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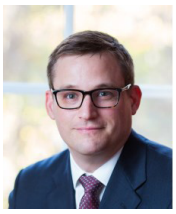

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how different the Christian faith would be if we didn't have the Bible? Leaders would pass instructions from one generation to the next, but there would be no way to evaluate their ideas, no standard by which we could judge between differing opinions.

This must have been how it was for many in Israel in the time of Moses. Their ancestors had passed down accounts of primeval history and their patriarchs. They'd told the story of how God had delivered Israel from Egypt, given them his law, and led them toward the Promised Land. But what were they to believe God was going to do with Israel in their current circumstances, and in the future? How were they to judge between differing opinions on these matters? God answered these kinds of questions by giving them the first five books of the Bible as the standard of their faith, the books we now call the Pentateuch.

This is the first lesson in our series The Pentateuch, and we've entitled it, "Introduction to the Pentateuch." In this lesson we'll introduce how the biblical books of Genesis to Deuteronomy served as the standard for Israel's faith.

Our introduction to the Pentateuch will divide into two main parts. First, we'll describe modern critical approaches to this part of the Bible. These approaches represent the views of interpreters who deny the full authority of Scripture. Second, we'll explore modern evangelical outlooks, the views of biblical scholars who affirm the full authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Let's look first at modern critical approaches to the Pentateuch.

Modern Critical Approaches

Although our lessons will go in a different direction, it's important for us to realize that many, if not most, modern biblical scholars have denied the divine inspiration and authority of the Pentateuch. They've also denied the traditional Jewish and Christian view that the Pentateuch came from the days of Moses, Israel's great lawgiver. So many commentators, teachers, pastors, and even lay people have endorsed these views that it's nearly impossible for serious students of Scripture to avoid them. And for this reason, it's crucial that we have some understanding of how critical scholars have handled this part of the Bible.

> In the last 150 to 200 years, critical scholars have given a great deal of attention to study of the Pentateuch. And although we evangelicals may disagree with many of those approaches, it's necessary for us to be aware of where many Old Testament scholars are in order that we can respond to their suggestions correctly. We must not simply do our Bible study in a vacuum, as it were, without being aware of what's going on around us. We need to state our approaches in the light of all that is being said elsewhere.
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> — Dr. John Oswalt

To understand modern critical approaches to the Pentateuch, we'll look at three issues: first, some important presuppositions that have influenced critical outlooks; second, critical perspectives on the authorship of the Pentateuch; and third, a number of significant interpretive strategies that critical scholars have pursued. Consider first some of the presuppositions that influence these approaches.

Presuppositions

For the most part, modern critical views on this part of the Bible flowed directly from the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment in seventeenth and eighteenth century Western Europe.

For our purposes, we'll focus on two significant presuppositions that grew out of the Enlightenment. Both of these perspectives have deeply influenced critical interpretations of the Pentateuch. First, we'll consider the concept of naturalism. And second, we'll look at presuppositions about the historical development of

Israel's faith. Let's start with naturalism.

Naturalism

In brief, Enlightenment naturalism was the dominant scholarly belief that if spiritual realities existed at all, they had no discernable effect on the visible world. And for this reason, they had no place in academic research. By the middle of the nineteenth century, naturalism dominated every academic field in the West, including studies in the Christian faith. One major effect of naturalism in biblical studies was that well-respected scholars rejected the longstanding Jewish and Christian belief that the Pentateuch was inspired by God. And for this reason, most handled the Pentateuch in the same ways that they handled the religious writings of ancient cultures in general. In this view, the Pentateuch contains all kinds of errors, contradictions and even intentional misrepresentations of history and false theology, like all other merely human writings.

Interestingly enough, as the presuppositions that led to naturalism freed modern scholars to dismiss the inspiration and authority of the Pentateuch, they also led to certain outlooks on the historical development of Israel's faith.

Historical Development

By the early nineteenth century, naturalism had led to what we may call "naturalistic historicism." This was the belief that the best way to understand any subject is to understand how it developed over time through natural causes. Nineteenth century biologists devoted themselves to explaining how life on earth originated and evolved through the millennia. Linguists traced the historical developments of human languages. Archeologists reconstructed the ancient backgrounds and advancements of human societies. And scholars in the field of religion gave similar priority to describing the naturalistic, historical evolution of world religions.

By and large, early modern western scholars reconstructed the evolution of world religions to align with their understanding of developments in human society. For instance, it was commonly assumed that ancient people first formed primitive tribal societies that practiced animism, the belief that objects in nature had spirits associated with them. As time passed, primitive tribal societies formed larger chiefdoms that practiced polytheism, a belief in

many gods. As various chiefdoms formed larger confederations, religion began to move from polytheism to henotheism, the belief that one god was greatest among all gods. Finally, with the development of large kingdoms and empires, powerful monarchs and priests often moved their nations from henotheism toward monotheism, belief in one god. And in this naturalistic historical view, it wasn't until this highly developed stage that the norms of religion began to be codified, or written down. Prior to this time, religion had passed from generation to generation only through oral and ritual traditions.

Now, we should note that later in the twentieth century anthropologists largely discredited the idea that religions evolved in such a simple manner. But these outlooks deeply influenced the ways biblical scholars handled the Pentateuch early in the modern period. And they continue to influence biblical scholarship even today.

