

Introduction: The Importance of the Pentateuch*R. Laird Harris, PhD**Experience: Former Professor and Department
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We begin in this first lecture our course on the Pentateuch. As we turn to these five books of Moses, we want to learn the contents of these books, some of the special teachings, in particular, verses and important doctrines of the Pentateuch. And we want to give a little attention from time to time to the background of the Pentateuch, its archeology, and also to some of the critical attacks that have been made on the Pentateuch. Let me emphasize first how important the Pentateuch is. It covers about one-fourth I believe of the Old Testament. And in the Pentateuch, we have the majority of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith and of the Old Testament teaching already lined out. So the Pentateuch is a book of great value for Old Testament theology and of course for Old Testament history as well.

The divisions of the Old Testament, we might remark, give us five divisions usually as the English Bible is often divided. We have first the five books of Moses, or the Pentateuch. Of course that's what Pentateuch means is five. And then we have twelve books of history—Joshua and following. Then five books of poetry—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Then we have five books of the major prophets and then the twelve minor prophets. So it goes five, twelve, five, five, and twelve. This is of course an artificial division. It is somewhat helpful as far as the general content of the Old Testament is concerned. But the Old Testament originally was not in this particular order as far as we can tell. This division of our English Bible, or the order of the books in our English Bible, comes to us through the Latin vulgate and hence from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made somewhere around 200 BC.

The Hebrew Bible has a different division. It has a three-fold division. The law of Moses again is set by itself. And then there are prophets, eight of them. The former prophets or early prophets are really books of history—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. And then the later prophets are the four of the major prophets—

three major and the twelve books of the minor prophets in one scroll. So that would be Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve. The other books are found in the last division of the canon called the Writings. I must insist that this three-fold division, of which some people make a great deal, is also not the original division. This division can be traced back to the writing in the Talmud, the chapter or tractate called [Bava Batra] and also to Jerome, the church father writing about AD 400. The Talmud actually is in that fifth century, but we do not have any evidence of this three-fold division earlier than about AD 400.

There was a three-fold division that is mentioned by Josephus, the Jewish historian writing about AD 90. He speaks of this three-fold division in his book *Against Apion*. In this book also called *Contra Apion* 1:8 is the reference, he speaks of the law; and he says that the Jews do not have a lot of different books the way the Greeks do differing among themselves but only twenty-two books. This is the arrangement of the books that he gives, and the enumeration of these twenty-two books is actually the same as our thirty-nine books of the Old Testament only they are associated a little bit differently. For instance, 1 and 2 Samuel counts for one book, 1 and 2 Kings counts for one book, all twelve of the minor prophets count for one book, and so he gets twenty-two books out of the total. But he says there are five books in the Law, and he has thirteen books of the prophets and then four books of hymns to God and books of value for pious living. So his three-fold division is not the same as the three-fold division found in the present Hebrew Bibles.

The Septuagint Bibles, of which I have spoken already, do not have any major divisions except just the Pentateuch which is of course by itself. And then the other books come in different manuscripts of the Septuagint Bible almost helter skelter. There is a general association of prophets and histories and poems and so on, but the Septuagint really fits the division that we have mentioned in the New Testament where the New Testament again speaks of the law and the prophets as if the Old Testament is just in two divisions. Once in the book of Luke 24:44, it speaks of the law and the prophets and the psalms where the psalms would be the major book of Josephus' third division probably where he speaks of hymns to God and books or precepts for godly living.

So the Pentateuch is, in any system of division, the first great division of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And it has been the regular view of

the Christian church that these books were written by Moses. Of course it is true that the book of Genesis does not have Moses' name attached to it. The material in Genesis came before Moses quite a good bit. Moses, when he wrote the book of Genesis, would have had to have material in hand either written material or at least traditions that came down to him from people who lived hundreds of years before. There is a view by P.J. Wiseman of England, the father of Dr. Donald Wiseman, a fine Christian archeologist at the British Museum, that Genesis is divided into eleven parts, each one beginning with "now these are the generations of" and that these eleven parts were actually eleven clay tablets that were written in early times and were in Abraham's library and came on down through the patriarchal times and finally came to Moses. And Moses actually had these different clay tablets as his sources, and he copied them out and perhaps even used their material and edited them some.

