INTRODUCING
ISRAEL'S
SCRIPTURES

THE PENTATEUCH

Introducing the Torah



Thomas B. Dozeman

The Pentateuch

Introducing the Torah

Thomas B. Dozeman

Fortress Press

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THE PENTATEUCH
Introducing the Torah
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Preface

The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah is written for use in topical undergraduate elective courses or seminary survey courses. The book is structured into four sections:

Part One: Introduction to the Pentateuch focuses on the literary structure of the Torah as a whole. The section introduces the names of the five books in the Hebrew Masoretic (MT) and Greek Septuagint (LXX) versions of the canon; it clarifies the plot, setting, and central characters in the overarching story of Genesis—Deuteronomy; and it examines the larger literary context of the Pentateuch in the Hebrew canon, exploring the relationship of Torah to the Prophetic Literature and to the Writings.

Part Two: Composition of the Pentateuch introduces the history of research on the formation of the Pentateuch in three chapters. Chapter 2 traces the changing views of the authorship of the Pentateuch—from the traditional Jewish and Christian understanding that Moses was the author to the identification of anonymous authors in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical criticism, cul-minating in the documentary hypothesis. Chapter 3 summarizes the impact of recovering oral stories and traditions behind the literature of the Pentateuch in the methodologies of form criticism and tradition history. Chapter 4 outlines the varied ways in which the authorship of the Pentateuch is described in the current practices of the documentary hypothesis and redaction criticism.

Part Three: Books of the Pentateuch provides an introduction to each of the five books of the Pentateuch. The summary of each book includes three sections: (1) the outline and the central themes; (2) the literary design, including the examination of the plot, setting, and central characters of each book, as well

as comparison to similar stories in ancient Near Eastern literature; and (3) composition.

Part Four: Reading the Pentateuch illustrates four different ways in which the readers bring meaning to the Torah. The four examples are limited, but they underscore the influence of readers in shaping the interpretation of Torah. Chapter 10 examines the transformation of the Pentateuchal literature into the Torah in post-exilic Judaism. Chapter 11 explores the ways in which the historical-critical study of the composition of the Pentateuch has also influenced the evaluation of the history of ancient Israel. Chapter 12 traces the changing theological interpretations of the Pentateuch in Jewish and Christian traditions from early Protestantism to the present time. Chapter 13 broadens in scope to explore selective themes in the reception history of the Pentateuch, including its influence in the American experience of colonization and the reaction of women to its patriarchal bias in their struggle to achieve equal opportunity in civil and religious law.

The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah may be used as either an introductory or an intermediate level textbook. As an introductory textbook, the instructor may wish to concentrate on **Part One: Introduction to the Pentateuch** and on **Part Three: Books of the Pentateuch**. These sections focus directly on the text of the Pentateuch, providing basic information on the plot, setting, and characters of the Pentateuch as a whole and on each individual book. **Part Two: Composition of the Pentateuch** introduces more complex historical-critical ways of reading the Pentateuchal literature, which is tied to the section entitled "Composition," in the interpretation of each book. In an introductory level course on the Pentateuch, the research on composition may be used as supplemental material on selective books or passages. **Part Four: Reading the Pentateuch** includes self-standing chapters, from which the instructor may select topics of interest to the students. A more advanced intermediate level course may simply follow the structure of the textbook to explore the present state of research on the Pentateuch.

The field of Pentateuch studies is developing so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with the changing landscape. I would certainly not have been able to

write this volume without the many new insights into the Pentateuch from my colleagues, shared freely at seminars and symposia. I have sought to bring as many voices into the conversation as possible, but I am well aware that this book could be expanded in so many directions with additional readings that deserve a hearing. This textbook originated from my teaching the Pentateuch at United Theological Seminary over the past two decades. I would like to thank my students for their interest in studying the Pentateuch and for the many insights they have brought to the classroom, without which this book would also not have been written. I would like to thank, in particular, Walter Brueggemann and Benjamin Sommer for reading Chapter 12: Pentateuch and Theology; Konrad Schmid for reading a portion of Chapter 4; my teaching assistant Chad Clark for his excellent editing of the manuscript; and the editors at Fortress Press for steering the project through to publication, including Neil Elliot, acquiring editor for biblical studies; Scott Tunseth for guiding the book through the editing process, and Alicia Ehlers for managing the project to its completion.

PART I

Introduction to the Pentateuch

The Introduction focuses on the literature of the Pentateuch as a whole. The section will introduce the names of the five books of the Torah in the Masoretic (MT) and Septuagint (LXX) versions. The overview of the plot, setting, and central characters in the overarching story of the Pentateuch will be outlined. The section will conclude with an interpretation of the literary context of the Pentateuch and its relationship to the Prophetic Literature and to the Writings.

Literature of the Pentateuch

1.1 Names of the Individual Books

The Pentateuch ("five books") is the title of the first five books of the Bible in the Greek translation, also known as the Septuagint (LXX). The more original title is Torah, meaning "law," in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT). The Hebrew Scriptures attribute the revelation and composition of the Torah to Moses, reflected in the additional designation of the books as the "Torah of Moses" (Ezra 3:2).

The most common name for the individual books of the Pentateuch derives from the Greek translation of the Hebrew:

- Genesis ("origin")
- Exodus ("going out" of Egypt)
- Leviticus ("relating to the Levites")
- Numbers ("the numbering of the Israelites")
- Deuteronomy ("the second law")

In Jewish tradition, the opening Hebrew words of each book provide the titles:

- Genesis = *Bereshit* (Gen 1:1, "in the *beginning*")
- Exodus = *Shemot* (Exod 1:1, "these are the *names*")
- Leviticus = *Vayiqra'* (Lev 1:1, "and Yahweh *called*")
- Numbers = *Bemidbar* (Num 1:1, "in the *wilderness*")
- Deuteronomy = *Debarim* (Deut 1:1, "these are the *words*")

The five books were originally not books at all, but scrolls—a roll of flexible material such as parchment or papyrus. The five scrolls are of different length, as can be illustrated from a comparison of the words in each book in the New Revised Standard English translation:

- Genesis (37,728 words; 50 chapters)

- Exodus (30,279 words; 40 chapters)
- Leviticus (23,666 words; 27 chapters)
- Numbers (31,220; 36 chapters)
- Deuteronomy (27,463; 354 chapters)

The word count of the Hebrew version would be different, of course, but the comparison of the English translation indicates that Genesis is by far the longest book, and Leviticus, the shortest. The different lengths of the scrolls suggest that their separation was not mechanical, as though it were determined simply by length so that each scroll could be of the same size, but that the themes and the plot of the storyline influenced the separation of the scrolls.

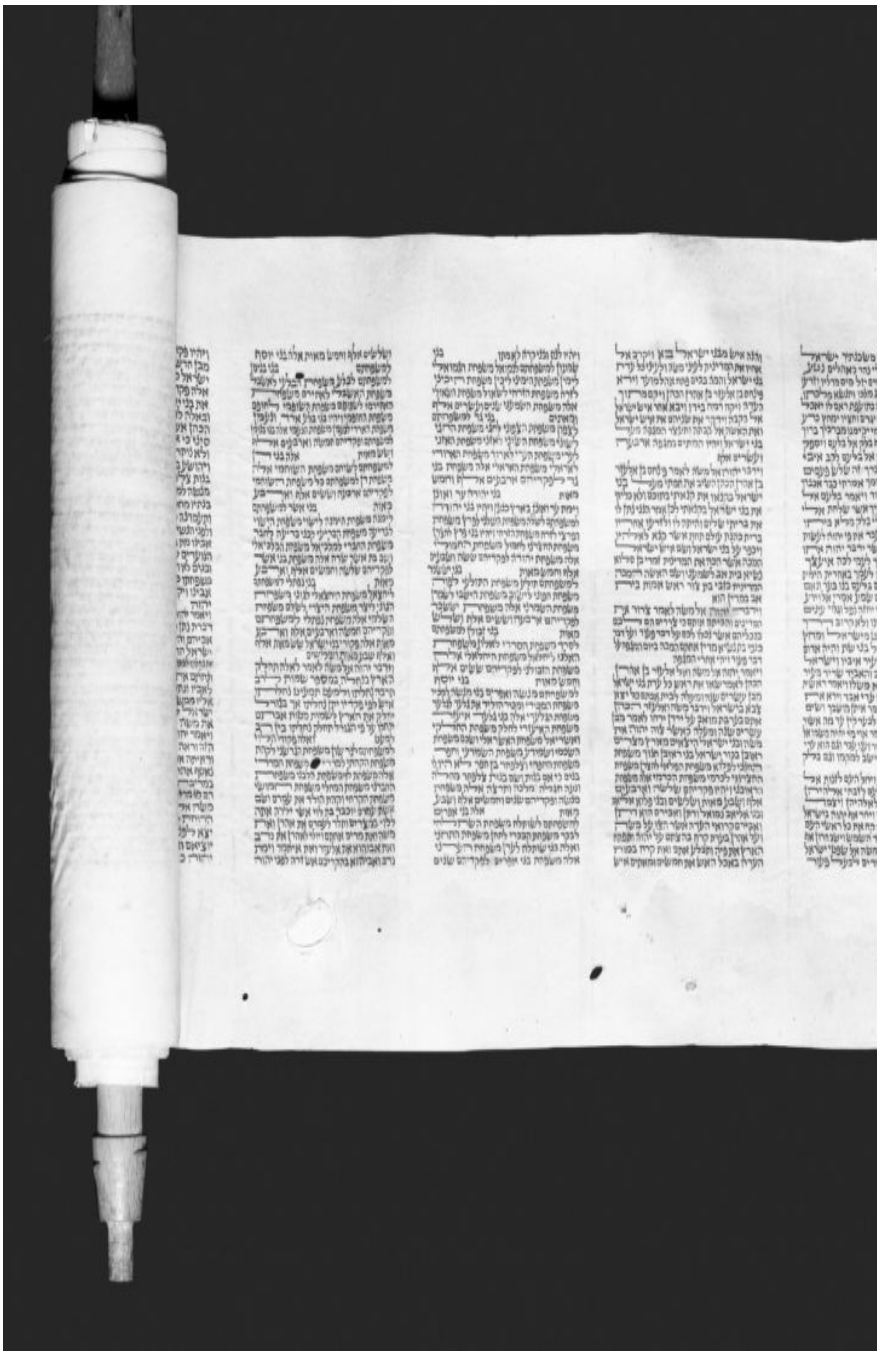

Figure 1.1 Torah Scroll. Ioánnina, Greece, mid-late 19th century. In

Sidebar 1.1 Writing and Reading in the Ancient World

The earliest writing in the Ancient Near East is from Sumerian scribes, who lived in the southernmost region of Mesopotamia (contemporary southern Iraq and

Kuwait). These scribes invented cuneiform writing in the fourth millennium BCE; it is a form of writing that imprinted wedge-shaped symbols on clay tablets. The absence of an alphabet required many different symbols. The Akkadian Empire further developed cuneiform writing throughout the third and second millennia BCE, influencing correspondence among scribes throughout the Ancient Near East. The roots of Hebrew writing become more evident with the emergence of Northwest Semitic languages in the fourteenth through twelfth centuries BCE, associated with Ugaritic and Aramaic, languages based on an alphabet, rather than the wedge-shaped symbols of cuneiform writing. An example of early or proto-Hebrew writing is the tenth-century Gezer calendar, in which seasonal activities are written on limestone; the writing of the Pentateuch reflects a later standard form of Hebrew from the eighth to the sixth centuries BCE, which undergoes changes to form the late biblical Hebrew in the fifth through third centuries BCE. In addition to clay or limestone tablets, scribes also wrote with ink on pots and potsherds, on animal hides described as parchment, and on sheets of papyrus made from reed plants. Writing was an important skill, making scribes prominent members of society in Ancient Israel. Although there is a long history of scribal writing, it is not yet clear how widespread literacy was among ancient people. For further discussion on writing and literacy, see Christopher A. Rollston (*Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*).

1.2 Plot, Setting, and Central Characters

A clue to the rationale for the separation of the five books emerges from the names of the books in Jewish tradition, which indicate an overarching plot. The story begins with creation (“in the beginning”) and follows the ancestral beginnings of Israel in Babylon to the land of Canaan. The account of the ancestors in Canaan leads to national slavery in Egypt (“these are the names”). Salvation from slavery progresses to the revelation of the cult at Mount Sinai (“and Yahweh called”), followed by a journey in the wilderness (“in the wilderness”) toward the promised land, which results in the death of the first generation of Israelites. The Pentateuch concludes with sermons by Moses to the second generation (“these are the words”), who prepare to enter the land that was denied to their parents.

The plot structure is further clarified from a more detailed interpretation of the introductions and the conclusions to the five books. Genesis begins with the creation of the world, “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1), and it ends with the vision of the promised land by the ancestor Joseph at the time of his death; he makes his brothers promise to remove his bones from Egypt and to rebury them in Canaan, the land of promise (Gen 50:24–26). Exodus begins by naming the sons of Jacob who migrate to Egypt, “these are the names” (Exod 1:1), and it concludes with a description of the glory of Yahweh that descends into the tabernacle sanctuary, which Israel built at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod 40:34–38). Leviticus begins with the divine address to Moses about proper cultic worship and sacrifice in the sanctuary at Mount Sinai, “and Yahweh called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting” (Lev 1:1), and it ends with the summary statement, “These are the commands that Yahweh gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai” (Lev 27:34). Numbers continues the divine instruction to Moses, but the emphasis shifts from the sanctuary to the wilderness setting of the Israelite journey, “Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai” (Num 1:1), and it concludes by noting that the Israelites progressed in their travel toward the promised land from the wilderness to the “plains of Moab” (Num 36:13).

Deuteronomy changes the focus from divine instruction to the “words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan” (Deut 1:1), and it concludes by underscoring the uniqueness of Moses, “never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face” (Deut 34:10–12).

Closer examination of the plot and the central characters in the Pentateuch indicates that the five books divide into two unequal parts: Genesis and Exodus–Deuteronomy. Genesis traces the ancestral origins of Israel from Babylon. It is composed in narrative, with no single character dominating the story. The central characters are the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their families, which include the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel as well as Jacob’s children, who represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Exodus through Deuteronomy recounts the Israelite salvation from Egypt, the wilderness journey, and the revelation of law at the divine mountain. These books are a mixture of narrative and law, with Moses emerging as the central character who leads the Israelites over the period of two generations.

The geographical setting for the story of the Pentateuch is broad in scope, extending from Babylon to Egypt. Genesis traces the journey of Abraham from Babylon, his original home, to Canaan, while Exodus–Deuteronomy recounts the salvation of the Israelite nation from Egypt and their wilderness journey toward Canaan.

The structure of the Pentateuch may be illustrated with the following diagram.

Table 1.1 The Structure of the Pentateuch

Genesis		**Exodus—Leviticus—Numbers**				**Deuteronomy**
Creation of World/Origin of the Israelite Ancestors		Biography of Moses Salvation of the Israelite People				
Creation World And Humans	Origin of the Ancestors	Exodus	Wilderness Journey	First Generation Revelation of Law Mount Sinai	Wilderness Journey	Second Generation Revelation of Law Mount Horeb
Gen 1–11	Gen 12–50	Exod 1–15	Exod 15–18	Exod 19–40; Lev Leviticus	Num 10–36	Deuteronomy

Num 1–9

Genesis: Creation of the World and Origin of the Ancestors

Genesis narrates the creation of the world (Genesis 1–11) and the ancestral origins of Israel (Genesis 12–50). It traces the evolution of the world through a series of genealogies that narrow from the cosmos (2:4a, heaven and earth) and all humanity (5:1, Adam; 6:9, Noah; 10:1, Noah's sons; 11:10, Shem) to the Israelite ancestors and other closely related people (11:27, Terah; 25:12, Ishmael; 25:19, Isaac; 36:1, Esau; 37:2, Jacob).

Sidebar 1.2 Genealogy of Priests

The genealogies in Genesis are often described as the Toledot. This word derives from the Hebrew verb, *yalad*, meaning "to bear or bring forth a child" (Gen 3:16); "to beget" (Gen 4:18); "to assist in childbirth" (Exod 1:16). The Hebrew noun *toledot* occurs often in Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:27; 25:12, 13; 36:1, 9; 37:2); Exodus (6:16, 19; 28:10); and Numbers (1:20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42; 3:1). It is meant to trace world history as the genealogy of the Israelite priesthood, who anchor their origin in heaven and earth (Gen 2:4); all humanity (Gen 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10); Israelite ancestors (11:27; 25:19; 37:2); Levites (Exod 6:16); and finally, Aaron and Moses (Num 3:1).

The genealogies trace the development of human history; they are also accompanied with dates that trace the history of the world. The creation of the first human (Gen 1:26–27) is Year 1 (anno mundi (AM) = Year of Creation). The chronology of world history emerges from the age of the characters as they have offspring. The birth of Seth provides an example: "When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth" (Gen 5:3). Thus Seth is born in the Year 130 AM. When we continue to add the time spans between the birth of humans, the timeline of world history emerges: the birth of Noah, for example, is the Year

1056 AM (Gen 5:28) and he fathers Shem, Ham, and Japheth five hundred years later in the Year 1556 AM (Gen 5:32). The flood begins one hundred years after the birth of Noah's sons, when he is six hundred years old (Gen 7:6) in the Year 1656 AM and it ends one year later, in 1657 AM, when Noah is six hundred and one years old (Gen 7:13–14). The system of dating continues after the flood, narrowing in scope. Noah's son Shem, for example, gives birth to Arpachshad two years after the flood (1659 AM); the process continues until Abraham is born in the year 1946 AM, and Jacob eventually enters Egypt in the year 2236 AM, setting the stage for the exodus in the year 2666 AM.

Sidebar 1.3 Dates in the Pentateuch

The chronology of the Pentateuch is difficult to interpret and it changes in the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) versions. It is likely, however, that the chronology of events in the Hebrew version of the Pentateuch (MT) is based on the ancient belief that an era of world history includes 4000 years. The era of 4000 years extends from creation (Year 1 AM) to the rededication of the Temple under the Maccabees (Year 4000 AM). Thomas L. Thompson illustrates the system of dating in the following chart (*Mythic Past*, 75):

Table 1.2 AM Chronology

Event	Date
Adam	1 AM
Birth of Abraham	1946 AM
Entrance into Egypt	2236 AM
Exodus from Egypt	2666 AM
Solomon's Temple	3146 AM
Exile	3576 AM
Edict of Cyrus	3626 AM
Rededication of Temple	4000 AM

The chart clarifies that the dating of events in the Pentateuch has theological significance. Jeremy Hughes clarifies that the most significant events in the system of dating are associated with Abraham and the temple (*Secrets of the Times*, 46). The dating highlights Abraham as the ancestor of the nation (1946 AM), while the

exodus (2666 AM) marks two-thirds of an era of world history. The temple becomes the central focus after the exodus; the system of dating highlights the temple of Solomon (3146 AM); its destruction (3576 AM); reconstruction after the Edict of Cyrus (3626 AM); and finally, rededication (4000 AM) after its defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes (who ruled 175–164 BCE).

The dating indicates that Genesis 1–11 narrates a broad sweep of time, which includes nearly two millennia (1946 years) between the creation of the first human (1:26–27) and the birth of Abraham, the eponymous ancestor of the Israelite nation (11:24). Genesis 12–50 narrows in scope to chronicle the family history of Israel, which takes place over a period of 215 years (1946–2236 AM). The main subject matter concerns the first three generations of Israelites, represented by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis ends with the fourth generation of Israelites (i.e., Joseph and his brothers) settling in Egypt (Gen 47:9). Two themes dominate the narratives of the ancestors: the divine promises of many descendants and of a homeland (12:1–4). These two themes remain central to the plot of Exodus–Deuteronomy.

A central feature of the literature in Genesis is the repetition of stories. Representative examples in Genesis 1–11 include two accounts of creation (1:1—2:4a; 2:4b–25), two genealogies of humanity (4:17–26; 5), and two versions of the flood (6–9). The story of the ancestors in Genesis 12–50 is also characterized by repetition. There are two accounts of God entering into covenant with Abraham (15; 17); two versions of Hagar being driven out into the wilderness from the camp of Abraham and Sarah (16:1–14; 21:8–21); twice, Jacob establishes a worship site at Bethel (28:11–28; 35:1–8); and Abraham and Isaac falsely present their wives as sisters to foreign kings not less than three times (12; 20; 26), with the father and son even deceiving the same king, Abimelech (20; 26).

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: Biography of Moses and Salvation of the Israelite People

Moses emerges as the central character in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He is idealized as the savior of the Israelites and the mediator of divine law. Exodus through Deuteronomy is framed by the birth (Exodus 2) and death (Deuteronomy 34) of Moses, so that the majority of the Pentateuchal literature is confined to the 120 years of his life, as compared to the millennia that transpire in Genesis. Moses experiences a heroic birth (Exodus 2) and an exceptional divine call on the mountain of God while tending sheep (Exodus 3–4). During his career, Moses liberates Israel from Egypt (Exodus 5–14), leads them in the wilderness (Exodus 15–18; Numbers 11–21), and mediates divine law, which is recounted twice—initially at Mount Sinai in the wilderness of Sinai to the first generation of Israelites (Exodus 19–Numbers 10) and the event is recounted to the second generation on the plains of Moab where the revelation is identified as taking place on Mount Horeb (Deuteronomy). The leadership of Moses over the period of two generations indicates the separation of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers from Deuteronomy.

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers: Moses and the First Generation of Israelites

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are nearly inseparable in the literary design of the Pentateuch and clearly distinct from Genesis and Deuteronomy. Exodus 1 sets the stage for the story of salvation from Egypt. It indicates a significant break in time (1:6, 8) from the events in Genesis, later described as a period of 430 years (Exod 12:30), making the date of the exodus the year 2666 (Exod 12:40–41). During this period, the original family of seventy grows into a large nation (1:5, 7), which threatens the pharaoh (1:8–10), who enslaves the Israelites (1:11–14) and slaughters the male infants to maintain population control (1:15–22). The divine promises of descendants and land to the ancestors from the book

of Genesis linger in the background, thus fueling the plot. The central themes of the book of Exodus are the power of Yahweh to rescue the Israelite people from slavery (2–15), the divine leading of the people through the wilderness (16–18), and the revelation of law at Mount Sinai, accompanied by the building of the tabernacle sanctuary (19–40).

Leviticus and Numbers continue the setting of the Israelite encampment at Mount Sinai (Lev 1:1; Num 1:1) in order to develop further the themes established in Exodus, which included the construction of the tabernacle, the appearance of the glory of Yahweh, and the revelation of law. Leviticus describes the sacrificial rituals of the tabernacle (1–7), the ordination of the priesthood to mediate the rituals (8–10), the regulations for impurity (11–16), and the laws of holiness (Leviticus 17–27). Numbers shifts the focus from the worship practices outlined in Leviticus to the social world of the Israelite people by describing a religious community organized around the sanctuary (1–10). Once organized, the people leave the divine mountain and set out for the promised land of Canaan (10). But the first generation of Israelites—those who were saved from slavery in Egypt—die in the desert because of their lack of faith in the leadership of Moses and in the power of Yahweh to fulfill the promise of land to the ancestors (11–21). Numbers closes by gradually shifting the focus from the first generation to the second, who are the children of the exodus generation. It highlights the divine care of the second generation of Israelites in the completion of the wilderness journey, especially in protecting the people against the threat of Balak, the Moabite (22–24), before turning attention to Israel's future life in the promised land (25–36). In order to prepare for life in the land, the people are warned against intermarriage (25; 31); they are counted (26); the future cycle of worship in the land is described (28–29); rules of war are outlined (31); inheritance rights of women are detailed (27; 36); and the tribal boundaries and Levitical cities in the land are clarified (34–35).

Deuteronomy: Moses and the Second Generation of Israelites

The book of Deuteronomy is set apart in time from the story in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The first generation of Israelites has died in the wilderness and Moses teaches the second generation on the last day of his life, dated year 40, month 11, day 1 after the exodus, or the year 2706 (1:3). The teaching of Moses progresses from the recounting of the exodus, the wilderness journey, and the revelation of the Decalogue (1–11), to the declaration of further law (12–26) that is tied to a series of blessings and curses (27–28), and a concluding section on the establishment of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, followed by poetic songs by Moses (29–33). Moses dies on Mount Nebo (34:1–5) upon the conclusion of his teaching at the age of 120 years (34:7). He is unique among humans, having seen God face-to-face and lived beyond that (34:10–12).

The story of Moses is also characterized by repetition. The narrative of the exodus includes two accounts of Moses's commission and the revelation of the divine name, Yahweh (Exodus 3 and 6), contrasting versions of the plagues (Exodus 7–10), and multiple accounts of the destruction of the Egyptian army (Exodus 14–15). The same technique of repetition continues in the story of the wilderness journey, where there are also multiple accounts of the Israelites' fear of conquest and loss of the promised land (Numbers 13–14). These instances of repetition are reminiscent of Genesis, where multiple versions of the most important stories also occur.

But the significance of repetition in the story of Moses exceeds the book of Genesis because of the recurrence of the revelation of law over two generations. The Decalogue (Exodus 20), the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21–23), and the Priestly legislation for the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40; Leviticus; and parts of Numbers) are promulgated to the first generation and the laws of Deuteronomy to the second generation. The law-codes create an extensive series of repetitions beyond the narratives. Examples include two mountains of revelation (Sinai in Exodus 24 and Horeb in Deuteronomy 4–5), two versions of the Decalogue (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), conflicting cultic calendars (Exod 23:14–17;

Leviticus 23; Numbers 27–28; and Deuteronomy 16), competing views of sacrifice (Leviticus 1–7; Deuteronomy 15), and different laws concerning warfare (Numbers 31 and Deuteronomy 20), to name just a few of the many instances in which laws repeat in the teaching of Moses.

1.3 Literary Context of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch is preserved in different canonical forms. The Samaritan version canonized only the Pentateuch and no other literature; hence, there is no literary context for interpreting the Pentateuch. The two other ancient canons combine the Pentateuch with additional literature, thus creating a context for interpretation. The two canons are the Hebrew Masoretic (MT) and the Greek Septuagint (LXX). The Masoretic version separates the canon into three parts: Pentateuch (Torah); Prophets (Nevi'im); and Writings (Ketuvim). The Septuagint (LXX) canon does not follow the three-part division of the Masoretic canon; it also changes the order and adds additional books. The interpretation of the literary context of the Pentateuch will follow the Masoretic (MT) canon, exploring the relationship of the Pentateuch to the Prophets and to the Writings (see Sidebar 1.5, "MT and LXX Canons").

Sidebar 1.4 Tanakh

The Masoretic (MT) canon is often designated as the Tanakh, a word that combines the first letter of the Hebrew name of the three sections: [T]orah; [N]evi'im; and [K]etuvim.

Sidebar 1.5 MT and LXX Canons

The following chart compares the Masoretic (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) canons. The three-part organization of the Masoretic canon is absent in the

Septuagint. The Septuagint changes the order of some books, most notably placing the Prophets at the conclusion; it also adds additional books (indicated by *italics*).

Table 1.3 MT and LXX Canons Compared

MASORETIC CANON (MT)	SEPTUAGINT CANON (LXX)
TORAH (PENTATEUCH)	
1. Genesis	1. Genesis
2. Exodus	2. Exodus
3. Leviticus	3. Leviticus
4. Numbers	4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy	5. Deuteronomy
NEVI'IM (PROPHETS)	
6. Joshua	6. Joshua
7. Judges	7. Judges
	8. Ruth
8. Samuel	9. 1 Kings (= 1 Samuel)
	10. 2 Kings (= 2 Samuel)
9. Kings	11. 3 Kings (=1 Kings)
	12. 4 Kings (=2 Kings)
	13. 1 Chronicles
	14. 2 Chronicles
	15. *Esdrae* 1
	16. Esdrae 2 (= Ezra and Nehemiah)
	17. Esther
	18. *Judith*
	19. *Tobit*
	20. *Maccabees* 1
	21. *Maccabees* 2
	22. *Maccabees* 3
	23. *Maccabees* 4
10. Isaiah	
11. Jeremiah	
12. Ezekiel	

13. Book of the Twelve	
KETHUVIM (THE WRITINGS)	
14. Psalms	24. Psalms
15. Proverbs	25. Proverbs
16. Job	
	26. Ecclesiastes
17. Song of Songs	27. Song of Songs
18. Ruth	
19. Lamentations	
20. Ecclesiastes	
21. Esther	
22. Daniel	
23. Ezra-Nehemiah	
24. Chronicles	
	28. Job
	29. *Wisdom*
	30. *Sirach*
	31. *Psalms of Solomon*
	32. Book of the Twelve
	33. Isaiah
	34. Jeremiah (Including Baruch, Lamentation, Epistle of Jeremiah)
	35. Ezekiel
	36. *Susanna*

Pentateuch and the Prophets

The Pentateuch and the Prophets are related in the Hebrew canon through literary design and shared themes. The Pentateuch closes with the death of Moses (Deut 34:7–8). At his death, the narrator prepares the reader for the section of the Prophets by identifying Moses as a unique prophet, who passes on a portion of his spirit to Joshua, the first character to appear in the Prophets: "Joshua, son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as Yahweh had commanded Moses. Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face" (Deut 34:9–10).

The Pentateuch and the Prophets are tied together further, when the entire section of the Prophets is framed by references to the Torah of Moses. The section of the Prophets begins with the divine command to Joshua that he follow the Torah of Moses for successful leadership: "Be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the Torah that my servant Moses commanded you" (Josh 1:7). The Prophets ends with the similar command at the conclusion of the last book, Malachi: "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" (Mal 4:4).

Sidebar 1.6 Former and Latter Prophets

The Prophets is often divided between the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve). The separation accentuates a difference in literary genre and style. The Former Prophets are narratives about the life of Israel in the land and the Latter Prophets are poetic books that recount the careers of central prophetic figures.

Former Prophets

The central themes of the Pentateuch suggest a literary relationship with the Former Prophets. Yahweh calls the ancestor Abraham from his home in Babylon with the promise: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:1–2). The divine commission contains two promises that are central to the story of the Pentateuch. Yahweh promises Abraham that he will become the ancestor of a great nation and that the people will have their own land. These promises raise the question of whether the narratives of the ancestors in Genesis and of the exodus and wilderness journey in Exodus–Deuteronomy are the whole story, especially since the divine promise of land remains unfulfilled.

The book of Deuteronomy intensifies the question of the Pentateuch’s literary context; it states that the second generation of Israelites has become a “great nation” of “wise and discerning people” (4:6), thus fulfilling one of the central themes of the Pentateuch. But the nation remains homeless, encamped outside of the land of promise, beyond the Jordan River in the plains of Moab (1:3), where, as we have seen, Moses addresses the second generation on the last day of his life. Does the Pentateuch really end with the death of Moses (Deut 34), leaving the promise of land incomplete, or does it continue into the story of the Israelites’ life in the land? This is a question of the literary context of the Pentateuch, since the story of Israel’s life in the land is recounted immediately after the death of Moses.

The Former Prophets contains the story of the Israelites’ life in the land. In the Hebrew canon, the content of the Former Prophets includes the Israelite conquest of the promised land (Joshua 1–24, Judges 1–2); the settlement of the tribes in the land and their inability to secure it from other nations (Judges 3–21; 1 Sam 1–7); the rise of the monarchy as a more secure form of leadership that leads to the rule of the house of David in Jerusalem (1 Sam 8–31; 2 Sam 1–24; 1 Kings 1–22; 2 Kings 1–16); and the eventual loss of the land (2 Kings 17–25). The Assyrians destroy the northern kingdom of Samaria (2 Kings 17). The

southern kingdom of Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians, who sack Jerusalem and exile the Davidic king and many of the people to Babylon (2 Kings 25). The Greek canon (Septuagint) extends the story further into the postexilic period to include the fulfillment of the promise anew with the return of the exiles in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles and the later rule of the Maccabees.

Interpreters question whether the Pentateuch should be read alone or with all or part of the four books of the Former Prophets, so that both of the divine promises to Abraham of nationhood and land are fulfilled. No one clear answer emerges, giving rise to a number of solutions about the appropriate literary context for interpreting the Pentateuch. The indecision arises from a range of shared literary motifs between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets.

The references to the Pentateuch in the Former Prophets illustrate the problem of determining literary context. The motifs “Torah,” “Torah of Moses,” “Book of the Torah,” and the “Book of the Torah of Moses,” in the Former Prophets are intended to refer to all or part of the Pentateuch. The following diagram provides the distribution of the motifs in the Former Prophets.

Table 1.4 Motifs in the Former Prophets

Conquest of the Land	Tribal Life in the Land	Rise of Kings	Loss of the Land under Kings
Joshua 1–24; Judges 1–2	Judges 3–21; 1 Samuel 1–7	1 Samuel 8–31; 2 Samuel 1–24; 1 Kings 1–22; 2 Kings 1–16	2 Kings 17–25
Josh 1:7–8 Torah/Moses/Book		1 Kgs 2:3 Torah/Moses	2 Kgs 17:13, 34, 37 Torah
Josh 8:31–34 Torah/Moses/Book		1 Kgs 10:31 Torah	2 Kgs 21:8 Torah/Moses
Josh 22:5 Torah/Moses		2 Kgs 14:6 Torah/Moses	2 Kgs 22:8, 11 Torah/Book
Josh 23:6 Torah/Moses/Book			2 Kgs 23:24–25 Torah/Moses/Book
Josh 24:26 Torah/God			

The book of Joshua contains many references to the “Torah of Moses.” It begins by linking the commission of Joshua to the death of Moses: “After the death of Moses, the servant of Yahweh, Yahweh spoke to Joshua, son of Nun,

Moses' assistant, saying, 'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses'" (Josh 1:1–3). Yahweh states that the "Torah of Moses" must be Joshua's resource and guide in fulfilling the promise of land (Josh 1:7–8). Once in the land, Joshua writes a copy of the "Torah of Moses" on the stones of the altar at Mount Ebal (Josh 8:30–35) and at the end of the book, he commands the tribes to obey the "Book of the Torah of Moses" in order to secure their new life in the promised land (Josh 23:6). The references to the "Torah of Moses" certainly link the book of Joshua to the Pentateuch in some way. Strengthening the literary relationship is the recognition that the two divine promises to Abraham of nationhood and land are fulfilled by the close of the book of Joshua. The completion of these important themes, in combination with motifs that link the two bodies of literature, such as the "Torah of Moses," have prompted some interpreters to identify the literary context of the Pentateuch with the book of Joshua, giving rise to the term *Hexateuch*, "six books." The Hexateuch is a positive story, in which the divine promise of the land to the ancestors in Genesis is fulfilled with the conquest of Joshua.