> What we call "critical scholarship" often assumes that the Old Testament reflects a development of beliefs from a primitive, less sophisticated form of religion to a more complex, more sophisticated form of religion, the latter being better than the former. There are a couple of things we can say about that. One thing, positively speaking, we can say that there is a progress in how God reveals himself. The Bible shows this, what we call "organic growth," where doctrines and themes and ideas about God grow from seed to full form, and so the Bible even talks about its own progressive message. And so, yes, there is a form of progression within the Bible and within the Pentateuch. It's a movement from the beginnings of God's revelation to the full flowering, if you will, if you can imagine a time-lapse photo of a flower blossoming. But, negatively speaking, critical scholars generally hold an evolutionary or development view of human history which assumes the inevitability of progress… Now, all we have to do is look at the world around us to see that the inevitability of progress is a great myth. Yes, we progress, but also as we progress, we also devolve. So, there's something about the hubris of the modern that looks upon something older as more inferior, whereas in fact, that is a philosophical assumption, it's not something that's found within the Bible itself.
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> — Rev. Michael J. Glodo

Early modern outlooks on world religions were obviously different from the way the Bible depicts the development of Israel's faith. The Pentateuch presents Israel's faith as consistently monotheistic. From Adam and Eve, to Noah, to the patriarchs, to the heads of Israel's tribes, the faithful worshiped the one true God as the Creator of all. And, as far as we know from Genesis, in these early stages, this true, monotheistic faith was passed through oral and ritual traditions from one generation to the next.

Then, according to the Pentateuch, a decisive transition took place in the days of Moses. At this time, the norms of Israel's faith began to be codified. Moses prepared Israel for nationhood, first by writing down God's law in the Book of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments, and, as we'll see later, by composing the rest of the Pentateuch to guide Israel's faith. So, according to the Bible, Israel's religion was oriented toward sacred writings from the time of Moses, long before Israel had a king and temple.

As straightforward as this well-known biblical account is, modern criticism considered this timeline impossible due to the assumptions of naturalistic historicism. Modern critical scholars deconstructed the biblical portrait of Israel's faith. And they reconstructed it to conform to modern ideas of how all primitive religions evolved. In this outlook, Israel's prehistoric ancestors embraced tribal animism. Then, the patriarchs of Israel moved toward polytheism as their tribes merged together in what amounted to chiefdoms. In this view, if there was a Moses who led Israel out of Egypt, the Israelites he led were little more than a confederation of tribes characterized by henotheism. And, contrary to the Scriptures, critical interpreters believed that, at this stage of social development, it would have been impossible for someone to have written down the standards of Israel's faith. Such written standards only could have emerged during Israel's early monarchy, when Israel's kings and priests sought to regulate Israel's faith. So, according to critical scholars, it was from the time of the monarchy that Israel's religion increasingly became a religion of the book.

Now that we've touched on the presuppositions of modern critical approaches toward Scripture and the historical development of Israel's faith, we should turn to a second, closely related issue. How have these outlooks affected critical approaches to the authorship of the Pentateuch?

Authorship

As we've seen, critical interpreters believed that Israelite faith only began to be codified in the time of Israel's monarchs. And of course, this assumption meant that Moses had no involvement in writing the Pentateuch. Rather, these books resulted from a long, complex process that began with ancient oral traditions that were compiled into various documents during the monarchical period. And it was only during and after the time of Israel's exile that these documents were edited and compiled into the Pentateuch as we now know it. Now, when students of Scripture first hear that many scholars believe in this long history of the Pentateuch's development, they almost always wonder what evidence supports it.

We'll look at this approach to the Pentateuch's authorship by summarizing three of the main evidences offered by critical scholars. We'll begin with variations in divine names found in the Pentateuch.

Divine Names

Early critical interpreters noted that the Pentateuch has a variety of names for God. And they argued that these variations were evidences of a long evolution of Israel's faith. For instance, sometimes the Pentateuch simply uses the Hebrew term אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*) or "God." Other times, God is called יהוה (*Yahweh*) or "the Lord." The Pentateuch combines these terms with each other and with other terms as well, like "*Yahweh Elohim*" or "the Lord God," and "*Yahweh Yireh*," or "the Lord provides." God is also called "*El Elyon*" or "God Most High," and "*El Shaddai*," often translated "God Almighty."

Now, it's important to note that while the Pentateuch does reflect a variety of names for God, this may not have been unusual. Twentieth century research into divine names of other ancient Near Eastern religions has pointed out that the same authors use a variety of names for their gods as well. Still, early critical scholars thought that variations in the names of God in the Pentateuch revealed a long history of composition. They believed that different names for God indicated that one source was added to another and another, and eventually resulted in the Pentateuch.

> When you're reading through the Old Testament, it doesn't take you very long to note that there are different names

> for God. In Genesis 1 the name for God is Elohim. Genesis 2, all of a sudden, you have the name Yahweh. Critical approaches will understand this very differently than an evangelical would. A critical scholar would say these come from different sources... As evangelicals, I think we need to step back and understand the bigger picture. God is Elohim, and he is Yahweh. Elohim is the God Almighty, the one who is over the world, the Creator, the one that all nations of the world would recognize as that higher power, that ultimate figure. But in a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel, he reveals himself in a very personal name, Yahweh. He is the "I Am" who will be for his people and will be with his people. And that is a covenant name because Israel is God's chosen people.
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> — Dr. David Talley

In addition to variations in divine names, many critical scholars have supported their views on the authorship of the Pentateuch by drawing attention to what they've called "duplicate accounts."

Duplicate Accounts

It isn't difficult to see that a number of passages in the Pentateuch resemble each other. But critical interpreters have argued that these passages reflect different oral traditions among different groups of people, and the processes by which these accounts came to be written down in the Pentateuch.

For example, interpreters have often pointed to what they call the "two creation accounts" in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25. They've also pointed out the similarities between the accounts of Abraham and Isaac when they lied and endangered their wives in Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18; and 26:7-11. Both traditional Jewish and Christian interpreters have explained these similarities in reasonable ways. But critical scholars maintain that these accounts represent different oral traditions that were written down and later incorporated into the Pentateuch.

In the third place, critical scholars have pointed to what they consider inconsistencies in the Pentateuch. And they claim that these so-called inconsistencies support their complex reconstructions of this part of the Bible's authorship.

Inconsistencies

For example, they've often noted differences between the regulations for Passover in Exodus 12:1-20 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8. And they've pointed out variations between the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Once again, traditional Jewish and Christian interpreters have shown how these and other differences can be reconciled. But critical interpreters have seen them as reflecting a long, complex history of oral traditions and written sources that were woven together into the Pentateuch as we have it today.

