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Title of extract: **The Pentateuch**

Name of Author: **Freedman, D.N.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible.
Dunn, J.D.G. and Rogerson, J.W.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company**

Pages scanned: **25 - 31**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **The Bible: Texts and Transmission
TRDL7071**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E. L. Hamb*

Date authorised: 12.04.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

The Pentateuch

David Noel Freedman

Introduction

The Pentateuch, also known as the Torah or Five Books of Moses, constitutes the first and most important division of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). It holds pride of place in the Jewish canon, and was regarded as having the highest authority, higher even than that of the Prophets and the Writings, since it was traditionally thought to be the work of Moses, who alone of the biblical heroes spoke with God face-to-face (cf. Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10-12).

The Pentateuch itself is the first part of a larger literary complex which we may designate the Primary History. This comprises the books from Genesis through 2 Kings but omits Ruth (which in the Hebrew Bible is to be found among the Writings). The Primary History recounts the story of Israel in the context of the total human experience from the beginning (i.e., creation) to the collapse of the kingdom of Judah and the Babylonian exile. It is to be distinguished from the Chronicler's history (1 and 2 Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah), which, while covering the same general subject matter, omits most of the earlier narratives and focuses on the kingdom of David and Solomon and their successors. It continues down to the Persian period and the reconstitution of the Jewish community under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is apparent from an examination of the two histories that they not only reflect drastically different points of view but are also products of vastly different periods in Israel's history. The inconclusive endings point toward a date of composition shortly after the events with which the story closes (i.e., before the next significant occurrence). Thus it is difficult to suppose that the return from Babylon would not have been mentioned had the Primary History been completed subsequent to that momentous event. By contrast, the Chronicler's account includes this datum and brings the narrative down to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (late fifth century BC). Since his story ends at this point somewhat inconclusively, it is a reasonable inference that the Chronicler's history was compiled about this time, or in any case not later than the early fourth century.

Composition

The date of composition of the Primary History may be fixed by the final entry in 2 Kings, itself a footnote to the story of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. This note refers to the favor shown the shadow-king Jehoiachin by Evil-merodach, the Babylonian emperor, in the year 561

BC. Since the death of Jehoiachin is hinted at in these verses (2 Kgs 25:29-30), we may date the work of the editor (RPH) in the decade following. By 550 the Primary History in substantially its present form was completed.

The compilation of this sacred history was itself a remarkable achievement. It reflected the determination of the exilic community to remain alive and to retain its identity as the people of God in spite of a series of catastrophic blows culminating in the loss of king and land, temple and priesthood. Nor could they minimize the significance of the disaster by attributing it to a hostile fate, or the changing fortunes of war, or the superiority of alien gods or peoples; rather, it was a deliberate act of judgment by their own God, the covenant God of Israel, who was Lord of heaven and earth and the disposer of the affairs of men. Soberly the exiles reviewed their history in order to discern the meaning of their fate: What had happened between God and his people in the past, from the start? How had they come to their present unhappy state, and what, if anything, might the future hold for them? They could delineate throughout the course of history a consistent pattern of divine grace and favor: a special commitment by God to Abraham and his descendants, fulfilled in the mighty deeds of exodus and conquest surrounding the covenant-making mystery of Sinai, wherein God had declared Israel to be his people and they had claimed him as their God. Successive generations saw the unfolding of this relationship of promise and demand, of grace and obligation, of hope and threat, through the tumultuous period of the judges until it reached fruition in the kingdom of David and Solomon. At the same time the unity and cohesion of the nation were flawed by disobedience to the terms of the covenant and defiance of the will of God, so that the state divided under pressure from within and finally collapsed in ruins from the attacks of foreigners. Thus had a singularly blessed, but persistently sinful, people reaped an inevitable judgment. Nevertheless, the end was not the end. Before and beyond the law of sin and death, there was an unconditional commitment and an eternal relationship of love (cf. Jer 31:3). The God who had summoned Abraham from the east would call his seed to a new pilgrimage westward. And the God who had saved his people from Pharaoh would deliver them again from bondage. Out of the momentous past, and in view of the present agony, the serious student could read sobering lessons for himself and his people. This history was not only a record of what had happened but also words of life and hope for today and tomorrow.