Sidebar 1.7 Different Names for the Literature of Torah

Interpreters describe the Torah with different names, depending on its literary context.

Pentateuch is the traditional description of the Torah as the five books of Genesis, Exodus, Levitius, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Tetrateuch describes the four books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers; it recounts the story of creation through the wilderness journey.

Deuteronomistic History separates Deuteronomy from the Tetrateuch and combines it with the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings); it recounts the tragic history of Israel from the time of Moses through the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the loss of the land.

Hexateuch describes the collection of six books, including the five books of the Torah and the book of Joshua; it includes the conquest of the land in Joshua to complete the story of the exodus with the fulfillment of the divine promise of land.

Enneateuch describes an even larger corpus that combines the five books of the Torah with the four books of the Former Prophets as one nine-volume collection that traces the history of Israel from creation through the destruction of the temple and the loss of the land.

But the context of the Pentateuch may be even broader, since the motif of the "Torah of Moses" actually frames the entire section of the Former Prophets, appearing both at the beginning (Josh 1:7–8) and at the end (2 Kgs 23:25) of the body of literature. After the book of Joshua, the references to the "Torah of Moses" fade from the further history of Israel in the land until the book of Kings, when David instructs Solomon to obey the "Torah of Moses" in order to have success in his rule over the land (1 Kgs 2:3). The advice repeats the divine instruction to Joshua, suggesting a literary relationship to Joshua 1:7–8. It also provides the perspective for evaluating the history of the kings by underscoring that successful monarchs will obey the "Torah of Moses" to ensure Israel's life in the land, while kings who disobey the Torah risk the loss of the land. Examples follow: King Jehu did not obey the "Torah of Yahweh" (2 Kgs 10:31), while King Amaziah followed the "Torah of Moses" by not killing the children of those who assassinated his father, Joash (2 Kgs 14:6). Violations of the Torah are the reason for the fall of the entire northern kingdom of Samaria (2 Kgs 17:13, 34, 37). The instruction of David to Solomon to obey the "Torah of Moses" reappears as judgment against the Davidic king Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:8). Josiah provides the model of obedience to the "Torah of Moses" in his short-lived but important reform of the kingdom of Judah and its royal city, Jerusalem (2 Kgs 22:8, 11; 23:24–25), before the Former Prophets end with the fall of Jerusalem and the loss of the land (2 Kings 25).

The important role of the "Torah of Moses" for evaluating the rule of the kings from David through Josiah suggests that the entire Former Prophets may

be providing the literary context of the Pentateuch, creating a single story that spans nine books. Interpreters who identify all four books of the Former Prophets as the literary context of the Pentateuch use the term *Enneateuch*, "nine books." The Enneateuch is a tragic story that chronicles the disobedience of the kings in not following the "Torah of Moses," which results in the loss of the promised land and the exile in Babylon. When read within this larger literary context, the setting of Babylon frames the entire story. Abraham is called from Babylon at the beginning of the story (Genesis 12), and the Davidic king, along with the leaders of Judah, end the story by returning to Babylon as an exile (2 Kings 25).

The literary relationship between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets is also evident from events, speeches, and characters that appear in both bodies of literature. Again, the distribution is uneven, with more occurrences in Joshua than in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The book of Joshua refers to the exodus from Egypt (Joshua 2); the crossing of the Red Sea (Joshua 4); the wilderness journey (Joshua 5); manna and the Passover (Joshua 5); the divine promise of land to Moses (Joshua 9); the worship at the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim (Joshua 8) as Moses commanded (Deuteronomy 28); and also chronicles the journey of Terah and Abraham from Babylon (Joshua 24). In addition, a variety of minor characters from the Pentateuch also appear in the book of Joshua, including Phinehas (Joshua 22), Caleb (Joshua 14), and the daughters of Zelophehad (Joshua 17).

Motifs from the Pentateuch appear less frequently in Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The character of Joshua is mentioned at the conclusion of the conquest of the individual tribes (Judges 2); Jephthah recalls the story of the wilderness journey around Moab from Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 2 (Judges 11); Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, marches with the ark (Judges 20); Samuel recounts the migration of Jacob to Egypt and the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron (1 Samuel 12); Jeroboam builds golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 11) that mirror the same sin of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32); Elijah prays to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2 Kings 13); and once, the narrator underscores the compassion of Yahweh because of the

past covenant with the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2 Kings 13). The literary ties to the Pentateuch increase in the story of King Josiah's reform, where the cultic centralization and aniconic worship reflect legislation from the book of Deuteronomy (2 Kings 22–23).

This list is not exhaustive, yet the infrequency of the literary links to the Pentateuch, especially after the book of Joshua, is surprising, given its foundational role in the Hebrew and Greek canons, prompting interpreters to debate whether the Pentateuch should be read alone, or with all or part of the four books of the Former Prophets.

Latter Prophets

The relationship of the Pentateuch to the remainder of the Prophetic literature is evident, but difficult to evaluate. The prophet Hosea associates Yahweh with the land of Egypt, suggesting a possible reference to the event of the exodus from the Pentateuch (12:9; 13:4). The reference to the exodus is reinforced with the further statement in Hosea that Yahweh brought the Israelites up from Egypt (12:13). The exodus and wilderness wandering are also recounted in Amos (2:10; 3:1; 4:10; 9:7).

There are references to the law throughout the prophetic books. Isaiah (24:5; 42:24; 59:4), Jeremiah (2:6; 5:4; 8:8; 26:4), Hosea (4:6; 8:1), Amos (2:4), and Zephaniah (7:12) accuse the Israelites of not obeying the law. Jeremiah also promises that the law will be a source of salvation by being written on the hearts of the people (31:33), and Ezekiel describes the law that will govern the temple (43:11–12; 44:5, 24). But whether these references to the law refer to the Pentateuch is not clear, especially since the reference to the Torah of Moses is absent.

The central character of the Pentateuch, Moses, is also nearly absent in the prophetic literature. Isaiah contains an account of the leadership of Moses through the Red Sea (63:11–12); Jeremiah pairs Moses with Samuel in the role of intercession (15:1); Micah attributes the Israelite salvation from slavery in Egypt to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (6:4); Malachi associates Moses with the

revelation of the law at Horeb (4:4). As noted, Hosea may make an allusion to Moses in the statement, “by a prophet Yahweh brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded” (12:13), but Moses is not named.

The problem of identifying the literary relationship between the Pentateuch and the Prophets continues in the appearance of other central characters from the Pentateuch. Jacob is prominent throughout the prophetic books. The book of Isaiah contains judgment oracles (2:5; 9:8; 17:4; 43:2) and promises of salvation (27:6, 9; 44:23) directed at Jacob or his descendants, which describe election (45:4) and a return to the land after exile (Isa 48:20). Similar themes appear in the book of Jeremiah, where the descendants of Jacob are, once again, the object of divine judgment (5:20), persecution by the nations (10:25; 30:7), and salvation (30:18; 31:11; 46:27). Jacob appears less frequently in the book of Ezekiel, but he is the object of the divine promise of the return to the land from exile (Ezek 20:5; 28:25; 37:35; 39:25). Jacob remains prominent in the Book of the Twelve: Hosea recounts specific stories of Jacob from the book of Genesis (ch. 12); Amos (3:13; 6:8; 8:7; 9:8) and Micah (2:7; 3:1) contain judgment oracles against the descendants of Jacob, while Micah (2:12; 5:7), Nahum (2:2) and Malachi (1:2; 2:12; 3:6) envision the salvation of Jacob.

The prominent role of Jacob contrasts against the minimal references to Abraham and Isaac in the Prophets. Abraham and Sarah are a source of hope and salvation in Isaiah: “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many” (51:2; see also 29:22; 41:8; 63:16). Outside of these few references to Abraham in Isaiah, he appears only one time each in Jeremiah (33:26); Ezekiel (33:24); and Micah (7:20). Isaac is mentioned twice in Amos (7:9, 16); and the three ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appear only once (Jer 33:26). The minimal occurrence of these characters in the Prophets is surprising, given their prominent role in the Pentateuch. Equally surprising, the central festivals of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Day of Atonement are all absent in the Prophets, raising still further questions about the relationship of the Pentateuch and the Prophets.

Pentateuch and the Writings

The literary relationship between the Pentateuch and the Writings is much stronger. Throughout the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, the reader is encouraged to relate the events of the narrative to the life of Moses and to the Torah of Moses. The book of Chronicles refers to the tabernacle made by Moses (1 Chr 6:49; 15:15; 21:29; 2 Chr 1:3), the taxes that are required to support it (1 Chr 26:24; 2 Chr 24:6), and the festivals of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Booths, and Passover that are associated with the wilderness sanctuary (2 Chr 8:13; 35:6). The central role of Moses in mediating law is prominent (1 Chr 15:15; 22:13; 2 Chr 33:8), as is the reference to the Torah of Moses (2 Chr 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah continue the practice of referring to Moses (Neh 1:7; 9:14) and the Torah of Moses (Ezra 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Neh 8:1; 13:1), as does the book of Daniel (9:11, 13). Moses also appears in the Psalms: Psalms 105 and 106 recount the events of the Pentateuch and the leadership role of Moses (105:26; 106:16, 23, 32; see also 77:20; 99:6; and 103:7), while Psalm 90 is entitled “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.”

The frequency of the references to the ancestors from the book of Genesis is just the reverse from the Prophets. Jacob is a prominent character in the Prophets, with Abraham and Isaac appearing infrequently. In the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, Jacob only appears twice (1 Chr 16:13, 17), while Abraham (1 Chr 1:27, 28, 34; 16:16; 29:18; 2 Chr 20:7; 30:6; Neh 9:7) and Isaac (1 Chr 1:28, 34; 16:16; 29:18; 30:6) take a more central role as the father of the nation and the recipients of covenant promises. Jacob appears as a central character, however, in the Psalms (14:7; 53:6; 59:13; 78:5; 85:1), where the deity is often identified as the “God of Jacob” (24:6; 46:11; 75:9; 76:6; 81:1), while Abraham (47:9; 105:6, 9, 42) and Isaac (105:9) are infrequently named.

1.4 Summary

The literary structure of the Pentateuch is important in the modern study of the literature. The many repetitions in the literature have raised questions about the unity of the narrative and the relationship of law and narrative in the present design of the Pentateuch.

Modern interpreters have struggled to explain why similar events are repeated, such as the multiple occasions when the patriarchs lie to foreign kings, stating that their wives are really their sisters (Genesis 12, 20, 26), or the appearance of the same laws in different books, such as the Decalogue (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5).

Interpreters question the relationship of the books of the Pentateuch. The story of the ancestors in Genesis is centered in the land of Canaan, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob interact with other kings and nations who also live in the land, often negotiating land claims or burial sites. In the story of Moses, the Israelites are foreign to the land of Canaan and they must journey through the wilderness and conquer the land, killing the indigenous nations. How do these different accounts of life in the land relate? The stories of the ancestors in Genesis and of Moses in Exodus are related in the present form of the Pentateuch for the most part by the story of Joseph, whose literary style is different from both the ancestors in Genesis and Moses in Exodus. What is the interpreter to make of this loose literary relationship?

Also, the story of Moses appears twice in Exodus–Numbers and in Deuteronomy, with many repetitions in the narrative events and in the revelation of law. Although the two bodies of literature are organized as one story, taking place over two generations, the book of Deuteronomy can easily be read as an independent book. How is the reader to evaluate the book of Deuteronomy and its relationship to the story of Exodus–Numbers?

The relationship of the Pentateuch to the Prophets and to the Writings also plays a prominent role in the modern period of interpretation. The multiple literary ties between the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua have prompted many

modern interpreters to abandon the literary category of the Pentateuch in favor of a Hexateuch, so that the journey from Egypt through the wilderness culminates in the conquest of the land in the book of Joshua. The minimal references to Moses and to the Torah of Moses in the Prophets also raise a series of questions about the composition of the Pentateuch. How does the interpreter account for the absence of Moses, the central character of the Pentateuch, in the Prophets? Is the Prophetic literature older than the literature of the Pentateuch, even though the story of Pentateuch is about a much more ancient time in the history of Israel? Does the closer literary relationship between the Pentateuch and Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles indicate that the composition of the Pentateuch is closer in time to these books? These questions take center stage with the rise of historical criticism in the modern period, when interpreters reject the Mosaic authorship and seek to identify the anonymous authors of the Pentateuch, who write during a much later time.

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PART II

Composition of the Pentateuch

The introduction to research on the composition of the Pentateuch will be spread across three chapters. Chapter 2 will trace the changing views of the authorship of the Pentateuch—from the traditional Jewish and Christian understanding that Moses was the author to the identification of anonymous authors in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical criticism, culminating in the documentary hypothesis. Chapter 3 will summarize the impact of recovering oral stories and traditions behind the literature of the Pentateuch in the methodologies of form criticism and tradition history. Chapter 4 will sketch out the varied ways in which the authorship of the Pentateuch is described in the current practices of the documentary hypothesis and redaction criticism. The three chapters illustrate that the question, “Who wrote the Pentateuch?” is constantly undergoing revision.

The Authors of the Pentateuch: From Moses to the Documentary Hypothesis

The identification of the author of the Pentateuch is crucial for the interpretation of the literature. For centuries, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was at the center of traditional Jewish and Christian inter-pretation, since the inspired author infused the text with divine authority. The identification of the author has been equally important in the critical study of the Pentateuch from the Renaissance to the present—the period when the rejection of the traditional view of Mosaic authorship launched the quest to identify anonymous authors. This chapter will highlight the changes that occurred from the traditional to the critical interpretation of the Pentateuch in three stages.

2.1 Mosaic Authorship

The authorship of the Pentateuch is attributed to Moses in Jewish and Christian traditions. The identification of the Pentateuch as the Torah of Moses already in the Former Prophets indicates that Mosaic authorship is embedded in the formation of the literature. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is reinforced by scattered references to writing in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Only God and Moses write in the Pentateuch. God writes laws (Exod 24:12), the architectural plans for the tabernacle (Exod 31:18), names of the elect in a special book (Exod 32:32), and the tablets containing the Decalogue (Exod 34:1; Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:10; 10:2–4).

Sidebar 2.1 Views of the Authorship of the Pentateuch

1. Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation.
2. Critical reading of the Pentateuch in the Renaissance and in the Protestant. Reformation.
3. Identification of anonymous authors in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical criticism, culminating in the documentary hypothesis.

The divine authorship emphasized the religious authority of the literature as revelation. Moses is also described as writing in the Pentateuch. He writes four distinct genres of literature: prophecy about holy war (Exod 17:14), laws (Exod 24:4; 34:27–28; Deut 31:9, 34), the history of the wilderness journey (Num 33:2), and a song (Deut 31:9, 22).

Mosaic authorship is most likely extended in Deut 31:24–26 to include the entire book of Deuteronomy, described as the “book of the Torah.” Interpreters debate whether the references to the “Torah of Moses” in the Former Prophets

originally referred only to Deuteronomy, but in the present form of the canon, the entire Pentateuch is more likely intended. The account of Ezra reading the "Torah of Moses" to the post-exilic community in Jerusalem further reinforces the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (see Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh 8:1; and also 2 Chr 23:18; 30:16; 34:14). In the process, Moses is idealized as an inspired author, which gives religious authority to the literature that he composed.

Sidebar 2.2 Ben Sira in Praise of Moses

Ben Sira honors Moses as a warrior, miracle worker, and especially as the lawgiver:

> [God] made [Moses] equal in glory to the holy ones,
> and made him great, to the terror of his enemies.
> By his words he performed swift miracles;
> Yahweh glorified him in the presence of kings.
> He gave him commandments for his people,
> and revealed to him his glory.
> For his faithfulness and meekness he consecrated him,
> choosing him out of all humankind.
> He allowed him to hear his voice,
> and led him into the dark cloud,
> and gave him the commandments face to face,
> the law of life and knowledge,
> so that he might teach Jacob the covenant,
> and Israel his decrees. (Sirach 45:2–5)

The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was assumed in Jewish Hellenistic, Rabbinic, and early Christian writings. Philo (20 BCE–50 CE) was a writer and philosopher in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, who sought to relate the Torah of Moses to Greek Platonism through allegorical exegesis. Examples of his many writings include *On the Creation; Allegorical Interpretation I, II, III; On the Life*

of Moses I, II; and On the Virtues. He entitled his account of the creation, "On the Creation According to Moses," indicating the Mosaic authorship of Genesis. [1] In his treatise on Moses, Philo praised the qualities of Moses reflected in the sacred books of the Pentateuch, which Moses authored.[2]



Figure 2.1 Philo of Alexandria (also known as Philo Judaeus). Illustration by Andre Thevet, 1584, in Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens.

Josephus (37–100 CE) also assumed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Josephus fought against the Romans in Galilee before surrendering in 67 CE. As a Roman citizen, he later wrote Jewish history focusing on *The Jewish War* of the first century CE, the comprehensive history of the Jews in the *Jewish Antiquities*, and the defense of Judaism as a classical religion in *Against Apion*, in which he also asserted that Moses authored the first five books (1.37–40).



Figure 2.2 The romanticized woodcut engraving of Flavius Josephus appearing in William Whiston's translation of his works.

The Rabbis too stated, "Moses wrote his own book" (*Bava Batra* 14b). Its origin was divine (*Sanhedrin* 99a). Early Christian writers shared the perspective of the Rabbis. The Apostle Paul referred to the Pentateuch as the "law of Moses" (1 Cor 9:9). The author of the Gospel of Luke expressed the same thought when the Pentateuch is indicated simply by reference to its author, "Moses" (Luke 24:27), later described as the "law of Moses" (Luke 24:44).

The above examples indicate three important insights about the traditional interpretation of the composition of the Pentateuch. First, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch emerged within tradition and not from the historical-critical study of its literary composition. Second, Mosaic authorship was important for attributing divine authority to Scripture. The Rabbis provide illustration when they concluded: God spoke the Torah to Moses, who wrote down the words (*Bava Batra* 15a). And third, the Mosaic authorship of the Torah influenced how the Pentateuch was interpreted. In the pre-critical eras of Judaism and Christianity, interpreters assumed that the Pentateuch contained one unified message because it had one divinely inspired author. This assumption required

interpreters to harmonize the many repetitions within the Pentateuch into a single message.

Questions about Mosaic authorship arose even in the absence of critical literary study. The Rabbis, for example, debated whether Moses could have written the account of his own death in Deuteronomy 34:5–12 (*Bava Battra* 15a; *Menahot* 30a.). Jewish medieval commentators noticed other problems. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167 CE), a twelfth-century CE Spanish author, made a cryptic statement in his com-mentary on Deuteronomy 1:1: "If you can grasp the mystery behind the following problematic passages: (1) the final twelve verses of this book [Deut 34:1–12]; (2) "Moses wrote" [Deut 31:22]; (3) "At that time, the Canaanites dwelt in the land" [Gen 12:6]; (4) ". . . In the mountain of God, he will appear" [Gen 22:14]; and (5) "behold, his bed is a bed of iron . . ." [Deut 3:11], "you will then understand the truth."

Ibn Ezra did not clarify the "mystery" of the passages, nor the "truth" that they reveal, but it most likely referred to their non-Mosaic authorship:

1. The phrase, "beyond Jordan" (Deut 1:1), could not have been written by Moses because he never crossed the Jordan River;
2. The third-person references to Moses, as in "Moses wrote" (Deut 31:22), imply another author;
3. The "Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen 12:6) assumes the expulsion of the Canaanite after the death of Moses;
4. The naming of Mount Moriah from the phrase, "in the mountain of God, he will appear" (Gen 22:14), occurs during the monarchy period; and
5. The description of Og and his iron bed (Deut 3:11) assumes a much later date than the time of Moses.

Doubts about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch remained at the periphery of interpretation, however, functioning only as a "mysterious truth," to use the words of Ibn Ezra. These literary problems did not provide a hermeneutical starting point for evaluating the composition and the meaning of the Pentateuch. Thus, in spite of a variety of literary problems, the authoritative

teaching of tradition concerning the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was accepted without serious or widespread opposition, which influenced interpretation. Jewish and Christian interpreters sought a unified message in Torah from its single, inspired author Moses.

2.2 Critical Turn to the Text and the Loss of Mosaic Authorship

The Renaissance (fourteenth–seventeenth centuries CE) and the Protestant Reformation (beginning in the fifteenth century CE) introduced a more critical stance toward religious tradition and biblical authority, expressed in the manifesto *sola scriptura*.

Sidebar 2.3 *Sola Scriptura*

Sola scriptura is Latin, meaning "Scripture alone." *Sola scriptura* is most often associated with the Protestant Reformation in debates over the relationship of Scripture and tradition, with reformers such as Martin Luther emphasizing the authority of Scripture over the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. Luther's belief in *sola scriptura* is evident in his declaration at the Diet of Worms (1521), when he refused to recant his teachings even though they might conflict with church tradition, because he was "bound by Scriptures" and he did "not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well know that they have often erred and contradicted themselves."

The claim of *sola scriptura* meant that only Scripture, not traditional teaching, represented divine instruction on all questions of faith and practice. Study of Scripture, therefore, was used as a counter-voice to papal authority. Such a use of Scripture required a more historical-critical hermeneutic in order to illustrate the misuse of Pentateuchal literature through past interpretation by the Roman Church. The reformers' critical stance toward tradition turned the focus of interpretation on the plain or literal sense of the text, as opposed to the traditional methodologies of typology or allegory. The more intense focus on the literal meaning of the Pentateuch, along with a critical stance toward tradition, would eventually call into question Mosaic authorship, since it too rested on the authority of traditional teaching, rather than arising from the historical-critical

study of Pentateuchal literature. John Calvin (1509–64) and Baruch Spinoza (1634–77) illustrate the emergence of historical criticism of the Pentateuch and the eventual rejection of Mosaic authorship.

John Calvin: Critical Reading of the Pentateuch



Figure 2.3 Portrait of John Calvin,
attributed to Hans Holbein the Younger.

John Calvin was originally a French lawyer who became a leader in the Protestant Reformation as the minister of the church in Geneva, Switzerland. In addition to writing the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin also wrote commentaries on the Bible, including a two-volume work on *The First Book of Moses Called Genesis* and a four-volume commentary on the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy entitled, *The Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*. Calvin never questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In the "Preface" to *The Four Last Books of Moses in the Form of a Harmony I*, Calvin assures the reader that "what was dictated to Moses was excellent . . ." (xiv). In the introductory "Argument" to *The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Calvin restricted his interpretation to the plain or literal sense of the text and he made clear that his aim was to discern the intention of Moses as a source of divine revelation (58–59). But, uncovering Mosaic intention was made difficult because of repetitions in the organization of the literature. Calvin stated that Moses did not relate the "history in a continuous

form” and as a consequence, Moses delivered doctrine in an unconnected manner.[3] In view of this, Calvin reorganized the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy for clarity, so that the reader would not be “led astray through ignorance of any regular plan.”[4]

The reorganization of the Pentateuchal literature required sustained literary study, which brought repetitions and potential contradictions into clearer focus. For example, Calvin is aware of the multiple law-codes in Exodus, Leviticus, and, Deuteronomy; he also recognized two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, along with the name changes for God from Elohim (in Genesis 1) to Yahweh (in Genesis 2). The repetition of the creation stories was not “superfluous,” according to Calvin, but it certainly did not prompt questions about Mosaic authorship, nor did it challenge the assumption that the Pentateuch contained a unified message about creation. Instead, the two creation stories were for emphasis, inculcating “the necessary fact, that the world existed only from the time when it was created. . . .”[5] The change from Elohim to the more personal name Yahweh was neither a contradiction nor an indication of distinct authorship, but “is here at length expressed by Moses, because his [God’s] majesty shines forth more clearly in the completed world [of Genesis 2].”[6] Moses recorded multiple accounts of Abraham (Genesis 12, 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) presenting their wives as sisters to foreign kings because it happened three times.[7]

Calvin solved more glaring contradictions by harmonizing different accounts, rather than by exploring the possibility of other authors than Moses, who might represent distinct traditions with conflicting messages. The two statements concerning the duration of the flood—40 days (Gen 7:17) versus 150 days (Gen 7:24)—indicate two periods of activity, according to Calvin, rather than two versions of the flood story. The water arose for 40 days, and then, maintained its present height for an additional 150 days.[8] Distinct accounts concerning Moses’s father-in-law (Reuel in Exodus 2, Jethro in Exodus 18 and Hobab in Numbers 10) were harmonized through genealogy in order to avoid contradiction. Those who sought to identify the two names as referring to the

same person were “grossly mistaken.” Reuel and Jethro are the same person, according to Calvin, and Hobab was actually the son of Jethro.[9]

Thus, in the end, Calvin maintained the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The assumption of single authorship reinforced Calvin’s desire to achieve a unified interpretation of the Pentateuch’s many repetitions and contradictions. As the title of his commentary on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy underscores, *The Four Last Books of Moses in the Form of a Harmony*, Calvin’s aim was to harmonize the diverse literature of the Pentateuch. In this respect, his commentary represents a rewriting of the four last books of Moses that might be compared to the work of Philo or Josephus.

Baruch Spinoza: Rational Reading of the Pentateuch



Figure 2.4 Portrait of Baruch de Spinioza by unknown artist (c. 1665). In the Herzog- August Bibliothek, Wolfenbuttel, Germany.

Baruch Spinoza was a Jewish-Dutch philosopher, who earned his income as a lens grinder. He is best known for his philosophical writing in the rationalistic Cartesian tradition, which, over time, also led to his denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Spinoza shared the Reformation rejection of traditional religious authority. He stated in the "Preface" of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* that blind adherence to religious authority without free rational and critical inquiry is nothing more than superstition rooted in fear, resulting in prejudice and violence.[10] The reformer's claim of *sola scriptura* opposed such tyranny. Calvin, for example, sought to discern the intentions of Moses in the Pentateuch to counter the authority of the Roman church. Historical study of the Aaronide priesthood indicated that Christ, not the papacy, represented Aaron.[11]

Spinoza agreed with the claim of *sola scriptura*. He wrote, "Scriptural interpretation proceeds by the examination of Scripture, and inferring the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental

principles."[12] But Spinoza went far beyond Calvin and the reformers. He rooted the superstition of religious tradition in the interpretation of Scripture itself, rather than in the Roman Church or the Jewish synagogue. The clearest evidence of this was the claim of Mosaic authorship.

"The author of the Pentateuch," wrote Spinoza, "is almost universally supposed to have been Moses."[13] But such a belief is "ungrounded and even irrational."[14] Spinoza reviewed the problems stated by Ibn Ezra, indicating non-Mosaic authorship. He added further problems. Spinoza expanded examples of third-person references to Moses, such as "Moses talked with God . . ."; and "Moses was the meekest of men. . . ." He noted anachronisms in the comparison of Moses to later prophets, as in the closing to the book of Deuteronomy, "there was never a prophet in Israel like Moses . . ." (Deut 34:10). And he highlighted problems of geography, such as the mention of Dan in the story of Abraham pursuing his enemies (Gen 14:14), since the city is not named until after the death of Joshua (Judg 18:29). The conclusion, wrote Spinoza, was "clearer than the sun at noonday that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived long after Moses."[15]

Spinoza introduced a whole new problem for the interpretation of the Pentateuch. It was that "the history of the Bible is . . . untrust-worthy."[16] Calvin never entertained such a possibility. For Spinoza, the defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch advanced the unreliable character of the Bible, and those who advocate for it provide one more instance of the superstition of traditional religious authority. In view of this, he wrote that the new aim of biblical interpretation is to uncover "a trustworthy history of the sacred writings."[17]

Three principles shaped Spinoza's new approach to the Pentateuch.

Sidebar 2.4 Spinoza's Three Principles of Interpretation

Spinoza established three principles of interpretation to counter the untrustworthy history of the Bible, which continue to influence researchers of the

Pentateuch:

1. Reliable history of ancient Israel must be built on a study of the Hebrew language.
2. Knowledge of the Bible must arise only from a study of the text and not from traditional teaching.
3. Interpretations must identify the genuine anonymous authors of the biblical books, who were channels of divine revelation. (*Treatise*, 101–3).

Thus, Spinoza continued to maintain the divine inspiration of Scripture. But interpretation of the divinely inspired Pentateuch became a quest for anonymous authors. Interpretation of their intentions would reveal the true, rational, and divine principles of Scripture.

Spinoza concluded that Moses wrote only limited portions of the Pentateuch: an account of war with Amalek (Exod 17:14; cf. also Num 21:12); the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21–23; cf. Exod 24:4); and the law in Deuteronomy. A later historian wrote the majority of the Pentateuch and incorporated Moses's writing within the history. Connecting phrases, moreover, indicated that the Pentateuch was part of a larger history, extending through Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, thus forming an Enneateuch. Spinoza provided the following evidence: "[A]s soon as he has related the life of Moses, the historian thus passes on to the story of Joshua: 'And it came to pass after Moses the servant of the Lord was dead, that God spoke to Joshua,' and, so in the same way, after the death of Joshua was concluded, he passes with identically the same transition and connection to the history of the Judges." Spinoza suspected Ezra (Ezra 7:10) to be the author of this history. Contradiction between similar accounts in the histories of Chronicles and Genesis–Kings, such as the account of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:17 and in 2 Chronicles 32:32, led Spinoza to conclude further that Ezra did not actually write the histories, but compiled them.[18]

2.3 Anonymous Authors and the Documentary Hypothesis

Sidebar 2.5 Interpreters of the Pentateuch in the Seventeenth– Mid-Twentieth Centuries

Many interpreters have contributed to the historical-critical study of the Pentateuch. The following list highlights the limited authors from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries whose works are included in this study.

17th Century

Baruch Spinoza (1634–1677)

Richard Simon (1638–1712)

Jean Astruc (1684–1766)

18th Century

Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827)

Johann Philipp Gabler (1753–1826)

David Ilgen (1763–1834)

19th Century

W. M. L. de Wette (1780–1859)

Hermann Hupfeld (1796–1866)

Heinrich Ewald (1803–1875)

Eduard Ruess (1804–1891)

20th Century

Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932)

Hugo Gressmann (1877–1927)

Albrecht Alt (1883–1956)

Umberto Cassuto (1883–1951)

Johannes Pedersen (1883–1977)

Sigmund Mowinckel (1884–1965)

Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963)

William F. Albright (1891–1971)

Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971)

Martin Noth (1902–1968)

Ivan Engnell (1906–1964)

Claus Westermann (1909–2000)

Frank M. Cross (1921–2012)

Eduard Nielsen (1923–)

Wilhelm Vatke (1806–1882)

Karl Heinrich Graf (1815–1869)

Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891)

Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918)

Jacob Milgrom (1923–2010)

Rolf Rendtorff (1925–2014)

Menahem Haran (1924–2015)

Hans Heinrich Schmid (1937–2014)

John Van Seters (1935–)

Spinoza's principles of interpretation laid the groundwork for the critical study of Pentateuchal narrative and law in the modern era. The aim of the emerging research was to identify the anonymous authors of the Pentateuch. The repetition of the narratives and the laws led interpreters to presume that many anonymous authors contributed to the composition of the Pentateuch, and that the literature could not be harmonized into a single, unified message.

Two goals comprise the core of the historical-critical study of the Pentateuch. First, repetitions and contradictions were separated, not harmonized, into different bodies of literature ("sources" and "law-codes") in order to identify authors from different times in history with distinct religious worldviews. And second, interpreters sought to arrange the order in which the authors wrote, thus fashioning the actual history of Israelite religion, as opposed to the traditional account in Torah. The identification of literary contradictions as a window into the work of distinct authors and the establishment of their chronology became the building blocks for historical critics to reconstruct the "trustworthy history of the sacred writings" advocated by Spinoza. Some shared Spinoza's belief in divine inspiration; others did not. But, in either case, the quest for anonymous authors created tension with the traditional teaching that the Torah was written by Moses, and thus, contained one unified message.

Jean Astruc and W. D. L. de Wette provide eighteenth-century CE examples

of the identification of anonymous authors, who composed narrative sources and legal codes in the Pentateuch. Julius Wellhausen represents the culmination of the research in the late-nineteenth century CE, in which the identification of the anonymous authors was combined into the documentary hypothesis.

Jean Astruc: Two Narrative Sources



Figure 2.5 Image of Jean Astruc engraved by Ambroise Tardieu (1788-1841).

Jean Astruc (1684–1766) was an accomplished Catholic medical doctor, who taught initially at Monpellier (1707–29), before becoming dean of the medical school at the College Royal in Paris (1730). He was even the consulting physician to the royal court of Louis XV. Astruc was also trained in Hebrew. Toward of the end of his career, Astruc sought to vindicate the quality of Moses's composition of the Pentateuch, which had come under criticism because of the many repetitions and unorganized arrangement of the stories and laws. He was not the first Frenchman to take up this task. Richard Simon had already published an extended study to demonstrate that "prophets" or "public writers," rather than Moses, were actually responsible for writing the Penta-teuch (1678). Simon hoped that his insights into the composition of the text would vindicate the Pentateuch from the criticism of Spinoza. Astruc had the same goal; his defense was published in 1753 as *Conjectures on the Original Documents that Moses appears to have used in Composing the Book of Genesis: With Remarks that Support or Clarify these Conjectures*. The goal was to apply contemporary

literary theory to the Pentateuch in order to identify the sources that Moses used, which, he believed, were originally written in columns on analogy to the New Testament Gospels, which were placed next to each other as separate books. Astruc thought that the separate versions of the Pentateuch were only combined into one disorganized story by a later editor.