Of course Moses was writing under the inspiration of the Lord and that he had these sources for the book of Genesis. This is quite possible. On the other hand, it really cannot be proved. It is certain that parts of the book of Genesis were passed on for centuries by oral tradition because the material of the early days, the first eleven chapters of Genesis which refer to the time before Abraham, much of this took place before writing was invented. Writing was invented around 3000 BC. Abraham's date would be roughly around 1900 BC, and Moses' date would be around 1400 BC. So the earliest chapters of Genesis would have been passed down by word of mouth unless they were directly given to Moses by God, and some of them indeed may have been. The story of creation, no one was present when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation of the stars and the moon and the world. Some of this surely was given to somebody by inspiration. But the flood story and some of the other things may well have been passed down by word of mouth. But there may well have been other material passed down by writing, whether it was in eleven tablets as Wiseman says, or whether it was in varied format. We really do not know and perhaps we may say do not need to know. Moses at least traditionally was the author of this material and no need to deny that if we believe the Mosaic authorship of the rest of the Pentateuch.

And as far as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are concerned, they are full of claims that Moses wrote these things. In Exodus, we have a section called the book of the Covenant. This book of the covenant goes from chapter 20 to 24. And at the end it

says that Moses took this book of the covenant, and he sprinkled it with blood and said this is the book of the covenant the Lord has made with you. and it includes a number of the laws and the Ten Commandments and all which it says Moses wrote down. So that part of Exodus surely is by Moses and also the directions for building the tabernacle in chapter 25 and following and the fulfillment of those directions in the latter part of the book of Exodus. Here we have instructions for building the tabernacle which presumably nobody knew but Moses, if you believe the statements that are given in the Word of God here. Moses was on the mount of God alone. and when he was up on Mount Sinai, God gave him these instructions. And it was he who gave those instructions to the workmen so that Moses had these instructions, and he wrote them down as the most natural thing to believe. And it is certainly implied in the narrative.

As far as Leviticus and Numbers are concerned, chapter after chapter of these books begins “the Word of the Lord came unto Moses saying.” The Lord spoke unto Moses saying. These are instructions that God gave to Moses, and Moses gave to the people and that Moses wrote these down certainly as the claim of these sections. In Numbers 33, we have a travelogue, an itinerary, of the children of Israel during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It specifically says that Moses wrote this history. That Moses wrote these things is plain, and the claim is plain in these books. Also in the book of Deuteronomy is a series of speeches by Moses. Moses called the people together, and he addressed them. These are the words of Moses. Toward the end of the book it says that he wrote down all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 31:9, “And Moses wrote this law and delivered it unto the priests, the sons of Levi who bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and unto all the elders of Israel.” It says then that Moses commanded the priests that they should teach this law to the children of Israel.

We forget sometimes that this was an important function of the priests to teach the law of the Lord to the people. Everybody was not literate. Everybody did not have the time, but the priests were the official teachers. And it says here that at the end of every seven years this would be the year of release, when the people had time and at the time of the annual festival in the fall, this would be the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles. When people came to the tabernacle or to the temple in later days and the people were all together, that was the time when the priest would hold what I would call a short-term Bible institute and give this law to the people. But notice it was Moses’ law, and it was written down.

Now it does not say here in chapter 31 of Deuteronomy how long this law was, how many chapters Moses himself actually wrote. Of course they didn't have any chapters in those early days. It simply says that Moses wrote this law, and there is no need to suppose that it is anything but the entire Pentateuch as the Christian church has held through all these years.

I think we might say indeed that when we say that Moses wrote this law, we do not need to suppose that Moses wrote it down with his own pen and in his own handwriting. Moses was a busy man. If Moses were alive today, I would picture him as a man with about three telephones on his desk and several secretaries at his beck and call and people waiting outside for an appointment. Moses was the executive head of a great nation, and he was busy. And as all kings and leaders of ancient people had, he had scribes. They were ready. And he would dictate these things to the scribes, and they would write it down; but it would be Moses writing. And Moses would have gone over it of course as a good boss would do with his secretary and check those words and, as it were, give them his signature and authority. So we may well say that the Bible teaches that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and we might say also that these claims are repeated in the rest of the Old Testament.

In the book of Joshua 1:7, it says that God told Joshua to go ahead and obey all the words that Moses had given. This law of the Lord, this law of Moses, should not depart out of his mouth. And if he would meditate therein day and night, in that he would have good success. So Joshua was to take this law of Moses and to live by it and to lead the children of Israel by it. Of course, many places in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah would have reference to the law of Moses. Ezra was a ready scribe in the law of Moses. This was after the captivity. Before the captivity, we have a very interesting section in the book of Hosea. In this book, especially the last chapters, there are many references to the books of the Pentateuch. They're not quoted by name, but there are references certainly to these Old Testament books and also indeed to the book of Judges. In chapter 10:9 there's a reference to the days of Gibeah, the battle in Gibeah, where the children of iniquity did not overtake them. This is a reference to the fight against the Benjamites because of their sin. In Hosea 12:3, he took his brother by the heel in the womb (this is Jacob) and by his strength he had power with God. This is a reference to the birth of Jacob and to his wrestling with the angel and having power with him. In verse 4, he had power over the angel and prevailed and wept—found in Bethel and so on.