> When you read the Bible and the Pentateuch in particular, you're confronted with a lot of different types of literature. And sometimes when you read it, you read things like, for example, when the book of Genesis starts off you have Genesis 1:1–2:3… We have a picture of God creating over seven days a particular order. God creates with his speech and it's a powerful statement about God being powerful, God being the Creator, God creating humanity in his image. And then the very next chapter, 2:4-25, we have another story of creation, that are kind of one right after another. When you look at that one, some people would see contradictions because now we see God is called the Lord God. Instead of being this God who just speaks things to existence, we have God actually coming down; he creates people. It says he makes a human out of mud, the first man. And then he takes the first woman right out of the man. So, you see God, instead of being this sort of invisible creator God, God's down almost, in human terms, kind of making stuff happen with his hands… But by having that other story, which is ultimately complementary, not contradictory… And again, we always have to remember if there's really contradictions, do we really think ancient people didn't see these things? I mean, that's a key piece. They aren't stupid people. It's a different time, a different culture, but they still have brains, and in their wisdom they keep these things together. And so like the second story gives us a God who is more hands-on. We call that in theology a God who is immanent, the God that comes into creation… And I think the faithful way of reading Scripture is not to read it suspiciously but ultimately read it with a sense to understand it. You know, I may have questions, but it's a faith-seeking understanding, and at the end of the day, I believe that what's in the Bible is what God wants

> to be in the Bible, and my job as a reader is to listen to it attentively, especially in places that may bother me, to try to see, what's God really saying by putting these two different things sometimes in juxtaposition. But we should be grateful for that because at different times in different places those two different kinds of images may speak more meaningfully at one time than at another time.
>
> — Dr. Brian D. Russell

Now that we've looked at modern critical approaches in terms of their presuppositions and views of authorship, we can consider some of the main interpretive strategies that critical scholars have followed as they've handled the Pentateuch.

Interpretive Strategies

There are many ways to summarize these matters, but we'll touch on five major interpretive strategies of modern critical scholars. We'll consider these strategies in the order they developed starting with source criticism.

Source Criticism

Source criticism, or as it was first called, "literary criticism," originated in the work of K. H. Graf entitled *The Historical Books* of the Old Testament, published in 1866. It was refined by the better-known interpreter, Julius Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, published in 1883.

Source critics believed that the Pentateuch had grown out of oral traditions, just like all other ancient religious writings. But they concentrated their attention on identifying and interpreting parts of the Pentateuch that they believed came from independent written sources that emerged during Israel's monarchical period.

Following Wellhausen's terminology, the earliest documentary source of the Pentateuch, written in the early monarchy, has normally been deemed "J" for the Yahwist. It bears this name because the prominent name for God in passages identified with this written source is "*Yahweh*" — spelled with a "J" in German, much like we spell the name "*Jehovah"* in English. "J" passages appear scattered in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Source critics have argued that portions of the Pentateuch were

originally written in Judah during the days of Solomon around 950 B.C. In this outlook, "J" passages represent a document that told of ancient times and supported the centralization and the regulation of Israelite religion and society by David's dynasty in Jerusalem.

A second written source of the Pentateuch has been deemed "E," for the Elohist, because God normally is called *Elohim* in these passages. "E" materials also appear in Genesis and Exodus. According to this theory, "E" sources were written around 850 B.C. in the North, after the division of Israel into two kingdoms. "E" texts promoted northern, prophetic views that were critical of David's dynasty.

A third literary source has been called "D," or the Deuteronomist. It's given this name because "D" materials appear primarily in the book of Deuteronomy and only occasionally in other parts of the Pentateuch. This material is usually dated sometime between Josiah's reforms in approximately 622 B.C. and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. In one common theory, "D" represented the work of Levites who defected from northern Israel to Judah. These Levites were loyal to David's house, but also critical of it.

Finally, a fourth major literary source in the Pentateuch's development has normally been called "P," standing for the Priestly writer or writers. In one common reconstruction, "P" was a group of priests who composed Leviticus and compiled and edited other portions of the Pentateuch between 500 and 400 B.C. According to this reconstruction, "P" designed the Pentateuch to direct social order and worship after a remnant of Israel had returned from exile.

Now, during the twentieth century, competent scholars left hardly any aspect of source criticism unchallenged. Yet, vestiges of these outlooks still appear in nearly every critical commentary on the Pentateuch.

Form Criticism

A second major strategy of critical approaches toward the Pentateuch has been deemed "form criticism."

Form criticism began as a specialized field of Old Testament studies with the work of Hermann Gunkel in *The Legends of*

Genesis, written in 1901. Gunkel and those that followed him accepted the major tenets of source criticism, but they focused on an earlier aspect of the Pentateuch's development. Rather than focusing on the Pentateuch's written sources, form critics concentrated on what they believed to be the oral traditions that predated the time of Israel's monarchs.

During the time when form criticism was popular, scholars noted the ways oral traditions functioned in illiterate tribal cultures. Form critics applied these studies as they searched for the pure, dynamic, pre-literary traditions that led to the documentary sources of the Pentateuch.

Form criticism's method was basically twofold: On the one side, form critics analyzed passages to discover ancient oral forms, or genres, like myths, folk-tales, sagas, romances, legends, and parables. On the other side, they associated these genres with cultural contexts known as the "*Sitze im Leben*," or the "life settings" of these oral traditions. These contexts included worship, tribal campsites, familial instruction, local courts, and the like.

For example, a number of form critics have treated the account of Jacob wrestling at Peniel, in Genesis 32:22-32, as a story that was originally told around the campfires of an ancient tribe. They've argued that it initially grew out of tales of supernatural, magical events at the ford of the Jabbok River. In this reconstruction, it was only much later that the story was associated with a tribal figure known as Jacob.

To be sure, form criticism rightly stressed the importance of the structures and formal features of biblical texts. But, like source criticism, form criticism has also been challenged in a variety of ways. Challenges to form criticism focus especially on its speculative reconstructions of the oral forms and settings behind biblical texts. Even so, we still find form criticism turning many critical scholars toward questionable reconstructions even today, rather than toward the Pentateuch as it exists in the canon of Scripture.