The identification of the sources arose from lack of chronology, repetition, and contradiction of content in the present form of the Pentateuch. The divine names emerged as an important starting point for tracing the literary thread of the distinct bodies of literature and the identification of the authors. In some stories, the deity is named *Elohim* (translated "God" in the New Revised Standard Version = NRSV), while in others, *Yahweh* (translated "Lord" in the NRSV). The opening chapters of Genesis provide an example. The deity is *Elohim* throughout Genesis 1:1—2:3, while the divine name *Yahweh* is used in Genesis 2:4–25. Calvin saw this already in his commentary on Genesis, but interpreted it as a literary technique by Moses for emphasis. Astruc, by contrast, identified the distinct names as the beginning of different sources that run throughout Genesis 1–Exodus 2, which he identified as A and B. The A source used the divine name *Elohim* (Gen 1:1—2:3), while B preferred *Yahweh* (Gen 2:4–25). The results may be summarized in the following manner.

Table 2.1 Names for God

	Source A (*Elohim*)	**Source B (*Yahweh*)**
CREATION (Gen 1–11)		
Creation	Gen 1:1—2:3	Gen 2:4–25
Eden		Gen 3
Cain and Abel		Gen 4
Genealogy of Adam	Gen 5	
The Flood	Gen 6:9–22	Gen 6:1–8
	Gen 7:6–10, 19, 22, 24	Gen 7:1–5, 11–18, 21
	Gen 8:1–19	Gen 8:20–22
	Gen 9:1–10, 12, 16, 17, 28, 29	Gen 9:11, 13–15, 18–29
Genealogy of Noah		Gen 10
Tower of Babel		Gen 11:1–9

Genealogy of Shem	Gen 11:10–26	

ABRAHAM (Gen 12:1—25:18)

Call of Abram		Gen 11:27—12:9
Sarah/Pharaoh		Gen 12:10–20
Abram/Lot		Gen 13:1–18
Covenant/Offspring		Gen 15:1—17:2
Circumcision	Gen 17:3–27	
Sodom/Gemorrah		Gen 18:1—19:28
Sarah/Abimelech	Gen 20:1–17	
Birth of Isaac	Gen 21:2–32	Gen 20:18—21:1
Sacrifice of Isaac	Gen 22:1–10	Gen 22:11–19
Death of Sarah	Gen 23	
Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah		Gen 24
Death of Abraham	Gen 25:1–11	

JACOB (Gen 25:19—38:30)

Birth of Jacob/Esau		Gen 25:19—26:33
Blessing of Jacob		Gen 27:1—28:5
Jacob at Bethel		Gen 28:10–22
Marriage of Jacob to Rachel/Leah		Gen 29
Birth of Jacob's Sons	Gen 30:1–23	Gen 30:24
Conflict with Laban	Gen 31:4–47 31:50—32:2[=1 Eng]	Gen 30:25–43; 31:1–3; 48–9
Jacob at the Jabbok River	Gen 32:1–2, 24–33	Gen 32:3–23
Jacob meets Esau	Gen 33:1–16	
Jacob at Succoth/Shechem		Gen 33:17–20
Birth of Benjamin/ Death of Rebekah	Gen 35:1–27	
Genealogy of Esau	Gen 37	
Judah and Tamar		Gen 38

JOSEPH (Gen 39–50)

Joseph and his Brothers		Gen 39

Joseph in Egypt	Gen 40–48	
Jacob’s Last Words	Gen 49:29–33	Gen 49:1–28
Death of Jacob	Gen 50	

ISRAEL IN EGYPT (Exod 1–2)

Israel in Egypt	Exod 1–2

Examination of parallel episodes in sources A and B illustrated the variety of ways in which a later editor combined the distinct sources in the Pentateuch. The two creation stories (Gen 1:1—2:4a and 2:4b–25) were placed side by side as doublets. In this case, two conflicting views of creation were juxtaposed. The author of Genesis 1:1—2:4a envisioned Elohim creating through a process of separation from wet chaos to dry land, while in Genesis 2:4b–25, Yahweh moved in just the opposite direction, fashioning life from dry desert by adding water. The accounts of the patriarchs in which Abraham and Isaac falsely present their wives as sisters to foreign kings were distributed more widely in Genesis 12–26, yet the distinction in divine names continued. When Abraham first lies to Pharaoh about Sarah (12:10–20), it is Yahweh that plagues the Egyptians. Thus, it is an episode in Source B, according to Astruc. But when Abraham repeated this action with Abimelech (20:1–18), Elohim, not Yahweh, threatened the king with disease and death, indicating a story in Source A. The divine name Yahweh returned in the account of Isaac, Rebekah, and Abimelech (26:1–16), making it an episode in Source B, along with the first story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (12:10–20).

The flood (Genesis 6–9), by contrast, illustrated how different sources could be interwoven, rather than placed side by side, or distributed throughout larger blocks of literature. Astruc identified two introductions to the flood. In Source B, Yahweh sees that the inclination of the human heart is thoroughly evil (6:1–8), whereas in Source A, Elohim sees that the earth is corrupt (6:9–22). Here, the two introductions are combined into one story. The two versions continue to be interwoven, with Yahweh (i.e., 7:1–5) and Elohim (i.e., 7:6–10) providing slightly different instructions to Noah about the ark and its cargo of animals. And the distinctions continue into the conclusion. In Source B, Yahweh ceases the

flood, smells sacrifice, and promises never to curse the ground again, because of the evil inclination of the human heart (8:20–22), repeating the theme that introduced this version of the story. In Source A, by contrast, Elohim blesses Noah (9:1–10).

The separation of divine names was the primary, but not the sole, criterion for identifying the separate sources. Additional literary criteria also influenced Astruc's interpretation. For example, he identified two other sources, C and D, which do not contain divine names. They constituted separate sources in Genesis because of literary repetitions, contradictions of content, and problems of chronology. The C source included portions of the flood, including the height of the water and the duration of 150 days (7:20, 23, 24), and probably, the story of Dinah's rape (Genesis 34). The D source included material that was foreign to ancient Israel, including Abraham's rescue of Lot (Genesis 14), the birth of children to Lot (19:29–38) and Abraham (22:20–24), the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12–18), Esau's marriage to Hittite women (26:34–35), and Onan's refusal to fulfill the levirate law (38:6–9). The difficulty inherent in such literary judgments is illustrated by the story of Dinah's rape (Genesis 34), which Astruc appears to attribute to both the C and D sources at different locations in his study.

The summary illustrates how Astruc employed literary-critical methodology to confirm the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He argued that the anonymous sources A and B were pre-Mosaic and used by Moses to compose the Pentateuch, originally in separate columns. Later editors blended the separate sources into one confused story, resulting in the repetitions and contradictions. Ironically, by seeking to confirm the literary quality of Moses's work, Astruc laid the foundation for the rejection of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Astruc's sources quickly took on the names of the deity prominent in each within the work of later scholars. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), for example, referred to Elohistic (E) and Yahwistic (J = the German, Jahwist) sources, whose anonymous authors wrote well after the time of Moses.

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette: The History of Law and Religion

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1859) was born to Dutch Lutheran parents outside of Weimar, Germany. De Wette attended gymnasium in Weimar and was influenced by the superintendent, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), the philosopher of history who, with Goethe and others, ushered in the *Sturm und Drang* period of German Romanticism.

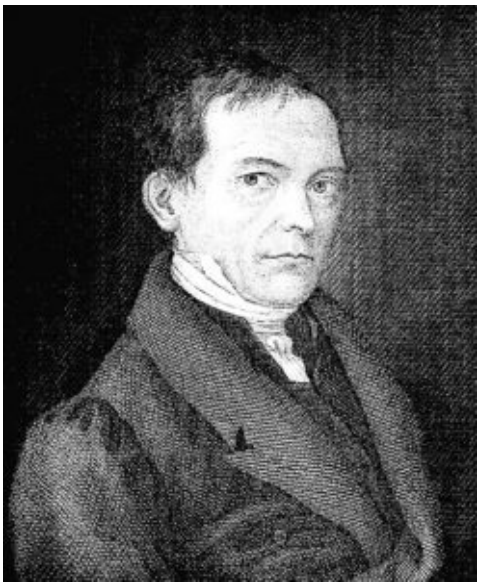

Figure 2.6 A portrait of theologian Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette by unknown artist.

Sidebar 2.6 *Sturm und Drang*

The German phrase *Sturm und Drang*, translated "Storm and Stress," represents an intellectual and aesthetic movement in the late-eighteenth century that ushered in the Romantic period led by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832); Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805); and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). The phrase, *Sturm und Drang*, derives from Friedrich Maximillian Klinger's play celebrating the emotion of the American Revolution (1776) over against the more sterile

rationalism of the Enlightenment that dominated Europe in the early- to mid-eighteenth century.

De Wette attended the University of Jena in 1799, where he began a lifelong pursuit to relate Kantian rationalism with the prominent role of art, mythology, and aesthetics in more archaic history and culture, which were central to German Romanticism. When these conflicting perspectives were applied to the interpretation of the Bible, the tension was whether the Bible revealed only a universal morality assessable through reason or a more particular, poetic, and historical truth. De Wette's dissertation on Deuteronomy (1805) and further research on the Pentateuch combined his critical and romantic interests. He sought to relate the composition of the Pentateuch with the formation of Israelite religion and cultic practice as a historical process from less structured to more controlled forms of worship. For de Wette, this was most evident in the laws of the book of Deuteronomy when compared to the more free form of worship in Genesis–Numbers.

The starting point of de Wette's research was the repetition of Moses mediating divine law twice in the Pentateuch to two generations of Israelites. First, Moses transmitted law at Mount Sinai in the year of the exodus (Exodus 19–Numbers 10) and a second time, forty years later, on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy). De Wette provided new direction for interpreting this repetition by focusing on the second body of law contained in the book of Deuteronomy. He noted that the story of Moses comes to an end at the close of Numbers. His impending death is confirmed (27:12–14), the land of Canaan is divided (26:52–56), and Joshua is appointed as successor (27:15–23). Then, somewhat unexpectedly, Deuteronomy begins the story anew, by repeating much of the material that occurred in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. New law is given (Deuteronomy 4–5, 12–25); the story of Israel's wilderness journey is retold (Deuteronomy 1–3); many specific laws repeat (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28); Joshua is appointed a second time to succeed Moses (Deuteronomy 31); and God

tells Moses again of his impending death (Deuteronomy 31, 34). The repetitions suggested that the account of Moses was completed at the close of Numbers and that the book of Deuteronomy was a separate account of the earlier story, written at a later time.

The separate composition of Deuteronomy from Genesis–Numbers was reinforced by its literary style and religious outlook. The language was more reflective and theologically sophisticated than the literature of Genesis–Numbers, with distinctive phrases, such as “so that you may long remain in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you” (4:40). Deuteronomy also contained a unique view of the cult that advocated worship at a single sanctuary, “Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place you happen to see. But only at the place that Yahweh will choose in one of your tribes—there you shall offer your burnt offerings and there you shall do everything I command you” (12:13–14). The demand for centralized worship conflicted with the portrait of Israel in Genesis–Numbers, as having many sanctuaries throughout the Mosaic period (e.g., Exod 20:24–25). The contrasts in language and worship practice indicated to de Wette that the book of Deuteronomy was a separate account of revelation and law from Genesis–Numbers, composed to fit the religious practices of a different time.

De Wette fixed the date for the composition of Deuteronomy from a comparison of the accounts of the history of the monarchy in Chronicles and in the Former Prophets (Judges, Samuel, and Kings). In Chronicles, the worship of Israel is Mosaic and Levitical throughout the entire period of the monarchy, with central worship at the Jerusalem temple from the time of David onward. Over against this, the Former Prophets presents a more developmental view of the cult in which the kings worship at different cultic sites. Examples include Saul (1 Samuel 13), David (1 Samuel 21), and Solomon (1 Kings 3). Only toward the end of the monarchy period is centralized worship introduced, during the Josianic reform (2 Kings 22–23).

Sidebar 2.7 Josianic Reform

Josiah was the Judean king in the late-seventh century (641–609 BCE) credited with instituting significant religious changes in Jerusalem. The account of the reform in 2 Kings 22–23 includes:

1. The central role of the Book of the Law as the basis for religious practice (22:8–20).
2. The promotion of aniconic worship by removing images and foreign gods from the Jerusalem temple (23:1–7).
3. The centralization of worship in Jerusalem through the elimination of all other cultic sites (23:8–15).
4. The cessation of ancestral worship by defiling the bones of the dead (23:15–20).
5. The institution of a new cultic calendar with Passover as a central festival (23:21–23).

The Josianic Reform is also described as the Deuteronomic Reform because the changes that Josiah instituted follow the teaching of the book of Deuteronomy.

De Wette judged the Chronicler's unchanging view of Israelite religion to lack all historical value; its author sought to read the Jewish cult of the post-exilic period back into the Mosaic era. De Wette favored the developmental view of the cult in the Former Prophets, in which worship practice evolved from the freedom of many sanctuaries to the demand for worship at a single sanctuary. The developmental view of the law and the cult allowed de Wette to locate the composition of Deuteronomy. The earliest portions of Deuteronomy were written in the closing years of the monarchy period, during the Josianic reform (621 BCE), which introduced the centralization of worship (2 Kings 22–23). Some form of Deuteronomy was likely the "book of the Torah" found in the temple (2 Kgs 22:8).

The late dating of Deuteronomy to the Josianic reform underscored the significant gap between the literary setting of the book in the Mosaic era and its composition at the close of the monarchy period. From this, de Wette concluded

that Deuteronomy contained no historical information about the Mosaic period. He wrote: “The laws in [Deuteronomy] are new, not only in respect to the time in which they are alleged to have been given, but in respect to their more modern character.”[19] As a result, the recovery of the Mosaic period was closed off to the modern historical critic of Deuteronomy.

De Wette extended the insight from Deuteronomy to Genesis– Numbers. Past interpreters, such as Astruc and Eichhorn, identified literary sources in Genesis and in the opening chapters of Exodus, which they assumed provided insight into the Mosaic age, even if Moses was not the author. De Wette rejected a source-critical solution to the composition of Genesis–Numbers, and with it, the historical value of sources. “The theory of Astruc, Eichhorn, Illgen, and Gramberg, which supposes there were two or more documents that extend through the whole book, falls to pieces of itself.”[20] He judged the literature of Genesis–Numbers to be a collection of unrelated fragments, made up of legends tied to monuments or popular songs, that were combined into the Yahwistic and Elohistic documents centuries later in the monarchy period, before the composition of Deuteronomy during the Josianic reform.[21]

Ancient legends, according to de Wette, are enlarged by posterity so that history gives way to “historical mythology” in the Pentateuch. In such literature, contemporary laws are referred back to a more ancient time in order to establish their divine authority.[22] Illustrations of this from the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources include the mythical origin of the Passover in the exodus (Exodus 12) and the establishment of Sabbath in the act of creation (Gen 2:1–3). The aim of such “legal myths” is “to inspire the people with reverence for their sacred laws and institutions.”[23] Thus, even though de Wette recognized that the literature of Genesis–Numbers was older than Deuteronomy, he also rejected any attempt to recover the history of the Mosaic period from it.

The evaluation of Genesis–Numbers as “historical mythology” is crucial to de Wette’s interpretation of the literature. It directs the interpreter away from the search for history in order to recognize the important role of the “free play of fiction” in the composition of Elohistic and Yahwistic documents, in which the

miraculous comes to dominant. In view of this, de Wette characterized these ancient narratives as “theocratic epic poems.”[24] Even though the recovery of the history of the Mosaic era was closed off to the modern interpreter of the “theocratic epic poems,” the “free play of fiction” by the different authors did bring to light the changing nature of religion and worship in the monarchy period at the time of the separate compositions. This becomes the primary focus of interpretation for de Wette; he sought to identify the authors, the historical circumstances, and the order of composition of the three epic poems. The sequence of composition was the Elohist, the Yahwist, and the book of Deuteronomy.

Sidebar 2.8 Three Epic Poems of de Wette

De Wette wrote prior to the establishment of the documentary hypothesis. The three epic poems that he identified in the Pentateuch are E, J and D. J includes many of the narratives that employ the divine name Yahweh, while D represents some early form of the book of Deuteronomy. The E version includes both the Elohist and the Priestly sources of the documentary hypothesis, which is a broad spectrum of literature that ranges widely from the story of Abraham deceiving Abimelech (Genesis 20) to the more technical description of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31).

The Elohist represented the older and more complete version of the Mosaic era. The document was written during the early monarchy period, in the time of Samuel and Saul. It is historical mythology, in which the deity plays a primary role and miracles are commonplace, with a more free form of worship at multiple sanctuaries. Support for this conclusion was the status of Bethel as holy a place (Gen 35:15), which was later condemned during the reign of Jeroboam I (Hosea 4:15). The independence of Edom (Genesis 36), however, placed the document even earlier than Jeroboam I, before the time of David, who subjugated Edom.[25] The Elohim document is nearly complete in form and it spans literature from Genesis through Joshua, indicating that de Wette worked

with the notion of a Hexateuch. It could be identified where the divine name Elohim appeared and where priestly Levitical religion was prominent. Examples include the creation story (Genesis 1), the genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5), the stories of Abraham (Genesis 17, 20–22), Jacob (Gen 27:46—28:9; 28), Joseph (39:6–20; 42–45), the call of Moses (Exod 6:2—7:7), the Passover (Exod 12:1–28, 37–51), the gift of manna (Exodus 16), the tabernacle (Exod 25:1—31:17), most of the cultic laws in Leviticus, the departure from Sinai (Num 10:11–28), additional literature in Numbers that extended into Joshua with the establishment of twelve memorial stones and the ritual observance of Passover in the land (Josh 4:9; 5:2–12).[26]

The Yahwist is composed considerably later than the Elohim document. Worship of Yahweh is free in form and it begins already in the earliest times (Seth, Gen 4:26; Abraham, Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; and Isaac, Gen 26:25). Historical references once again provide the criterion for dating. The earliest possible date is during the reign of Solomon; the Yahwist document refers to the Edomites' revolt (Gen 27:40), which occurs during his reign (1 Kgs 11:14). But the revolt of Edom also takes place against Joram (2 Kgs 8:20–23), which would place the document at a later time in the monarchy period. The Yahwist document is much less unified, according to de Wette, and it contains no ancient sources.[27] Examples of Yahwistic literature include an account of creation (Gen 2:4—3:24), a genealogy of Adam (Gen 4:1–26), stories of Abraham (Genesis 15, 16, 19, 26), Jacob (Gen 27:41–45; 28:13–16, 18, 19), Joseph (Gen 39:1–5), the birth and call of Moses (Exod 2; 3:1—4:17), the death of the firstborn and the law of Passover (Exod 12:26–36; 13:2–16), the golden calf (Exodus 32–34), minimal, scattered laws in Leviticus (Lev 17:15), the leading of the ark (Num 10:29–36), and the gift of quails (Numbers 11). The Yahwist document does not extend into the book of Joshua.[28]

Deuteronomy is written at an even later time than the composition of the Elohistic and Yahwistic documents. The author read the earlier Mosaic books; their very language was present in his memory, according to de Wette. Thus, the historical statements derive entirely from Genesis–Numbers, which meant that there is no historical value in the book. The laws too do not derive from the

Mosaic era, but reflect the institutions of religion that are prevalent at the time of composition.[29] Examples include the distinctive role of the priests and the Levites (12, 14:22–29; 16:11,14; 26:12), the references to the office of kings and prophets (Deuteronomy 18), the centralization of the cult (Deuteronomy 15), and the different account of theophany (4:12, 15, 32) from the version in Exod 19:18–19. The late date for the composition of Deuteronomy and the comparison of the book to Genesis–Numbers confirmed, for de Wette, that there was a development of religion and law in ancient Israel from the more free form of worship in Genesis–Numbers to the restriction of the cult to one location in Deuteronomy.

De Wette is a central figure in the interpretation of the composition of the Pentateuch. The fixing of Deuteronomy to the end of the monarchy period established a paradigm that would influence nearly all subsequent research on the composition of the Pentateuch. The methodology of de Wette was also crucial for later researchers. The combination of the critical literary analysis of the Pentateuch with a romantic quest for its mythological and religious meaning placed the development of Israelite religion at the center of the research on the composition of the Pentateuch. Even though de Wette rejected the historical value of the Pentateuch, he remained confident in his ability to recover Israel's religious tradition by identifying the anonymous authors and placing them in historical sequence. Julius Wellhausen would refine and expand upon the literary insights of de Wette that supported his recovery of Israelite tradition.

Julius Wellhausen: Documentary Hypothesis

Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) was born in the town of Hamelin in the province of Hanover, Germany; his father was a Protestant minister. Wellhausen studied theology in Göttingen and was ordained in 1865; he returned to Göttingen in 1868 to study with Heinrich Ewald (1803–1875), the foremost German scholar in biblical studies at the time. Wellhausen's career can be separated into three parts. His initial work was on the Hebrew Bible at the University of Greifswald (1871–1878). When Wellhausen left Greifswald for Halle (1879–1892), he transitioned from biblical studies to the study of Semitic languages and Islam, which continued to be his central area of research even after he took a new position at Göttingen (1892–1913). Toward the end of his career (from 1903 onward), Wellhausen transitioned once again from the study of Islam to the New Testament, focusing particularly on the Gospels. Wellhausen produced important contributions to each of these areas of study; but he is noted especially for his initial research on the Hexateuch in two publications, *The Composition of the Hexateuch and the Historical Books of the Old Testamen*t (1st ed., 1876–77) and *The History of Israel* (1878), which was later retitled *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1883) since he intended a second volume, which was never completed.



Figure 2.7 Julius Wellhausen.

Wellhausen is identified as the originator of the (new) documentary hypothesis. Interpreters throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had already developed documentary theories composition of the Pentateuch. De Wette is a prime example. Wellhausen is identified with the “new” documentary hypothesis because of the revised order of composition that he proposed, in which the Priestly religion associated with the tabernacle was judged to be the latest composition, rather than the earliest, as de Wette thought.

Sidebar 2.9 What is “new” about the documentary hypothesis?

Astruc and de Wette had already developed a type of documentary hypothesis with the identification of the A and B sources or the E, J, and D epic poems. The documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen introduces at least two new insights:

1. The separation of the Priestly source (P—originally identified as Q) from de Wette’s previous identification of E, which had included the account of creation (Genesis 1), the description of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31, 35–40) and its cultic rituals (Leviticus).
2. The later dating of the Priestly literature to the post-exilic period. The (new) documentary hypothesis is the theory that the Hexateuch is composed of four parallel sources in the following sequence: the (1) Yahwist (J) and (2) the Elohist

(E) sources are independent compositions from the early to mid-monarchy period; (3) the core literature in the book of Deuteronomy (D) is composed during the Josianic reform at the close of the monarchy period; and (4) the Priestly (P) source is a composition from the post-exilic period. These independently written sources are combined in at least two stages: (a) the Jehowist (JE) redactor combines the J and E sources at an early stage in the development of the literature, and (b) the Pentateuchal (PR) redactor combines the P source with JE and D to form the Pentateuch (JEDP).

Two developments in the study of the Pentateuch were foundational to Wellhausen's proposal of the documentary hypothesis: (1) Hupfeld's separation of the E document into two sources, and (2) de Wette's identification of the late date of Deuteronomy and the implications of this for interpreting the development of the law in Israelite religion.

The separation of the Elohist document into two sources, written by distinct authors at different times in the history of Israel, was first proposed by Karl David Ilgen (1798); but Wellhausen acknowledged the research of Hermann Hupfeld (1853) as providing the starting point for his work.[30] Hupfeld identified a series of ancestral stories in Genesis, where the deity is named Elohim, but the literary character of the narratives and the nature of divine revelation contrasted with the formality of the account of creation (Genesis 1) or the description of the Priestly cult (Exodus 25–40; Leviticus). Examples in the Abraham cycle of literature included the deception of king Abimelech (Genesis 20), the conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 21), and the divine testing of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). Throughout these narratives, the deity is named Elohim, but the stories develop in a free literary style with revelation taking place in dreams.[31] The same emphasis on dreams, as a channel for revelation, reappeared in select stories from the Jacob cycle of narratives, where Elohim was also the name of the deity. Examples included stories tied to the setting of Bethel (28:10–22; 35:1–7), birth stories (30:1–24), and additional encounters between the patriarch and God (32:25–33; 33:18–20; 46:2).[32] Hupfeld concluded that there were two E sources. E1 was the original and oldest

source of the two, with its description of Priestly religion organized around the tabernacle cult. Because it was the oldest source, E1 was described as the *Urschrift* (the original document) in the Pentateuch.[33] E2 was a later Elohist source that included the more narrow body of literature in which the God, Elohim, was revealed through dreams.[34] The Yahwist was an even later source.[35]

The comparison of Wellhausen and de Wette on the interpretation of Abraham (Gen 12:10–20; Genesis 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) falsely identifying their wives as sisters illustrates the influence of Hupfeld.[36] Both de Wette and Wellhausen distributed the multiple accounts between the two documents E (Genesis 20) and J (Gen 12:10–20; 26). De Wette concluded that the sequence of the E document included the account of creation (Genesis 1); the genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5); a version of the flood (parts of Genesis 6–8) the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1–17); the genealogy from Shem through Terah (Gen 11:10–32); the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17); and the deception of Abraham (Genesis 20).[37] Wellhausen separated Genesis 20 from the larger narrative context, designating it the E source (Hupfeld's document, E2). He renamed the remaining stories of creation, genealogy, flood, and covenant as "Q," from the Latin, *quattuor*, "four," to signify the four covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel at Sinai, which he believed made up the source (Hupfeld's document, E1). The source Q was later renamed the "Priestly source" (P) because of the focus on Priestly religion associated with the tabernacle and its ritual legislation.

The central contribution of Wellhausen was to reevaluate the order in which the sources were written; he focused, in particular, on the Priestly source, with its account of creation (Genesis 1), emphasis on genealogy (Gen 2:4; 5:1; etc.), covenant (Genesis 9; 17) and Priestly ritual legislation (Exodus 25–31; 35–40; Leviticus). De Wette's research on Deuteronomy provided the starting point for Wellhausen. De Wette had demonstrated that the book of Deuteronomy, with its emphasis on law and the centralization of worship, emerged late in the monarchy period during the Josianic reform; this insight provided the basis for his developmental view of ancient Israelite religion from being free in form to

becoming more restricted by law. In spite of this breakthrough in research, de Wette assumed that the ritual legislation of the tabernacle was written at the outset of the monarchy period and that it influenced Israel's entire life in the land, while Deuteronomy was a reinterpretation of Priestly law. But there were growing doubts about this hypothesis. Karl Heinrich Graf (1815–1869) and Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891) recognized that prophetic books such as Amos and Hosea demonstrated no dependence or even acquaintance with the ritual legislation of the Priestly source. They proposed that the prophets represented an older form of law-free religion, which preceded the Priestly ritual legislation. Wellhausen wrote of his first encounter with this new hypothesis: "I learned through Ritschl that Karl Heinrich Graf placed the Law later than the Prophets, and, almost without knowing his reason for the hypothesis, I was prepared to accept it; I readily acknowledge to myself the possibility of understanding Hebrew antiquity without the book of the Torah."[38]

Wellhausen refined the research of de Wette on Deuteronomy to argue for the late composition of the ritual legislation in the P source. De Wette had demonstrated that centralized worship during the Josianic reform was an innovation in Deuteronomy, and that prior to this event, worship was at many sanctuaries. De Wette's insight allowed Wellhausen to identify the JE literature as being older than the book of Deuteronomy (e.g., Exod 20:24–26), since it prescribed worship at many different cultic sites.[39] This literary insight was not new; de Wette had already recognized the same development of religion. But Wellhausen focused more intently on de Wette's insight about cult centralization in Deuteronomy. He underscored the polemical tone of Deuteronomy as evidence that the command for centralized worship was new at the time of its writing. The attack against multiple sanctuaries was sharp and the law of the single sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12) was spelled out with unusual care and detail. The polemical rhetoric indicated that the conflict over the single sanctuary was immediate and perhaps even unsettled for the author.[40] The Priestly source, by contrast, appeared almost "indifferent to the question of the one sanctuary." The reason, according to Wellhausen, was clear: What was a *command* for the single sanctuary in Deut-eronomy at a time of conflict was *presupposed* in the P source.

[41] The absence of conflict indicated a much later document, written during the post-exilic period, when Israel was a theocracy, organized around one sanctuary and ruled by priests.[42]

Wellhausen was now in a position to provide a new chronology to the composition of the sources. The Yahwist (J) was the oldest composition in the monarchy period; the Elohist (E) document was also written in the monarchy period; and a redactor (the "Yehowist") combined the two sources into a single document (JE) at a still later time, prior to the composition of Deuteronomy. Wellhausen agreed with de Wette that Deuteronomy (D) was written at the end of the monarchy period. But he departed from de Wette and others in arguing that the Priestly cult of the tabernacle was the last composition in the Pentateuch, not the first; it was composed in the post-exilic period. Wellhausen's late dating of the P source to the post-exile provided the basis for the classical theory of the (new) documentary hypothesis, in which the order of the sources in the Pentateuch is J, E, D, and P.

The sources may be characterized in the following manner. Wellhausen did not systematically separate the sources J and E, preferring instead the designation JE when describing the earliest literary sources. Yet, he did recognize the distinct literary characteristics of the J and E sources within the Hexateuch. The central feature for attributing texts to the J source remained the use of the divine name, Yahweh, prior to the revelation to Moses in Exodus 3. Doublets of the same story were also important (e.g., creation in Genesis 1 and 2; covenant in Genesis 15 and 17; revelation to Moses in Exodus 3–4 and 6), as well as the religious outlook and the portrayal of characters, especially the anthropomorphic representation of the deity. Yahweh creates from clay (Genesis 2); walks nightly in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3); makes clothes for humans (Genesis 3); fears the potential strength of humans (Genesis 11); and regrets past actions, whether it be the creation (Genesis 6) or excessive anger (Exodus 32). The literary scope of the J source is the Hexateuch. Central stories include the account of creation (Genesis 2); the expulsion from the garden (Genesis 3); the murder of Abel by Cain (Genesis 4); the flood (part of Genesis 6–8); subsequent stories of Noah (part of Genesis 9); and the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The

ancestral literature is organized around the divine promise of land and descendants (Gen 12:1–3), conceived as covenant (Genesis 15). J literature is also prominent in the story of Moses, including accounts of the Israelite oppression (part of Exodus 1), the birth of Moses and his early years (part of Exodus 2–5), the exodus (part of Exodus 7–14), revelation at Sinai (part of Exodus 19–34), wilderness wandering (part of Exodus 15–18; Numbers 10–21), and stories of the conquest (part of Joshua– Judges 2).

The Elohist source is distinguished from J by the use of the divine name Elohim in the stories before the revelation to Moses in Exodus 3. Central examples include the second episode of Abraham falsely presenting Sarah as his sister to Abimelech of Gerar (Genesis 20); the expulsion of Hagar (Genesis 21); and the divine command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). Each story identifies the deity as Elohim while also advancing unique themes, such as the prophetic leadership of Abraham and the importance of fearing God. Additional Elohistic stories include the call of Moses (part of Exodus 3); the theophany and covenant at Sinai/Horeb (part of Exodus 19–20, 24, 32–33), the wilderness journey (part of Numbers 11, 12, 22); and an account of conquest (part of Joshua 1–11).

The D source was confined to the book of Deuteronomy.

The identification and the dating of the Priestly source was the central concern of Wellhausen. The P source is written in a formal style; it concentrates on ritual law, genealogy, the priesthood of Aaron, and the sacramental power of holiness in the sanctuary, covenant, and sacrifice. The themes combine to establish a religious theocracy in the post-exilic period. The deity is more removed from human affairs in the P source; yet also undergoes a series of name changes throughout the covenantal history of ancient Israel: Elohim creates (Genesis 1) and makes covenant with Noah (Genesis 9); El Shaddai makes covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17); and finally, Moses encounters Yahweh (Exodus 6). The scope of the P source spans the Hexateuch, beginning with creation (Genesis 1) and concluding with the distribution of the land (Joshua 13–22). Between these poles, the P source includes an extensive genealogy, linking the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; a version of the exodus that

emphasizes Passover (Exodus 12), the revelation of the tabernacle cult at Sinai (most of Exodus 19–40), the Priestly laws and rituals associated with the tabernacle (Leviticus), the social structure of the tribes around the sanctuary (Numbers 1–10), and stories of the wilderness journey (parts of Numbers 10–34).

Wellhausen's research on the Priestly source had far-reaching implications for interpreting the history of ancient Israelite religion and tradition. Neither Mosaic authorship, nor even the Mosaic period played a role in his interpretation of the Pentateuch. J and E are narratives from the monarchy period. He judged J to be a history written in the southern kingdom of Judah, while E was a later, northern version; the Yehowist (JE) combined the two sources. The JE composition assumed multiple cultic sites, worship was closely tied to agrarian life, and there was a minimal role for law. Wellhausen placed the two sources, J and E, and their combination in JE in the early Neo-Assyrian period (ninth–eighth centuries BCE). The D source remained firmly fixed as the document of the Josianic reform in the late-seventh century BCE. And now P, with its theocratic vision of Priestly leadership and ritual legislation, was judged to be a late document from the post-exilic period, no earlier than the fifth century BCE.

The festival calendars illustrated the history of the composition of the sources and the changing nature of Israelite tradition and religion. The following diagram lists the central teaching of the festivals in the sources JE, D, and P.

