

Critical concepts regarding the Pentateuch

Much of this work is covered very expertly in OT521: FOUNDATIONS IN BIBLICAL HISTORY. Therefore, this being a survey course, I do not do much with it here. But a brief review is not a bad idea and this appendix sheet will help you keep things in focus.

We acknowledge Moses as the issuing authority for the Pentateuch and do so on the following lines:

1. Statements within the Pentateuch
Ex. 24:4, Dt. 31:9, Ex. 17:14, Num 33:2....et al.
2. Further Old Testament statements
1 Kings 2:3, 2 Chron. 34:14, Neh. 8:1-8
3. New Testament references
Jn. 5:45-47, Lk16:29-31, Mt. 8:4
Acts 3:22, Mk. 7:10, Romans 10:5
and there are many more in all categories
4. The traditional concept of the Hebrew and Christian community.

But much modern scholarship has denied the Mosaic authorship and looked for other authorial sources. (The discussion in Harrison: INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT gives good analysis in all directions on these questions.) The chief claimants in this field are:

1. The Documentary hypothesis: Literary analysis of the Pentateuchal materials to determine source. The predisposition is that the Pentateuch is too complex and too much of a work for a single issuing authority. It is divided into source areas by literary analysis in which the key ingredients, in the Pentateuch, are: the distinction in divine names, the occurrence of parallels (couplets), the continuous narrative of individual documents, and the varied styles of separate sources. The study developed out of the literary efforts of Johan Wolffe, et al, (literature critics) and was applied by Astruc, the French physician, to Genesis and the early parts of Exodus. "Astruc's Clue", as it is known, is the idea that the different names for God evidence separate sources for the narrative...although he apparently thought Moses was the compiler. The documents were identified as "J", the Jehovist work, "E" the Elohim circle, "D" the legal body or the Deuteronomist portion, and "P" the priestly segment. A number of other documents are suggested by other scholars...best known would be "S", the Sinai or Seir material, and "H" the holiness code assigned to "P". These materials were first preserved in their own circles and eventually woven together by redactors and editors to give a completed Pentateuch...probably around 400 BC. There is no physical evidence for this view--anywhere, it is all assumptive. The archaeological work that is available to us is against it but it has a powerful grip of the imaginations of the critically minded and is taught in most places as fact today. Allis: THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES presents all the evidence needed to show its fallacies although Allis is not easy to read.

2. The Developmental Theory: This takes off from the documentary analysis...they blend together...and is the popular work of Wellhausen in which the documents developed show the progressive growth of Israel's faith as the nation matures from early animism to polytheism to monolatrianism to monotheism. The growth from simple to complex is the idea and the concept is that people of Moses' time could not have had highly developed views of the deity.