Tradition Criticism

A third major way that critical scholars have interpreted the Pentateuch is often called tradition criticism or traditio-historical criticism.

Building on the conclusions of source and form criticism, tradition critics focused on how primitive oral traditions and written texts developed into complex theological and political perspectives. Leading scholars like Martin Noth in *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, published in 1948, and Gerhard von Rad in his *Theology of the Old Testament,* published in 1957, asked how the Pentateuch reflected the influence of various traditions.

Among other things, tradition critics identified what they believed to be sets of competing theological beliefs found in the Pentateuch. They noted how the Pentateuch reflected consolidations of diverse traditions on subjects like creation, the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, and the conquest of the Promised Land. They also explored views concerning the tribes of Israel, David's throne, and Jerusalem's temple, to mention just a few. And they believed these complex streams of theology deeply influenced many of the major themes that appear in the Pentateuch.

Once again, most of the specific conclusions of tradition criticism have been questioned through the years. Yet, we can see the vestiges of this approach when Old Testament interpreters speak of passages reflecting various streams of tradition in Israel that contradicted or even competed with each other.

Redaction Criticism

A fourth major way that critical interpreters have approached the Pentateuch's development has been called redaction criticism. As the word "redaction" indicates, this strategy focused on how hypothetical documents were edited together into the Pentateuch as we know it today.

Redaction criticism began in the twentieth century in New Testament studies as a way of explaining the differences between the Gospels of the New Testament. Redaction critics believed these differences resulted from editing and reshaping previously written records.

Similar techniques were applied to the Pentateuch. Attempts were made to explain how different editors took earlier written sources like "J", "E", and "D" and wove them together until the Pentateuch reached its final shape. This approach especially focused on the late editorial work of "P."

Redaction criticism had the advantage of drawing attention to the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy as they appear in the Bible today. But redaction criticism never broke significantly with the conclusions of source, form and tradition criticism.

Contemporary Criticism

At this point, we should mention some of the tendencies that characterize contemporary criticism, or the more current influential critical approaches to the Pentateuch.

In recent decades, many leading critical interpreters have sought to go beyond older critical historical reconstructions. Instead, they've concentrated on the remarkable theological unity and depth of the Pentateuch's traditional Hebrew text. These approaches have taken different forms — rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism, new literary criticism — to name just a few. But they all share a focus on interpreting the Pentateuch as it's been handed to us through the synagogue and the church. Treatments of the Pentateuch in its final form are more promising than older critical approaches. But only time will tell what fruit these more contemporary approaches will yield.

So far in our "Introduction to the Pentateuch", we've focused on modern critical approaches to this part of the Bible. Now we should turn to our second main topic in this lesson: modern evangelical outlooks on the Pentateuch. How do evangelicals today approach the first five books of the Bible?

Modern Evangelical Approaches

You'll recall that for our purposes here we've defined evangelicals as those who hold to the full authority of Scripture. Needless to say, evangelicals haven't always applied this conviction in precisely the same ways. But as we'll see, this commitment to Scripture's authority still leads evangelicals to handle the Pentateuch very differently than modern critical scholars.

We'll summarize modern evangelical outlooks on the Pentateuch along the lines of our earlier discussion. First, we'll look at some important presuppositions that should guide us. Second, we'll consider evangelical outlooks on the authorship of the Pentateuch. And third, we'll survey several major evangelical interpretive strategies. Let's look first at some important evangelical presuppositions.

Presuppositions

We'll limit ourselves to two presuppositions that contrast critical and evangelical outlooks. First, we'll examine our belief in supernaturalism. And second, we'll look at our presuppositions about the historical development of Israel's faith. Let's look first at our belief in supernaturalism.

Supernaturalism

> "Supernatural" is kind of our modern language as distinguished from "natural" because, of course, if we believe in God, we believe God works through all things. But since the Scottish skeptic philosopher David Hume made that kind of distinction and said, "Well, we don't have reason to believe in supernatural activity," it's been an issue. And that's been one of the main reasons that many people have argued against the reliability of the Bible, because they say, well, the Bible is full of miracles and we know that miracles don't happen. Well, why do we know miracles don't happen? Well, because David Hume "proved" that. And you go back and you look at his argument, and his argument isn't very good at all. In fact, one of the key points of his argument is that we don't have eyewitnesses, who — credible eyewitnesses — who claim the existence of miracles, certainly not today when we can test it. And yet, even in Hume's day, there were credible eyewitnesses that God was still doing miraculous things, and today we have an incredible number of those… And if they take place today, how much more can we expect that they took place at significant junctures in salvation history as God was working.
>
> — Dr. Craig S. Keener

The Scriptures teach that God ordinarily directs history in ways that follow discernable patterns. Reason and science are gifts from God that help us discern these patterns. And for this reason, evangelicals rightly value rational and scientific research into the Pentateuch. But at the same time, followers of Jesus also know that God has involved, and continues to involve himself supernaturally in the world. God acts in ways that are without, beyond, and even against ordinary processes and natural causes. This belief affects our study of the Pentateuch in many ways. But in particular, it assures us that God inspired and superintended

the writing of these Scriptures. So, they are his fully authoritative and reliable Word. Of course, we always have to be careful not to confuse our interpretations with what the Pentateuch actually says. Our interpretations are always subject to improvement. But from an evangelical point of view, whatever the Pentateuch actually claims to be true is true because it is inspired by God.

Our presuppositions about supernaturalism lead directly to presuppositions about the historical development of Israel's faith.