So from Genesis, we have a quotation. Also from Exodus in chapter 12:9, “I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt.” This is a passage from the beginning of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, also 13:4. “Yet I am the Lord thy God in the land of Egypt” again a quotation from Exodus 20:1. Then in Hosea 12:9, the last part of that verse I quoted says “I will yet make thee dwell in tabernacles as in the days of the solemn feast” in reference to living in tabernacles during the Feast of Booths. It is a peculiarity of the book of Leviticus and possibly also found in Deuteronomy 31:10, the verse I referred to. But here the dwelling in tabernacles is emphasized, and it may well be that this comes from Leviticus 23:42. So we have these references. And then to the book of Numbers [he says-but the verse is actually Hosea], there’s a reference in 9:10. It says “After the Israelites in ancient times went to Baal Peor and separated themselves unto that shame.” This is an incident in the book of Numbers right after the Balaam oracles.

And finally, the book of Deuteronomy is mentioned in a rather peculiar situation in chapter 11:8 [Hosea again]. It says, “How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboyim?” The children of Israel had sinned so that God feels it would be necessary to punish them. But He loved them so much that He cannot deliver them up. How can I make you like Admah? Who were Admah, and who were Zeboyim? Some people would say they were man and wife like Sodom and Gomorrah is the old joke. But of course these are cities, and they are cities very much like Sodom and Gomorrah as a matter of fact. These are two of the five cities of the plain that were overthrown when the Lord saved Lot, the incident back in the book of Genesis. But the book of Genesis does not name Admah and Zeboyim. It just speaks of the five cities of the plain. Admah and Zeboyim are named in Genesis 14, the slaughter of the kings, but there they are not destroyed. The only place in the Pentateuch where it speaks of Admah and Zeboyim as being cities destroyed there in the plain along with Sodom and Gomorrah is in Deuteronomy 29:23. So here you have in these various instances in the book of Hosea, and Hosea was written well before the exile in the days approximately of Isaiah, here you have every one of the five books of the Pentateuch quoted in Hosea.

And I might say that if you look through these passages, I think you will find that the so-called major documents that critics set up of J, E, D, and P are also quoted, which is very remarkable because of course the D document, Deuteronomy, was not supposed to have

been written until sometime after Hosea. And the P document, the book of Leviticus and so on, the priestly document is said to have been written in 450 BC, and yet the book of Hosea quotes that too. So the book of Hosea in this quotation gives us further reason to say that the Pentateuch is what the Christian church has always held that it is the law of Moses. And these five books were written by him. Of course the reason why we really believe this is because Christ Himself says so. In John 5:46, Christ remarks that “If you do not believe Moses and his writings, how can you believe My words? And He says this is because “He wrote of Me.”

The Pentateuch, of course, raises certain problems. One problem in the Pentateuch that we do not go into in detail is the problem of evolution. Some things we will say about that in the next lectures. But the question of evolution is a very important one these days. I will quote in future lectures something from a book I have written *Man: God's Eternal Creation* in which I have a couple of chapters on this question of evolution. It is an important problem in the minds of many. Perhaps it has been overemphasized, and yet we do believe that the first chapters of Genesis mean what they say and say what they mean that God created the various kinds of plants and animals and that they did not arise by chance, and they did not arise without God's special creation just by innate, natural tendencies. No, they were created by God. Unfortunately, in the minds of many, the doctrine of evolution has come to replace the doctrine of creation. And the mechanics that are alleged of biological evolution have come to replace the power and Word of the eternal God. So evolution has been a great problem, and we will have to give it some attention.

Also, the problem of higher criticism finds its most important application here in the Pentateuch. Genesis has been divided up into J, E, and P—J for the document using the word *Lord* or *Jehovah*. Critics call it *Yahweh*. The Hebrew is represented by four letters without any vowels. At a later time, the Jews felt that the name of God was so sacred that it could not be pronounced. The result was that the pronunciation has been totally lost. The word *Yahweh* is used by some. Personally I do not feel that this is the correct vocalization of these four Hebrew letters, but that's a long story. *Jehovah* is also a hybrid and not the original pronunciation. The King James Version uses the word *Lord* to refer to these four Hebrew letters of the name of God that we call sometimes the tetragram because of the four letters.