Here was Israel's legacy to Israel: the remains of the old age and a foundation for the new. Old Israel perished

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in the furnace of exile, but a new Israel was to emerge. The authoritative guide of postexilic Judaism was the Pentateuch. The division of the Primary History into Pentateuch and Former Prophets (Joshua–2 Kings) was occasioned by the needs and insights of the postexilic community: the law of Moses and the social and cultic pattern of the wilderness society were to be normative for the Persian province of Judea. It may well have been Ezra who permanently fixed the authority of the Pentateuch in the Jewish community, although the books themselves had long since been written. There can be little doubt as to the relative antiquity of the text of the Pentateuch (and the Former Prophets) as compared with the other books of the HB. Not only do we have distinct recensions — for example, the Masoretic Text (MT), the Greek Septuagint (LXX), the Samaritan Pentateuch (Sam) — but also a long, traceable history of textual transmission. The Hebrew source of the LXX text goes back at least to the third century BC, and almost certainly to the fourth, while the Samaritan is almost as old. The MT, on the other hand, may be even older. All three are represented in ancient manuscripts from Qumran.

If the Pentateuch was a finished product by the fifth century BC (probably it was already complete in the sixth century BC, as part of the Primary History), is it possible to trace the earlier history of this great work and the sources which contributed to its compilation? Such questions have exercised the minds of biblical scholars for hundreds of years, and the results of their inquiries have varied considerably. While there is as yet no consensus, and the “assured results” of critical analysis are no longer so sure, certain conclusions may be regarded as highly probable, and others as likely. The documentary hypothesis, commonly associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen but actually the product of the labor of many eminent biblical scholars of the past two hundred years, remains the point of departure for the scientific study of the Pentateuch. Its minute source analysis, which was one of the crowning achievements of nineteenth-century biblical criticism, grew out of repeated efforts to deal with the difficulties apparent in the received text. Inconsistencies in content, duplicate or parallel narratives, and significant variations in diction and style militated against the traditional view of unity of authorship. Obvious anachronisms and shifts in the historical and geographical perspective likewise indicated that a Mosaic date for the composition of the Pentateuch was untenable.

In its standard form the documentary hypothesis rested on arguments of two kinds: those based on literary and linguistic evidence, which resulted in the division of the Pentateuchal material into various written sources; and those based on historical evidence for the evolution of religious institutions and ideas in Israel, which produced an analytical description of the interrelationships among the documents and a chronological arrangement to account for them. Literary investigation isolated four primary written sources: J, E, D, and P. D was the simplest to identify since it stands out as a literary unit (i.e., the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy — hence the designation D), with a distinctive style and

viewpoint. The separation of P (for “Priestly document”) from the remaining narrative material was also a comparatively routine undertaking, and scholars have achieved practical unanimity in defining the contents of this work. It consists chiefly of archival and institutional data spread out on an elaborate genealogical framework. What remains is the general narrative, itself manifestly composite. Thus the separation of the two creation stories in Genesis (1:1–2:4a; 2:4b–3) and the assignment of the former, with its schematized and formulaic pattern, to P and the latter to the narrative source (in this case J) are easily seen. On the other hand, the disentanglement of the narrative strands has proved much more difficult. The Joseph story (Genesis 37; 39–50) is clearly composite. In the episode describing the brothers’ treachery against Joseph (37:12–36), there are two accounts of what happened, which have been blended into confusion. In one, Joseph was thrown into a pit and left there to die. He was found by Midianites, brought to Egypt, and sold there. In the other, he was sold to a passing band of Ishmaelites. Reuben figures prominently as the intercessor for Joseph in one, Judah in the other. Only such a separation offers an intelligible account of the episode.

Two principal narrative sources were identified: J (so-called because of its standard use of the name Jehovah [YHWH] for God; it has also been associated with the Southern Kingdom, Judah) and E (because of its use of Elohim for God, though with less consistency beyond the book of Genesis; it has been connected with the Northern Kingdom, Ephraim). The details of the division are not nearly so certain as in the case of D and P; in many passages where J and E have been fused, the analysis is disputed (e.g., Exodus 32–34). Sometime before they were integrated into the Primary History, J and E were combined into a single narrative (JE).