Table 2.2 Israel's Festivals in JEPD

JE	D	P
Exod 23:14–17 Exod 34:21–23	Deut 16	Lev 23

Wellhausen argued that the calendar laws in JE reflect an agricultural way of life, in which yearly worship was organized around harvest festivals (Exod 23:14–17; 34:21–23). The three festivals included Unleavened Bread in the Spring of the year at the time of the barley harvest; the feast of the First Fruits at the completion of the grain harvest; and Ingathering or Harvest at the end of the year in the Fall. None of the dates were firmly fixed because the changing

agricultural cycle in any given year determined the time for festivals, and the only month mentioned is Abib, as the time for Unleavened Bread. The fluidity of the dates reinforced the close relationship between religious practice and the agricultural life of the Israelites: “It is out of the simplest, most natural, and most wide spread offering, those of the first-fruits of the flock, herd, and field, the occasions for which recur regularly with the seasons of the year, that the annual festivals took their rise.”[43] The view of religion in JE corresponds to that of the prophet Hosea where the blessing of land is the end of religion (Hosea 2); it “has for its basis no historical acts of salvation, but nature simply.”[44]

Deuteronomy continued to reflect the agricultural cycle reflected in JE: “[N]ot only in the Jehovistic (JE) but also in the Deuteronomic (D) legislation the festivals rest upon agriculture, the basis at once of life and of religion.”[45] As a consequence, both JE and D shared a view of sacrifice as a form of communion in the land between the worshiper and the deity. But signs of change in worship practice also appear in D.[46] The festivals must be observed at one location: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose” (Deut 16:16). The temporal sequence between festivals is more firmly fixed with the elaboration of seven weeks between Unleavened Bread and First Fruits: “You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time of the sickle is first put to the standing grain” (16:9). And worship is somewhat abstracted from nature with the more historical emphasis on the exodus: “Remember you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes” (16:12).

The Priestly festival legislation is the latest; it is written in the post-exile to lend authority to the Priestly theocracy. The literary setting of the wilderness for the revelation of Leviticus 23 signals the degree to which the festival legislation is detached from the rhythm of Israel’s agricultural life in the land.[47] The same abstraction from the agricultural cycle of nature is evident in festivals. “The feasts entirely lose their peculiar characteristics, the occasions by which they are inspired and distinguished.” Communion with God in the land in the traditional festival of the First Fruits becomes a ritual of fixed dues paid to priests: “When

you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance" (Lev 23:10–11). The traditional fluidity of the calendar in the observance of the agricultural festivals also becomes fixed in the Priestly source with lunar dating, as in the festival of Ingathering, which is historicized to the wilderness journey and renamed as Booths or Sukkot: "On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths" (23:33) (p. 101). The tripartite calendar is even interrupted with the new Day of Atonement, which becomes the central focus of the festival calendar (23:26–32). "Nothing could illustrate more clearly the contrast between the new cultus and the old, fixing its regard at all points on sins and its atonement, it reaches its culmination in a great atoning solemnity."

2.4 Summary

The significance of the literary-critical study of the Pentateuch from the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century is enormous. The traditional understanding of the Pentateuch, as composed by Moses, gives way to the identification of the multiple anonymous authors of the documentary hypothesis, J, E, D, P, whose portrayal of Moses is removed from the history of the Mosaic era. The combination of these distinct works accounts for the many repetitions in the present form of the Pentateuch. The interpretation of the sources in the chronological order of composition provided a window into the changing nature of Israelite religion. The development progressed from the natural cycle of agriculture in the JE sources during the monarchy period to the post-exilic Priestly cult, where ritual legislation becomes detached from the cycle of nature.

The documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen is more than a literary solution to the composition of the Pentateuch; it is also a theory of religion and tradition, in which the free form of worship practiced within the cycle of nature is judged to be more authentic than highly structured sacramental Priestly rituals. De Wette had already proposed this view of religion without identifying the late date for the composition of the Priestly source. By removing the Priestly cult from the earliest literature and by locating it late, Wellhausen further developed de Wette's view of religion. The isolation of the J and E sources from the P source allowed for the identification of the most dynamic form of ancient Israelite religion in JE, which was diminished in D and lost in the P source. Wellhausen's evaluation of the changing festivals from JE to D, and finally, P provides illustration: "Deprived of their natural spontaneity" the festivals are "degraded into mere exercises of religion," in which sacrifices are restructured into the "monotonous sameness of the unvarying burnt-offering and sin-offering of the community as a whole."[48]

The documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen was revolutionary for interpreting the composition of the Pentateuch. It also created a number of

problems that influence subsequent interpretation of the Pentateuch. Five issues stand out.

First, **the literary incoherence of the Pentateuch**. The doc-umentary hypothesis judged the present form of the Pentateuch to lack literary coherence, which allowed for the recovery of source documents from repetitions and doublets. This literary judgment assumed that redactors only preserved early sources without imposing their own literary creativity into the formation of the Pentateuch. The literary coherence of the Pentateuch will remain a central topic of debate.

Second, **developmental view of religion**. The linking of literary-critical research with a particular view of religion introduced an ongoing problem in the interpretation of the Pentateuch. It raised the question to what extent literary research on the Pentateuch can be separated from the hermeneutical presuppositions of the interpreter about the nature of Israelite religion. Does the documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen require a view of religion in which Priestly law and sacramental ritual are a late form of cultic practice that suppress a more agrarian form of religion?

Third, **tradition, change, and the role of redactors**. Wellhausen's view of tradition contains inner tensions. On the one hand, he advocated dynamic change in tradition from the nature-based J and E sources to the emphasis on law and cultic centralization in the D and P sources. Yet, on the other hand, his view of the literary development of the Pentateuch required that the traditional material in the J and E sources be preserved, unchanged by later redactors. The question arises why redactors would preserve the ancient source documents J and E, when this material advocated a form of religion that was rejected in the later D and P traditions, which one assumes represented the authoritative religious practice of the editors? The debate over the role of redactors in the composition of the Pentateuch and the nature of religious tradition in ancient Israel will continue throughout the modern period of interpretation.

Fourth, **Ancient Near Eastern literature**. Wellhausen limited his study to the literature of the Pentateuch. He did not broaden his research to include comparative Ancient Near Eastern literature, even though excavations at

Nineveh and El-Amarna were producing significant mythologies and legal documents from neighboring cultures. The broader study of comparative literature could provide new information on the role of law in religion and on the antiquity of Priestly rituals, which would require a reappraisal Wellhausen's view of Israelite religion.

Fifth, **oral tradition**. Wellhausen did not incorporate the role of oral tradition in his analysis of the source documents. Although he acknowledged oral tradition as a potentially dynamic force, he proceeded in his research as though the act of writing was the origin of a source document. The history of religions school would expand the significance of oral tradition and qualify the creative role of literary authors that was assumed in the documentary hypothesis.

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The Tradents of the Pentateuch: Comparative Literature, Oral Stories, and History of Tradition

The study of the Pentateuch took a decidedly new turn toward the end of the nineteenth century at the University of Göttingen, the very school where Julius Wellhausen was teaching at the end of his career (1892–1913). In the documentary hypothesis, Wellhausen had syn-thesized nearly two centuries of research on the composition of the Pentateuch. The focus during this period was on authors and literature. The separation of the sources, J, E, D, P, clarified the different literary compositions, allowing for the identification of the source authors with their distinct concepts of religion. Wellhausen idealized the earliest authors, J and E, who wrote during the monarchy period. These authors represented the most dynamic form of ancient Israelite religion, when worship was tied to agriculture and free of legal restrictions.

A new generation of scholars at Göttingen sought an even earlier stage of Israelite religion than that represented by the authors of the sources J and E. The discovery of mythological and legal texts from Mesopotamia and Egypt provided a new window into the influence of ancient cultures on the Pentateuch; it suggested that the stories of creation and the ancestors were older than their written versions in the sources. As a consequence, these scholars wished to push the study of ancient Israelite religion further back in time by recovering the oral stories and the tradents who preserved and handed them on. The assumption was that Israelite religion took shape through ancient oral stories, whose meaning arose from the concrete life experience of the Israelite ancestors and tribes. The immediacy between the lived experience of the storytellers and the oral stories represented an even more dynamic form of religion than that which was represented by the authors of the written sources. The tradents of oral tradition

were judged to be the real shapers of the tradition of the Pentateuch long before the source authors ever wrote their compositions.

Sidebar 3.1 History of Religions School

The History of Religions School (German, *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) emphasizes comparative study for the interpretation of all forms of religion. The methodology is based on the assumption that all religions develop from the cross-fertilization of traditions through shared cultural experience over long periods of time, which accounts for the development of any particular religion; thus, the History of Religions approach opposes the study of any religion in isolation with a focus on its dogmatic confessions alone. The emphasis on comparison and historical development in the History of Religions methodology has also given rise to the name, Science of Religion (German, *Religionswissenschaft*).

The researchers named their new quest the History of Religions School. Albrecht Eichhorn (1856–1926) was the leader of the group, but it comprised many influential scholars of the early-twentieth century, including Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), Bernhard Duhm (1847–1928), and Hugo Gressmann (1877–1927) in the Old Testament; Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), Wilhelm Bousett (1865–1920), and William Wrede (1859–1906) in the New Testament; and Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) in Theology and Philosophy. This chapter will trace the influence of the History of Religions School on the interpretation of the Pentateuch in two important areas of research: (1) the identification of individual oral stories in form criticism; and (2) the attempt to trace the formation of oral stories into larger collections in tradition history.

3.1 Recovery of Oral Sagas



Figure 3.1 Hermann Gunkel.

Hermann Gunkel

Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) was born in north-central Germany in the town of Springe, and he was raised even further north in the city of Lüneburg. His father and his grandfather were both ministers, and in 1881, Gunkel also began theological study at Göttingen and Geissen. Gunkel was ordained in 1885 and he completed his dissertation in 1888 in the New Testament. The topic of research was the popular view of the work of Holy Spirit in the earliest period of the church. The emphasis on the psychological effects of the Holy Spirit foreshadowed a lifelong interest in uncovering the immediate power of religion in the lived experience of ancient people. Gunkel was part of a group of like-minded young scholars at Göttingen, who rejected the rationalism of dogmatic theology that dominated the work of Albrecht Ritschl. They understood biblical religion to be implanted in history and to be organic with its surrounding culture. Dogma could not uncover embedded religion. Instead, interpretation required the search for religious experience behind dogma. This romantic focus on the discovery of religion in more archaic history and culture was already present in the work of de Wette. The group at Göttingen went beyond de Wette, however, by introducing a broad comparative study of literature to trace the history of religions. Gunkel spent his entire career working out the methodology of the History of Religions School—first, at Halle (1889–1894), where he shifted his research from the New Testament to the Old Testament, then at Berlin (1894–1907), Giessen (1907–1920), and finally, back to Halle (1920–1927).

Gunkel's first book on the Pentateuch, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton*, compared the Babylonian creation mythology, Enuma Elish, to Genesis 1 and Revelation 12.

Sidebar 3.2 Enuma Elish

Enuma Elish is the Babylonian creation mythology recounted on seven tablets.

In 1849, Austen Henry Layard discovered fragments of the myth in the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh destroyed in the seventh century BCE, although versions of the account date at least from the twelfth century BCE. The mythology recounts Markuk's victory over the primeval water goddess, Tiamat, which leads to the creation of the world and his enthronement as king of the gods. The mythology was part of the liturgy of the Babylonian spring Akitu festival, which celebrated Marduk's defeat of the chaotic sea monster, Tiamat, each New Year.



Figure 3.2 Scan of plate from Austen Henry Layard's Monuments of Nineveh, Second Series' plate 19/83, London, J. Murray, 1853.

The discovery of the Babylonian mythology provided a window into pre-Israelite tradition, in which creation was described as a conflict with the primordial water dragon, Tiamat. The influence of the myth in the Hebrew Bible was evident in the sea monster, Rahab (Isa 51:9); the dragon, Leviathan (Ps 74:14); the beast, Behemoth (Job 40); and the watery deep, Tehom (Job 41:25). Gunkel identified similar motifs from the Babylonian creation mythology in Genesis 1, including the presence of darkness before creation; the brooding spirit; the watery deep, Tehom; the rule of luminaries; and the structure of seven days.[1]

The different forms of the motif of the sea monster indicated that the Babylonian mythology informed the Hebrew Bible in general, and Genesis 1 in particular. But there were also differences. Gunkel noted, for example, a tendency in Israelite tradition to subordinate the motif of the dragon to the sea,

which, for him, argued against direct literary dependency (74). This was also the case with Genesis 1; it reflected the astral religion of the Babylonian mythology and it shared a similar view of the earth bringing forth plants and trees. Yet, Genesis 1 departed in many ways from the Babylonian account of creation; it too subordinated the dragon to the sea and it emphasized creation by divine word. Gunkel favored the indirect influence of the Babylonian mythology on Genesis 1. He suggested that isolated features of the myth became part of the long history of religions in the ancient Near East and that they infiltrated Israelite tradition through oral transmission, as "echoes" of the original mythology. The vast age of the oral tradition, with its many transformations in the history of religions allowed for the persistence of motifs from the Babylonian mythology and the variety of interpretations that were evident in the Hebrew Bible.

Sidebar 3.3 Oral Tradition

Oral tradition investigates the dynamic way in which knowledge, art, ideas, and culture are transmitted through oral human communication. The study of orality was advanced in the 1930s through the research of Milman Parry on the transmission of epic poems in the former Yugoslavia; he discovered that poets employed formulaic phrases, type scenes, and patterns to recite lengthy epics. The insights of Parry were developed by Albert Lord in *The Singer of Tales* (1960), where he also applied the theory of oral transmission to Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, as well as to other medieval epics such as *Beowul*f. The methodology of oral tradition has also provided insight into the formation of a wide range of Ancient Near Eastern literature, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the stories in Genesis, and the Gospels in the New Testament.

The hypothesis of a dynamic and creative oral tradition in ancient Israel revolutionized the source-critical interpretation of the Pentateuch. Wellhausen had limited the study of Genesis 1 to the literature of the Hebrew Bible and he focused, in particular, on its composition, especially the isolation of its language from other texts in the Hebrew Bible. Examples from Genesis 1:1–6 included the

phrase “in the beginning,” the verb “to create,” the unique expression “formless void,” the additional verb “to divide,” and the cosmological term “firmament.” The use of this unique language was attributed to the author; it provided the basis to identify Genesis 1 as a late, post-exilic composition by the Priestly author. The appearance of similar terms in Second Isaiah reinforced the late composition of Genesis 1.[2] The broader study of comparative literature led Gunkel to a radically different conclusion. He no longer focused on the creativity of the author or even on the literary composition of Genesis 1. Instead, the creative formation of Genesis 1 took place in its pre-literary development. He wrote: “Genesis 1 is not the composition of an author, but rather the written deposit of a tradition” that goes back to Babylon.[3] Thus, for Gunkel, Genesis 1 could not be interpreted properly without first recovering the oral tradition.

Gunkel turned his attention more directly to the recovery of the oral stories of the Pentateuch in his commentary on Genesis (1901^1, 1910^3). But he lacked a methodology. Source critics had identified distinct authors on the basis of repetitions in the literature, but no one had yet sought to recover oral stories from the larger literary documents. Gunkel was aided in this task by the similar quest to recover the oral history of German literature. Literary theorists, such as Wilhelm Scherer (1841–1866), provided guidelines for recovering the spirit of the German people in the history of their literature. Central to the theory was the belief that early oral stories arose organically from shared communal experience; they were not the result of individual creativity. The form (or genre) of oral stories tended to be simple in structure and short in length; they became more complex in form as the communal nature of society changed, giving way to individual achievement associated with literary authors. The theory resulted in a view of the history of literature as a development from simple oral stories to complex literary compositions. The goal of the interpreter of the history of German literature was to recover the oral stories in order to participate in the same communal experience as the original storytellers. The shared experience through language created national identity. The interest in the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers in the nineteenth century provided an example, since these stories were thought to capture the unique spirit of the German people. Gunkel

embraced the romantic vision of reconstructing the spirit of a people through their literature, but he shifted the focus to the history of Israelite literature; he sought to share in the communal religious experience of ancient Israel by recovering the original oral stories in Genesis.

Gunkel's methodology of form criticism can be summarized with three related hypotheses.

First, **he argued that the oldest genre in Genesis originated in the oral tradition of Israel and was written down only later**. He identified the genre as the "saga." Gunkel defined the saga as an independent unit of approximately ten verses; it lacked ornamen-tation; it was limited in motifs; and it tended to focus on the action of two typical characters, who functioned in opposition. The subject matter of sagas often mixed popular and religious themes about primeval history, the ancestors, or folk heroes, such as Moses or Joshua.

Second, **Gunkel agreed with the prevailing view of the time that the history of literature evolved from simple to complex structures**. When a saga was passed on to later generations, its pure form was lost as different motifs were added to address the contemporary situation of the later tradents or authors. Over time, the individual sagas were collected with others to form cycles, until they were finally incorporated into the written sources of the book of Genesis.

Third, **Gunkel assumed that the earliest oral sagas arose directly out of the lived experience of the community, which he described as the *Sitz im Leben*, "the setting in life."** The setting in life infused the saga with a mixture of communal and religious experience. But the organic relationship between story and setting was lost when the isolated oral story became an episode within a larger body of literary, which could exist independently from the original setting in life. The goal of interpretation was to recover the lived experience that animated the original saga. The original setting in life of the saga could be uncovered by asking: Who is the speaker? Who is the audience? What is being said? What is the mood of the situation? And, what is the purpose of the story? The careful pursuit of these questions would reveal the essence of Ancient Israelite communal and religious experience to the sensitive interpreter.

Sidebar 3.4 *Sitz im Leben*

The German *Sitz im Leben* translates to “setting in life.” The phrase is meant to emphasize that stories must be interpreted in social contexts so that interpreters are able to discern their purpose and function within the community that preserved and transmitted them. The focus of the setting in life is on the typical function of stories within communities; it is not intended to discover the unique function of a story within an individual occurrence of its recitation. The emphasis on the communal and typical, as opposed to the individual, occurrence is underscored in Hermann Gunkel’s original phrase, *Sitz im Volksleben*, “setting in the life of the people,” which over time was shortened to *Sitz im Leben*.

The three stories of Abraham (Genesis 12, 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) falsely presenting their wives as sisters to foreign kings illustrate Gunkel’s use of form criticism to recover oral stories, while also providing a contrast to the source criticism of Wellhausen. The following diagram illustrates the central features of the three stories.

Table 3.1 Three Stories of Abraham and Isaac

	Gen 12:10–20	**Genesis 20**	**Genesis 26**
Characters	Abraham, clever Sarah, beautiful Pharaoh	Abraham, prophet Sarah, sister Abimelech	Isaac, fearful Rebekah, beautiful Abimelech
Deity	Yahweh	Elohim	Yahweh
Deception	Lie	Mental reservation	Lie
Adultery	Takes place	Prevented at the last minute	A potential danger
Wealth	Abraham becomes wealthy from the lie	Abraham acquires wealth after the event to reconcile and to honor Sarah	Isaac acquires wealth because Yahweh blesses his land
Plague	To make Pharaoh aware of the sin	To warn Abimelech of the potential for sin	No plague is necessary
Result/Treatment	Abraham is expelled from Egypt	Abraham is allowed to live in the land	Isaac is expelled from the land over envy because of his wealth

Gunkel envisioned form criticism to be a supplement to source criticism. Throughout the commentary on Genesis, Gunkel provided a source-critical analysis of the text as the starting point for recovering the oral form of the stories. Yet, a comparison of the interpretations of Wellhausen and Gunkel illustrates how uneasily the two methodologies relate. Wellhausen anchored his analysis of Genesis 12, 20, and 26 in the study of the language. The divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, were important. The use of Elohim identified Genesis 20 as a composition in the E source; Yahweh in Genesis 12 and 26 placed these episodes in the J source. The double version of the story in J meant that one episode was a later addition. Wellhausen judged the story of Isaac in Genesis 26 to be original to J; the parallel account of Abraham in Genesis 12:10–20 was a free literary creation added later to J, since the focus on Abraham alone disrupted the narrative context, where Abraham and Lot were together.[4] Gunkel followed Wellhausen in interpreting Genesis 20 as E; and Genesis 12 and 26 as J.

But when Gunkel shifted from source to form criticism, he introduced a whole new set of interpretive tools and aesthetic criteria for evaluating Genesis 12, 20, and 26. He concluded that the repetition of the story indicated how beloved the tale was among the Israelites. He paid little or no attention to the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim. Instead, he focused on the differences in the literary style, aesthetic outlook, and religious perspective to recover the earliest version of the tale, which he determined was the version of Genesis 12, just the reverse of Wellhausen.[5] Genesis 12 was an oral saga from the earliest time of Ancient Israelite religion; it transmitted the communal experience of this period and was not a free literary creation, as Wellhausen had argued.

The evidence for Gunkel's form critical interpretation was in the aesthetic style and outline of Genesis 12. The saga is presented in a naïve manner; the style of the tale contains minimal details; yet the structure is clear, with two characters, Abraham and Pharaoh, functioning over against each other. The physical and economic welfare of the hero, Abraham, and religion are intermixed, so that the faithfulness of God and the benefits that come to Abraham stand side by side in the saga. The morality of the lie of Abraham and

the adultery between Pharaoh and Sarah are not explored. Abraham acquires wealth from his deception, and the intervention of God through a plague allows for the return of Sarah. The perspective of the oral saga is one in which all's-well-that-ends-well for the clever hero. Gunkel added that the original story likely contained the motif of Pharaoh's discovery of Sarah in the harem, since such an action is a typical feature of the saga. The naïve presentation of the saga without the overlay of a more dogmatic morality to justify Abraham allowed Gunkel to share directly in the experience of the storyteller, who is taking pleasure in praising the cleverness of Abraham, the beauty of Sarah, and the faithfulness of God.

Genesis 20 and 26 are later versions of Genesis 12. The character of the narratives provided the essential insight for Gunkel: "The candor by which Genesis 12 narrated the story became offensive to later tradents." Genesis 20 and 26 transform the saga of Genesis 12 in different directions: Genesis 20 represents a theological and moral transformation of the saga into a legend; and Genesis 26 transforms the saga in the opposite direction into a narrative of history. Through the process of transformation, both Genesis 20 and 26 detach the saga from its bawdy original life setting. Genesis 20 removed the profane motifs of Abraham's cleverness and of Sarah's beauty, and featured, instead, the action of God. The economical style of the saga gives way to extended speeches between characters in the legend, which provide theological commentary that is intended to make Genesis 20 a more appropriate moral and religious story. Genesis 26 transforms the saga in the opposite direction, into an account of history, where the focus is exclusively on a profane adventure. The encounter between Abimelech and God is removed; the motif of divine protection of the ancestor is no longer prominent, and, in its place, Abimelech realizes by coincidence that Rebecca is Isaac's wife.

The History of Religions School dominated the study of the Pentateuch in the first half of the twentieth century. The focus on comparative literature placed the Pentateuch in the broad cultural and religious context of the Ancient Near East. The development of form criticism provided agreed-upon criteria to recover oral sagas from literary documents. The romantic understanding of the

setting in life allowed the interpreter to recover the earliest form of Israelite religion, not within organized worship, but in the informal setting of the family: “In the leisure of a winter evening the family sits about the hearth; the grown people, but more especially the children, listen intently to the beautiful old stories of the dawn of the world, which they have heard so often yet never tire of hearing repeated.”[6]

Form criticism also introduced new problems in the study of the Pentateuch. Three stand out:

First, **the relationship between the methodologies of form criticism and source criticism were not clarified**. Although Gunkel employed source criticism as the initial step in the interpretation of the oral sagas in Genesis, the two methodologies represent different theories of literature and religion. Form criticism used aesthetic criteria to trace the dependency between Genesis 12, 20, and 26. The saga of Genesis 12 gave rise to the legend in Genesis 20 and the historical narrative in Genesis 26, revealing a development in religion and culture. The J and E authors became collectors of tradition in this model at an even later stage in the development of Israelite religion. Source criticism emphasized, instead, the creativity of the J and E authors; it did not view the multiple versions of the story as being interdependent in any way, nor did it view literary formation to be a process of supplementation or reinterpretation. The stories were independent compositions by separate authors.

Second, **the different views of the literary process raised an additional question about religion and tradition**: Was the creative period of ancient Israelite religion in the communal experience of oral storytelling among tribal families, or was it in the literary creativity of the individual J and E authors during the monarchy period? Form criticism idealized the communal religious experience of tribal Israel; source criticism highlighted the creativity of the individual J and E authors.

Third, **form criticism did not adequately describe the larger structure of the Pentateuch**. Its goal was to recover the oldest individual oral sagas in the Pentateuch in order to retrieve the taproot of religious experience. The

Pentateuch was not interpreted as a whole. The lack of focus on the formation of the Pentateuch gave rise to the methodology of tradition history.

3.2 History of Oral Tradition

Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth

Tradition history develops from form criticism. Both methodologies investigate the dynamic role of oral tradition in the formation of the Pentateuch, but the focus of study is different. The concentration in form criticism—on individual sagas narrated by storytellers—is broadened in tradition history to include creedal statements and larger units of tradition that were part of the earliest cultic worship in ancient Israel. The change in focus gives rise to different aims of the two methodologies. Form criticism moves away from the present form of the Pentateuch in order to recover the earliest individual oral stories embedded in the text. Tradition history moves in the other direction; it identifies the structure of the earliest oral creeds and the larger units of tradition as a means to understand the formation of the Pentateuch.



Figure 3.3 Gerhard von Rad.

The development of tradition history is attributed to Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) and Martin Noth (1902–1968), both of whom were students of Albrecht

Alt (1883–1956), who taught at the University of Leipzig from 1923 to 1956. Noth was born in Dresden and educated for the most part at the University of Leipzig, where he studied under Alt and was his assistant for one year, before accepting a position to Königsberg (1930–1944); he completed his career at the University of Bonn (1945–1965). Von Rad was born in southern Germany, in the city of Nuremburg; he studied theology in Erlangen and Tübingen and eventually replaced Noth as the assistant to Alt at Leipzig (1930–1934). Von Rad left Leipzig to teach at Jena (1934–1945); Göttingen (1945–1949); and Heidelberg (1949–1967). The research of Noth and von Rad on the Pentateuch intersects throughout their careers. The two scholars shared the same goal of broadening the focus of form criticism on individual sagas to include larger complexes of tradition; both sought to interpret the formation of the Pentateuch. Von Rad provided the transition from form criticism to tradition history with the publication of *The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch* (1938). Noth added three important studies, which build on the research of von Rad while also changing it in many significant ways: *Josua* (1938); *Tradition Historical Studies: The Collecting and Compiling of the Historical Works in the Old Testament* (1943), and *The History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1948).

Form criticism came to dominate the interpretation of the Pentateuch in the early-twentieth century. The recovery of individual oral sagas and the identification of their setting in life within the lived experience of tribal Israel became the central approach for the interpretation of the Hexateuch. In addition to Hermann Gunkel's research on Genesis, Hugo Gressmann (1877–1927) recovered sagas associated with the exodus and the wilderness stories of Moses, while Albrecht Alt (1883–1956) identified the original oral sagas in the book of Joshua. But the prominence of form criticism reached an inevitable "stalemate," according to Gerhard von Rad, because interpretation became so predictable. The problem was not simply the uniformity of research among scholars, it was also the fragmentation of the "final form of the text as we have it" because of the focus on individual sagas. Von Rad wrote: "[o]n almost all sides the final form of the Hexateuch has come to be regarded as a starting-point barely worthy of discussion, from which the debate should move away as rapidly as possible in

order to reach the real problems underlying it."[7] In view of this, von Rad raised a new question: Could form criticism be redefined so that the study of oral tradition would provide insight into the form of the Hexateuch?

Von Rad shifted study from individual oral sagas that had been the focus in classical form criticism to ancient tribal liturgies that influence the structure of the Hexateuch. The structure of the Hexateuch may be summarized as six central themes: (1) creation; (2) promise to the ancestors; (3) Exodus from Egypt; (4) revelation at Sinai; (5) wilderness wandering; and (6) land.

Sidebar 3.5 Historical Credos

The Historical Credos (Deut 6:20–24; 26:5b–9; Josh 24:2b–13) consisted of four themes: (1) the promises to the patriarchs; (2) the oppression in Egypt; (3) the wilderness journey; and (4) the land; it was celebrated during the Feast of Weeks at Gilgal. Gerhard von Rad focused the study of the Pentateuch on the Historical Credos for much of the twentieth century, with his thesis that the credos were ancient confessions of faith that shaped the formation of the Hexateuch.

Von Rad started his research by identifying three ancient oral creeds or historical credos, which included many of the central themes of the Hexateuch: Deuteronomy 6:20–24; 26:5b–9; and Joshua 24:2b–13. The prime example was the creedal confession associated with the liturgy of first fruits in Deuteronomy 26:5b–9.

Table 3.2 Creedal Confession in Deut 26

(1) **Creation**	**Absent**
(2) Ancestors	5A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.
(3) Exodus	6When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7we cried to Yahweh, the God of our

	ancestors; Yahweh heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. [8]Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an out stretched arm, with terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders;
(4) **Sinai**	**Absent**
(5) Wilderness Wandering	[9]and he brought us into this place
(6) Land	and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The creed in Deuteronomy 26:5b–9 represented the earliest oral genre of the Hexateuch, according to von Rad. The same oral genre was evident in Deuteronomy 6:20–24 and Joshua 24:2b–13. These historical credos "follow a canonical pattern" and even represent "a Hexateuch in miniature."[8] The identification of a new oral genre, "the historical credo," also required a distinct setting in life from the saga. Gunkel had placed the life-setting of sagas in the context of personal piety and the family. Von Rad disagreed: "It is evident that such material does not exist in some nebulous sphere of piety, nor is it the creation of a more or less personal religiosity; it belongs to the official worship and is in fact fundamental to the worshipping community. Its function therefore is to be sought in the public religious activity of the community, that is to say, in the cultus."[9] Von Rad concluded: "[T]he creed as we have it in Deuteronomy 26 is the cult legend of the Feast of Weeks," which took place yearly during the tribal period at Gilgal and celebrated the divine gift of the land to the tribes.

The absence of certain Hexateuchal themes from the historical credo provided further insight into the early history of Israelite religion and the oral traditions of the tribes. The absence of creation indicated to von Rad that early Israel lacked a theology of creation, favoring, instead, the themes surrounding the exodus and the settlement of the land. Equally significant was the absence of the revelation at Sinai (Exodus 19–34) in the historical credo. Von Rad concluded from this that the revelation at Sinai was a separate oral tradition from the historical credo. The historical credo focused on the leading of God and the wandering of the people; the tradition of Sinai focused on the coming of God to

the people, theophany, and the making of covenant. It contained its own fixed pattern of four themes: (1) the exhortation and the historical recital of the events of Sinai (Exodus 19); (2) the reading of law (the Decalogue in Exodus 20 and the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21–22); (3) the promise of blessing (Exodus 23); and (4) the sealing of the covenant (Exodus 24).

Here was an independent cultic legend from the celebration of the exodus and the settlement during the Feast of Weeks at Gilgal. The essential element of the Sinai tradition, according to von Rad, was “the proclamation of God’s righteous purpose” through the ritual giving of commandments that took place in a covenant renewal festival at Shechem.

Sidebar 3.6 Revelation at Sinai

The account of revelation at Sinai was an independent oral covenant tradition, according to Gerhard von Rad, that consisted of four themes: (1) history recital; (2) reading of law; (3) promise of blessing; and (4) sealing of the covenant; it was celebrated during a covenant renewal festival at Shechem.

Von Rad hoped to overcome the fragmentation of the Pentateuch in classical form criticism with its focus on individual sagas. His solution was to study the tradition-historical development of the creedal form into its more elaborate presentation in the Hexateuch. He concluded that the Hexateuch represented the merging of the Sinai tradition into the framework of the historical credo. Such a combination was only possible after the ancient traditions were detached from their original cultic settings at Gilgal and Shechem sometime during the monarchy period, which allowed them to become spiritualized as resource material for an author.[10] The author who merged the Sinai tradition into the historical credo was the Yahwist, writing in the early period of the monarchy.[11]

The tension between the revelation of law (Sinai) and the narrative of redemption (historical credo), which forms the core of the Hexateuch, is the

result of the creative literary work of the Yahwist. Thus, the Yahwist is not a mere collector of tradition, as Gunkel had argued; but a creative author, who shapes the oral traditions into a unique theology of the settlement to support the power of the monarchy. The Yahwist accomplished this goal in a number of ways: the author merged the Sinai tradition and the historical credo; added the theme of creation in the primeval history in order to place the Israelite story of salvation in a universal context (Genesis 2–11); and emphasized the theme of the promise of the land throughout the ancestral stories (Genesis 12–50). In this way, the Yahwist brought the oral traditions of tribal Israel into literary form to create the Hexateuch. The further literary development of the sources E and P add nothing new to the discussion of the tradition-historical development of the Hexateuch: "their writings are no more than variations upon the massive theme of the Yahwist's conception."[12] The book of Deuteronomy was outside of the structure of the Yahwist; it represented a later development of the tradition of Sinai, in which the original four-part structure of the cultic liturgy is expanded and reinterpreted for a contemporary audience.[13]

During the same year in which von Rad published *The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch*, Martin Noth completed the first edition of his commentary on Joshua (1938). Even though the commentary was on a book in the Former Prophets, it was central to Noth's interpretation of the formation of the Pentateuch, which would not appear for an additional ten years in *The History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1948). The problem with the past interpretation of Joshua, according to Noth, was that it was viewed as completing the storyline of the Pentateuch, which gave rise to the literary theory of the Hexateuch. This is the view of source-critics such as Wellhausen, who identified the sources J, E and, P in Joshua; and it remained the interpretation of von Rad in *The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch*. Noth argued that the material in Joshua was not related to the Pentateuch and that the book should be interpreted independently from this literature. In so arguing, Noth rejected the literary category of the Hexateuch that had dominated source criticism for over two centuries.



Figure 3.4 Martin Noth.

Noth's interpretation of Joshua followed the form-critical research of his teacher, Albrecht Alt ("Josua," 1936). Like Alt, Noth initiated the research by recovering a series of oral sagas about Joshua's local leadership in the tribal area of Benjamin and Ephraim. The sagas included etiological tales such as Rahab (Joshua 2); the stones that mark the crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3–4); the circumcision at Gilgal (Joshua 5); the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6); the ruins of Ai (Joshua 8); and the covenant with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). These individual sagas were eventually brought together into an oral collection (Joshua 2–9), before they were incorporated into the composition of the book of Joshua. There is nothing particularly innovative about Noth's research up to this point; he is following the standard form-critical methodology advanced by Gunkel, which Alt had already applied to the book of Joshua.