Historical Development

As we've seen, modern critical scholars have argued that Israel's faith developed by natural means along the same lines as all other religions in the ancient Near East. But evangelicals hold that Israel's faith developed through special divine revelations. God actually revealed himself directly to men and women, beginning with Adam, and then Noah. And he also spoke to Israel's patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He addressed Moses in the burning bush. He disclosed his Law to Israel at Mount Sinai. These kinds of revelations caused Israel's faith to develop differently than other religions in the ancient Near East. To be sure, God's common grace and the influence of Satan led to similarities between Israelite faith and the religions of other nations. But Israel's faith did not simply evolve naturally. Instead, God supernaturally led the development of Israel's early faith just as the Pentateuch teaches.

We've considered modern evangelical outlooks and the presuppositions that contrast with critical approaches to the Pentateuch. These outlooks have led to contrasting beliefs about the Pentateuch's authorship. Critical scholars reject the idea that the Pentateuch could have come from the days of Moses. But evangelicals continue to affirm the longstanding Jewish and Christian belief that the Pentateuch came from Moses.

Authorship

To investigate evangelical outlooks on the Pentateuch's authorship, we'll look in two directions. First, we'll note some biblical evidence for this point of view. And second, we'll explain how modern evangelicals believe in what's been called "essential Mosaic authorship." Let's start with some biblical evidence for Moses' authorship.

Biblical Evidence

Scripture contains more than enough biblical evidence for the traditional view that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. But for the sake of time, we'll consider just a few passages from three distinct parts of the Bible, starting with evidence from the New Testament. Listen to Luke 24:44 where Jesus said:

> *Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44).*

Here, Jesus referred to the entire Old Testament in three divisions, much like other Jews in his day: Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Through these designations, Luke plainly indicated that Jesus associated the Pentateuch, or Torah, with Moses.

Jesus also referred to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch in John 5:46 where he said:

> *If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me (John 5:46).*

In addition to Jesus' own testimony, other New Testament passages refer to specific portions of the Pentateuch as coming from Moses. We see this in places like Mark 7:10, John 7:19, Romans 10:5, and 1 Corinthians 9:9.

In reality, the New Testament support for Mosaic authorship was based on the testimony of the Old Testament. And on many occasions, Old Testament books associate the Pentateuch with Moses. For example, listen to 2 Chronicles 25:4:

> *[Amaziah] acted in accordance with what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses (2 Chronicles 25:4).*

Similar Old Testament passages also associate Moses with the Pentateuch, including verses like 2 Chronicles 35:12; Ezra 3:2 and 6:18; and Nehemiah 8:1 and 13:1.

We should also note that the testimony of the New Testament and Old Testament in general is based on what the Pentateuch itself says about its author. Strictly speaking, most of the Pentateuch is anonymous. Except for the first verse of Deuteronomy, Moses isn't named at the beginning or the end of any of these books in a way that would indicate his authorship. But this was not uncommon

in the ancient Near East. Nor was it unusual in the Scriptures. In fact, the Pentateuch itself makes explicit statements verifying that Moses received revelations from God and was responsible for the Pentateuch's composition. For instance, Exodus 24:4 tells us that Moses wrote the Book of the Covenant found in Exodus 20:18–23:33. In Leviticus 1:1-2 we learn that the regulations in Leviticus were given to Israel through Moses. In Deuteronomy 31:1 and 32:44, we're told that Moses gave the speeches contained in the book of Deuteronomy. In sum, the Pentateuch clearly and explicitly claims that Moses was actively involved in receiving and transmitting the contents of major portions of the Pentateuch.

These and many other biblical evidences explain why evangelicals have stood strong against critical speculations about the Pentateuch's authorship. Clearly, Scripture doesn't support critical reconstructions that assume the Pentateuch was written much later than the life of Moses. If we follow the testimony of the Old and New Testaments, we can rest assured that we should associate the Pentateuch with Moses.

> The Pentateuch itself presents itself as being essentially Mosaic. Moses is one of the major characters, of course, from Exodus through Deuteronomy. And the text presents itself as being largely from the time of Moses. We're told in Exodus, for example, Exodus 25, that Yahweh told Moses to write the Book of the Covenant, which is Exodus 21 to 23. We're told in the book of Leviticus that we've got a series of speeches and laws presented from Moses. Moses is the main character in the book of Numbers, of course. In the book of Deuteronomy we've got a series of speeches that Moses delivered, and we're told several times within the book of Deuteronomy that Moses wrote this section and handed it to the priests. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy as a whole per se, but the book of Deuteronomy itself tells us that significant portions of the book, the bulk of the book, Moses wrote and then handed to the priests. So, for example, in Deuteronomy, whether or not he was the final author or the final narrator, we may have at least 90% of the book that Moses himself wrote.
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> — Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

Having seen that the basic concept of Mosaic authorship is supported by biblical evidence, we should turn to a second

consideration. What do modern evangelicals mean by essential Mosaic authorship?

Essential Mosaic Authorship

As evangelicals responded to critical views on the Pentateuch, they refined their responses in a variety of ways. But by the middle of the twentieth century, it became common to speak of "essential Mosaic authorship" of the Pentateuch.

Listen to the way Edward J. Young summarized this outlook in his Introduction to the Old Testament, published in 1949:

> When we affirm that Moses wrote … the Pentateuch, we do not mean that he himself necessarily wrote every word… [He may] have employed parts of previously existing written documents. Also, under divine inspiration, there may have been later minor additions and even revisions. Substantially and essentially, however, it is the product of Moses.

Now, evangelicals have understood the details of this outlook on Moses' authorship in a variety of ways. But to one degree or another, we speak of "essential Mosaic authorship" to remind ourselves of three factors that we must always keep in mind: the sources Moses used, the process by which the Pentateuch was written, and the updating of the Pentateuch that took place after the days of Moses. Let's consider first the sources Moses used.

Sources. The Scriptures tell us that God revealed himself to Moses in different ways. For instance, God wrote the original Ten Commandments with his own finger. And the Book of the Covenant contains the laws that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. But, as with many other parts of Scripture, there are indications that Moses also used additional sources as he wrote the Pentateuch.

On the one hand, he probably drew from a variety of oral traditions. For instance, in all likelihood Moses learned some things from his birth mother and extended family during his early childhood. Moreover, we see in Exodus 18:17-24 that Moses was quite receptive to instruction from his father-in-law, Jethro the Midianite.