D was the starting point in the determination of the chronological relationships of the sources among themselves and with respect to the history of Israel. D was identified with the law code discovered in the Jerusalem temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah (622 BC); its composition has generally been dated in the seventh century. With regard both to narrative and to legal material, D proved to be later than and dependent upon JE; JE therefore belonged to the monarchic period (tenth–eighth centuries). More precise examination of JE established the priority of J tenth–ninth centuries perhaps) over E (ninth–eighth centuries). This decision was based in part on the opinion that J was more primitive in his theology (i.e., grossly anthropomorphic), but more exuberant and naive in his storytelling. E, on the other hand, was more subtle and sophisticated, and therefore of a later date. Traditionally D has been considered independent of and prior to P, and many still assign P to the exilic period or later. However, a growing number of scholars are arguing for a preexilic P, its earliest editions coming even before D.

The major conclusions of the documentary hypothesis with regard to source analysis and the relative dating of the documents stand fairly firm. Some of the premises are less certain, particularly the theory of a simple evolutionary development of Israel’s religious institutions and

ideas. And the details of the analysis are open to question in a number of instances. In addition, important new areas of interest have been opened up in the continuing quest for knowledge about the Pentateuch. (See the bibliography.)

A synthesis of what appear to be the soundest insights of scholars who have worked and are now working in the field follows:

J and E

J and E, the familiar narrative sources of classic Pentateuchal analysis, are prose compositions, probably derived from older oral and written sources, but with a significant amount of original material as well. In the Tetratauch at least, J and E follow the same basic pattern and order of events, and thus presuppose a common source. At the same time they are distinct compositions, with diverging concerns and attitudes, and they differ strikingly in numerous details. On the basis of a minute analysis of these sources, as far as they can be extricated from the Hexateuch, scholars have concluded that J has a southern orientation, as against E, which is northern; that J is concerned with David as king and with his dynasty, while E has marked affinities with and interest in the prophetic movement, especially as it was related to political developments in the north. In general, J has been regarded as a product of the United Monarchy (c. tenth century), and E of the Northern Kingdom (c. ninth-eighth centuries). Subsequent editions (e.g., J₂ and E₂) would be dated still later.

The distinctive historical character of Israel's religion made it inevitable that the story would be rewritten repeatedly so as to include the most recent events which resulted from Yahweh's dealings with his people. Unlike pagan myth, which was timeless and self-completing, and which required only to be rehearsed and reenacted in the cult, Israelite traditions could not finally be contained in this fashion; and reenactment did not exhaust the historical significance or future possibilities of the tradition. In like manner the pagan epic was a self-enclosed entity describing a distinct era of the past: the age of the heroes and their great deeds. But Israel, even with an "epic" tradition, could not simply look back to the glorious past, but was concerned with the continuing actions of God.

While scholarly agreement on the scope of J and E has never been reached, and end points for both have been fixed all the way from the end of Numbers on into Samuel and Kings, it is likely that the end point is determined roughly by the date of the writer. The interpretation herein adheres to the common, if somewhat conservative, view that J dates from the United Monarchy (i.e., tenth century), and that E is northern and is to be dated in the late ninth or early eighth century. This means that both J and E are not simply prose abstracts of an earlier tradition, but rather separate historical accounts based on that tradition, carrying the story beyond its original limits to their own time. Thus J finds the complete fulfillment of the promise to the fathers not in the original settlement under Joshua but in the conquests and kingdom of David. Without attempting to

pin down precisely the J material in Judges and Samuel, one may nevertheless point to the two sources of 1 Samuel and identify the earlier, pro-monarchy source with J. The transference of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15 — and old tradition) to David and his house (2 Samuel 7) is also to be attributed to J. Whether J extends beyond this point is debatable (the so-called Court History — 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 — may or may not be a separate source); its possible ending, which would put it in the reign of Solomon, could be 1 Kgs 4:20–21 (Heb. 4:20–5:1): "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." Subsequent editions of J may well have carried further the story of the fortunes of the house of David and the kingdom of Judah.