Sidebar 3.7 Deuteronomist author and the Deuteronomistic History

Martin Noth identified the Deuteronomist as an exilic author, who composed a history of Israel and Judah to account for the destruction of the temple and the loss of the land. Noth described the literary work of this author as the Deuteronomistic History; it includes the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

Noth's interpretation of Joshua becomes innovative in his identification of the author of the book. In place of the source authors J, E, and P, Noth identified a new author, the Deuteronomist. The name, Deuteronomist, underscored the influence of the book of Deuteronomy on the author of Joshua, especially the emphasis on obeying the law as a means for religious and political health. Noth cited the emphasis on obedience to the law in the divine commission of Joshua at the outset of the book (Joshua 1) and again at the conclusion (Joshua 23), when Joshua repeats the same legal instruction to the tribes. Source-critics, such as Wellhausen, had long recognized Deuteronomistic composition in the book of Joshua, especially in the insertion of the motif of the law. But these interpreters limited the influence of the Deuteronomist to late editorial additions, which lay outside of their primary concern to identify the conclusion of the Pentateuchal sources in Joshua. Noth transformed the discussion of composition with the elimination of the Pentateuchal sources in favor of the Deuteronomist as the author of Joshua. Von Rad challenged the radical character of Noth's proposal already in the conclusion to *The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch*: "What we must protest against is the isolation of the literary problems of the *Book of Joshua* from the overall problem of the Hexateuch, whose sources present one single whole from the point of view of form."[14]

Noth drew out the implications of his commentary on Joshua in the book, *Tradition Historical Studies: The Collecting and Compiling of the Historical Works in the Old Testament* (1942), a portion of which is translated *as The Deuteronomistic History* (1981). Noth argued that the author identified in Joshua composed a larger history, which included Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings; he described the literary work as the Deuteronomistic History. The author wrote sometime in the middle of the exilic period (587–535 BCE). The notice of the release of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings 25 under the rule of the Babylonian king, Amel-Marduk (562–560 BCE) provided the date. The aim of the history was to provide a theological account for the fall of the kingdom of Judah and the subsequent Babylonian exile. The law in Deuteronomy provided

the theological standard for tracing the moral and political decline of Israel from the period of the tribes (Joshua and Judges) through the monarchy (1–2 Samuel; 1–2 Kings), thus accounting for the loss of the kingdom and the exile.

The Deuteronomistic author incorporated divergent traditional sources in writing the history, such as the collection of sagas in Joshua 2–9. The creativity of the author in organizing the array of traditional material was evident when interpretation focused on the entire Deuteronomistic History. The literary unity of the divergent traditions was achieved through the insertion of speeches by leading characters at important junctures in the story: Moses in Deuteronomy 1–3; Joshua in Joshua 1, 23; Samuel in 1 Samuel 12; and Solomon in 1 Kings 8. The speeches repeat important themes from Deuteronomy, such as the need to observe the law (Deut 4:1, 5; Josh 1:7–9; 23:6), the warning not to rebel against the voice of God (1 Samuel 12) or to forget the law (Deut 4:9), the threat of punishment (Deut 4:25–31; 1 Kgs 8:35–36) and the promise of divine forgiveness if the people repent (1 Kgs 8:46–53). The speeches are complemented by summary statements, such as the list of conquered nations in Joshua 12; the failure of the tribes to conquer the land in Judges 2:11ff; and the fall of the Northern kingdom in 2 Kings 17:7ff. The speeches and summary statements share similarities in language, style, and content that is unique to this body of literature, further reinforcing the literary unity of the Deuteronomistic History in spite of the diversity of the source material.

The identification of the Deuteronomistic History set the stage for *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1948); it clarified that there never was a Hexateuch, or even a Pentateuch. There was only a Tetrateuch, consisting of the four books Genesis–Numbers, and in view of this, Noth informed the reader: “the designation ‘Pentateuch’ will be used in this limited sense.”[15] But when Noth turned his focus from the present structure of the Tetrateuch (Genesis–Numbers) and the Deutero-nomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings) to the oral tradition, he agreed with von Rad that the cultic confessions “constituted the roots from which . . . the Pentateuch grew.”[16] The problem, according to Noth, was that von Rad had identified a later point of development in the oral tradition, when the themes of the historical credo were already combined. Noth sought an even

earlier stage in the formation of the Pentateuch, when the themes of the historical credo were not yet combined. He isolated five themes: (1) “guidance out of Egypt”; (2) “guidance into the arable land”; (3) “promise to the patriarchs”; (4) “guidance into the wilderness”; and (5) “revelation at Sinai.”

Von Rad had clarified that the revelation at Sinai was independent from the historical credo, with its own cultic setting in the tribal period. Noth took the insight one step further, arguing that the other four themes of the historical credo could also be separated. In this way, Noth sought to identify older cultic celebrations of tribal Israel and to trace the tradition-historical development of each theme into its inclusion in the historical credo.

The oldest theme in the Pentateuch, according to Noth, was the “guidance out of Egypt.” The core confession of the theme was the destruction of the Egyptians in the sea. This theme was distributed broadly throughout the Hebrew Bible, in old narratives (e.g., Josh 2:10), in the prophetic literature (e.g., Hos 11:1), in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., Deut 7:8), in the Holiness Code (e.g., Lev 25:42), and in hymns (e.g., Psalm 114). The antiquity of the theme was evident in its ability to stand alone, independently from the other themes of the Pentateuch. The poetic couplet in Exodus 15:21b provided illustration:

> “Sing to Yahweh,
>
> for he has triumphed gloriously.
>
> Horse and rider
>
> he has thrown into the sea.”

Here was the “kernel of the whole subsequent Pentateuchal tradition,” according to Noth, a “primary confession” that may even reach back to the “bedrock of an historical occurrence.” It was so ancient that it resisted a particular setting in life. “This confession was so universally relevant,” according to Noth, “that it could have and must have been recited at any cultic occasion which called for a hymn.”[17]

Noth was unable to trace the independent use of the theme, “guidance into the arable land.” There was no historical event of an “all Israelite” occupation of

the land to allow for the independent identification of this theme. In view of this, he raised the question of where the theme might have originated? Whatever its roots, the theme “guidance into the arable land” became attached to the confession of the exodus early in the traditional historical process. Noth speculated that the theme may have become attached to the exodus in the festival of First Fruits, which von Rad had already identified in Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Whatever the tradition-historical process, the evidence of the secondary attachment of the theme of land with the exodus was evident in the Pentateuchal tradition, where there was not a smooth connection between the two themes. The tradition never clarified how the exodus from Egypt ended up in southern Transjordan or why the Israelites detoured around Edom to enter the land. Noth concluded that the complicated and unrealistic geography of the Pentateuchal story was not history; it is fashioned, rather, by the need to combine two themes —the exodus from Egypt and the occupation of the land, which were originally separate.[18]

The theme of the promise to the patriarchs originally consisted of localized traditions of single ancestors, who functioned as cult founders and represented a form of religion, in which the father had a personal relationship with the deity. The tradition-historical process in the expansion of the theme most likely started with Jacob, as was evident in the liturgy of First Fruits in Deuteronomy 26:1–11; but it expanded to include southern traditions of Isaac, and then, Abraham. The stories of Joseph are very late additions to provide a link to the theme of the exodus. The theme of the guidance into the wilderness is also a very late development in the tradition-historical process. Evidence for this is the inability for this theme to function independently; it presupposes in every respect the other themes of the exodus and the land.

The merging of the themes of the exodus, land, and promise to the patriarchs and guidance in the wilderness brought the study of the Pentateuchal traditions back to the historical credo, identified originally by von Rad. Noth followed von Rad at this point in proposing that the covenant renewal festival associated with the revelation at Sinai was absorbed into the historical credo, where it receded into the background behind the exodus. But Noth departed from von Rad by

attributing the creative formation of the Pentateuch to the oral stage of development, rather than to the Yahwist author. The five central themes were filled out at the oral stage of development with a host of traditions that arose from tribal life in the land; these explore the relationship between people (e.g., Caleb at Hebron; the Midianites; the Edomites); the contrast between agricultural and Bedouin society (e.g., the Passover); imaginative stories about customs and universal human experience (e.g., thirst and hunger in the wilderness; murmuring of the people); and war (e.g., Sihon). Genealogies, travel notices, and geography linked the five themes and the supplemental material into an ever larger oral tradition, so that the shape of the Pentateuch was achieved prior to the composition of the literary sources.

The literary stage of composition of the J and E sources took place in the monarchy period and the P source in the exile. The act of composition detached the oral traditions from the sphere of the cult and brought them into the "theological sphere of reflection and a synoptic view of the whole."[19] The authors provided distinct points of view. The author of J expanded the oral tradition by prefixing the primeval history to the promise to the patriarch, thus placing the history of Israel within the universal context of creation and the nations. The E author explored the role of God in history from the migration of Abraham to the tribal occupations. The P author reaffirmed the power of the cult, without extending the story into an account of the occupation of the land.[20] Noth did not view the formation of the Pentateuchal narrative as a whole to be a creative undertaking; the work of redactors was a mechanical two-stage process. The J source was the framework for the combination of J and E, which resulted in the limited amount of E literature that remained. The P source became the framework for the formation of JE and P, which accounted for the absence of the occupation of the land in the present form of the Tetrateuch.[21] The process resulted in two voices dominating the present form of the text: the Tetrateuch (Genesis–Numbers) represents the Priestly theology of the cult, and the law in Deuteronomy is the theology of the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings). The main features of Noth's tradition-historical development of the

Tetrateuch may be summarized in the following three parts: Oral Tradition; Literary Sources; Present Form of the Text:

Table 3.3 Noth's Traditional-Historical Development of the Tetrateuch

Oral Tradition

Original Theme

Guidance out of Egypt

Festival of First Fruits

Guidance out of Egypt	Guidance into the Arable Land

Historical Credo

Promise to the Patriarchs	Guidance out of Egypt	Guidance in the Wilderness	Guidance into the Arable Land

Merging of Historical Credo and Revelation at Sinai and the Filling out of the Five Themes

Promise to the Patriarchs	Guidance out of Egypt	Guidance in the Wilderness	Revelation at Sinai	Guidance into the Arable Land

Literary Sources

Creation (Genesis 1–11)

Story	J	E	P	**Present Form**
Creation	Gen 2:4b–25		Gen 1:1–2:4a	
Eden	Gen 3			
Cain/Abel	Gen 4			
Adam Genealogy			Gen 5	

Noah/Flood	Gen 6–8		Gen 6–9[22]
Noah/Vintner	Gen 9:18–27		
Noah Genealogy	Gen 10		Gen 10[23]
Babel	Gen 11:1–9		
Shem Genealogy			Gen 11:10–26

Ancestors (Genesis 12–50)

Story	J	E	P
Abraham (Genesis 12–25)			
Call of Abram	Gen 12:1–4a, 6–9		
Sarah/Pharaoh	Gen 12:10–20		
Abram/Lot	Gen 13:1–18		
Covenant/Offspring	Gen 15:6–12, 19–21	Gen 15:5, 13–16	
Flight of Hagar	Gen 16:1–14		
Covenant/Circumcision			Gen 17
Sodom/Gomorrah	Gen 18:1–19:28		
Sarah/Abimeleck		Gen 20:1–17	
Expulsion of Hagar		Gen 21:8–21	
Sacrifice of Isaac		Gen 22:1–19	
Death/Burial of Sarah			Gen 23
Marriage Isaac/Rebekah	Gen 24		
Ishmael Genealogy			Gen 25:12–17
Jacob (Genesis 25–36)			
Birth of Jacob/Esau	Gen 25:21–26:33		
Stolen Blessing	Gen 27:1–45		
Bethel Dream		Gen 28:11–22	

Marriage Jacob to Leah/Rachel	Genesis 29		
Jacob's Children	Genesis 30[24]	Genesis 30	
Conflict with Laban	Genesis 31[25]	Genesis 31	
Wrestling with the Angel	Genesis 32		
Rape of Dinah	Genesis 34		
Sons of Jacob			Gen 35:22b–26
Isaac's Death			Gen 35:27–29
Esau Genealogy			Genesis 36[26]

Life of Moses (Exodus–Numbers)

Story	J	E	P
The Birth and the Call of Moses (Exod 1:1–7:7)			
Israelite Oppression	Exod 1:8–12		Exod 1:1–7, 13:14
Midwives		Exod 1:15–21	
Birth/Flight	Exod 2:1–22		
Call/Revelation of Divine Name	Exod 3:1–6:1	Exod 3:9–12, 13–15	Exod 2:23–25; 6:2–7:7
The Plagues and the exodus from Egypt (Exod 7:8–15:21)			
Plague	Exodus 7–11		Exod 7:8–13; 8:16–19; 9:8–12
Passover	Exod 12:21–39		Exod 12:1–20, 28, 40–51
Victory at the Red Sea	Exodus 14	Exodus 14	Exodus 14[27]
The First Wilderness Journey (Exod 15:22–18:27)			
Manna	Exodus 16		Exodus 16[28]
Water from the Rock	Exod 17:1–7		
War with Amalek	Exod 17:8–16		
Jethro's		Exod 18:1–27	

Instruction			
The Revelation at the Mountain of God (Exod 19:1—Num 10:10)			
Theophany	Exod 19:18	Exod 19:16–17, 19	
Decalogue		Exod 20:1–20	
Tabernacle Plans			Exod 24:12b–18; 25–31
Golden Calf	Exodus 32–34	Exod 32:1b–4, 21–24	
Tabernacle Construction			Exodus 35–40
Ordination of Priests/Sacrificial System			Leviticus
Selection of Levites/Organization of the Camp			Num 1:1—10:10
The Second Wilderness Journey (Num 10:11–36:13)			
Departure	Num 10:29–36		Num 10:11–28
Seventy Elders	Numbers 11		
Conflict over Prophecy (Miriam, Aaron, Moses)	Numbers 12		
Spy Story/Loss of the Promised Land	Numbers 13–14		Numbers 13–14[29]
Cultic Law			Numbers 15
Korah, Dathan, Abiram Revolt	Numbers 16		Numbers 16[30]
Aaron’s Budding Rod			Numbers 17
Priestly Duties			Numbers 18
Corpse Contamination			Numbers 19
Sin of Moses			Num 20:1–13
Conflict with Edom	Num 20:19–20	Num 20:14–18, 21	
War against Sihon		Num 21:21–35	

and Og			
Balak and Balaam	Num 22–24[31]	Numbers 22–24	
Census			Numbers 26
Inheritance			Numbers 27
Calendar/Sacrifice			Numbers 28–30
War against Midian			Numbers 31
Land Distribution			Numbers 32
Canaan/Cities of Refuge			Numbers 34–36
Moses's Teaching on the Plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 1–34)			
Teaching			
Death of Moses			Deut 34:1a, 7–9
Priestly Tetrateuch (Gen–Num)		Deuteronomistic History (Deut–2 Kgs)	

3.3 Tradition-History in the Twentieth Century

Von Rad and Noth viewed their research in tradition history to be complementary. Each emphasized the formative role of oral tradition, while also allowing for the influence of literary authors in the creation of the Pentateuch. Both applied the methodology of tradition history to trace the development of Israelite religion from its earliest oral form in pre-monarchical Israel to its later post-exilic construction. The themes of Noth and the historical credo of von Rad anchored the origin of Pentateuchal tradition in tribal worship; while Noth's Deuteronomist and von Rad's Yahwist demonstrated the creative influence of authors in shaping and transforming oral tradition into literature through the period of the monarchy and into the exile and post-exilic periods.

The combined research of von Rad and Noth formed the center of Pentateuchal studies in the twentieth century. Many sought to refine the traditional-historical methodology by focusing on particular oral traditions or by refining the literary works of the Yahwist or the Deuteronomistic historian. Others criticized the synthesis. Scandi-navian scholars, especially the Uppsala School, judged the work of von Rad and Noth to be too Western in its orientation by downplaying the role of oral tradition in oriental culture. North American interpreters, especially the Albright School, had the reverse criticism, which was that the tradition-historical analysis of von Rad and Noth overly emphasized oral tradition and combined it with a developmental view of religion that was too subjective.

The Uppsala School

A group of Scandinavian scholars rejected the role of literary criticism in Pentateuchal studies and the influence that it had in the tradition-historical work of von Rad and Noth. They judged the methodology of literary criticism to be too Western in its conception of oriental culture. They rejected the evolutionary view of religion in source criticism and in the tradition-historical study of von Rad and Noth as being too simple and too linear in its view of religious development. They also criticized the focus on oral creeds or themes as isolating Israelite religion from its roots in the larger Ancient Near Eastern culture of which it was a part. The combination of these criticisms fueled a reevaluation of oral tradition and the cultic life of Ancient Israel with a focus on the relationship between myth and ritual.

Johannes Pedersen (1883–1977) from the University of Copenhagen provided an early counter-theory of oral tradition in his study of the Passover (1934). The study was more a critique of classical form criticism, in which individual sagas were isolated and interpreted within the setting in life of the family; but his interpretation also laid the groundwork for later criticism of the tradition-historical research of von Rad and Noth. Pedersen argued that Exodus 1–15, as a whole, represented a sacred oral liturgy for the cultic festival of Passover.



Figure 3.5 Johannes Pedersen.

Sidebar 3.8 Myth and Ritual

The inherent relationship between Pentateuchal stories and cultic rituals is central to the Myth and Ritual School, although the relationship between the two is debated. William Robertson Smith represents an early version of the Myth and Ritual School, when he argued that ritual, not myth, was central to Ancient Near Eastern religion (*Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*); to which S. H. Hooke disagreed, stating that the mythic account of ritual has power in it own right (*The Origins of Early Semitic Ritual*). Many members of the Uppsala School in Scandinavia contributed to the research on the relationship of myth and ritual in the development of Ancient Israelite religion.

This oral legend was the center of the Pentateuch. The legend was meant to support a nocturnal ritual that began at evening and ended at dawn. The night of watching represented a mythic story of conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh, in which the events surrounding the Passover were relived through the ritual. The legend contained early material from the nomadic period; the spirit of legend from the royal temple in Jerusalem; and the role of the high priest Aaron from

the post-exilic period. These features from different times in the history of Israel were intermixed and could not be separated into distinct sources. As a result, it was not possible to divide the legend into pre- and post-exilic material, as was the practice in literary criticism. Pedersen's interpretation of the Passover legend resulted in a different view of oral tradition, cultic legend, and literary composition than the evolutionary methodologies of source criticism (Wellhausen), form criticism (Gunkel), and tradition history (von Rad and Noth).

Ivan Engnell (1906–1964) from the University of Uppsala extended the critique of the "evolutionary doctrinarianism," represented by Wellhausen, Gunkel, von Rad, and Noth. He provided a counterview of tradition history that came to be characterized as the "Uppsala School," a loose coalition of researchers including Sigmund Mowinckel (1884–1965), Henrik Samuel Nyberg (1889–1974), Arvid S. Kapelrud (1912–1994), Helmer Ringgren (1917–2012), Gösta W. Ahlström (1918–1992), and Eduard Nielsen (1923–).



Figure 3.6 Eduard Nielsen.

Engnell repeated the criticism of Pedersen that the focus on the development of literature in the Pentateuch was anachronistic and that it prevented the researcher from understanding the nature of oral tradition in the Ancient Near East; he characterized the problem as a Euro-centric (*interpretatio europaeica*

moderna) “book view” of the Ancient Near East. Oral tradition was the primary means of transmission; it was conservative and stable through time, and thus, reliable as a resource for recovering the most ancient traditions. Engnell also argued that oral tradition could not be limited to small units or sagas, as Gunkel argued, but that its scope was large—so large that it could account for the formation of the entire Pentateuch, while the late writing down of the material in the exilic and post-exilic periods added nothing new.[32]

The study of oral tradition was part of the science of religion.[33] Central to the science was broad comparison within a history of religions perspective, especially aimed at Canaanite culture and religion, but it could also be extended to cultures as distant as Indian and Iranian traditions. The comparison was not restricted to content, as had been the case with Gunkel; it also included form and style. Broad comparison would reveal patterns that provided insight into the sociology and psychology of ancient people, including their culture, mentality, and religious outlook. It would also reveal patterns, techniques, and laws that govern the form of oral tradition and folklore in general. In this regard, Engnell referred approvingly to Axel Olrik’s identification of Epic Laws of Folk Narrative, which limited the freedom of oral storytellers. Epic laws applied to all genres; thus, all oral tradition produced patterns that ensured stability and reliability, rather than innovation and change over time.

Sidebar 3.9 Axel Olrik’s Epic Laws of Folk Narrative

Axel Olrik (1864–1917) was a Danish scholar of medieval folklore at the University of Copenhagen, who described laws by which oral folk narrative was formed. The most prominent laws include:

(1) Folk narratives neither open nor close abruptly [Law of Opening and Closing];

(2) Repetition is common and events usually repeat three times [Law of Repetition and Law of Three];

(3) Scenes are limited to two speaking characters [Law of Two];

(4 & 5) Contrast is important between weak and strong; rich and poor, often embodied in twins [Law of Contrast and Law of Twins];

(6) The younger will be the more sympathetic character with the final experience of that character the most decisive [Law of Final Position];

(7) The plot follows one line of action [Law of the Single Strand]; and

(8) Similar scenes repeat [Law of Patterning].

Olrik also stressed that oral narrative folklore often has a strong visual component coupled with a unified plot that focuses on the leading or central character ("*Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung*").

Engnell applied the science of religion to the Pentateuch.[34] At the outset of his study, Engnell rejected a central axiom in the study of the Pentateuch since de Wette—that a form of Deuteronomy fueled the centralization of the cult during the Josianic reform. This hypothesis provided a key to the development of Israelite religion in classical source criticism and it continued to influence the tradition history of von Rad and Noth. Engnell countered that different views of cult centralization could be held simultaneously, so that the pairing of Deuteronomy and the Josianic reform provided no insight into the historical development of Israelite religion. In fact, Pentateuchal tradition did not allow for the recovery of any development of religion. The better way to begin the tradition-historical study was to focus on the present form of the Pentateuch and to examine the structure of the tradition. This starting point clarified two circles of tradition: the "P work" (Genesis–Numbers) and the "D work" (Deuteronomy–2 Kings). Both were formed in oral tradition over the long history of Ancient Israelite cultic practice from a variety of materials, including poetry, songs, blessings, narrative, and law. The different genres were fused together throughout the oral process of transmission and written down in the exilic or post-exilic period.

The P work included ancient material associated with the tabernacle that reflected a pro-Jerusalem point of view. The P circle of tradents were conservative in the transmission of tradition from the earliest time in Ancient Israel, through the monarchy period and into the post-exile. The tradition-historical process likely included a combination of the writing of legal material and the oral transmission of narrative. But the conservative nature of oral transmission and the constant mixing of tradition did not allow for the separation of the P work into stages of development. Engnell acknowledged that oral strata similar to J and E likely existed at one time in the tradition process, but they were fused together in transmission and no longer distinguishable. In view of this, the best way to proceed in the application of tradition history was to focus on the present organization of the Tetrateuch in the P work and to examine the entire text from a form-critical perspective. The structure revealed that the P circle of tradents had an antiquarian interest in genealogy; they focused on sacral institutions and cultic rituals; they did not advocate cult centralization. The Passover was at the center of the tradition and it represented the historicizing of an original cultic myth that was tied to an annual festival and ritual; the wilderness journey stories also emerged from the same cultic festival as stages in a ritual procession, while Moses, the leader, was idealized in royal categories. The formation of the D work was similar to that of the P work. Old and new content was placed together side by side. The process of formation likely included a combination of written legal material and the oral transmission of narrative. The D circle of tradents combined a pro-Jerusalem point of view with a conservative attitude toward the traditional material. The date of formation was 562–561 BCE in the exile (2 Kings 25).

The Albright School

William Foxwell Albright (1891–1971) taught throughout his entire career at Johns Hopkins University (1927–1958), where he trained many influential North American scholars in the twentieth century, including John Bright (1908–1995), George Mendenhall (1916–), Frank Moore Cross (1921–2012), and David Noel Freedman (1922–2008). Albright worked primarily in archaeology, but he was also an expert in the study of Semitic languages, which underwent a renaissance in the early-twentieth century, with the discovery of the library from the ancient port city of Ugaritic, located at contemporary Ras Shamra.

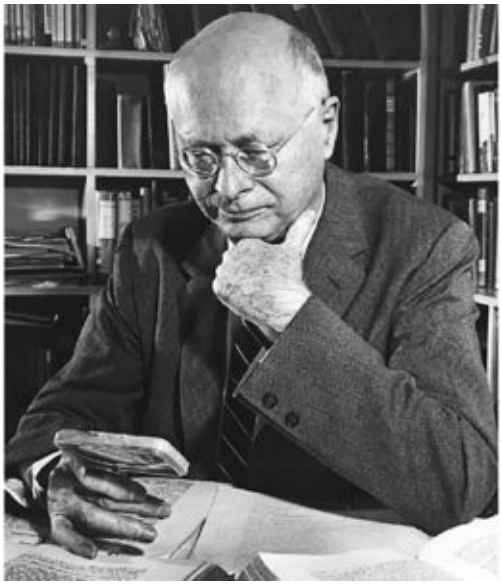

Figure 3.7 William Foxwell Albright.

The Canaanite city of Ugarit was destroyed in the late-thirteenth or early-twelfth century BCE, leaving behind numerous texts from the fourteenth–twelfth centuries written in Ugaritic, a Northwest Semitic language related to Hebrew. “Thanks to the excavation of Ugarit,” wrote Albright, “our knowledge of Canaanite higher culture has been increasing by leaps and bounds,” “beyond our wildest dreams.”[35] Three Canaanite poetic texts, in particular, were important for Albright in evaluating the formation of the Pentateuch: (1) the mythology of

the god Baal, who battles his brothers Yamm (sea) and Mot (death); (2) the Legend of Keret, who undergoes trials to secure a wife; and (3) the Legend of Danel, whose son, Aqhat, is killed by the goddess Anat for his bow.



Figure 3.8 Map: Ras Shamra (Ugarit) in Modern S

Sidebar 3.10 Ugaritic and Canaanite Religion

Ugarit was destroyed in the late Bronze Age (approx. 1200 BCE) by the Sea People, who attacked the city by ships. The excavation of the city in 1929 revealed an extensive library, including mythological texts about Canaanite religious beliefs and practices. The central religious drama is contained in the Baal Cycle, which focuses on a family or pantheon of gods: El/Elyon is the leader of the pantheon and Athirat is the wife of El; these gods have children, including Baal Hadad, the storm god; Yamm, the god of sea and river; Mot, the god of death; and Anat, the virgin goddess of war and sister or mate of Baal Hadad. The drama of the mythology is the conflict for rule over the land between Baal Hadad, aided by Anat, and Yamm and Mot; the drama is seasonal and represents the forces of fertility and chaos in the cyclical cycle of the agricultural year. The texts are translated by Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith (*Stories from Ancient Canaan*).

Albright proposed to study the poetic form of the Ugaritic mythology and legend as a window into the oldest Pentateuchal traditions, since the Ugaritic language and Canaanite culture were the matrix out of which Hebrew and Israelite culture emerged. He summarized his research *in Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*. Central to his proposal was the hypothesis that the oldest literature in the Hebrew Bible was poetry, not prose, as was also the case in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, where poetry was sung or chanted.[36] The antiquity of poetry and its importance for recovering the earliest form of Pentateuchal tradition had been obscured in modern scholarship, according to Albright, because of the predominance of the documentary hypothesis. Under the influence of Wellhausen, “the date of Hebrew poetry was lowered more and more as literary critics came to accept as normative . . . the Hegelian view of religious history as a development from ‘fetishism,’ through henotheism, to monotheism.” Within this theoretical framework, the advanced concepts in poetry, often containing monotheistic presuppositions, required a late date for composition “in the Hellenistic age

between the late-fourth and the first century B. C.” But the discovery of Canaanite poetry and the recognition of its influence in the Hebrew Bible called into question the reigning consensus.



Figure 3.9 This manuscript in Ugaritic on clay is from Ras Shamra, Ugarit, Syria, thirteenth c. BCE. The text says that SHAMUMANU, OWNER AND TREASURER OF A MARZIH, A SOCIAL BANQUETING CLUB, FROM ITS MEMBERS, THAT HE SHALL REPAY 50 SHEKELS OF SILVER THAT HE HAS STOLEN. SHAMUMANU, ANGERED BY THE ACCUSATION, THREATENS TO THROW THE CLUB MEMBERS OUT OF HIS HOUSE AND RELEGATE THEM TO A STALL, TO TREAT THEM LIKE ANIMALS. WITNESSES: IHIRASHPU SON OF UDRNN AND ABDINU SON OF SIGILDA.

The linguistic form and poetic structure of Canaanite poetry provided Albright a model for identifying ancient Hebrew epic poetry; the oldest would be closest in style to the classic Canaanite form.[37] The central feature of Canaanite

poetry was repetitive parallelism. The repetitive style included content and also fixed word pairs, such as “enemy” and “foe.” In the standard word pair, the word in the first line (“A-word”) was emphasized over the synonym in the second line (“B-word”). The standard form for writing Canaanite poetry was the tricolon in hexameter (3 3 3), which progressed to a climax (“climactic parallelism”). The following speech to Baal provides an example; it contains three lines that repeat the same content in the word pattern of abc:abd:ad´b´. The word pair “enemy and foe” runs through the tricolon and it climaxes in the third and final line.

abc:a´b´d:a´d´b´
a b c
Behold, thine enemies, O Baal
a´ b´ d
Behold, thine enemies shalt thou crush
a´ d´ b´
Behold, thou shalt crush thy foes!

The comparison of Hebrew poetry to the Ugaritic language and to the Canaanite style of repetitive parallelism allowed for the identification of the earliest Pentateuchal tradition.[38] Preservation of older forms of Hebrew and the predominance of repetitive parallelism were signs of archaic poetry. Change in the style from repetitive parallelism to the literary tropes of assonance and paranomasia allowed for sequencing the Hebrew tradition of poetry as it moved away from the Canaanite style.

Three stages of archaic poetry emerged: (1) The oldest stage of the poetic tradition (thirteenth to eleventh centuries BCE) included the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15); the Song of Deborah (Judges 5); the Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23–24); and the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33). Exodus 15 was the most ancient poem with a number of archaic linguistic forms and fully developed examples of repetitive parallelism, while Deuteronomy 33 was the latest, since assonance and paraono-masia predominate. The first stage of the poetic tradition contained the earliest version of the Pentateuch, according to Albright. The Song of Miriam (Exodus 15; also identified as the Song of the Sea) celebrated the exodus by giving voice to the monotheistic revolution associated with Moses

during the radical changes of the Amarna period. (2) The second stage (eleventh century BCE) included the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32); the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49); the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10); Psalm 72 and assorted poetic fragments (e.g., Exod 32:18; Judg 15:16; 2 Kgs 13:17; Hos 12:13–14). These poems contained only echoes of true repetitive parallelism and featured assonance and paronomasia. (3) The third stage (tenth century BCE) consisted of poems attributed to David, in which there was a further abandonment of repetitive parallelism (e.g., 2 Sam 1:18–27; 22; 23:1–7; and parts of Psalm 68). The identification of the archaic poetic tradition clarified that there was no development of Israelite religion as envisioned in the documentary hypothesis. [39]

All additional Pentateuchal tradition evolved from the archaic poetry. The first stage of development beyond the archaic poetry was the paraphrasing of epic poetic tradition into prose, after which there occurred revisions of the narrative tradition. Albright argued that even the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, originated in the poetic tradition, as a word pair in repetitive parallelism. Remnants of the word pair lingered in the Psalter, where preference for the name Elohim, in Psalms 42–83, contrasted with Yahweh in Psalms 1–41; 84–150. Albright argued that the same contrast was evident in the archaic poetry: the name Yahweh dominated in the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15); the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32); the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33); and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5); the name Elohim in the Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23–24). The distribution indicated that the contrast in the divine names did not originate in the separate prose sources, as assumed in the documentary hypothesis; it was present already in the archaic poetry.

The research in the distribution of the divine names supported an alternative supplemental view of the formation of the prose tradition in the Pentateuch. Albright argued that the archaic epic tradition of poetry was paraphrased in a prose version during the tenth century BCE “with Yahweh dominant throughout.”[40] This “J” version “was replaced in the North by an E redaction” in the ninth century BCE after the split of the Northern kingdom. In the seventh century BCE, a “new edition of the early narrative tradition was prepared, which

took J as its basis, supplementing its narrative by divergent material from the E recension." This "JE" version represented the non-Priestly literature of the Pentateuch.

Oral transmission was important in Albright's view of the formation of the Pentateuch, but in a very different manner than the Uppsala School, where oral transmission was a positive process by which the tradition grew. For Albright, oral tradition was a negative process; it accounted for literary inconsistencies as mistakes. Albright fashioned the growth of the Pentateuchal tradition on analogy to textual criticism. He concluded that comparison of the MT, LXX, and Qumran manuscripts demonstrated a pattern of shortening, rather than expansion through conflation. The hypothesis rested on both textual and theological assumptions: The reason for so few scribal glosses was that "the sacred text was exempt from such deliberate additions," but there could be "many inadvertent losses."[41] The process of shortening arose from oral transmission: "Scribes and reciters from memory were clearly conscientious in not adding to the text, though humanly fallible in dropping words, letters, phrases and even whole passages."[42] Once the process of shortening was clarified, the textual critic had a powerful tool to recover the original textual version.