The E document is the document that is supposed to use the name *Elohim* which is the Hebrew word for God. And the P document, the priestly document, also uses the word *Elohim* through the book of Genesis. But then in chapter 6:3 of Exodus, the P document says that formerly the name of God, *Jehovah*, was not used. But now in Exodus 6:3, Moses speaking there, the name of the Lord *Jehovah* is revealed. And so from this point on, the P document can use the name *Jehovah*. So it is a curious thing that in the book of Leviticus for instance, most all P document, you have considerable variation between *Jehovah* and *Elohim*. And yet this is not used as a basis of division for the book of Leviticus. Whereas in the book of Genesis, the P document is supposed never to use the name *Jehovah*. Although I must say that there are two or three places where even the use of a redactor in the most skillful, critical division cannot get rid of the word *Jehovah*. And even the P document uses the word *Jehovah* in Genesis 21:1 for example.

In Genesis 21:1, the Lord, that is, *Jehovah*, visited Sarah as He had said. This is supposed to be the J document. "And the Lord *Jehovah* did unto Sarah as He had spoken." This is supposed to be the P document. You have the Lord *Jehovah* in both halves of the verse. Obviously, the verse is a unit. The verse is simply Hebrew repetition. And yet the critics with one voice take this verse and divide it in two and say half of it belongs to the J document, and half of it belongs to the P document. But they have to find that a redactor put the word *Jehovah* in the second half, whereas the word *Elohim* stood in there originally. This is only one example, of course, of a rather willful and false treatment of the text. If you use a redactor this way and put in what you feel ought to be there as wasn't there originally, then you have yourself manufactured the text. And then you divide it according to your own presuppositions. And of course then you can divide on this basis almost any text. But at least this question of higher criticism is a very important one. And it is important to the Christian also, because it really touches on the question of the authority of Christ.

Now in the remaining time of this lecture, it might be worthwhile for us to give a brief outline of the Pentateuch. I don't know that it is necessary to memorize outlines, at least not detailed outlines, but to have in mind the major points and the movement of the author; because it does show really the sweep of one hand planning the whole work. The idea that it should be cut up into various documents makes us miss a great deal of the purpose of the author as he gives us first the history and then the laws that

the Lord gave to Israel and carries the history of the children of Israel on down to Promised Land.

The book of Genesis can be divided rather easily. There are fifty chapters in the book of Genesis, and the first quarter refers to the time before Abraham, that is, the first eleven chapters. I will give more details of the division of Genesis as we come to that book, but we can for the moment remember that the first eleven chapters are pre-Abrahamic. They refer to the creation of the world and the history of the flood and the times after the flood, the genealogies on down to Abraham. And then from chapter twelve to fifty, the rest of the book is the patriarchal period—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and finally Joseph down in Egypt. It is often said that Genesis ends with a coffin in Egypt.

Then we come to Exodus. And Exodus is, as the name implies, the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. The first half of the book treats this deliverance, the plagues of Egypt, and Moses' deliverance and taking the children of Israel down to Sinai. There at Mount Sinai, this group of people, shepherds with their flocks and their families, a motley group—here they were welded by Moses over the space of a year into a nation. And there God gave them laws, organization, and an institutionalized worship, tabernacle with a priesthood, also organized the army and prepared them for fighting. So they were in Sinai for better than a year. And the last half of Exodus tells of the building of the tabernacle from 20 to 40. And then the book of Leviticus tells of the time at Sinai. It doesn't give any history, but it gives the laws that the Lord had ordained—the laws of worship and some of the laws also of public health and of conduct. So we have this in Leviticus. Numbers goes on, but Numbers tells of the movement out of Sinai. So numbers, the first ten chapters, tells of preparations to leave Sinai and then the trip to Kadesh Barnea, and in chapter 14, the abortive effort to enter the land of Canaan and then the forty years of wandering. So you see Numbers deals with a history more, whereas Leviticus deals with the laws.

Toward the end of Numbers, the Israelites are mustered again and make their preparations to enter the land of Canaan in the second campaign, but this time by the eastern gateway. So they go up around Edom and Moab, conquer [trans-Jordan] and prepare to enter Palestine by the gateway of Jericho. The book of Deuteronomy, we shall treat later, means a second law. And the book of Deuteronomy actually repeats a great deal. It is sermonic. Moses tells them and reminds them of the past. It repeats some

of the laws as well, but it is a kind of a farewell book preparing for Moses' death which is given in the last of the book, chapter 34.