E is more difficult to fix as to date and extent. On the basis of a northern provenience and demonstrable interest in the prophetic movement, E may be regarded as a product of the religious enthusiasm stimulated by Elijah and Elisha, and his work may be placed in the age of Jehu and his successors (c. 842–745 BC). A clue to the character of E may be found in the evaluation of Jehu's revolution in 2 Kgs 10:28, 30: "Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. . . . And the LORD said to Jehu, 'Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.'" This material is embedded in a typically hostile Deuteronomic estimate of the same king (vv. 29, 31) and must therefore derive from a different, and sympathetic, northern source. The reference to the descendants of Jehu to the fourth generation would bring us down to Jeroboam II, whose dominion might be regarded more suitably as a fulfillment both of promise and of prophecy. The assertion that Jeroboam's victories were achieved as fulfillment of the word of the prophet (Jonah son of Amittai) is particularly instructive: "He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet" (2 Kgs 14:25). E reconstructed the story of Israel in the light of the prophetic movement, beginning with Abraham, anachronistically described (by E) as a prophet and similarly identifying Miriam, Deborah(?), Samuel, and other ancient figures by the same term. If we remove the Deuteronomic framework and commentary, what remains of Kings (through 2 Kings 14, essentially E) is predominantly the story of the prophets and their impact on the history of the Northern Kingdom; for it was the prophets who were the successors to the judges and the Northern Kingdom which inherited the traditions of the tribal league and its cult center. Thus E was the defender of the older tradition against the claims of the Davidic dynasty. It may be concluded that E was composed in the eighth century BC, in the north, and represented an attempt, in the prophetic tradition, to relate the ancient traditions to the history of the Northern Kingdom and to establish

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the latter's claim to be the true successor and heir of "all Israel."

JE is the product of a literary merger. At some time after the completion of J and E as separate entities, they were blended into a continuous narrative by an editor or redactor, R_{JE}. Analysis of the surviving material in the Pentateuch indicates that the editor used a variety of methods in weaving the narratives together. First, the dominant strand is clearly J, which, in fact, formed the basic narrative. E has actually been broken up and inserted piecemeal into the overall structure of J. On occasion there are parallel accounts (J and E) of the same episode; sometimes one version has been suppressed in favor of the other (where apparently they were practically identical); elsewhere they have been woven together into a single narrative. On the face of it, JE is the work of a southern (Judahite or Jerusalemite) editor whose object was to preserve the traditions of the north and to harmonize them with the J narrative to form a single composite history of the people of God. The logical occasion for this work would have been the destruction of Samaria and the collapse of the Northern Kingdom (722-721 BC). Its purpose was to win the surviving population of Ephraim to allegiance to the temple in Jerusalem and the Davidic king of Judah. Since this was the announced policy of Hezekiah, according to the account in 2 Chr 30:1-31:1, in which a determined effort was made to establish Jerusalem as the center of worship for northerners as well as southerners, we may plausibly connect the compilation of JE with the movement toward religious reunion initiated by Hezekiah. We may date R_{JE} in the early seventh century BC and hold that his work included the major part of J and selected material from E, and closed with the reformation of Hezekiah and the attempt to unite "all Israel" in the worship at Jerusalem.

D and DH

The next major subdivision in the classic analysis of the Pentateuch is D, identified with the document found in the temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah (622 BC) and corresponding roughly to the present book of Deuteronomy (perhaps chs. 5-26; 28). Scholars have been divided on the questions of the date of composition and provenience of this document, though there is increasing agreement that D, like E, has northern affinities, and that it was composed during the century preceding its discovery. Its nucleus is a legal corpus, preserving many ancient laws and customs derived from the days of the confederation (e.g., the law of holy war) and reflecting the traditions of the cult center at Shechem and its priesthood. In their present form, chs. 5-26; 28 constitute a series of warnings and exhortations uttered by Moses just before his death. A date of composition in the reign of Hezekiah or later is practically required by the emphasis on centralization of worship in a single sanctuary, presumably the temple at Jerusalem. The tradition of the central sanctuary is very old, going back to the premonarchic period. But the principle of exclusiveness — that is, the single, central sanctuary — is new. It reflects the circumstances of Hezekiah's time: the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the emergence of the Jerusalem temple as