The same process of shortening through oral transmission occurred in the formation of the Pentateuch. Albright wrote: "[T]he original J text has come down to our Hebrew Bible through JE and P . . . these are not in any sense independent sources, but rather very ancient recensions, all of which provide valuable clues in our efforts to reconstruct Biblical history."[43] For example, the conflict in the account of Israel's travel between Exodus 13–14 and Numbers 33 was the result of shortening in Exodus 13–14. The multiple names for Moses's father-in-law, Hobab, Jethro, and Reuel, resulted from mistakes in oral transmission. Analysis of the confusion surrounding the Midianite and Kenite clan systems led Albright to the following textual emendation: "We have only to change the vocalization from ḥôtén to ḥătán where Hobab is mentioned, and our difficulties vanish: render Num 10:29, 'Hobab, the son of Reuel, the Midianite, son-in-law (!) of Moses.'" In this way, Albright harmonized the diverse traditions of Moses's father-in-law by assigning the names to different

generations, rather than distinct sources. The interpretation represented a sophisticated version of Calvin's solution to the same problem. But unlike Calvin, Albright concluded that the multiple identities of Moses's father-in-law were "the result of scribal errors and misunderstandings," which were "further exaggerated by the unnecessary conjectures of modern literary analysts."[44]



Figure 3.10 Frank Moore Cross.

Frank Moore Cross (1921–2012) expanded the research of Albright on the Pentateuch in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (1973). He brought Albright's research into conversation with the larger fields of tradition history and the history of religions by exploring the cultic setting of the archaic poetry. Albright identified the archaic poetry of the exodus and the conquest to argue for the antiquity and historical reliability of the tradition, but he never clarified how the tradition functioned in the cultic life of the tribal league. Cross set out to address this problem. He blended aspects of the tradition-historical work of von Rad on the historical credo with the myth and ritual research of Engnell. The result was the reconstruction of the ritual of the divine warrior in the ancient covenant renewal festival at Gilgal, as the setting in life for the archaic poetry on the exodus.[45] The festival took place in the Spring; it rehearsed the Passover or the feast of Unleavened Bread as the

celebration of the exodus-conquest. Central features of the ritual were still embedded in Joshua 3–5, including the sanctification of the people for holy war; the procession of the ark of the covenant to the sanctuary; the crossing of the Jordan River as an event of conquest recalling the events of the Red Sea; the memorializing of the event of salvation with twelve stones; circumcision; and the appearance of the divine warrior.

The sequence of the festival at Gilgal indicated the original unity of the historical credo and the revelation at Sinai, against the theory of von Rad and Noth, who separated these events in the earliest traditions of tribal Israel. The ritual was unified, according to Cross, because it was grounded in historical events. Yet, the cultic celebration at Gilgal also absorbed and historicized the Canaanite mythology of the divine warrior to provide cosmic significance to the events of the exodus.

Comparison of the archaic poem of Exodus 15 and the Canaanite myth of Baal's conflict with Yamm (sea) and Mot (death) illustrated the intermixing of history and myth. The pattern of the conflict between Baal and Yamm was particularly important; it included conflict between Baal and Yamm; Baal's victory over Yamm; the kingship of Baal; the building of Baal's temple and the manifestation of his rule. Exodus 15 followed the same mythic pattern. It too included conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh; the defeat of the enemy; the building of the sanctuary at the mountain of possession; and the manifestation of eternal kingship. But there were also differences, which indicated that the early tribal league historicized the Canaanite myth. The enemy was a historical monarch, while the sea became a weapon of war, rather than the opponent. Cross concluded: "In Israel, myth and history always stood in strong tension, myth serving primarily to give a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning to the historical, rarely function to dissolve history."[46]



Figure 3.11 El, father of the gods, and an orant. Bas-relief on a serpentine stele. Late middle Syrian period, from the acropolis at Ugarit (Ras Shamra), Syria.

Cross also expanded Albright's theory of the formation of the Pentateuch as a series of revisions or supplements, rather than the combination of parallel sources. Albright limited his supplemental view of the Pentateuch to the JE tradition. Cross agreed that J and E were "variant forms in prose of an older, largely poetic Epic cycle of the era of the Judges."[47] But he extended the analysis of Albright by arguing that the Priestly work was also a "systematizing expansion of the normative JE tradition of the Tetrateuch."[48] In so doing, Cross rejected the position of Noth that P was a source, in favor of Engnell, who also argued that the "P circle" of tradents shaped JE into the Tetrateuch.

The evidence for the supplemental character of the P work was the minimal amount of narrative in Genesis and in Exodus that resulted from isolating the Priestly literature. In addition, an independent P source would lack crucial material, including an account of primordial human rebellion; the birth of Moses; the covenant ceremony at Sinai; and the Balaam story to name only the larger story episodes. In view of this, Cross concluded that the Priestly tradent fashioned the Tetrateuch by using sources, including the JE tradition; a

genealogical document similar to Genesis 5:1–32 that outlines the book of Genesis (Gen 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9, etc.); a document of wilderness travel preserved in Numbers 33 that is used to organize Exodus and Numbers (Exod 12:37a; 13:20; 14:1, etc.); and tabernacle documents (Exodus 25–27; 35–38; 40). “The Priestly trident’s documentary sources, including JE, are very close to the surface,” according to Cross. The “primary work [of the Priestly trident] was imposing the framing elements, and supplementing JE with his theological formulae and an occasional discrete document, until reaching the Sinai sojourn when his supplementation became massive.”[49]

3.4 Summary

The twentieth century witnessed a revolution in the study of the Pentateuch. The emergence of legal and mythological texts from surrounding cultures placed the study of the Pentateuch in the larger world of Ancient Near Eastern religion and law. The antiquity of these traditions pulled scholars back in time, prompting them to move behind the work of authors and written sources in the monarchy period in order to probe more deeply into the oral roots of the Pentateuch during the tribal period. The goal was to recover the earliest oral forms of Pentateuchal tradition and to identify their function in ancient Israelite religion. Form criticism paved the way; it provided agreed-upon criteria to recover individual oral sagas from literary documents, which opened a window into early family religion. Tradition history refashioned form criticism; it sought to understand larger structures of oral tradition that provided better insight into the formation of the Pentateuch within the cultic life of tribal Israel.

The quest to recover the earliest traditions of the Pentateuch led to divergent theories of archaic tradition, such as individual sagas (Gunkel); creeds (von Rad); themes (Noth); archaic poetry (Albright); and oral versions of the entire Pentateuch (Engnell). The different reconstructions of tradition were also placed in distinct settings, such as the family (Gunkel); the festival of First Fruits at Gilgal (von Rad); a covenant festival at Shechem (von Rad); the ubiquitous celebration of the exodus (Noth); the celebration of the divine warrior at Gilgal (Cross) and so forth. In spite of these significant disagreements, what unified interpreters was confidence in the ability to identify the earliest forms of the Pentateuchal tradition and to recover the original cultic setting of the material, whether in the family or in the corporate worship life of tribal Israel. These points of agreement focused Pentateuchal research throughout the twentieth century on ancient traditions in the pre-monarchical period as the creative time in the formation of the Pentateuch.

Several areas of research combined to erode the shared confidence among interpreters that the original oral traditions of the Pentateuch could be recovered

and that they could be anchored in the early cultic life of tribal Israel.

First, **the relationship between tradition history and archaeology breaks down**. The methodology of tradition history developed with the emergence of archaeological research in the early-twentieth century. The initial results of archaeology promised to recover the history of the tribes and to support the recovery of the earliest oral traditions of tribal Israel. Noth was confident that the theme of the exodus from Egypt went back to an experience of liberation from Egypt; Alt identified tribal stories from the period of Israel's earliest time in the land; Albright reconstructed the details of the conquest of the land, including the cities were destroyed. But the optimism that archaeology would support the historicity of the content of the Pentateuchal traditions broke down in the mid-twentieth century, raising questions about the recovery of tribal cultic tradition (see chapter 11).

Second, **interpreters are unable to recover the social history and structure of the tribes.** The ability of interpreters to recover the history of tribal Israel was accompanied by detailed reconstructions of the social structure of the tribes. For example, Noth proposed that tribal Israel was organized as an amphictyony, in which independent groups created loose leagues or confederations around religious sites. An example of an amphictyony was ancient Greek tribes, who maintained a religious association around cultic sites. Noth argued that the same religious confederation occurred among the Israelite tribes, who came together at shared worship sites. This social model supported the reconstruction of the early traditions of the Pentateuch as cultic legends at such sites as Shechem or Gilgal. But the refinement in anthropological methodology raised questions about the theory of tribal Israel as an amphictyony with shared worship sites. As a result, interpreters began to question the reliability of the extravagant cultic reconstructions at Gilgal or Shechem, which were required to be the transmitters of ancient Pentateuchal tradition during the tribal period.

Third, **interpreters were unable to identify ancient oral creeds**. Tradition history arose from the assumption that the Pentateuch contained ancient oral creeds. This was central to the research of von Rad, who identified the historical

credo of Deuteronomy 26 as such an oral confession. Noth agreed with von Rad and pushed his research even further back in time to recover the remnants of older oral creeds, in which the themes of the historical credo were separate. Further literary study of the historical credos by L. Rost, for example, eroded the presuppositions of tradition history, since he concluded that the credos were late literary compositions in Deuteronomic tradition, thus challenging the original tradition-historical assumption of von Rad about the oral origin of the Hexateuch (1965). The identification of archaic epic poetry as the taproot for the formation of the Pentateuch also failed to acquire widespread acceptance.

The growing questions about ancient tradition, oral transmission, and the nature of tribal worship coalesced in the late-twentieth century, prompting interpreters to move away from form criticism and tradition history as reliable methods for recovering the history and cultic practice of tribal Israel. In their place, researchers returned to the literary study of the Pentateuch, focusing especially on its late composition in the exilic and post-exilic periods.

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7. *Problem*, 1. ↲
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17. *Pentateuch*, 50. ↲
18. *Pentateuch*, 54. ↲
19. *Pentateuch*, 228. ↲
20. *Pentateuch*, 236–47. ↲
21. *Pentateuch*, 248–59. ↲
22. Main sections of the sources include: P = Gen 6:9–22; 7:6, 11, 13–16a, 17a, 18–21, 24; 8:1, 2a, 3b–5, 7, 13a, 14–19; 9:1–17. J = Gen 6:1–8; 7:1–5, 7–10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22–23; 8:2b, 3a, 6, 8–12, 13b, 20–22. ↲
23. Main sections of the sources include: P = Gen 10:1–7, 20, 22–23, 24, 31–32. J = Gen 10:8–19, 21, 25–30. ↲
24. Main sections of the sources include: J = Gen 29:31–35; 30:4–5, 7–16, 20–21, 24–43. E = Gen 30:1–3, 6, 17–19, 22–23. ↲
25. Main sections of the sources include: J = Gen 31:1, 3, 17, 19a, 20–23, 25b, 27, 30a, 31, 36a, 38–40, 46–49, 51–53a. E = Gen 31:2, 4–16, 19b, 24–25a, 26, 28–29, 30b, 32–35, 36b–37, 41–45, 50, 53b–55. ↲
26. Genesis 37–50 separates between J and E. P provides a list of Jacob's offspring (Gen 46:6–27) and a notice of Jacob's death, along with burial instructions (Gen 49:29–33; 50:12–13). ↲
27. Main sections of the sources include: P = Exod 14:1–4, 8–10, 15–18, 21–23. J = Exod 13:20–22; 14:5b, 6, 13–14, 19b, 20, 24, 25b, 27aa, 30–31. E = Exod 13:17–19; 14:5a, 7, 11–12, 19a, 25a. ↲
28. P = Exod 16:1–3, 6–27, 32–35a. J = Exod 16:4–5, 28–31, 35b, 36. ↲
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30. Main sections of the sources include: P = Num 16:1a, 2–11, 16–24, 27a, 35–50. J = Num 16:1b, 12–15, 25–26, 27b–34. ↲

31. Main sections of the sources include: J = Num 22:3b–8, 13–19, 21–37, 39–40; 23:28; 24:1–25. E = Num 22:2–3a, 9–12, 20, 38; 22:41—23:27, 29–30. ↵
32. *Rigid Scrutiny*, 3–11. ↵
33. *Rigid Scrutiny*, 12–34. ↵
34. *Rigid Scrutiny*, 50–67. ↵
35. *Yahweh*, 4. ↵
36. *Yahweh*, 2. ↵
37. *Yahweh*, 1–10. ↵
38. *Yahweh*, 10–28. ↵
39. *Yahweh*, 164–68. ↵
40. *Yahweh*, 34. ↵
41. *Yahweh*, 36. ↵
42. *Yahweh*, 35. ↵
43. *Yahweh*, 38. ↵
44. *Yahweh*, 42. ↵
45. *Canaanite Myth*, 79–90. ↵
46. *Canaanite Myth*, 90. ↵
47. *Canaanite Myth*, 293. ↵
48. *Canaanite Myth*, 293–325. ↵
49. *Canaanite Myth*, 305. ↵

Contemporary Return to the Literature of the Pentateuch

The study of the Pentateuch underwent significant change in the latter half of the twentieth century. For most of the century, Pentateuchal study was dominated by the quest to recover ancient oral tradition. This emphasis pushed the study of the Pentateuch back in time, into the tribal period and the early monarchy period, where interpreters believed that the earliest traditions arose out of the lived-experience of Ancient Israelites. Even though the quest led to divergent theories, there was a shared confidence in the stability of tradition through time and the ability of interpreters to identify and to recover the early traditional material. But growing questions about ancient tradition, the stability of oral transmission, and the nature of tribal society coalesced in the late-twentieth century, prompting interpreters to move away from form criticism and tradition history as reliable methods for recovering the history and the cultic practice of tribal Israel. In their place, researchers returned to the literary study of the Pentateuch, focusing especially on its late composition in the exilic and post-exilic periods.

4.1 Reexamining Tradition

The late-twentieth century was a time of social unrest in Western culture, when university students organized into political movements that distrusted tradition and traditional authority. The culture of criticism was focused on established forms of political power, but it quickly moved to the broader questioning of intellectual foundations. The culture of criticism was both chaotic and creative; it questioned many long-held presuppositions of research and the institutions of academic authority, whether defined by nationality, gender, race, or class. Pentateuchal study was particularly vulnerable to the new critical attitude in research. The methodologies of form criticism and tradition history accentuated the authority of tradition; they assumed that tradition was stable and reliable, and that the researcher could recover a pure form of tradition at the oral stage. Source criticism was based on a similar assumption concerning the stable character of source documents that could be recovered because of their careful preservation by redactors. These assumptions were severely challenged in the new critical climate of the late-twentieth century, where a distrust of tradition, whether oral or written, gave rise to an emphasis on cultural change, not continuity.

Sidebar 4.1 Tradition

The English word “tradition” derives from the Latin *tradere*, which means to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping, or even to surrender. Tradition is crucial in the study of history, society, and religion, since it describes inherited or customary patterns of thought and behavior often supported by stories or beliefs about the past. Tradition is the handing down of these beliefs, legends, and customs from one generation to another, creating a sense of continuity through time; it may be passed along orally or in writing. The aim of transmitting tradition is to create a sense of continuity in culture and belief. But interpreters question the stability of tradition, noting its transformation through time and even the “invention of tradition” to create a mythic past. The debates over the formation of the Pentateuch

tend to focus on different forms of folklore study or literary criticism, but they are also informed by different views of tradition even though it may not be stated. For general discussion of tradition, see Edward Shils (*Tradition*); for examples of the invention of tradition in modern Europe, see Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (*The Invention of Tradition*).

The Protestant faculties of German universities represented the center of research on the composition of the Pentateuch from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Many other Jewish and Christian scholars from Europe, Israel, and North America also contributed in important ways to the ongoing research on the Pentateuch, but the center of gravity remained in Germany. Thus, it is noteworthy and probably not unexpected that the initial unease with the traditional methods for interpreting the Pentateuch emerged in North America from researchers whose work was not centered in the Pentateuch. Separate articles in the 1960s by three presidents of the Society of Biblical Literature questioned the role of tradition in the interpretation of the Pentateuch, and in so doing, each signaled new directions of study. The three presidents were Samuel Sandmel (1961 President), Frederick Winnett (1964 President), and James Muilenburg (1968 President). The summary of the work of Sandmel, Winnett, and Muilenburg will set the stage for an examination of current trends in the composition of the Pentateuch. Although the studies were distinct in methodology and incomplete in their arguments, they accentuate four areas that influence the contemporary research on the composition of the Pentateuch: (1) the reevaluation of tradition; (2) the creative role of editors in the composition of the Pentateuch; (3) the interpretation of the present form of the text; and (4) the shift in focus from the tribal and monarchy eras to the exile and post-exile as the creative time in the formation of the Pentateuch.

Samuel Sandmel: Post-Biblical Jewish Haggadah as the Model for the Composition of the Pentateuch

Samuel Sandmel (1911–1979) received his rabbinical degree from Hebrew Union College (1937) and his doctorate in New Testament from Yale University (1949), before joining the faculty of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, OH (1952–1979). In 1961, the year of his presidency of the Society of Biblical Literature, Sandmel wrote a provocative article entitled “The Haggada within Scripture” (1961). In this article, Sandmel described two ways in which the text of the Pentateuch was lost in the act of interpretation: (1) through an overemphasis on recovering oral tradition, and (2) in the quest to discover sources behind written documents.

In each case, Sandmel concluded, “the student has embarked on an egregious tangent!”[1]

Sandmel cautioned against the overemphasis on oral tradition in the twentieth century, especially when interpreters “so stress the oral that they forget that their pursuit” is based on written documents. Compounding the problem was the prevailing assumption that oral tradition was stable and unchanging and thus available to the interpreter of the written documents. Sandmel protested that written documents were never simply verbatim transcriptions of unchanged oral tradition, since no one writes without a point of view or a purpose. He found it “a priori impossible to believe that a writer can abstain from letting at least some tiny facet of his personality enter in.”[2] The influence of writers on their subject matter meant that tradition was constantly changing as their personalities reshaped the material. The understanding of oral tradition as undergoing dynamic change over time was a departure from form criticism and tradition history, where the assumption of the stability of tradition allowed interpreters to recover the past.

Once the centrality of written texts was firmly established, Sandmel turned to the primary aim of the article: the demonstration that the documentary hypothesis was an inadequate theory of literary composition, especially its

central axiom that the Pentateuch consisted of independent parallel sources combined by a neutral editor. The problem was the same as with oral tradition; only, this time, the focus turned to the theory of the redactor, the person who combined the sources J and E, as compared to the writer of oral traditions. The assumption in source criticism was that the redactor of JE was a copyist, who worked mechanically without creativity or point of view to combine and to adjust the independent source documents. The view of the redactor as a mechanical copyist was essential for the recovery of the source documents; it reinforced the presupposition that written tradition was preserved unchanged, so that doublets in the Pentateuchal text would lead the researcher back to the independent parallel sources, whose interpretation was the goal. Sandmel wondered how such a process could even take place: “Were there two divergent documents, J and E? Did RJE sit at a desk, copying now from J, and now from E, adding a phrase here and there?” Even more troublesome was the assumption of neutrality on the part of the editor. That an editor would have no “discernable motive or viewpoint,” made “no sense”; the assumption that tradition, whether oral or written, was stable and unchanging was “an impossibility.” There was no pure form of tradition frozen in a past moment and preserved by neutral editors; tradition was rather dynamic and constantly in the process of change.

Sandmel favored a view of the composition of the Pentateuch as a process of rewriting, which conformed to the method of composition in the New Testament and in post-biblical Jewish literature. The baptism of Jesus in the Gospels provided an example. It indicated a process of rewriting, rather than multiple and divergent sources: “Mark relates that Jesus was baptized by John, Matthew appends to the narrative that John would have prevented him, while Luke relegates the matter to a subordinate clause; John omits it entirely, possibly deliberately.”[3] The stories of Abraham (Genesis 12, 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) falsely presenting their wives as sisters to foreign kings illustrated the same process of rewriting: The account in Genesis 12 is embellished in Genesis 20 in such a way that “were we to find this story in Gen Rabbah instead of Genesis 20, we would promptly recognize it as a haggada based on Genesis 12,” by which Sandmel meant the “fanciful retelling of tales” in post-biblical Judaism. Genesis

26 simply continued the process of rewriting, which extended beyond the Pentateuch into the post-biblical literature; the rabbis embellish the story of Genesis 12 even further with the addition of an angel in the bedroom of Pharaoh, who would beat him whenever he made advances toward Sarah.

Sidebar 4.2 Haggada

The interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in post-biblical Judaism includes aggadic and halakic forms of exegesis that combine to create Midrashic literature.

Halakah, "the way to walk," is the methodology used to interpret biblical laws; its aim is to make preexistent laws applicable to new situations, especially when the original form of the law is unclear or fails to address a contemporary legal matter.

Aggadah, "telling, expanding," is the methodology used to interpret non-legal biblical literature; it is often aimed at drawing out the hidden or latent meaning within a text in order to explore the full significance of a particular story.

When Samuel Sandmel describes haggada as the "fanciful retelling of tales," he is referring to the aggadic method of non-legal exegesis (he is not referring to the liturgy for the Passover Seder, which is also described as the Haggadah). For illustration of halakic and aggadic exegesis in the composition of the Pentateuch, see Michael Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*).

Gunkel identified the same process of reinterpretation at the beginning of the twentieth century. But he mistakenly restricted the process of reinterpretation to the oral stage, so that he could also adhere to the documentary hypothesis, in which tradition was frozen in time by neutral redactors. By focusing more narrowly on the process of textual reinterpretation, Sandmel underscored the incompatibility of the two approaches of composition. The theory of source criticism and the continual rewriting of traditional material were not complimentary methodologies, as Gunkel had assumed.

Frederick Victor Winnett: The Creativity of Exilic Editors

Frederick Winnett (1903–1989) was born in Ontario Canada. He graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in oriental languages (1923), earned a degree in theology from Knox College (1927), and completed his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto with a thesis on a thirteenth-century Syriac document (1928). Winnett's primary area of research was pre-Islamic Arabic, but he also maintained an interest in the study of the Pentateuch, which was the topic of his 1964 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature entitled "Re-Examining the Foundations." In this address, Winnett built on the work of Sandmel that the composition of the Pentateuch did not result from parallel sources, but from "haggadic additions" to a basic document. He agreed with Sandmel that stories such as the wife-sister episodes (Genesis 12, 20, 26) represented the reinterpretation of traditional material over time. Winnett extended the research of Sandmel in three ways; he focused on: (1) the literary unity of larger bodies of literature in Genesis; (2) the process of editing in the formation of the Pentateuch; and (3) the post-exilic date of the editorial process.

Winnett argued that the "Late J" editor was responsible for the formation of the book of Genesis. Genesis 1–11 provided the initial profile of the "Late J" editor. The literary evidence pointed to a single creative author of Genesis 1–11, as compared to past attempts to dissect the literature in order to recover separate oral traditions or distinct literary sources. The tower of Babel (11:1–9) was a prime example. Gunkel had identified two sagas in the "beautiful little legend . . . about the building of the city of Babylon": the saga about a tower (the J^{j} document) and a separate account of the building of a city (the J^{e} document). But "common sense" argued against this: "Would a tradition about the founding of Babylon make no mention of its most distinctive architectural feature, the great temple tower, Entemenanki?" Would an origin myth of New York City not include skyscrapers?

Winnett conceded inconsistencies in Genesis 1–11, "but any attempt to resolve the problem by arranging the traditions in two separate sequences raises

more problems than it solves." The better solution was to view Genesis 1–11 as the "work of a single, creative mind, who selected, adapted and arranged his materials to tell a continuous story." In contrast to von Rad, who placed the Yahwist author of Genesis 1–11 in the tenth century during the rise of the Solomonic empire, Winnett located the Late J editor in the exile at the earliest. One reason was the central role of Babylon and the identification of the nation as the Chaldeans, which Israel only encountered in the late-seventh century and into the exilic period. The aim of Late J was to place the Israelite people within the larger context of the nations and to advocate for the universal significance of Yahwism with an emerging monotheistic theory of religion.

The ancestral stories in Genesis 12–50 were likely cultic traditions during the monarchy period made up of a basic J version, with E supplements in the appendix to the Abraham stories (e.g., Genesis 22–22) and in select Jacob stories (e.g., Genesis 27, 29–30, 34), where the divine name Elohim was inserted. The Late J editor prefaced Genesis 1–11 to the ancestral traditions, while also adapting and rewriting the promises of land (Gen 12:7) and offspring (Genesis 18) that were already part of the cultic legend of Abraham. These limited promise traditions were expanded to include the themes of a great nation (e.g., 12:2–3; see also 22:14–18; 26:3–5, 24) and a more extensive vision of the promised land (e.g., 13:14–17) in order to provide hope to exilic Israel. Late J also extended the promises of nationhood and land from Abraham to Isaac (e.g., 26:3–5, 24) and Jacob (e.g., parts of Genesis 28).

Winnett proposed a radically different view of the composition of the Pentateuch. Sources disappeared, even though the language of source criticism continued with the identification of Late J and the E supplement of J. Stable tradition gave way to change through rewriting. Editors became the real authors of the literature, as compared to their passive role as copyists in source criticism. As a consequence, the central meaning of the Pentateuch was no longer located in its early traditions preserved within the present text, whether conceived as original oral tradition or source documents; it was in the later rewriting within the editorial process. The exile and the post-exile became the creative periods in the composition of the Pentateuch, since they were the time when editors were

most active. Genesis was addressed to exiles and it was intended to offer hope about a future in the land to a displaced nation. The formation of the entire Pentateuch was an even later literary creation. In the post-exile, the P editor rewrote Genesis again, anchoring Abraham in the city of Ur (Gen 11:28–31), relating Abraham to the larger nations (Genesis 14), addressing problems of justice after the events of 587 BCE (parts of Genesis 18), and elevating Yahweh to the position of the "God of heaven and earth" (Genesis 24). The P editor was also the first to combine the story of origins in Genesis with the account of Moses in Exodus and Numbers, thus creating the Pentateuch. The center of gravity for interpreting the composition of the Pentateuch was certainly not the tribal period of Ancient Israel, according to Winnett, nor was it even the monarchy period. The Pentateuch was literature of the exile and the post-exile; it provided identity to a displaced people in the larger world of the nations and the hope that they would, one day, return to their homeland.

James Muilenburg: The Literary Artistry of the Present Form of the Text

James Muilenburg (1896–1974) was born in Orange City, Iowa; he majored in the classics at the Dutch Reformed Hope College in Holland, MI (1920), after which he received a Masters degree in English literature from the University of Nebraska (1922) and a Ph.D. in the study of the history and the literature of religion from Yale University (1929). Muilenburg taught the history and literature of religion at Mount Holyoke College (1926–1932) and Old Testament at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkley, CA (1932–1945), before accepting the Davenport Professor of Hebrew and the Cognate Languages at Union Theological Seminary in New York City (1945–1962). He completed his teaching career at San Francisco Theological Seminary (1963–1971).

Muilenburg's 1968 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature was entitled "Form Criticism and Beyond." Muilenburg represented a new form of scholarship in the study of the Pentateuch. It is noteworthy that he lacked a divinity degree; in this, he was a forerunner to an emerging trend in university-based Religious Studies that would become prominent in the late-twentieth century and change the perspective for studying the Pentateuch. Clergy and rabbis had dominated the past interpretation of the Pentateuch, which tended to accentuate the formative role of tradition; as a result, the study of composition was directed to the theology, cultic practice, and the history of Israelite religion. Muilenburg did not focus on the development of tradition, whether in the form of oral sagas or written documents; instead, he narrowed his study to the poetics of particular texts. His emphasis on literary techniques of the present text was not undertaken in a vacuum. Jewish scholars such as Umberto Cassuto had already made significant advances in the study of Hebrew poetics (*The Documentary Hypothesis* [1961]; *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [1961–64]; *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [1967]). Muilenburg built on current work in poetics, but he also pursued postgraduate study in Germany early in his

career, attending the seminars of Hermann Gunkel on form criticism, with its emphasis on the recovery of ancient oral tradition.

In the presidential address, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” Muilenburg sought to bridge his interest in literary stylistics with the more tradition-based discipline of form criticism. He praised form criticism for providing a history of Israelite literature, for identifying oral genres and their function within the life setting of ancient Israel, and for introducing comparative literature into the study of the Hebrew Bible. But he also criticized the view of tradition in form criticism, with its emphasis on similarity in genres, as though tradition was preserved unchanged through time. This view of tradition forced interpreters to retrieve ancient material, while ignoring the stylistics of the present text. Muilenburg countered that there was no such thing as a “pure genre,” in which every instance is the same; instead, the literary details of any genre are always different in a specific biblical text, and as a result, “stylistic and rhetorical differences outweigh the similarities.” He identified the study of ancient poetics as rhetorical criticism.

Muilenburg’s emphasis on the poetics of individual texts shifted research away from the recovery of ancient oral or written tradition to the late composition of the Pentateuch, as was the case with Sandmel and Winnett. The focus on poetics also raised new questions about the literary devices of repetition and doublets. Muilenburg rejected the negative evaluation of repetition, as the result of editors whose primary goal was to preserve tradition, as well as the tendency to eliminate doublets into individual sagas or written sources. Sandmel had already questioned this procedure as reflecting a modern preoccupation with “paralellomania,” the presupposition that repetition in an ancient text was always the result of the combination of sources (1962).

Muilenburg reinforced the criticism of Sandmel, arguing that repetition was part of the composition of poetry and narrative throughout Ancient Near Eastern literature and that it provided “an open avenue to the character of biblical thinking.”[4] He encouraged the reader to allow the repetitive style to function in its own right, rather than being evaluated negatively or eliminated altogether in the interpretation of biblical narrative. The literary critic, Robert Alter (1935–),

illustrated the impact of this view on the interpretation of Pentateuchal narrative. In *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* Alter identified the stories of Abraham (Genesis 12, 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) falsely presenting their wives as sisters to be a conventional way of writing Hebrew narrative. He described the repetitive stories as type-scenes and cautioned the modern reader: "[W]e need to relearn something of this mode of perception that was second nature to the original audiences. Instead of relegating every perceived recurrence in the text to the limbo of duplicated sources or fixed folkloric archetypes, we may begin to see that the resurgence of certain pronounced patterns at certain narrative junctures was conventionally anticipated, even counted on."[5]

Muilenburg intended to compliment the work of form criticism with the addition of rhetorical criticism. As the title "Form Criticism and Beyond" indicated, he envisioned the study of literary devices within individual texts to build on form criticism, with its emphasis on similarity within a genre. But the two methods coexisted uneasily. The focus of form criticism on the earliest sagas could only be recovered by isolating repetitive stories and by separating them into distinct traditions, which were preserved in the text.

The emphasis on literary devices in rhetorical criticism was based on a more dynamic view of tradition, in which material was constantly undergoing change at the hands of later authors, who communicated their point of view through the poetics of the narrative. The more dynamic view of tradition as a continual process of change led Muilenburg to reject the recovery of "pure genres" in the biblical text. The overemphasis in form criticism on the recovery of pure genres had actually led to an abstract methodology, in his judgment, which detached texts from their historical context and from their rhetorical function in the biblical narrative. Attention to the stylistics of particular texts would tie the literature to specific authors and provide a more satisfying interpretation of the intended design of biblical literature, since "linguistic patterns" reveal the writer's thought, "not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it" (7).

Summary

The research of Sandmel, Winnett, and Muilenburg in the 1960s signaled a growing criticism of past theories of the composition of the Pentateuch. Although the essays were brief and programmatic, they overlapped in four areas, setting the stage for the contemporary research on the composition of the Pentateuch:

1. Tradition and change. The three studies were unified in rejecting the view of tradition as stable through time, allowing for the recovery of ancient material by modern interpreters. Tradition was conceived as the process of dynamic change over time, which often obscured the past beyond recovery.

2. Editors as authors. The dynamic view of tradition as a process of change fueled the reevaluation of editors in the composition of the Pentateuch. For Sandmel, tradition underwent change through haggadic rewriting; Winnett emphasized the creativity of the Late J editor; while Muilenburg played down the role of tradition even further by emphasizing the poetics of the present text. In each case, late editors replaced early storytellers or source writers as the creative force in the composition of the Pentateuch. Their creativity obscured the past development of the text, whether oral or written.

Sidebar 4.3 Redactors and Authors

The relationship and distinction between redactors and authors is an important topic in the study of the Pentateuch's composition. Redactors are traditionally identified as editors who combine and preserve texts; authors are more creative, they may use an established text but the aim is to write something new.

In *source criticism*, anonymous authors wrote J, E, and P; they may have used material, but they were creative in fashioning the separate documents. The redactor is an editor whose aim is to preserve the literature through the process of combining the sources. The understanding of the redactor as an editorial preservationist

supports a view of tradition as being stable through time, since the aim of redactors was to conserve authoritative documents with minimal change.

Recent *redaction-critical* approaches to the composition of the Pentateuch attribute a more creative role to redactors; they are judged to transform texts with additions to such a degree that redactors are judged to be authors in their own right. The view of redactors as creative authors leads to the further conclusion that tradition is unstable in the Pentateuch because its literature is not preserved; rather, it is constantly undergoing revision. For contrasting views concerning the definition of and relationship between redactors and authors, see Jean-Louis Ska ("A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Redactor") and John Van Seters ("Author or Redactor?" and *The Edited Bible*).

3. Present form of the Pentateuch. The creativity of editors also meant that the formation of the present text was intentional and that it required a literary explanation as part of the history of composition, which was not always the case in tradition history or source criticism.

4. Exile and Post-Exile. Finally, the emphasis on the editorial process in the composition of the Pentateuch shifted the focus of study from the tribal and monarchy eras to the exile and the post-exile, when the editors were most active.

4.2 Editors as Authors

Rolf Rendtorff: Problem with the Yahwist



Figure 4.1 Rolf Rentdorff.

Many of the methodological issues in the articles of Sandmel, Winnett, and to some extent, even Muilenburg, are expanded and refined by the German scholar Rolf Rendtorff, born in Preetz, Germany (1925–2014). His father was a Lutheran minister and Rendtorff also studied theology at the universities of Kiel, Göttingen, and Heidelberg (1945–1950), before pursuing doctoral work at Heidelberg with Gerhard von Rad (1950–1953). Rendtorff taught at Berlin (1958–1963), and then, at Heidelberg (1963–1990), thus joining his mentor, von Rad, who continued at Heidelberg through 1971.

