional Mosaic authorship in favor of various theories, ranging between those mentioned above.

b. 19th century— DeWette proposed that Dt was produced in the 7th century and was the “Book of the Law” during Josiah’s reform. Ewald argued that E was the primary core of the Pentateuch, w/J added to it. He later argued that there were two E sources, E₁ and E₂. Julius Wellhausen developed the “Documentary Hypothesis” to the basic form in which it still exists today (1878—See *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*). He agreed that there were 4 sources, JEDP, & he dated them in that order.

c. 20th century—Most scholars accepted JEDP theory, but tended to further fragment the sources by finding sources w/in the sources. (Some did disagree, such as Umberto Cassuto & most Catholic scholars.) This fragmentation was caused by rigorous application of the criteria that led to the argument of sources in the 1st place.

Hermann Gunkel began to look at “forms” (*gattungen*) of literature that were present in the Pentateuch. He did not reject sources; rather he sought to find their prehistory. He sought to find the social situations of the forms. This is **form criticism**. Following Gunkel & in part building upon his work were Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth, who developed **tradition-history criticism**. They sought to find the background of various Pentateuchal traditions, such as the feasts of Israel or the different sanctuaries (Gilgal, Shechem, Bethel).

III. Literary Criticism Examined

The “Documentary Hypothesis” presupposes sources that were not combined until much after Moses’ day. Thus Mosaic authorship is greatly diminished if not denied completely. We should note that the purpose of Wellhausen & his contemporaries was not to teach theology or to understand the Pentateuch. Rather the point was to explain the history of the religion & institutions of ancient Israel. By determining the sources of the literature & the setting of each source, they believed that they could better understand the history of Israel’s religion.

1. The **criteria** for determining sources are:

- a. Divine names—Jehovah (Yahweh) & Elohim—the earliest criteria. The 2 names appeared to be used in different sources & seldom mixed, at least until Deuteronomy.
- b. Duplications of events, i.e. naming of Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22 & 35:13-15). These were seen as two sources remembering the same event differently.

- c. Disagreements between narratives & laws (i.e. creation accounts, laws in Ex. & Dt.)
- d. Style & Vocabulary
- e. Concepts, particularly religious—i.e. place of worship.

2. **Dating** of the sources—Wellhausen's theory has held sway throughout the century.

J—early divided monarchy

E—from northern kingdom, combined w/J after 722.

D—1st used in Josiah's reform & combined w/JE after that point.

P—Product of the exile & post-exilic period, when Judaism was being defined.

Other have disagreed, some dating E 1st, some P earlier, & some D in the exile or later. In fact, consensus has disappeared in the past 20 years on many fronts.

3. **General Conclusions of Documentary Hypothesis**—

a. The Pentateuch is not the beginning of ancient Israel but of Judaism, founded after the exile. The Pentateuchal narratives & laws served as a foundation and a constitution for the new religion (Judaism).

b. 19th century thought (based on Hegel?)—"thesis-antithesis-synthesis," i.e. the earliest Hebrews were a primitive, nature religion w/agricultural festivals & no thought of one God; the prophetic period called for a new religious spirit shown in justice & righteousness based on the worship of Yahweh; & Judaism turned this into a system of rituals & laws.

c. Anything not mentioned in a source must be later, i.e. Sinai not found in JE so it must have been unknown by the earlier sources, thus being a product of D or P.

d. The Pentateuch is a development through 5+ centuries, with little before the 9th and the primary religious teachings not included until the exile or later.

4. **Problems**—

a. The lack of agreement on content, dates, & origin of sources.

b. The presupposition that ancient literature should be analyzed acc. to modern critical standards & methods.

c. The question of the editors' failure to solve the problems between the sources. If contradictions exist, then why did the editors not remove them? Certainly they could have seen them as well as we do.

d. The tendency to fragment the Pentateuch into many pieces, sometimes to the point of dividing single verses into 3 different sources. It becomes ridiculous.

e. The original problem of the literary critics was not solved. They failed to develop a satisfactory account of the formation of Judaism based on the sources they discovered.

f. The theory ignores other writings in ancient Israel (wisdom, psalms, prophetic).