the only "independent" cult center. The temple at Bethel apparently survived, but it was under constant attack from the south as heterodox and had suffered considerable loss of prestige with the fall of Samaria. It was finally wrecked by Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 23:15ff.). Furthermore, the sermonic addresses anticipate or more probably presuppose the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the captivity of its inhabitants, thus pointing likewise to a date c. 700. A date in the reign of Manasseh is also possible but less likely, while the idea that D was composed in the reign of Josiah and deliberately planted in the temple in order to be discovered there may be dismissed as a fantasy.

The principal concern of D is the Horeb (Sinai) covenant and its significance for the life of Israel. The covenant is a guarantee of life to those who obey its stipulations (the Ten Commandments and subsequent legislation), but for those who forget, ignore, or defy its demands there is certain disaster. Placed in the mouth of Moses, these sermons are not only a reminder of the solemn bond between God and Israel — an explanation of the requirements of the covenant, with its promise of security and threat of destruction — but also a prophetic anticipation of the culmination of Israel's history. For D, Moses is the true prophet (18:15ff.; cf. 34:9-10, which is secondary), who, long before the great prophets of more recent times, foresaw the threatened catastrophe of military invasion and conquest, intensified by that peculiarly inhuman practice of mass deportation. The only hope of Israel, or what survived of it, lay in strict adherence to the covenant obligations beginning with the first commandment, which requires the exclusive worship of Yahweh, and which, on the Deuteronomist's reasoning, restricts worship to the one place he has chosen for his name.

The effect on Josiah and Judah of the discovery of D in the temple is familiar to all. The great reformation of national life and religion is described in detail in 2 Kgs 22:3-23:25 (cf. 2 Chr 34:8-35:19). The so-called Deuteronomistic History (DH) probably owes its inspiration and composition to the reformation stimulated by the discovery of D. It is a single work including the books from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Beginning with the Mosaic sermons (to which he has prefixed an introduction, Deuteronomy 1-4), the Deuteronomistic Historian has traced the Horeb covenant through the history of Israel, interpreting it in the light of the covenant requirements and evaluating kings and people according to their adherence or defiance of them. He has incorporated much older material practically untouched, while providing for the whole a chronological and theological framework. Thus in the book of Judges he has organized chronologically and classified theologically a heterogeneous group of ancient heroes and the folk tales handed down about them. In the books of Kings he has inserted from the official court records the necessary chronological data of accessions, reigns, deaths, and successions; he has also interspersed a theological commentary grading each king in relation to his good or evil deeds.

It used to be thought that the Deuteronomistic History was compiled during the exile (i.e., after the last date in 2 Kings), but more recently scholars have argued co-

gently that the first edition of this work was issued earlier, during the reign of Josiah. Clearly the description of the Josianic reform in 2 Kings 22–23 is the climax of this history, while what follows is a melancholy epilogue. Note especially the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Bethel (from 1 Kgs 13:1–3) in 2 Kgs 23:15–18, with particular reference to the name of Josiah (which is anticipated in the prophecy), and the conclusion in 23:25: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him." This, together with the formal summary of his reign in v. 28, looks like the original ending of the historical work. It is interesting that the notice of his defeat and death at Megiddo follows the summary.

The Deuteronomistic Historian was inspired by the conviction that Josiah was the long-awaited scion of David, who in his work and life would fulfill the ideals of kingship, restore the empire of his illustrious ancestor, and lead his people to renewal of life in obedience to the terms of the ancient Mosaic covenant. The entire history aims at this conclusion, the happy climax of the biblical story. At the same time the Deuteronomistic discourses of Moses and the disastrous experience of the Northern Kingdom served as a warning of another denouement, so that the catastrophe which actually ensued was not entirely unprepared. All along there had been two possibilities. With the tragic death of Josiah, it became clearer which alternative was the more likely. It is probable that the Deuteronomistic History originally ended with the successful reformation of Josiah, and was subsequently revised to accord with the somber facts of history (cf. the pathetic attempt at reinterpretation, 2 Kgs 23:26: "Still the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him").