In an address to the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in 1974 entitled “Der ‘Jahwist’ als Theologie? Zum Dilemma der Pentateuchkritik,” Rendtorff expressed his unease with the conflict in methodology between tradition history and source criticism, the same concern expressed by Sandmel. This article had an especially strong impact in England and in North America, leading to its translation in 1977 as “The ‘Yahwist’ as

Theologian? The Dilemma of Pentateuch Criticism," but it also signaled the beginning of change in the study of the Pentateuch on the European continent. Rendtorff extended his argument in the 1977 book, *Das Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (partially translated as *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, 1990). The review of Rendtorff's theory of the composition of the Pentateuch will separate into three parts: (1) the critique of the Yahwist in the work of von Rad; (2) the testing of a new model of composition in the promise to the ancestors; and (3) the implications of the proposal.

Yahwist of von Rad

Rendtorff worked in the methodology of tradition history. He viewed the growth of the Pentateuchal tradition as a process of expansion and reinterpretation from small units, like sagas, to larger complexes of tradition, such as the collection of sagas organized around a central theme. This was the position of Gunkel in developing the methodology of form criticism and it continued in the tradition-historical work of von Rad and Noth. But the tendency in both form criticism and tradition history was to restrict the process of reinterpretation in the growth of tradition to the oral stage and to shift to the documentary hypothesis to describe the intermediate literary formation of the Pentateuch, even though the two methodologies arose from very different presuppositions and asked distinct questions of the text. Tradition history started with the earliest material, whether a saga or the historical credo; it assumed the continual reinterpretation from the earliest material through the larger individual complexes and into the present form of the text. Source criticism started with the present form of the text to identify problems of literary unity; it identified parallel sources of the entire Hexateuchal story, which were combined by copyists, thus creating the problem of unity in the present text. [6]

The result of the uneasy alliance of tradition history and source criticism, according to Rendtorff, was that the process of reinterpretation, which characterized the oral stage of tradition history, was never carried through the

literary development of the larger complexes of tradition. Without completing the entire procedure of tradition history, the interpreter could not judge whether the theory of source documents was the best hypothesis for the literary formation of the Pentateuch.

Rendtorff argued that the application of tradition history beyond the oral stage and through the creation of the larger literary complexes would demonstrate that source documents were not part of the intermediate phase in the formation of the Pentateuch. Although this tension in methodology was present already in the form criticism of Gunkel, Rendtorff focused on the tradition history of von Rad to illustrate his argument, especially von Rad's view of the Yahwist, as the first author to create a literary Hexateuch. For von Rad, the starting point of tradition was the historical credo; this meant that the structure of the Hexateuch was already in place at the origin of tradition, so there was no need to relate the themes of the ancestors, Exodus, wilderness wandering, and land. The creativity of the Yahwist was the merging of the historical credo and the Sinai tradition to create the first literary version of the Hexateuch in the early monarchy period. It was Noth who separated the historical credo into four independent themes (ancestors, Exodus, wilderness, land), which required a tradition-historical explanation of how they were linked to form the larger story of the Hexateuch. This problem is absent in the work of von Rad and it is only vaguely addressed even by Noth in his hypothesis of a foundational source (G or *Grundschrift*), which he posited as the stage of tradition where the independent themes were linked, either orally or in writing, sometime in the pre-monarchy period. The G source provided the basis for the Yahwist and the Elohist documents.

Rendtorff used Noth's theory of the independent themes to evaluate von Rad's identification of the Yahwist as the architect of the Hexateuch. The problem with von Rad's theory of the Yahwist for Rendtorff was that he could not find clear criteria to support the literary unity of the independent themes at the intermediate stage of development, when the Yahwist was supposed to have created the first version of the Hexateuch. There was no one clear style; nor was there a discernible theological focus to identify a single author or to support the

existence of a unified source that extended from creation to the conquest of the land.

Testing a New Model of Composition in the Promise to the Ancestors

Rendtorff proposed that the study of the larger complexes of tradition would illustrate that the Pentateuch was made up of separate and self-contained units at the intermediate stage of development, each with its own central theme (the primeval story, the ancestors, Moses and the Exodus, Sinai, the sojourn in the desert, and the occupation of the land) and a distinct history of inner composition. Rendtorff is unclear about dating the process of composition. He suggested that the rewriting of the individual complexes of tradition likely began in the monarchy period, but the linking of the separate complexes into the continuous story of the Pentateuch was a late literary process, initially undertaken with the Priestly editing of selective individual complexes, and subsequently, with a more expansive Deuteronomistic editing that created the first continuous story of the Pentateuch.

Rendtorff sought to illustrate the independent literary development of the large complexes in the Pentateuch through the study of the divine promises to the ancestors in Genesis 12–50. His aim was to describe the editorial process by which the motifs of divine promise were used to combine smaller units of tradition into larger cycles. The interpretation would demonstrate that the tradition of the ancestors was the result of planned editing and that the editorial process was undertaken independently from other themes in the Pentateuch (e.g., Exodus, Sinai, wilderness).

Rendtorff initiated the study by separating out the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50) as special material in order to concentrate on Abraham (12:1—25:18), Isaac (Genesis 26), and Jacob (25:19–34; 27:1—28:9; 29–36). Past tradition-historical research clarified that the material on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represented distinct cycles and that each contained smaller units of tradition. The Abraham cycle included the stories of Abraham and Lot (12:1–8; 13; 18:1–16aa;

19:1–28, 30–38); the Negev Group (Genesis 20–22), and narratives unrelated to any cycle of stories (parts of 12:1–8; and 12:10—20; 15; 16, 17; 23). The Isaac cycle included the false presentation of Rebekah as sister to the foreign king Abimelech (26:7–11) and the treaty with Abimelech (26:26–31). And the Jacob cycle separated between stories of Jacob-Esau (25:19–34; 27:1—28:9; 32–36) and Jacob-Laban (Genesis 29–31).

The overview underscored the unique character of the Abraham cycle; it contained many independent stories, yet it also gave the "impression of an internal coherence."[7] The separate components to the ancestral material and the unique character of the Abraham cycle may be summarized in the following diagram:

Table 4.1 Abraham Cycle in Genesis

Abraham: 12:1—25:18	Isaac: 26	Jacob: 25:19–34; 27:1—28:9; 29–36
1. Abraham and Lot: A. Journey to Canaan: 12:1–8* (portions) B. Separation: 13 C. Divine Appearance at the Oaks of Mamre: 18:1–16aa D. Destruction of Sodom and Gemorrah: 19:1–28 E. Lot and his Daughters: 19:30–38	1. Wife-Sister Deception with Abimelech: 26:7–11 2. Treaty with Abimelech: 26:26–31	1. Jacob-Esau: 25:19–34; 27:1—28:9; 32–36 2. Jacob-Laban: 29–31
2. Negev Stories A. Wife-Sister Deception Abimelech of Gerar: 20 B. Sarah conceives Isaac: 21:1–7 C. Conflict with		

Hagar: 21:8–21
D. Conflict Over Water with Abimelech: 21:22–34
E. Sacrifice of Isaac: 22

3. Independent Stories
A. Wife-Sister Deception of Pharaoh: 12:10–20
B. War: 14
C. Covenant: 15
D. Abraham and Hagar: 16
E. Covenant: 17
F. Burial of Sarah at Machpelah: 23

Rendtorff concluded that the coherence of the tradition was the result of the distribution of the divine promises throughout the section. But he added that closer examination revealed “a bewildering variety of forms, both in content and formulation” (52–3). There were divine promises of land (e.g., 12:7; 13:14–15; 17:8), descendants (e.g., 12:2–3; 13:16; 17:1–7; 22:15–17; 24:60; 28:3), and blessing (e.g., 12:2; 22:18; 26:4), all of which appeared in several different forms. The promises also functioned differently in their narrative context; some were embedded in the narrative, while others were independent pronouncements with little or no connection to the surrounding narrative context.

The aim of Rendtorff was: (1) to sort out the different forms of the divine promises; (2) to trace the process of editing by which the divine promises were added to the Abraham traditions; (3) to describe how the editorial process related the traditions of Abraham to Isaac, Jacob, and even Joseph, thus creating one large literary complex; and (4) to demonstrate that the editorial process was confined to the ancestral tradition and not to the larger Pentateuch as a whole.[8]

The successful accomplishment of these goals would eliminate von Rad’s Yahwist as a stage in the composition of the material.

The promise of land provides a small illustration of the larger project, which

included an analysis of all forms of the divine promises in the ancestral tradition. The distribution of the promise of land throughout the ancestral stories may be illustrated in the following diagram:

Table 4.2 Promise of Land in the Abraham Cycle

	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph
Promise #1: “to you”	13:17			
Promise #2: “to you and your descendants”	13:15; 17:8	26:3	28:4; 28:13	
Promise #3: “to your descendants”	12:7; 15:8; 24:7	26:14		48:4

The promise of land occurs seven times in the Abraham cycle in three different forms that function differently in their narrative context. The separate forms provided a partial window into the editorial history of the Abraham cycle, which also linked this body of literature with Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

1. The oldest form of the promise was directed to Abraham alone and it was embedded in the narrative context: “Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it *to you*” (13:17). [9]
2. The formula was expanded with the addition of the promise to Abraham and his descendants: “For all the land that you see I will *give to you and to your offspring*” (13:15; and 17:8). This form of the promise related the story of Abraham to Isaac and Jacob. The deity promises the land to Isaac and his descendants (26:3), which Isaac repeats to Jacob (28:4), who later receives the promise directly from Yahweh (28:13).
3. The latest form of the promise of land was directed only to the descendants and it no longer functioned within the context of the narrative, but was added as an aside or a note: “Then Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said, ‘*To your offspring* I will give this land’” (12:7; see also 15:18; 24:7). This form of the promise of land extended over the entire ancestral material from Abraham through Joseph. It was introduced as a divine promise at the outset of the story of Abraham (12:7); the deity repeats the promise to Isaac (26:14); and Jacob claims the promise at the close of his life in blessing Joseph’s sons (48:4).

The absence of the divine promise of land in other traditions of the Pentateuch reinforced the conclusion that the editing was confined to the ancestral tradition. Rendtorff noted that when the promise of land reappeared at the outset of the story of Moses, it was introduced as an unknown place, occupied by foreigners, without ties to the story of the ancestors: “I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Exod 1:8). Rendtorff wrote: “There is no word which mentions that the patriarchs have already lived a long time in this land and that God has promised it to them and their descendants as a permanent possession.”[10] He concluded that there was no early version of the Pentateuch (or the Hexateuch) during the monarchy period, as was assumed in the identification of the J and E source; there were only individual themes that were reworked internally in isolation from other themes.

The linking of the separate themes was accomplished for the first time in Priestly tradition, which Rendtorff identified as a layer of editing, rather than as an independent source document.[11] Priestly texts cluster into different groups that emphasize creation (Genesis 1), covenant (Genesis 17) and the revelation of the divine name (Exodus 6–7). The cross-referencing of motifs clarified that one aim of the Priestly editing was to relate the ancestral tradition to the exodus. The theme of covenant, for example, related the end of the flood (Genesis 9); the Abraham cycle of stories (Genesis 17); the oppression in Egypt (Exod 2:23–25); and the commission of Moses (Exod 6:2–9).

Rendtorff concluded that the Priestly layer of composition was the first to link the ancestral material to the Exodus. But the Priestly layer of editing did not create the story of the Pentateuch; its scope was limited to the ancestors and to the Exodus. Later Deuteronomistic editors fashioned the Pentateuch by linking the themes of the patriarchs, Exodus, Sinai, wilderness journey, and the occupation of the land into a single continuous story. The evidence was yet another editorial layer of the promise of land in a new form, which specifically identified the three ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and guaranteed the

promise of land with a divine oath: “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die, but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he *swore* to *Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob’*” (Gen 50:24). This promise linked the story of the ancestors (Gen 50:24) to the Exodus (Exod 13:5, 11), Sinai (Exod 32:13; 33:1–3a), and the wilderness journey (Num 14:32; 32:11). Rendtorff concluded: “[T]his deuteronomically stamped layer of reworking is the first and, according to our examination so far, the only one which unambiguously views the Pentateuch as a whole and will have it understood as *one* great coherent complex” (196).

Implications

Although undertaken independently, the research of Rendtorff reinforced many of the proposals about the composition of the Pentateuch voiced by Sandmel, Winnett, and Muilenburg. The dynamic and creative role of editors in transforming the ancestral tradition illustrated the argument of Sandmel that editors were authors with a point of view, which changed the meaning of the literature. Rendtorff struggled with the proper identification of the editors. He resisted the description of their work as redaction, since this term was tied too closely to source criticism, where redactors were passive copyists. Rendtorff preferred the terms collector (*Sammler*) or reworker (*Bearbeiter*), which were employed by Noth in his commentary on Joshua to describe the creative work of editors, as opposed to the passive role of copyists in the preservation of sources. [12]

Rendtorff was vague on dating the history of the editing. His proposal that the combination of the ancestors and the Exodus took place in a Priestly editorial process placed the formation of the Pentateuch in the exile or later, as Winnett had also argued. The creativity of editors to transform the text also meant that the quest for the origin of the tradition was greatly limited. As a consequence, the goal of retrieving ancient tribal material in classical tradition history gave way to the more modest aim of identifying pre-exilic tradition from the study of post-exilic editing. Rendtorff wrote: “[A]ttention must be drawn repeatedly to

the fact that essential themes and names in the Pentateuch tradition are scarcely, or not at all, mentioned in the pre-deuteronomistic or pre-exilic period. This observation must undoubtedly be taken more seriously than it has been hitherto. In fact, this ‘silence’ in the pre-exilic literature is a certain sign that the contents of the pentateuchal tradition cannot have played the central role at this time that is often attributed to them today.”[13] The statement signals the shift to the exile and post-exile in the study of the Pentateuch that now dominates the contemporary study of composition.

Erhard Blum: Farewell to the Yahwist

The research of Erhard Blum (1950–) illustrates the influence and the refinement of Rendtorff's hypothesis of the composition of the Pentateuch. Blum studied theology at the University of Heidelberg (1976), before completing his dissertation (1982) and Habilitation (1988) with Rendtorff at Heidelberg. Selected publications of Blum illustrate three stages of development in the emerging redaction-critical study of the Pentateuch: (1) the expansion of Rendtorff's method of tradition history in the study of the ancestral traditions; (2) the identification of the two post-exilic revisions KD and KP that form the Pentateuch; and (3) the renewed emphasis on the separation of the ancestors in Genesis from the story of Moses.

History of the Ancestral Traditions

Blum expanded the research of Rendtorff in his dissertation *Die Kompositionder Vätergeschichte*, 1984. The proposal of Rendtorff was only programmatic, leaving unanswered questions about the composition of the Pentateuch, including the identification of pre-exilic tradition and the process of revision in the post-exilic period. Blum addressed many of the unanswered questions; he identified the pre-exilic features of the ancestral tradition, while also clarifying the sequence of editing in the exilic and post-exilic periods.

Blum began the study of the ancestral tradition with the Jacob stories, since they represented the oldest tradition. He identified a form of the theophany of Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28:10–13aa, 16–19a) as the origin of the tradition and traced its development into the formation of the entire ancestral tradition and the Pentateuch as a whole. The story was combined with the Jacob-Esau-Laban cycle of stories in the early monarchy period through a process of editing. The insertion of motifs, such as the different forms of the divine promises to the ancestors (e.g., the promise in 28:13b–15) or the vow of Jacob (Gen 28:20–22), created larger narrative units, until the Jacob cycle was eventually combined

with the Joseph story to create a complete biography of the northern ancestor, Jacob (Genesis 25–50). Sometime after the fall of the Northern kingdom (721 BCE), the Jacob cycle was combined with the southern Abraham cycle (Genesis 13, 18–19) through genealogy and the insertion of the motifs of the divine promise (e.g., 13:14–17; 28:13–15). This combination constituted the pre-exilic form of the ancestral tradition.

Blum refined the programmatic statements of Rendtorff that the ancestral material underwent Priestly and Deuteronomistic-like (D) editing in the exile or in the post-exile. As noted, Rendtorff was vague about the process and the time of editing; yet, he suggested that the Priestly editing provided the first combination of the ancestors and the Exodus and that the more extensive D revision fashioned the Pentateuch as a whole. Blum reversed this sequence. He argued that the ancestral material underwent three revisions in the exilic and post-exilic periods. In the exile, the tradition of the ancestors was revised to emphasize the theme of leaving the land; this revision included the divine statements to leave the land (e.g., Gen 31:13); the travel of the ancestors (e.g., Abraham to Egypt [12:10–20]; Jacob [Gen 46:1ff]); and the divine promise of land (e.g., 12:2–3; 21:13; 26:2; 28:14b; 46:3).

The literature was rewritten in the post-exilic period initially by D, and then, by Priestly editors, thus reversing the order of editing from Rendtorff. The D editors revise the ancestral material, while also incorporating it within the larger story of the Pentateuch, using the language of divine promise with oath that was similar to expressions from the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., Abraham, Gen 13:16b; 15:1–18; 16:10; 18:17–19, 22b–32; Isaac, 26:3bb–5; Jacob 28:15; 32:10–13). The Priestly editors rewrote the material again, incorporating the references to God as El Shaddai, while adding additional forms of the divine promise (e.g., Abraham, Gen 17; 21:4; Jacob, 27:46—28:9; 35:9–15; and Joseph, 48:3–7).

KD and KP Editorial Compositions

In *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (1990), Blum is less focused on

tradition history than on the literary analysis of the present form of the story of Moses as a springboard for retrieving the history of composition. The focus on the present form of the text as the starting point of interpretation introduced new methodological restrictions for recovering the history of composition history. Blum emphasized the organic relationship between synchronic and diachronic interpre-tations of the story of Moses in the following manner:

1. Interpretation must begin with a synchronic study of the coherence of the larger story of Moses. The aim was to understand the unifying literary structure and the points of complexity (literary tensions) that informed the story of Moses.
2. The diachronic study of composition must remain closely tied to the present form of the text; it targeted the points of tension in order to identify the contour (the "diachronic relief") and boundaries (the "horizon") of earlier compositions, which, in spite of having been overwritten, continued to contribute to the coherence and meaning of the text. The restricted criteria for recovering the history of composition eliminated the identifi-cation of early forms of tradition.

Sidebar 4.4 Synchronic and Diachronic

Synchronic and diachronic are complementary methods for studying language: the synchronic approach describes the rules of a language from an established point in time without evaluating its historical development; the diachronic approach exams the evolution of a language through history. The linguistic terms are carried over into the study of the Pentateuch to relate literary interpretation of the present form of the text (synchronic) with historical-critical study of composition (diachronic). For discussion, see J. C. de Moor (*Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*).

3. The story of Moses allowed for the identification of two compositions,

according to Blum, which formed the foundational structure of the Pentateuch. The first was the D composition (KD for German D *Komposition*), and the second, the Priestly compo-sition (KP for German P *Komposition*). The KD is a pre-Priestly composition, meaning that it is written earlier than KP. The identification of the two compositions built on the research from *Die Kompositionder Vätergeschichte*, where Blum had initially reversed the order of the editorial compositions from Rendtorff's proposal. But unlike the research on the ancestral material, the history of composition in the story of Moses left no room for the identification of more ancient independent stories.

Blum identified the pre-Priestly KD composition of the story of Moses in the Exodus (Exodus 1–14) and in the revelation at the divine mountain (Exodus 19–34). In the Exodus, the KD composition was most evident in the call of Moses (3:1—4:18), which Blum interpreted as a late literary insertion between the death threat to Moses by the king of Egypt (2:23a) and the divine command for Moses to return to Egypt, after the death of those who sought his life (4:19). The emphasis on the elders, the resistance of Pharaoh, and the taking of possessions from the Egyptians (3:16–22) provided motifs that allowed for the further identification of the KD composition in the death of the firstborn (11:1–3); Passover (12:21–27); and Unleavened Bread (13:3–16).

In addition to the revelation at the divine mountain, KD was also evident in the accounts of the golden calf, the intercession of Moses for the renewed presence of God, and the renewal of the covenant (Exodus 32–34). These stories shared a range of motifs, including the intercessory role of Moses (32:10; 33:11), the stiff-necked character of the people (32:9; 33:5; 34:9), the emphasis on the tent of meeting (33:7–11), the imagery of divine descent (33:9; 34:5), and the promise of land as oath (32:13; 33:1).

Comparison of motifs, such as the promise of land as oath, allowed for the broad identification of the KD composition throughout the Pentateuch, from the ancestral stories (e.g., Gen 15, 22:15–18; 50:24) through the accounts of the Exodus (Exod 13:5, 11), Sinai (Exod 32:13; 33:1), wilderness (Num 11:12), and even into the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 31:23). Although the KD composition was similar to Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, it represented a

later stage of development that was intended to function as the preface to Deuteronomy and to the Deuteronomistic History. The account of the ancestors (Genesis 12–50) and the story of Moses (Exodus—Numbers) provided a Torah for Israel in the post-exilic period.

Blum identified the Priestly (KP) version of the story of Moses in the second divine address to Moses (Exodus 6), the plagues (I—Exod 7:19–20a*a*, 21b, 22; II—Exod 8:1–3,11; III—Exod 8:12–16; IV—Exod 9:8–12), the confrontation at the sea (Exodus 14), the rebellion in the wilderness (Numbers 16), and the conflict between Moses and Yahweh at Meribat Kadesh (Num 20:1–13). The gaps in plot between the episodes indicated that the Priestly composition was not an independent source, but a revision that interacted with the KD material; yet the large quantity of literature also pointed to a complex tradition in its own right that exceeded a simple redaction of the KD version. Like KD, the Priestly composition (KP) was also intended to be a Torah for the post-exilic community that explored the theme of the presence (or nearness) of God with Israel; it extended from creation (Genesis 1) through the end of the book of Numbers.

The combination of the KD and the KP compositions into the Torah of the Pentateuch reflected a religious and political compromise among post-exilic Jews to establish local law under the direction of the Persian Empire.

Separate Origin Accounts of the Ancestors and Moses

In the same year as Blum's *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, Thomas Römer published a dissertation on the meaning of the "fathers" entitled, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der DeuteronomistischenTradition*, 1990. Römer studied with Rendtorff at Heidelberg (1984), before completing his disseration at Genf with Albert de Pury (1989). In this study, Römer moved in the opposite direction from Blum, emphasizing the independent development of Genesis and Exodus–Deuteronomy until their initial combination in Priestly tradition.

Römer built on the insight of John Van Seters and Rendtorff that the references to the "fathers" changed meaning in the formation of the Tetrateuch,

Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History. In Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, “fathers” designated a variety of different generations, including the Exodus generation, but in nearly all cases, not the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Deuteronomy 1:35 provides an example where the “fathers” is a reference to the Exodus generation: “Not one of these—not one of this evil generation—shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers.” Römer noted that only a limited number of late additions to Deuteronomy identified the “fathers” as the three patriarchal ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from the book of Genesis: “See I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land that I swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them” (Deut 1:8; see also 6:10; 9:5, 7; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4).

The emphasis on the Exodus generation indicated that Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history presupposed an origin story of Moses as a prophet (Deut 18:18), which began with the Exodus from Egypt and designated the “fathers” as the generation of the Exodus. This origin story lacked literary ties to the story of the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in Genesis. Only the later additions to Deuteronomy provided clear cross-references to the patriarchs in Genesis. The identification of an origin tradition that began with the Exodus from Egypt complimented the earlier conclusion of Rendtorff that the story of the ancestors in Genesis developed independently from the story of Moses in Exodus. The result was the identification of two separate origin traditions existing independently into the exilic period: (1) the account of the ancestors in Genesis and (2) the story of Moses leading Israel from slavery in Exodus–Deuteronomy.

In Genesis, the ancestors are indigenous to the land; while in Exodus–Deuteronomy, Israel is not native to the land, but must invade it for possession. The hypothesis of separate origin traditions was supported in prophetic books such as Hosea, according to Römer, where the tradition of Moses as a prophet was used to criticize the origin tradition of the ancestor Jacob (Hosea 12).

Römer advanced the additional theory of Rendtorff that the linking of the two origin stories was first achieved in Priestly tradition, not in the pre-Priestly

KD composition, as Blum had argued. The evidence was the multiple cross-references to Genesis in the Priestly version of Exodus. Examples included the Priestly introduction to the Exodus: “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (2:23–25). The cross-references continued in the commission of Moses: “I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name ‘Yahweh’ I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them” (6:2–8). The literary achievement of the Priestly composition was significant, according to Römer; it represented the first creative merging of the two conflicting accounts of origin into a single narrative. The story of the ancestors in the land became the prelude for the story of Moses, who led Israel from slavery in Egypt (back) to the land, and this, according to Römer, was the first instance of “salvation history” as the model of Israelite religion. All additional cross-references to the “fathers” as the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were dependent on the Priestly work.

The central role of the Priestly composition in creating the first “Pentateuchal” story meant that the additional filling out of the Pentateuch was undertaken by “post-Priestly” authors. The identification of post-Priestly editorial work was already present in source criticism in the identification of the editor of the Pentateuch, who combined the J, E, and P sources. But the influence of this redactor was in the combining of the independent sources, not in adding new literature or in providing a distinct interpretation of the Pentateuch.

Römer argued that the post-Priestly composition in the Pentateuch was extensive and that it had to be recognized as a significant transformation of the literature. The implication of this theory was that a text like the commission of Moses (3:1—4:18), which had traditionally been interpreted as a pre-Priestly composition (whether the J and E documents in source criticism or the KD composition of Blum), was actually a late post-Priestly composition, dependent on the Priestly version in Exodus 6. The literary evidence was the identification of the patriarchal ancestors as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6, 15, 16), which was dependent on the Priestly reinterpretation of the “fathers.” The reevaluation of the history of composition from separate origin traditions in Genesis and in

Exodus–Numbers to their initial combination in the Priestly composition further reinforced the conclusion proposed by Winnett and Rendtorff that the creation of salvation history in the Pentateuch was an invention of post-exilic Judaism.

The research of Römer concentrated on Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History; he only addressed the composition of the Tetrateuch in a closing section of the book. The interpretation of Genesis and Exodus–Numbers as distinct origin traditions was developed further by a number of European researchers, including Jan Christian Gertz[14] and Konrad Schmid.[15] This research also emphasized the creative impact of the Priestly composition in merging the origin stories of the ancestors (Genesis) and Moses (Exodus-Numbers) and the formative role of post-Priestly editing in the composition of the Pentateuch, which became identified as the "end or final redaction" (*Endredaktion*).

The following diagram summarizes the research of Schmid as one example of this growing body of research. The diagram illustrates the formation of the Pentateuch in four stages or phrases: (1) the original traditions of the Jacob cycle and the Moses-Exodus story; (2) the further development of the independent origin traditions of the ancestors and of Moses and the Exodus; (3) the exilic combination of the origin traditions within the Priestly composition to form the story of salvation history; and (4) the post-Priestly expansion of the story of salvation history in the post-exilic period to form the literary corpus of the Enneateuch, which begins with creation and ends with the fall of the monarchy and the loss of the land (Genesis–2 Kings):

Table 4.3 Four Phases of the Formation of the Pentateuch

Phase One: Separate origin traditions of the ancestors and of Moses

Core of Ancestral Tradition	**Core of Moses-Exodus Tradition**
Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25–35)	Exodus 2–Joshua 12

Phase Two: Development of the independent origin traditions

Origin Tradition of the Ancestors	**Origin Tradition of Moses-Exodus**
1. Central Theme: Land Possession	1. Central Theme: Land Possession
2. Promise: Present Life in Land	2. Promise-Fulfillment: Conquest of Land
3. Indigenous to Land	3. Outsiders to Land

4. Inclusive to Other Peoples in the Land
5. Peaceful
6. Israelite Identity: Genealogy
7. Focus is on Abraham
8. Southern Point of View
9. Bearers of Tradition: People of the Land
10. Literary Boundaries: Ancestor Cycle

4. Exclusive to Other Peoples in Land
5. Holy War
6. Israelite Identity: The Exodus
7. Focus is on Moses
8. Northern Point of View
9. Bearers of Tradition: DTR School
10. Literary Boundaries (Exodus–2 Kings)

Abraham

Call and Promise (Gen 12:1–9)
Abraham, Sarah, Hagar (Genesis 16, 21)
Sarah, Visitors, Sodom (Genesis 18 [minus vv. 17–19, 20a–33])

Isaac

Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)
Birth of Twins (Gen 25:19ff)
Life at Gerar (Genesis 26)

Jacob

Jacob, Esau, Laban (Genesis 27–33)
Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 35)
Joseph and Brothers (Genesis 37)
Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39)
Jacob's Family in Egypt (Gen 46:28ff; 47; 49; 50)

Exodus

Birth of Moses (Exodus 2)
Confrontation with Pharaoh (Exodus 5)
Plagues and Exodus (Exodus 7–14)
Wilderness Journey (Exodus 16ff)
Sinai (Exodus 19–24; 32–34)

Numbers

Wilderness Journey (Numbers 10ff)

Deuteronomy

Recounting of Wilderness (Deuteronomy 1–3)
Death of Moses (Deuteronomy 31–34)

Joshua

Conquest (Joshua 1–12)
Land Distribution (Joshua 13–21)
Covenant (Joshua 20–23)

Judges

1 Samuel; 1–2 Kgs 25:26

Rise and Fall of Monarchy

Phase Three: Combination of the independent origin traditions in the Priestly composition

Priestly Composition

1. The Priestly composition brings the Origin traditions of the Ancestors and Moses/Exodus together, not in a set sequence, but as different acts of creation. This development occurs in the exilic period.

2. The Priestly composition develops further the innovation of Second Isaiah, by placing the Origin traditions of the Ancestors and Moses/Exodus in a sequence. Thus, the Priestly writer is the "inventor" of salvation history, in which the promise to the ancestors is placed in a chronological sequence with the exodus tradition.
3. The Priestly composition corrects the D theology of Exodus–Kings, focusing less on clarifying the past and more on the future promises.
4. The Priestly composition links the origin traditions of the Ancestors and Moses-Exodus and inserts new material:

A. The Priestly composition incorporates earlier genealogical material (e.g. the book of Toledot, Gen 5:1) into a larger literature structure of Genesis, which aids in linking the Ancestors and the story of Moses-Exodus.

B. Two Central Covenants

(1) Noah (Genesis 9)

(2) Abraham (Genesis 17)

C. Covenant of Abraham is Historicized

(1) Growth of Israel into a Nation (Exod 1:7)

(2) Promises of Covenant and Land (Exodus 6)

(3) Promise of Land is focused more on divine indwelling with the people, than land possession (Exod 29:45)

(4) The Ancestors and Moses/Exodus become two epochs of revelation, resulting in changes (the promise of land goes beyond Genesis; and salvation history takes on a prophetic perspective—requiring future fulfillment, since the promise to Abraham is broken)

Phase Four: Post-Priestly expansion to form the Enneateuch

Post-Priestly Redaction

1. A further interpretation of salvation from a prophetic perspective. This revision occurs in the post-exilic period under the influence of Persian rule.

2. The thematic horizon of the post-Priestly redaction is the history

spanning Genesis–2 Kings. The central texts of the post-Priestly redaction include:

A. Covenant and Promise to Abraham (Genesis 15)

B. Commission of Moses (Exod 3:1—4:18)

C. Covenant at Shechem (Joshua 24)

D. National Crisis of Israel in Egypt (Gen 50:25ff; Exodus 1)

3. The post-Priestly texts are related by themes and motifs; they indicate an awareness of the Priestly composition and reinterpretation, focusing on the following themes: the further accentuation of the ancestors and Exodus; a presentation of God as savior from death; the promise of land to the ancestors as oath; faith; the importance of prophetic leadership (Abraham, Moses, and Joshua); and a focus on Abraham as a character who represents compromise between competing groups.

4. The post-Priestly redaction results in a new two-part structure to salvation history:

A. Salvation History (Genesis–Joshua)

B. Downfall of Salvation History (Judges–2 Kings)

C. Central to this structure is the repetition in the passing away of a generation (Exod 1:6–8 and Judg 2:6–10)

Blum revised his view of the composition of the Pentateuch to account for the new emphasis on the creative role of the Priestly composition in forming the Pentateuch and the identification of significant post-Priestly editing. Blum had argued that the insertion of the non-Priestly call of Moses (Exod 3:1—4:17) was part of the KD composition and that it linked the ancestors (Genesis) and Moses (Exodus–Numbers) into a single story in the post-exilic period. This conclusion favored the creation of the story of salvation history prior to the Priestly composition (KP). In the article "*Die literarische Verbundung von Erzvätern und Exodus: ein Gespräch mit neueren Endredaktionshypothesen*," Blum modified his theory to accommodate the more formative role of the Priestly composition that was advocated in the most recent research on the Pentateuch. He argued that Exodus 3:1—4:17 contained two stages of composition: (1) the KD composition

of the call of Moses in Exodus 3; and (2) the post-Priestly expansion in Exodus 4:1–17, where the theme of disbelief from the Priestly version of the call of Moses (Exod 6:9) was developed further ("thematized") in the story.

The result was three stages of composition in the formation of the Pentateuch: (1) The KD version of the call of Moses (Exodus 3) was unrelated to the account of the ancestors in Genesis; it began in Exodus; (2) the KP composition with its version of the call of Moses in Exodus 6 was the first to combine the separate origin stories of the ancestors (Genesis) and Moses (Exodus–Numbers); and (3) the post-Priestly composition (Exod 4:1–17) expanded the theme of "disbelief" from the Priestly version of the call of Moses (Exod 6:9).