> Any time we talk about oral traditions behind any part of the Pentateuch, including the primeval history or some

other part, it's a bit nebulous because there is obviously no concrete evidence for it. That's what it means when you say it's "oral", it means nothing was written down. But when you think about it for just a minute, we know a couple of things that help us realize that Moses probably did not just simply one day think up these stories, nor did God probably just tell him these stories one day without any kind of oral background. One evidence of that is just the fact that primitive cultures even today depend a lot on storytelling, a lot on repetition from generation to generation of ancient stories of their peoples, and this is often paralleled back to biblical times when people would do similar sorts of things. And the most concrete evidence we have of that in the Pentateuch, as a whole, is the way that the stories that are found in Exodus and Numbers are repeated often in the book of Deuteronomy. And in the book of Deuteronomy, we're given the context where Moses is giving speeches or giving sermons that include elements that we find also in the book of Exodus and Numbers. But the interesting thing about them is while they're similar they're not exactly the same. And so, there was a culture in the days of Moses, there was a culture in Israel in those days, of taking stories from the past or taking tales from the past, things that had happened and how they'd been passed down from generation to generation and then using them in specific ways in the context where you lived. And of course, you know Moses grew up in his mother's home in the early years of his life, and this of course would have given him stories to know about his ancestors, know about his identity as a Hebrew, know his identity as one who descended from Abraham. And, of course, as Moses would interact with the elders of Israel, even upon his return from his time with Jethro, he would have been learning even more stories that were distinctive to his ancestry. And so, there's good reason to think that Moses did, in fact, depend on oral traditions, or stories that were told from generation to generation, as he wrote different parts of the Pentateuch.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

The influence of oral traditions explains a remarkable feature of Moses' call at the burning bush. Listen to what took place in Exodus 3:13, 16:

> *Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" … "[S]ay to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — appeared to me'" (Exodus 3:13, 16).*

Notice that God simply told Moses to refer to him as "the Lord" — or Yahweh — "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Someone must have taught Moses about the divine name Yahweh and the traditions of the patriarchs. Otherwise, God's statement would have raised countless questions in Moses' mind. But, as we see here, Moses was so well prepared to receive God's directive that he never raised any questions about it.

We can be even more confident that Moses' sources also included independent documents when he composed the Pentateuch. We see this in places like Exodus 24:7. This verse indicates that Moses wrote "the Book of the Covenant" as an independent document that he later included in the book of Exodus. And in Numbers 21:14-15, Moses quoted geographical references from an existing book known as "the Book of the Wars of the Lord."

In addition to this, in Genesis 5:1, we read what is likely an explicit reference to an external literary source called "the book of the generations of Adam." As this literal translation indicates, Moses probably referred to information that he acquired from an actual "book" or "scroll" — סֵפֶר (*sēpher*) in Hebrew — about Adam's descendants.

Moreover, Exodus 17:14 refers to a record of battle. In this verse, God commanded Moses:

> *Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it (Exodus 17:14).*

God's command to Moses indicates that Moses independently recorded at least some events before he wrote the Pentateuch as a whole.

> When you take a look at the Pentateuch it appears that, especially in the case of the book of Genesis, Moses was actually incorporating very ancient documents. We know Moses would have known, actually, four languages. Moses knew Egyptian. He also knew Hebrew because he

> was raised in a Hebrew family; his mother was his own wet nurse. We also know that he would have known the common language of that day, the international trade and diplomatic language called Akkadian. And he also would have known Aramaic, because Aramaic is a language that the Israelites spoke in their early days — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on. So, Moses was a very, very well-trained, well-educated person, and it appears from the way that he structured the book of Genesis that he's telling us he was using certain documents, because ten times he says to us, "These are the generations of…" or "These are the accounts of…" so-and-so. And it appears that those are accounts that he had access to, that he had preserved, that he had translated, perhaps, from some original language, partly Aramaic, perhaps, or earlier Canaanite, into the Hebrew that he wrote in for the people that he was writing Genesis for. Not necessarily was this the case after Genesis. Once you get to Leviticus and Numbers and so on, and certainly Exodus and Deuteronomy, once you get the final four books of the Pentateuch, Moses is composing those on site, on the scene. He's right there; he's making it happen. And more importantly, God's making it happen, because the bulk of those books is God's words through his prophet.
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> — Dr. Douglas Stuart

In addition to acknowledging oral and literary sources for the Pentateuch, when evangelicals speak of essential Mosaic authorship they also acknowledge that the Pentateuch was actually written down through a complex process.

Process. To begin with, Moses delivered much of the Pentateuch through oral recitation before it was actually written down. His speeches in Exodus and Deuteronomy provide us with explicit examples of this. And it's likely that other portions of the Pentateuch were also delivered to Israel orally at first and then written down later.

It's also very likely that Moses employed amanuenses — secretaries or scribes — to compose the Pentateuch. We know that Moses was educated in the courts of Egypt. So, he would have been familiar with the well-established practice of using scribes and secretaries for writing official documents. As Israel's leader, Moses probably commissioned amanuenses to write much, if not all of the Pentateuch under his supervision.

Scripture is clear that other inspired biblical writers also employed secretaries. For instance, in Jeremiah 36:4, the prophet Jeremiah explicitly instructed his disciple Baruch to write down his words.

We can see evidence of this practice primarily in the Pentateuch's uneven literary styles. For instance, the narrative styles that appear in various portions of Genesis are quite different from each other. And we see remarkable differences between the formulaic and repetitious Hebrew of Deuteronomy and all the other books of the Pentateuch. In all probability, variations like these reflect the work of different scribes.

Essential Mosaic authorship concerns not only the sources and the process Moses used, but also the updating of the Pentateuch after the time of Moses.

Updating. As we've seen, critical interpreters treat the entire Pentateuch as reaching its final form after Israel's return from exile. But evangelicals have held that the Pentateuch originated in the days of Moses. Still, there are some portions of the Pentateuch that represent slight editorial updating after the days of Moses.