Concerning the scope of DH, the question must be raised whether Deuteronomy 1 actually constitutes the beginning. In other words, does Deuteronomy 1–4 serve simply as an introduction to DH, or is it rather a bridge between the narrative of the Tetrateuch (JE) and DH? When it is remembered that D is explicitly attributed to Moses, then the necessity for placing these addresses in the context of the JE narrative becomes clear. Unless JE is to be cut off at the end of Numbers plus a few verses on the death of Moses, it is not possible to argue that DH is an entirely independent work. Not only does such a view leave JE a hopeless torso in the Tetrateuch, but it offers no explanation for the beginning of DH in the fortieth year of the wanderings. If, in the course of D, Moses actually reviewed the previous sequence of mighty deeds, then we could recognize here an imitation of epic style. But there is specific recapitulation only as far back as the Horeb (Sinai) experience, while the antecedent history is dealt with in the vaguest possible way. In short, JE is assumed because it was attached. If J and E actually carried the story down into the period of the monarchy, then DH must have used them, as he used D and other sources. And if he made use of JE for the post-Mosaic period, he

could hardly have dismissed or ignored it in the pre-Mosaic and Mosaic eras.

It is likely, therefore, that DH compiled his history along the same lines as J and E (or JE, which is presumably all that was available to him) — that is, he began with Genesis and carried the story down to the reign and reformation of Josiah. However, the fulcrum of his account was the major prophetic exhortations of Moses, the new document, D, found in the temple. DH had little or nothing to add to the JE narrative in the Tetrateuch, though there may be traces of his work there. His creative enterprise begins with Deuteronomy 1–4, which constitutes an introduction to the history which follows but also serves as a bridge connecting it with what has gone before. It is clear that DH did not think that Israelite history began with Moses, whatever may be the opinion of scholars since Wellhausen.

We conclude that the Deuteronomistic History was originally composed before the fall of Jerusalem, and that it consisted of JE and D, plus other materials of a narrative and archival nature, covering the period from creation down to the reign and reformation of Josiah.

P

It remains to deal with P, the last of the sources identified in classic Pentateuchal analysis. P consists mainly of archival data of different kinds: genealogical tables, tribal lists, including a pair of census tabulations, and priestly data and regulations — concerning, for example, the tabernacle, the priesthood, sacrifices, and questions of clean and unclean. Embedded in P are also legal prescriptions which form part of the complex legal corpus of the Pentateuch (e.g., the Book of the Covenant and Exodus 34, usually associated with JE; the law code in D; and H, the so-called Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26). The principal questions concerning P are: (a) Is P an independent source, or is it merely supplemental to JE in the Hexateuch (or Tetrateuch)? Put another way, is P himself the compiler of the Pentateuch, incorporating into the narrative such archival data as seemed desirable? (b) What is the extent of P? It is generally agreed that P is to be found in the books through Numbers, and not in Deuteronomy (except for a couple of verses). But what about Joshua?

The two questions are linked, and the answer given to one will influence one's view of the other. It would seem that the meticulous analysis of earlier scholars and their conclusions concerning the nature of P have not been overthrown by more recent advocates. It still appears that the case for P as an independent source is stronger than the case against it. If P was a self-contained entity, what were its character and scope? That P in Exodus–Numbers is primarily concerned to fix in detail the cultic practice of the wilderness encampment and to establish it as a permanent norm for Israel through the unquestioned authority of Moses is clear. Here there is essentially a static treatment of ancient materials, with a concern, not, as in the older sources, for the movement of God in history, but for the original pattern of worship, which is binding forever. The particular historical event has partly given way to the timeless and unchangeable pattern of heavenly things. If P were limited to Exodus–