IV. Form Criticism Examined

--Gunkel-- He argued that these early forms (*gattungen*) were transmitted orally and only written down at a later date. Thus their origin was early & in the form of oral tradition.

This takes the discussion of the Pentateuch to another level. When the sources were written down becomes secondary, because their earlier use is more important.

--Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, describes the form critical approach in detail—

a. Five aspects to form criticism:

1. Isolating literary types—(see Tucker, *Form Criticism & the OT*)—These could include myths (stories about God); folk-tales; saga; romance; historical narrative; wisdom oracle; prophetic oracle (which could include vision in narrative, discourse, threat, promise, exhortation, invective/attack); lyric poetry (i.e. lament, love song, wedding song, song of victory, royal song, hymn, thanksgiving, messianic psalm).
2. Studying the history of each literary type, comparing with other biblical materials & sometimes ANE documents, i.e. laws, family matters, treaty/covenant.
3. Determining the setting in life of each literary type, i.e. in the gates, in a worship setting, in a family setting, public/private, etc.
4. Studying how each literary type was passed down orally, i.e. its “transmission history.” Thus the emphasis is not upon sources or texts, but traditions that were passed down in particular settings or groups before taking written form.
5. Studying the redaction history (editing) of each literary type after it was written down.

b. Tradition History—Looking at the individual traditions (i.e. blocks of material, such as Sinai covenant, exodus, wilderness wanderings, Abraham & Sarah, Abraham & Hagar, Jacob & Esau, etc.) and attempting to trace the prehistory of that tradition. The idea was that the traditions were kept alive as oral tradition for generations (or centuries), usually in conjunction with a particularly festival and/or cultic site.

1. Gerhard von Rad—

--He argued that the Pentateuch originated in a “short historical creed” which was recited in first-fruits festival, or Festival of Weeks, at Gilgal during the judges period. As it was used in this religious setting, it was expanded, & eventually these combined traditions became our Pentateuch. The Sinai tradition was not a part of this original tradition, since it was excluded from the “short historical creed” (see *Problem of the Hexateuch* for many of his arguments).

--He also argued that the earliest written sources for the Pentateuch originated in the courts of King Solomon. He called this the period of “Solomonic Enlightenment.”

2. Martin Noth—

--He argued that the Pentateuch was made up of 5 basic traditions, which were combined & interwoven. Some later material was also added to the original five. He also sought to find the place of origin & remembrance of each tradition, i.e. patriarchal traditions in Ephraim region was kept alive in “clan cults” (i.e. worship w/in individual clans).

c. Problems in Form/Tradition-history Criticism:

1. How did the oral traditions become a literary work? The Pentateuch is not just a narrative, but also a collection of narratives that became a literary work (i.e. a written document). This process has never been adequately explained.
2. Can the traditions/forms be related to the sources or are they irreconcilable? (Some have indeed argued that they were irreconcilable.)
3. How does, or can, cult (religious ritual/worship) produce narrative?
4. How do the traditions of different scholars correspond, i.e. von Rad's exodus-occupation & Sinai traditions in comparison to Noth's five traditions?

V. Other Critical Approaches Examined

a. Canonical Criticism—Associated w/Brevard Childs. He argues that the discussion of sources and historical origin of the Pentateuch has removed it from its canonical foundation. He seeks to move back to the canon, looking at the position of the text in the canon, comparing the text(s) in question with others in the canon, and examining historical understandings of the text(s) acc. to those who held the book to be canonical. (The purpose of the latter is to understand the reason for canonization & how the book/text has been interpreted & used in the past.)

b. Modern Literary Criticism (“New Literary Criticism”)—The text is a “closed system.” The text must, therefore, be examined w/o reference to author or origins, but simply as it stands. This is a reaction to the “excavative methods” of previous literary criticism.

c. Reader-Centered Approach—Fretheim (*The Pentateuch*) proposes this. He chooses to focus on the readers, i.e. implied readers, of the text. Thus the meaning of the text could change if a different implied reader was assumed (i.e. Christian reading the OT). Thus, one must look at the original implied reader, and then the abiding themes & teachings for the current implied reader. This approach should not violate historical matters but does not concern itself w/them.