Now, we have to be very careful as we date particular elements of the Pentateuch. For instance, some interpreters have suggested that every passage that mentions "Philistines" must have been written after the days of Moses. But this point of view is less than convincing for at least three reasons. First, the archeological data for the presence of Philistines in the region is disputed. Second, Moses may have used the term "Philistine" (which means "traveler") as a sociological designation. And third, even if the term "Philistine" was not known in Moses' day, it's always possible that the use of "Philistine" simply represents a slight updating to aid audiences after the days of Moses.

In a similar way, interpreters have argued that the list of Edomite rulers in Genesis 36:31-43 goes far beyond Moses' lifetime. But the identifications of Edom's rulers listed in Genesis are not certain. And it's also possible that these passages merely contain slight extensions of lists added after Moses' time.

One clear example of minor updating in the Pentateuch appears in Genesis 14:14. There we read:

> *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 (Genesis 14:14).*

This passage says that Abraham pursued his enemies "as far as Dan." But we learn in Joshua 19:47 that this northern region wasn't named Dan until the days of Joshua. So, the Scriptures themselves indicate that Genesis 14:14 reflects an updated place name. This type of modernization would have helped later readers associate the story of Abraham with geography they knew. And it's likely that a number of other passages in the Pentateuch were updated in this same way as well.

Perhaps the best known and most significant updating found in the Pentateuch is the record of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34. But even here, we have little more than an appendix explaining what happened to Israel's lawgiver.

In addition to minor updates like these, the Pentateuch's language was also updated as the Hebrew language developed. Recent research strongly suggests that Moses wrote in a language that scholars have called "proto-Hebrew." Evidence from international documents found in Egypt, known as the "Amarna letters" indicates that this form of Hebrew was closely related to Canaanite dialects used in Moses' day. But this language was much earlier than what we find in the traditional Hebrew text of the Pentateuch.

> The question of the language of the Old Testament is a fascinating one. When did this language… Where did it come from? Where did it emerge? It is one that has puzzled people for a long time, because the evidence on the ground from archeology, is there even Hebrew writing, ancient Hebrew? And we do have quite a bit of texts that have been excavated in the recent past, in the twentieth century. And, but they all come late. They come later than the Mosaic time… And so, what do you do with that? Well, we have evidence during the thirteen hundreds, fourteenth century B.C. that there was a whole diplomatic correspondence, an archive that was excavated, not in Canaan, the land of Israel — that will become the land of Israel — but in Egypt… And they write in Akkadian, which is a language that really originates from Mesopotamia, but it's the lingua franca, it's the international language of diplomacy of the time. But they're Canaanites, they're local guys writing to their rulers in Egypt, and they have little margin notes that they have there, and this is written in Canaanite. And then that's our

> connection. The Canaanite language is then what connects us to the Hebrew of the Mosaic time. Now, of course, we don't have any record, we don't have anything left of the Hebrew of the Mosaic era, but that's our connection, that's our bridge. So, it goes from the Canaanite margin notes that we have to the Hebrew of Moses' time to the Hebrew that we know as standard biblical Hebrew in which most of the pre-exilic Hebrew and the text of preceding the exiles come from. So, that's our connection. It's an indirect one, but it's a real one, and it's a substantial one.
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> — Dr. Tom Petter

During the time of Israel's monarchs, between 1000 B.C. and 600 B.C., the language had developed into what is now called "old" or "Paleo-Hebrew." Many scholars would agree that portions of the Pentateuch resemble this stage of Hebrew, such as parts of Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32.

But the vast majority of the Pentateuch very closely resembles the vocabulary, spelling, and grammar of what we now call "Classical Hebrew," a stage in the development of Hebrew that was in use sometime between the mid-eighth and the early sixth centuries B.C.

From this evidence, it would appear that the Proto-Hebrew that Moses himself used was updated to Paleo-Hebrew. Then it was later modernized into Classical Hebrew as we have it now in the Hebrew Bible.

It's always important to remember that in the days of Jesus and his apostles and prophets, the Hebrew of the Pentateuch had already gone through these kinds of changes. But this fact didn't dissuade Jesus or his followers from treating the Pentateuch of their day as faithfully representing what Moses himself wrote. So, as followers of Christ today, we can rest assured that the Pentateuch, as we have it now, faithfully represents Moses' original writings.

So far, we've looked at modern evangelical outlooks and touched on some important presuppositions that evangelicals bring to the Pentateuch. And we've considered how evangelicals view the authorship of this part of the Bible. Now, let's note some of the ways these outlooks have affected the interpretive strategies that evangelicals follow.

Interprative Strategies

There are many ways to describe these interpretive strategies, but we'll speak of three main directions that evangelicals have pursued. First we'll consider what we may call thematic interpretation. Then we'll explore historical interpretation. And finally, we'll investigate literary interpretation. These three strategies are highly interdependent and never operate apart from each other. But they represent different emphases, so it will help to look at them individually, beginning with thematic interpretation.

Thematic

In thematic interpretation, we hold up the Pentateuch like a mirror to reflect on issues that are important to us. Evangelicals have legitimately emphasized certain topics or themes in this part of the Bible. But as we'll see, every book in the Pentateuch has its own sets of priorities. So, Moses himself may or may not have emphasized these themes. This approach has characterized much of Christian interpretation throughout the millennia.

The list of themes that Christians have emphasized is very long. Some have stressed personal questions and current controversies. Others have used the Pentateuch as support for their views in traditional systematic theology. For instance, the Pentateuch reveals many things about God. It also spends a great deal of time on different aspects of humanity. And it gives a lot of attention to the rest of creation in general.

Now, one of the greatest drawbacks to thematic interpretation is that it often minimizes the fact that Moses' original themes were for the Israelites who followed him toward the Promised Land. And because little attention is given to this original context, thematic interpretations often do little more than draw attention to minor themes.