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Numbers, then the question of its independent status would not figure seriously, and its incorporation into the narrative as essentially supplementary data would be understandable. But the presence of P in Genesis, where it provides the chronological framework and some narrative details, suggests a broader, at least partly historical, concern. If this is true, and it can hardly be doubted, then we must recognize in P the old traditions present in the other historical works and preserved in the festivals which are a principal interest of P. P's interest in the patriarchs, however, requires a corresponding concern with the settlement in the promised land. While Moses and the pattern of life and worship in the wilderness are central to P, the prelude in Genesis can be balanced only by the fulfillment in Numbers and Joshua; but it is only in Joshua that the specific expectations of P in the patriarchal narratives are fulfilled. In no way can Moses and the wanderings or even Sinai be regarded as the resolution of patriarchal anticipation. The divine promise can be realized only in the occupation of the land (which is explicitly not Transjordan and for P does not even include it). Therefore, if P is an independent source, and is found in Genesis as well as in Exodus-Numbers, then we should expect to find it in Joshua also.

It is probable that P was incorporated by the final redactor (R_{PH}) into the so-called Deuteronomistic History (including JE, as already pointed out) during the exile. Apparently R_{PH} added the final reference to Jehoiachin, and this points to the completion of the work in the decade 560-550 BC. Thus by the middle of the sixth century the Primary History was complete, and it has been preserved substantially without change. Subsequent to the completion of this work, the Pentateuch was abstracted, and not later than the time of Ezra it was firmly established as the Holy Scripture of Israel.

Form and Contents

The separation of the Pentateuch from the Primary History, and its assignment to a unique place of honor and authority in Israel, was a development of the greatest importance. The factors responsible for the division between Deuteronomy and Joshua were neither literary nor historical, but primarily theological; they arose out of the concerns and needs of the exilic community. Classic critical scholarship identified the Hexateuch as the basic literary compilation, recognizing the close connection between the occupation of the land described in Joshua and the preceding stories of the Pentateuch. More recent scholarship has identified the Deuteronomistic History as a single literary work, thus dividing the Primary History at the end of the book of Numbers and connecting Deuteronomy with the following books. It will be seen that neither approach allows for a normal break at the end of Deuteronomy. At the same time, the ultimate sources, oral and documentary, cut across the same dividing line. The conclusion seems inescapable that the isolation of the Pentateuch from the Primary History was the last stage in the process, and that it was occasioned by the special interest of the exilic community in the person of

Moses and the experience of Israel in the wilderness. A subtle shift in emphasis from the historical pattern of the older sources to the more static pattern of P is discernible in the new arrangement. Where the Primary History is essentially the record of God's dealings with his people and their experience together through more than twelve hundred years, the Pentateuch, while retaining a chronological framework and, of course, sharing the same narrative for the first half of this era, nevertheless has its central interest not in the mighty deeds of God, nor in the historical vicissitudes of Israel, but rather in the description of an eternal, perfect, and unchangeable pattern of community life, first and fully revealed at Sinai and successfully achieved by Israel in the wilderness. For the Pentateuch, the desert encampment governed by all the laws, civil and criminal, cultic and dietary, was the first true realization of the anticipations outlined in Genesis and the embodiment of the kingdom of God. The pattern of the desert constituted the authoritative example and model for the postexilic community. History has been subordinated to revelation, and mighty deeds to eternal words. Essentially what was required of Israel was conformity to the Sinai pattern; in this would be found the guarantee of its survival and the promise of its security. To a considerable extent, the Pentateuch defined and also restricted the future hope of the postexilic community. While Pentateuchal passages could be pressed into service for messianic purposes, such expectations were more at home in the prophetic literature. The themes of a second Moses, a second exodus, and the perfect realization of the Sinai pattern reflect the shadow cast by the Pentateuch on all hopes and speculations about the future. Alongside the controlling pattern of community life is the figure of Moses, who dominates the Pentateuch. His life constitutes the frame and thread of the story from the beginning of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy (to which may be added the traditional view that he was the author of all five books). Not only is he the charismatic hero of the JE narrative, but he is also the prophet "nonpareil" of D and Israel's sole lawgiver of P. Thus all the sources and strands of the four latter books of the Pentateuch are drawn together around the superhuman figure of Moses (cf. Exod 34:29-35), while Genesis serves as prologue to the great drama. The chief emphases of the Pentateuch are on the intricate but ultimate pattern of laws governing the life of the people of God, and the mediator of these laws, Moses, who at the same time receives a full biographical treatment.

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