Still, we should always keep in mind that the New Testament validates this approach to the Pentateuch. Jesus and New Testament authors looked to the books of Moses when they dealt with themes like justification by faith, divorce, faith and works, and a host of other relatively minor themes in this part of the Bible. So, as long as we're careful not to read themes into these Scriptures, thematic interpretation can be a valuable approach to the Pentateuch.

In addition to the interpretive strategy of thematic interpretation, it's also been common for evangelicals to explore the Pentateuch with what we may call historical interpretation.

Historical

Evangelicals not only believe that the theological themes of the Pentateuch are true. But, following the examples of Jesus and his apostles and prophets, we also believe that the Pentateuch's record of history is true. For this reason, evangelicals have often interpreted the Pentateuch as a means of discovering what happened in the past.

We've mentioned that thematic interpretive strategies treat the Pentateuch like a mirror that reflects on themes that are of interest to us. But, historical analysis treats the Pentateuch like a window to history. We look through the books of Moses, as it were, to explore the history that lies behind them.

Genesis traces history from creation to the days of Joseph. Exodus' main storyline extends from the death of Joseph to the time when Israel encamped with Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai. Leviticus elaborates on some of the laws and rituals that Moses received while at Mount Sinai. Numbers traces the march of the first and second generations of the exodus from Mount Sinai to the Plains of Moab. And Deuteronomy elaborates on Moses' speeches to Israel on the plains of Moab, as they were about to enter Canaan. In historical interpretation, evangelicals have capitalized on this rather obvious historical orientation.

As valuable as historical interpretation has been, this approach to the Pentateuch has its limitations as well. Much like thematic analysis, historical interpretation gives relatively little attention to Moses and his original audience. Instead, the orientation is toward what God did in different periods of time before the books of the Pentateuch were written. What did God do with Adam and Eve? What was the significance of Noah's flood? How did Abraham interact with God? What did God accomplish when Israel crossed the sea? These are legitimate pursuits, but they minimize the significance of Moses as the author and Israel as the original audience.

Clearly, evangelicals have benefitted in many ways from thematic interpretation and historical interpretation of the Pentateuch. But in recent decades, a third orientation has moved to the

foreground, what we may call literary interpretation.

Literary

As we've seen, thematic analysis treats the Pentateuch as a mirror that reflects on themes that are important to us. Historical analysis treats the Pentateuch as a window to historical events prior to the writing of the Pentateuch. By contrast, literary analysis treats the Pentateuch as a portrait, a literary work of art designed to impact its original audience in particular ways. Essentially, literary interpretation asks: How did Moses intend to impact his original Israelite audience as he wrote the Pentateuch?

It's fair to say that Moses had many purposes. But it helps to describe these purposes in general terms. So, we'll describe Moses' goal in this way: As Israel's God-ordained leader,

> Moses wrote the Pentateuch to prepare Israel for faithful service to God in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

Rather than touching on an assortment of themes in the abstract, or dealing with events out of mere historical interests, in one way or another every theme and historical record in the Pentateuch was designed to accomplish this goal.

Literary interpretation acknowledges that Moses stood between two periods of time as he composed the Pentateuch. On the one side, Moses wrote about what we may call "that world," events that had taken place in the past. Events in the book of Genesis occurred long before Moses' day. Exodus and Leviticus concentrate on events during the time of the first generation of the exodus from Egypt. Numbers and Deuteronomy include events in the time of the first generation to the days of the second generation. When Moses wrote each book of the Pentateuch he had these various times from the past in mind.

On the other side, however, Moses also wrote for "their world," for the days of his original audience. Moses drew from the past of "that world" to teach his audience how they should think, act, and feel in service to God in "their world." To accomplish this goal, Moses wrote about "that world" in ways that would connect it with "their world."

Moses connected the past to his original audience in three main ways. He gave them accounts of the past that established the background or origins of his audience's current experiences. He also provided them with models to imitate and reject. And he shaped his accounts as foreshadows or adumbrations of his audience's world.

At times, Moses made these connections rather explicit. For instance, in Genesis 15:12-16, Moses told his audience about the background of God's promise to bring them out of Egypt. This promise was being fulfilled in their day. In Genesis 2:24, Moses explained that Adam and Eve's marriage was a model for marriage among God's faithful people. And in Genesis 25:23, Moses reported that the wrestling between Jacob and Esau in their mother's womb was a foreshadow of the struggle between his original Israelite audience and the Edomites in their day.

Explicit connections between "that world" and "their world" appear here and there in the Pentateuch. But for the most part, these connections were implicit. So, one of the chief tasks of literary interpretation is to discern how Moses connected "that world" of the past to "their world" of his original audience.

For millennia, the interpretation of the Pentateuch has stressed thematic and historical strategies far more than literary analysis. So, in our lessons on the books of Moses, we'll devote most of our time to literary interpretation. We'll unpack how Moses shaped the content of each of his books to provide backgrounds, models and foreshadows of his audience's experiences. We'll explore what Moses emphasized for his original audience, how he connected the content of his books to their lives, and how he led his original Israelite audience toward faithful service to God in their day.

Conclusion

In this introduction to the Pentateuch we've examined some crucial features of modern critical approaches to this part of the Bible. We've considered how the presuppositions of critical interpreters have led to certain views of the Pentateuch's authorship and particular kinds of interpretations. We've also looked at modern evangelical outlooks and seen how the presuppositions of modern evangelicals have led to a very different view of authorship and interpretation.

As we continue to explore the Pentateuch, we'll see these introductory considerations move to the foreground many times. And as they do, we'll find ourselves better equipped to deal with this foundational part of the Bible. Along the way, we'll consider questions like: Why did Moses write each book of the Pentateuch? What was the original purpose for these books? What were the implications of the Pentateuch for Moses' original audience? By answering these kinds of questions, we'll discover crucial orientations toward Moses' original meaning. And not only will we see how the first five books of the Bible served as the earliest standard of Israel's faith in the days of Moses, but we'll also discover how these books should serve as the standard of our faith as we follow Christ today.