Summary

The evaluation of editors as authors in contemporary research is in the initial stage of research. There remain significant disagreements on the identity and number of the editors; the literary process of composition, especially the prominent role assigned to the Priestly composition; the scope of the literary works, whether redactors are confined to the Tetrateuch, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch; and the purpose of the writing, whether the aim of the Pentateuch is for identity formation, education, worship practice, or a local law book for Second Temple Jews. In spite of the differences among interpreters, the reevaluation of editors as authors transforms the study of the Pentateuch in three ways:

1. **The sources J and E of the documentary hypothesis are replaced by editorial rewriting of Pentateuch material**. The identification of the separate origin traditions of the ancestors (Genesis) and of Moses (Exodus–Numbers) eliminates the J and E sources of the documentary hypothesis, since they presuppose a unified account of the Pentateuchal story already in the monarchy period.
2. **Tradition is reevaluated as a process of continual change through time as editors rewrite texts**.
3. **The exile and post-exile become the formative periods in Israelite religion and literature**. The redaction-critical models for the composition of the Pentateuch locate the story of salvation history in the exile and post-exile, as the accomplishment of the P source or Deuteronomistic editors, as compared to the tribal period in traditional history or the era of the monarchy in source criticism. The absence of salvation history in these earlier periods suggests that the pre-exilic religion of Israel had more in common with its neighbors, as one more version of a tribal and monarchic religion with a national god, and that the uniqueness of Mosaic religion in the story of salvation history is an innovation in the exilic and post-exilic

periods. Schmid writes: “The paradigm of discontinuity [in salvation history] is not a peculiarity of ancient Israel but rather a characteristic feature of Judaism of the Persian period, which projected its ideals back into the Hebrew Bible.”[16]

4.3 Response to the Social Trauma of the Exile

John Van Seters: Exilic Yahwist

The traumatic experience of the exile plays a significant role in the modern historical-critical study of the Pentateuch. In source criticism, the exile played a prominent role, signaling the culmination of the composition of the Pentateuch. The exile was the crucial event that transformed the dynamic form of Yahwism in the J and E sources into the legal religion of the P source. Nineteenth-century source critics evaluated this process negatively as the loss of creativity and freedom in religion, as post-exilic Yahwism became detached from its more natural setting of the land.

Sidebar 4.5 Exile and Trauma

Exile and Trauma have emerged as formative topics of study in recent biblical research. The exile describes the diaspora experience of Judeans after the Neo-Babylonian destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE, which lasted through the downfall of the Babylonians by the Persian ruler Cyrus (539 BCE). Daniel L. Smith-Christopher clarifies that the Babylonian exile must be studied as a two-sided experience—it is both an historical human disaster as well as an event that gave rise to formative social and religious responses that shape biblical literature (*A Biblical Theology of Exile*). David Carr adds that the disaster of the exile may be understood as the experience of group trauma, in which catastrophic events overwhelm the ability to cope, thus shattering previously established identity and forcing communities to come to a new understanding of themselves through indirect reflection and writing. The reformulation of the promises to Abraham in the Pentateuch would provide an example of an indirect response and reflection upon the trauma of the exile (*Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origin*).

The emphasis on the exile in contemporary research is just the reverse. It

abandons the view of religion as a decline from a spontaneous to a legal form, and instead, interprets the exile as the creative force in Israelite religion and in the composition of the Pentateuch. The trauma of the exile becomes the catalyst for the composition of the Pentateuch.

The emphasis on the exile as both a traumatic and a dynamic event that influences the composition of the Pentateuch was first suggested in the research of Winnett. He argued that the "Late J" editor wrote in the wake of the social catastrophe of the exile and that this author was responsible for the formation of the book of Genesis. He noted tensions in the present form of the text, but resisted the past attempts to resolve literary problems through the identification of separate sources originating from the period of the monarchy. He advocated, instead, "a single, creative mind" that "selected, adapted and arranged [the] materials to tell a continuous story." The aim of the author was to place the Israelite people within the larger context of the nations in order to advocate for the universal significance of Yahwism.

Many subsequent interpreters also highlight the exile as a catalyst in the composition of the Pentateuch, employing different identifications for the literary work and distinct forms of composition. Examples include Reinhard G. Kartz, who identifies the exilic JE composition as including a form of Genesis–2 Kings[17]; Christoph Levin locates the redactional composition of the Yahwist history in the exile[18]; Joseph Blenkinsopp identifies a D editing of the Pentateuch in the exile[19]; and R. N. Whybray also identifies the non-Priestly composition of the Pentateuch in the exile, but refrains from any particular name (221–42). These examples are representative of a larger trend in Pentateuchal research.

The most prominent advocate for the identification of an exilic historian is John Van Seters; his work represents the most thorough development of Winnett's hypothesis. Van Seters studied the Ancient Near East at the University of Toronto (BA, 1958) and at Yale University (MA, 1959); he also pursued theological study at Princeton Theological Seminary (BD, 1962), after which he returned to Yale University to complete his doctoral work (PhD, 1965). The

research of Van Seters will provide illustration of the growing emphasis on the exile as the creative and crucial moment in the composition of the Pentateuch.

Van Seters worked within the framework of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis, in which Noth argued that a single author had fashioned a continuous history from Moses (Deuteronomy) through the fall of Judah (2 Kings) during the exile. The purpose was to account for the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of the land. The author was a compiler, who adapted and arranged source material in composing the history. The identification of the Deuteronomistic History led Noth to the further conclusion that the Tetrateuch (Genesis to Numbers), rather than the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy), comprised the core literature of origins. Noth argued that the story of origins was already written in the early monarchy period within the J and E sources.

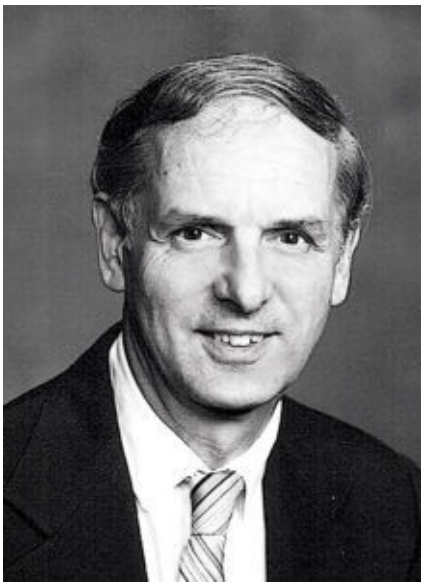

Figure 4.2 John Van Seters.

The identification of the Tetrateuch and the Deuteronomistic History was also the starting point for Van Seters, but he reversed the history of composition from Noth. Van Seters argued that the Tetrateuch was written later than the Deuteronomistic History, that it too was the product of the traumatic experience of the exile. But unlike the tragic vision of the Deuteronomistic history, which sought to account for the downfall of the kingdom, the Tetrateuch was composed

to provide a more hopeful analysis of the loss of the land by focusing on the unconditional promises to the patriarchs as a way forward. Van Seters identified the author as the exilic "Yahwist." The review of Van Seters will include: (1) his view of tradition and social change, and (2) the composition of the Pentateuch as a process of arrangement, adaptation, and supplementation.

Tradition and Social Change

Tradition is essential to Van Seters's interpretation of the exilic Yahwist author. He wrote: "Tradition is a key word in biblical studies today."[20] But unlike source critics and tradition historians who identified tradition with religious practice and assumed its stability through time, he focused on the social role of tradition to form cultural identity during times of radical social change.[21] Van Seters was particularly interested in the role of tradition and social change in literate societies, since this was the social setting of the exilic Yahwist author. In oral society tradition maintains a sense of homeostasis because the fluidity of orality and memory allows for change without a sense of discontinuity. But in a literate society, such as exilic Israel, the different stages of historical time accumulate and are not forgotten. "The result," according to Van Seters, "is that both for a particular author's work and for the accumulated historical tradition as a whole the tradition takes on the character of a 'palimpsest composed of layers of belief and attitudes belonging to different stages in historical time.'"[22] The Yahwist composition of the Pentateuch represents the complex role of tradition during the radical social change of the exile; it preserves outdated and contradictory material in a single literary work, which creates the awareness of historical process, while also giving rise to the critical evaluation of the past.

The comparative study of history writing in the ancient world refined the function of tradition in the Yahwist's work (*In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History*). History writing, for Van Seters, is "the intellectual form in which civilization renders account to itself of its past."[23] It is a form of tradition that cannot be restricted to the cult, the religious realm, or even to laws or genealogies. History writing incorporates

the past in creative ways to examine the causes of present conditions often related to tragic events.[24] Herodotus provides illustration. He was part of the intellectual elite, who wrote with a national focus to fortify belief, create identity, explain the causes of events, place authority in persons and institutions, and critically evaluate the past or the customs of different people; his goal was to evaluate the causes of the Persian war.[25] The Yahwist wrote in the same genre; he too was a historian writing in the wake of the exile. His aim was to examine the causes of the exile and to refashion individual stories of the patriarchs into a broad history of origins that could function as a resource for a new understanding of national identity.[26]

Composition as Arrangement, Adaptation, and Supplementation

Van Seters focused, in particular, on the Abraham stories to identify the Yahwist's method of composition and the time of writing. The Abraham tradition consists of a series of compositions in which "each later writer is directly dependent upon the earlier level of tradition."[27] The conclusion is based on the evaluation of the present form of the narrative. The Abraham tradition was not a unified narrative by a single author because of the plurality of material, such as the multiple versions of the wife-sister stories (Genesis 12, 20, 26) or the two accounts of covenant (Genesis 15, 17). The diverse material was held together artificially by means of the narrative framework. The central problem of interpretation is to account for the relationship of the multiple stories to each other.[28] Van Seters argued that the literary formation of the Abraham tradition was an interdependent process, in which "each successive stage of the literary development had access to the previous scribal tradition."[29]

The wife-sister stories (Genesis 12, 20, 26) provide illustration of composition. Genesis 12 is the oldest version of the wife-sister stories; it conforms to Olrik's epic laws of folktales (see ch. 3, pp. 116–17). The plot includes a crisis (famine), a problem (the wife's beauty), a threat (the potential death of the husband); the solution (the lie to act as brother and sister); the initial

success (wealth of the patriarch), the unexpected consequence (the intervention of God), and the resolution (expulsion). The folktale can be read independently from its larger literary context.[30] Genesis 20 does not share the folktale character of Genesis 12, nor does it conform to the epic laws of Olrik: it does not begin with a problem; there is no famine, and hence, no reason for Abraham to travel to Gerar; nor is there a threat to the patriarch. As a result, the abrupt statement, “She is my sister,” is a blind motif without meaning in the narrative setting (171–75). Genesis 20 is a deliberate literary recasting of the folktale in Genesis 12 for moral and theological concerns that are part of a larger story cycle centered only on Abraham. Genesis 26 is dependent on both Genesis 12 and 20.[31] Genesis 26:1 refers directly to both Genesis 12 and 26: “Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham (see Genesis 12). And Isaac went to Gerar to King Abimelech of the Philistines (see Genesis 20).” “This one verse is enough to establish the perspective of the writer,” whom Van Seters identifies as the Yahwist. “He has no interest whatever in the folktale but only in the use of previous narrative elements to construct a history of Isaac” in order to link the two patriarchs into a larger multi-generational story (178).

The Yahwist’s re-creation and expansion of the Abraham tradition occurred in the exile. Van Seters noted that Abraham plays no significant role in the prophetic literature before the exilic period, nor are the ancestors combined into a single tradition outside of the Pentateuch before this time. He cites the prophet Ezekiel as the period of transformation in the tradition of Abraham. On the one hand, the exilic prophet identified the Exodus generation as the ancestors who receive the promise of land (Ezek. 20:3), thus anchoring the tradition of election in the story of the Exodus, as is the case in the book of Deuteronomy. On the other hand, Ezekiel also contained the earliest reference to Abraham in the prophetic literature, as a symbol of hope for the future possession of the land (Ezek 33:24). Abraham also appears in the later exilic writing of Second Isaiah in a more developed presentation, where he receives a unique blessing (Isa 51:2), an unconditional promise of election (Isa 41:9–10), and is linked with the ancestor Jacob: “Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my

friend” (Isa 41:8). The confessional reformulation of Abraham by the Yahwist provided a new identity for Israel as a people without a monarch, who yet had hope for a return to the land based on the unconditional promise of land to the patriarchs.

4.4 Refinement of the Documentary Hypothesis

The documentary hypothesis continues to play a prominent role in the study of the composition of the Pentateuch. Many interpreters follow, in general, the identification of the J and E sources from the monarchy period; the D source from the Josianic reform at the close of the monarchy period; and the P source from the post-exilic period. The traditional view of the documentary hypothesis also includes the active role of an early redactor who combined the sources J and E in the monarchy period, a later redactor who merged the JE document with D and P in the post-exile, and a final redactor who created the Pentateuch.[32] Two reevaluations of the documentary hypothesis have also influenced the interpretation of the Pentateuch: (1) the re-dating of the P source from the exile to the monarchy period; and (2) the limitation of the role of the redactor(s) in the combination of sources.

Reform of Hezekiah and the P Source

The documentary hypothesis placed the composition of the Priestly source in the post-exilic period, judging it to represent the priestly theocracy of the second temple. De Wette's insight that the demand for centralized worship in Deuteronomy took place during the Josianic reform was pivotal for Wellhausen's dating of the P source after the monarchy period. He noted that the demand for the centralization of the cult in Deuteronomy was resolved by the time that the P source was composed, since it is assumed throughout the document. The separation of the Zadokite priests from the Levites by the exilic prophet Ezekiel (44:4–14) provided an additional benchmark for placing the P source later than the exile, since the P source represented a further development of the separation of the Aaronide priests from Levites (e.g., Exodus 28–29; Numbers 3–4). Wellhausen broadened his research further to include the conception of the tabernacle cult, the hierarchy of the cultic personnel, the tendency to archaize, and the fixing of the festivals to specific times, thus detaching them from nature, to conclude that the transformation of cultic practice in the P source likely began in the exile with Ezekiel and culminated in the post-exile under the leadership of Ezra (Nehemiah 8–10).

The documentary hypothesis sought to identify literary texts and their authors; it did not probe more deeply into the nature of religious practice before the time of composition. The emergence of tradition history sought to fill in this gap by recovering early forms of cultic practice, especially those that influenced the formation of the J and E sources. The cultic rituals behind the Priestly source also came under limited study. For example, in his investigation of *Israelite Religion*, Helmer Ringgren noted that the tradition-historical study of the priestly laws of sacrifice in Leviticus 1–7 reached back into the monarchy period; he cautioned, however, that the material could only be used indirectly because of the rewriting of sacrifice in the P source during the post-exile (pp. 166–7). Georg Fohrer agreed; he too stated that the sacrifices in Leviticus 1–3 derive from the period of the monarchy and that the original form of each sacrificial practice

could be recovered by removing the introductory formulas, which provide the narrative context in Leviticus, and by changing the direct speech to third-person discourse.[33] Yet, he also added that the incorporation of the pre-exilic sacrifices into Leviticus did not signify a point of continuity with pre-exilic religion, because “the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the Exile, marked a decisive turning point that had a major effect in the realm of the cult.”[34]

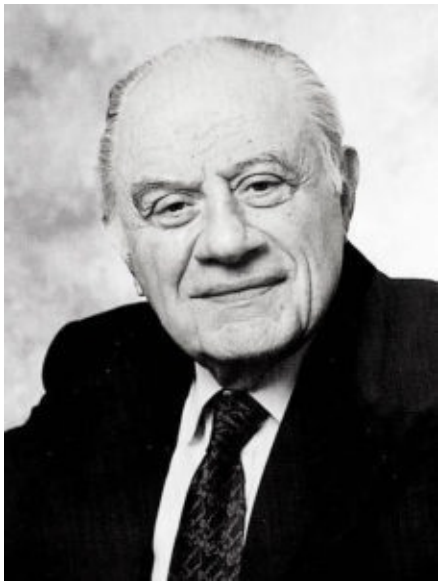

Figure 4.3 Menahem Haran.

Menahem Haran (1924–2015) disagreed with the view of tradition that separated the priestly cultic practice in the P source from the period of the monarchy; he also disagreed with the late composition of the P source. He argued that the P source reflected the cultic practice of the monarchy.

Haran received an MA (1947) and a PhD (1956) in Bible from the Hebrew University, where he eventually assumed the Yehezkel Kaufmann Chair of Bible Studies (1968–1993). Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963) represented a counter-voice in the early-to-mid-twentieth century to the classical version of the documentary hypothesis (*The Religion of Israel*). Kaufmann adhered to the hypothesis of the JE, D, and P sources, but he interpreted their composition and internal relationships differently. He rejected the developmental view of Israelite religion, which traced a progression from multiple cultic sites in JE, through the

centralized worship and monotheism in D, to the detachment of the cult from nature in the post-exilic P source. Kaufmann argued, instead, that Mosaic monotheism was a unique development at the outset of the history of Ancient Israel. This unique perspective produced all of the literature of the Pentateuch, which eliminated the possibility of evolutionary development in the religion of Ancient Israel. He also argued that the P source was written before Deuteronomy; that it did not advocate centralized worship; and that it was the law code for worship at the high places.

Haran proposed a modified version of Kaufmann's interpretation of the documentary hypothesis in *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (1978). He too argued that the P source was not a post-exilic composition, since it lacked a cultic and social setting in this period; the post-exilic cult lacked the ark, the cherubim, the Urim and Thummim, anointing oil, and even the contagious view of holiness that permeates the P source. These were cultic realities in the monarchy period; they were all indispensable to the rituals of the first temple in Jerusalem. Thus, when the utopian characteristics of the P source were removed, such as their idealistic setting in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, the rituals reflected the cultic practice of priests in Jerusalem during the monarchy period. In fact, Haran concluded that all the sources of the Pentateuch were composed in the monarchy period. The sources J and E preceded P. The P source was written during the reign of Hezekiah, while the D source emerged at the close of the monarchy period during the Josianic reform. Although the P and D sources did not have a literary relationship, they both advocated for the centralization of worship in the monarchy period.

Unlike Kaufmann, Haran recognized the emphasis on cult centralization in P as in D. The shared focus, however, was not the late reaction of the post-exilic P source to D. Instead, the P source reflected its own social development within the Jerusalem temple after the fall of the Northern kingdom (722 BCE), which introduced new tensions in the priesthood and in cultic practice. Haran argued that the view of the cult in the P source took shape during the reforms of Hezekiah (716–687 BCE) and that the priesthood of the Jerusalem temple wrote the P document. The P source introduced the separation of the Levitical class

from the priesthood and the centralization of worship as a response to the social instability in Jerusalem after the fall of the Northern kingdom, which, according to the Chronicler, prompted the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29–32). Haran added that the P source remained a semi-esoteric document confined to the ritual practices of the Jerusalem temple throughout the monarchy period, which accounted for its lack of impact during this time or during the Josianic reform. The P source acquired more social and cultic influence in the post-exile, when Ezra made it public through the process of canonization.

The pre-exilic date for the composition of P received support from the research of Avi Hurvitz, who investigated the linguistic changes between the Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) of the monarchy period and the Late Bible Hebrew (LBH) that emerged during and after the exile.[35] In classical source criticism, the separation of the Zadokite priests from the Levites in Ezekiel 44:4–14 was judged to be a time of transition in the priesthood that eventually resulted in the distinction between Aaronide priests and Levites in the P source of the post-exile. Hurvitz compared the priestly terminology in Ezekiel 44 with the Priestly source to classify the Hebrew in each body of literature; he concluded that Ezekiel represented the time of transition from CBH to LBH and that the language of the P source did not yet exhibit the same changes. On this basis, he concluded that Ezekiel 44 was later than the P source, thus reversing the historical relationship of the texts from classical source criticism; his linguistic conclusion supported Haran's earlier date for the P source in the monarchy period.

Other interpreters built on the research of Haran. Richard Elliot Freidman, for example, followed the research of Haran in general, while also adding modifications.[36] He too identified the P source with the conflicts at the time of Hezekiah. But Friedman also argued that the theme of cult centralization was an urgent topic in the P source, and thus, it was not simply assumed as Wellhausen concluded. Friedman also departed from Wellhausen in arguing that the tabernacle structure was a feature of the Jerusalem temple and not a fiction from the post-exile. In addition he concluded that the composition of the P source was dependent upon the content and the order of the JE document and that the P

source was written as a critical response to the prophetic focus of the JE document in order to defend the Aaronide priesthood (e.g., Numbers 16).

Israel Knohl provided yet another interpretation of the P source as a composition from the monarchy period; but his interpretation moves further away from the classical form of the documentary hypothesis.[37] Classical source criticism had always identified at least two separate bodies of Priestly literature: the extended narrative of the post-exilic P source and an older body of law entitled the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26).

Knohl reversed the literary relationship between the P source and the Holiness Code; he also expanded the presence of the Holiness Code throughout the P source. The P source (designated Priestly Torah) represented early priestly tradition in the monarchy period; it advocated the point of view of temple priests, who were focused inwardly on esoteric cultic practice without exploring the ethical implications of sacred ritual; this is similar in many ways to Haran's position. The emphasis on holiness and ethics in the Holiness Code (designed Holiness School) represented the reformation of the esoteric ritual practices of the Jerusalem priesthood in response to the prophetic criticism during the reform of Hezekiah.

Knohl argued that the literature of the Holiness School extended beyond the law-code of Leviticus 17–26 to include a layer of editing throughout the P source, thus incorporating an extensive redaction-critical model into the interpretation of the P source. The redaction sought to relate cultic rituals to broader social issues. Examples of the Holiness School's revision of the Priestly Torah include the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7–8, 14), the call of Moses (Exod 6:2—7:6); the teaching on the Passover (Exod 12:1–20, 43–49), sabbath law (Exod 31:1–17), and the instruction concerning the Levites (Num 1:48—5:10). The editorial revisions expanded the cultic holiness of the Priestly Torah to include the emphasis on social holiness in the Holiness Code that is aimed at the laity.

Identifying the J and E Sources and Clarifying the Role of Redactor(s)

The J and E sources are often compared and contrasted in the documentary hypothesis. But the identification of the E source did not originate from a comparison with the J source. Ilgen and Hupfeld identified the E source by studying the different styles of literature in Genesis where the divine name Elohim appeared; the comparison in literary styles eventually led to the separation of the E and P sources, followed by Wellhausen's late dating of the P source to create the documentary hypothesis: J, E, D, P.

Once the E source was identified, however, the contrast between E and P eventually gave way to the comparison between J and E, since these sources represented the oldest compositions from the monarchy period. Interpreters agreed that the two sources contrasted in the use of the divine name: J used the name Yahweh beginning with creation (Genesis 2–3); while E presented a developmental view of the divine name, in which Elohim appeared to the ancestors (e.g., Genesis 20) and Yahweh to Moses (Exodus 3). The divergent plots for the revelation of the divine name Yahweh, along with the multiple occurrences of key stories, like the episodes of the wife-sister deception (J in Genesis 12 and 26 and E in Genesis 20), provided sufficient evidence for source critics to conclude that J and E were two parallel sources, even though the E material was incomplete and the thorough separation of the sources remained difficult. Wellhausen, for example, often referred simply to JE in his identification of the non-Priestly Pentateuchal sources and this practice has continued into the present time.

Richard Elliot Friedman has sought to refine the literary and the historical criteria to separate the J and E sources more completely, stressing that no one method can be used to achieve the goal. The separation of the J and E sources and the identification of their composition in the monarchy period requires a combination of six divergent methodologies: four are literary (consistent content; terminology; connection to other literature; and narrative flow) and two are

historical (linguistic analysis of Hebrew and the relationship of the sources to history). The convergence of the literary and the historical methodologies provides comprehensive support for the identification of the J and E sources.[38]

The most important literary method for separating and identifying the J and E sources is the consistent content of each document, especially regarding the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, since each has "a different idea of when the name YHWH was first revealed to humans."[39] Other distinctions in content include sacred objects, such as the ark in J (Num 10:33–36) and Moses staff in E (e.g., Exod 4:2—5:17). Terminology is also different in each source, such as the mountain of God and Horeb in E and Sinai in J, as well as the exclusive use in J of such terms as Sheol, the word "to suffer," or the word "to know" to indicate sex.[40] The comparison of consistent content, terminology and parallel stories results in the following separation of parallel J and E stories[41]:

Table 4.4 J and E Source Content Compared

	J Source	E Source
Genesis		
Wife-Sister Stores	Abraham: 12:10–20 Isaac: 26:6–14	Abraham: 20:1–18
Hagar and Ishmael	16:1–2, 4–14	21:8–19
Naming of Beersheba	26:15–33	21:22–31
Jacob at Bethel	28:10, 11a, 13–16, 19	28:11b–12, 17–18, 20–22
Joseph sold into Egypt	37:2b, 3b, 5–11, 19–20, 23, 25b–27, 28b, 31–35; 39:1	37:3a, 4, 12–18, 21–22, 24, 25a, 28a, 29–30
Exodus		
Yahweh commissions Moses	3:2–4a, 5, 7–8, 19–22; 4:19–20a	3:1, 4b, 6, 9–18; 4:1–18, 20b–21a, 22–23
Theophany at Sinai/Horeb	19:10–16a, 18, 20–25	19:2b–9, 16b–17, 19; 20:18–21

But literary comparison alone cannot identify the entire J and E sources. One reason is that the redactor of JE was aggressive in combining the sources, often

reworking or deleting source material.[42] Another reason is that each source contains unique stories absent in the other, or the sources are so intermingled that separation is no longer possible. The J and E sources remain inseparable, for example, in the Abraham covenant (Genesis 15) and in the account of Jacob's twelve sons (Genesis 29; 30; 35). Each source also contains stories that do not appear in the other. Only the J source, for example, includes the primeval events of creation, humanity, and the flood (Genesis); the ancestral stories of Abraham and Lot as well as Jacob and Esau (Genesis); the confrontation at the Red Sea (Exodus); the spy story (Numbers); and the sin at Baal Peor (Numbers). The E source, by contrast, alone contains the story of the plagues and the Passover (Exodus), the stories of rescue with water or food in wilderness (Exodus and Numbers); and the appointment of Joshua (Deuteronomy). The following diagram illustrates central stories that appear only in the J source (column 1); the E source (column 2); or are so intermixed that separation is not possible with literary methodology alone (column 3).[43]

Table 4.5 Further Literary Examination of J and E Sources

	J Source	E Source	JE Sources
Genesis			
Creation	2:4b–25		
Genealogy of Adam	4:17–26		
Flood	6:5–8; 7:1–5, 7, 10, 12, 16b–20, 22–23; 8:2b–3a, 6, 8–12, 13b, 20–22		
Genealogy of Shem	10:21–31 (mixture of J and P)		
Migration of Abraham	12:1–4a		
Abraham and Lot Separate	13:5, 7–11a, 12b–14		

Abrahamic Covenant				15
Prophecy of Isaac's Birth	18:10–14			
Jacob, Esau and Jacob's Departure to the East	27:1–45; 28:10			
Jacob's Twelve Sons				29:32–35; 30:1–24; 35:16–20
Jacob's Name Change		32:25–33		
Exodus				
Moses, Pharaoh and the Plagues		5:3—6:1; 7:14–18, 20b–21, 23–29; 8:3b–11a, 16–28; 9:1–7, 13–34; 10:1–19, 21–26, 28–29; 11:1–8		
Passover			12:21–27, 29–36, 37b–39	
Red Sea	13:21–22; 14:5a, 6, 9a, 10b, 13–14, 19b, 20b, 21b, 24, 27b, 30–31			
Water from the Rock at Meribah			17:2–7	
Ten Commandments	34:10–28			
Kid in Mother's Milk	23:19 (Covenant Code); 34:26			
Numbers				
Manna and Quail in the			11:4–34	

Wilderness		
Spy Story	13:17–20, 22–24, 27–31, 33; 14:1b, 4, 11–25, 39–45	
Heresy at Peor	25:1–5	
Deuteronomy		
Appointment of Joshua		31:14–15, 23

The further separation of the J and E sources in these instances requires additional literary and historical methodologies. The methodology of Hebrew linguistics allows for the general dating of the J and E sources to the monarchy period, according to Friedman, who follows the research of Avi Hurvitz (*Linguistic Study*) that all of the sources of the Pentateuch reflect Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH), and thus, were composed in the monarchy period. Friedman concludes that the J and E sources derive from the earliest stage of Biblical Hebrew; the P source represents a later stage of composition; and the Deuteronomistic texts still later.[44]

The early date of the J and E sources is reinforced when the documents are examined within the history of Ancient Israel from 922 to 722 BCE, the period of the separation of the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The sources reflect the distinctive points of view of the Northern (E source) and Southern (J source) kingdoms. Levitical priests from Shiloh composed the E source with a special focus on Shechem, the capital of the north (Gen 33:18–19); it is implicitly critical of the oppression of David, Solomon, and Rehoboam in its account of slavery in Egypt (Exod 1:11; 1 Kgs 12:18) and of the priest Aaron (Numbers 12), while idealizing law (Book of the Covenant, Exodus 21–23) and the northern hero Joshua as the successor of Moses (Exod 17:9–14; 24:13; 32:17; 33:11; Num 11:28; Deut 31:14–15, 23).

The J source reflects the point of view of the Davidic dynasty; it idealizes Hebron, Judah’s capital (Gen 13:18; 18:1; Num 13:17–20, 22–24) and the southern ancestor, Judah (Gen 38; 37:26–27; 42:22; 43:8–9; 44:18–34). An additional aid in identifying the J source is its close literary ties to court history of David (2 Samuel). Literary parallels include the stories of Dinah and Shechem

(Genesis 33) and Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13), or the account of Lot (Genesis 19) and the concubine (Judges 19). These parallels aid further in separating the J and E sources, while also clarifying that the scope of the J source is the entire Enneateuch (Genesis–2 Kings), while the E source lacks the same literary connections.[45]

The northern and southern points of view of the authors of J and E also allow for the separation of mixed JE stories. The geographical description of the promised land as extending "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen 15:18) in the mixed JE narrative of Genesis 15 can be identified as J, because "it matches the borders attributed to David, the first king of Judah."[46] The mixed JE narrative of the birth of Jacob's twelve sons can also be separated into sources based on the political perspective of the authors: the J source is limited to the birth of the first four sons, which ends with Judah (Gen 29:32–35), while the E source recounts the birth of the remaining sons, emphasizing the giving of the birthright to Joseph, the father of the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:13–20).

There is also debate within current practitioners of the documentary hypothesis. Baruch Schwartz has argued for a more extensive reevaluation of the documentary hypothesis, which he argues has never been successfully carried through to its conclusions.[47] The problem originates already with Wellhausen, who failed to disentangle the J and E sources, and as a consequence, he all-too-often simply referred to the Non-P narratives as JE. The failure to carry through the identification of the J and E sources constitutes the central task for contemporary interpreters who work within the framework of the documentary hypothesis, according to Schwartz. But the goal is hindered by methodological confusion that has accumulated over the past two centuries of source-critical research on the Pentateuch. Four problems are especially noteworthy.

First, the documentary hypothesis has evolved into a model for interpreting the Pentateuch; as a result, what had been the broad study of the present form of the text as a whole in a quest for sources often shifts to specific stories. When this happens, interpreters are "driven by a compelling need to find two or three accounts of every episode in the Pentateuch."[48] For this reason, it is important

to emphasize that the documentary hypothesis is not a method, but a proposed literary solution to the unintelligible character of the canonical Pentateuch.

Second, practitioners of the documentary hypothesis tend to propose distinct literary characteristics, terminology, stylistics, and theological points of view as criteria for separating the sources, as illustrated by Friedman. Schwartz cautions that the literary catalogue may result from having identified sources, but it cannot be a central methodology, since it presupposes the accomplishment of the goal. The primary focus of the documentary hypothesis is to account for the literary unintelligibility of the canonical Pentateuch as a whole, because of doublets, contradictions, and narrative discontinuities. The identification of the literary characteristics of the distinct sources is not helpful in achieving this goal; it only follows after the separation of sources. This is true even for the evaluation of the divine names, Elohim and Yahweh. The divine names do not function as distinct terms in the sources; rather, they provide insight into the author's views of when the name Yahweh became known to Israel—a feature of narrative logic and coherence.[49]

Third, the documentary hypothesis and historical reconstruction cannot be tied together, as is the case in Friedman's combination of literary and historical methodologies. The documentary hypothesis is a literary-critical enterprise; it seeks to explain the literary structure of the Pentateuch by separating it into its constituent parts and by clarifying how the parts were combined. The only historical claim of the documentary hypothesis, according to Schwartz, is that four source documents exist and that they are combined in the Pentateuch. The placing of the four documents in their historical context is a separate and more speculative enterprise.[50]

Fourth, the documentary hypothesis has traditionally identified too many redactors in the formation of the Pentateuch, according to Joel Baden.[51] Friedman represents the most common view of the role of redactors within the model of the documentary hypothesis, in which three are identified: (1) the redactor who formed JE; (2) the redactor who combined JE and D; and (3) the Pentateuchal redactor, who merged JED with P to form the canonical text.[52]

The redactor of JE is especially problematic for the revisionist view of the

documentary hypothesis, since the creative role of this editor eliminates the full recovery of the J and E sources. Baden has argued that there is no JE redactor; instead, the J and E sources existed independently until they are combined to form the Pentateuch. There is also no redactor of JE and D, since Deuteronomy too existed as an independent document until its incorporation into the Pentateuch. Thus, there is only one redactor in the formation of the Pentateuch, who combined the four independent sources, J, E, D, and P. He states the methodological principle in the following manner: "we must assume, unless provided otherwise, only as many compilers as are necessary to put the four sources together—in other words, one" (220).

The method by which the single redactor worked to create the Pentateuch is also important to the revision of the documentary hypothesis. The redactor is a preservationist (224). In fact, "the extent of contradiction that the compiler allowed to stand in his combined text is extraordinary" (221). The single redactor of the Pentateuch privileged law (228–9); but had no interest in creating meaning in the compilation of the Pentateuch. The redactor is neither an historian, nor an interpreter. There is no evidence that the redactor combined the sources for ideological or theological reasons. The sole purpose of the redactor was to preserve the four independent sources in a chronological order: "At every stage at practically every word, he was faced with a decision: is there something in another source that needs to come before the next words of this one? If not, then he could continue with the same source until the question arose again. If not, then he switched sources, and was immediately faced with the same questions again. The intricacy of this process cannot be overstated" (226). The fidelity of the redactor to the preservation of the four sources allows for their complete recovery in this revisionist view of the documentary hypothesis. The strict rules by which the redactor worked to compile and to preserve the sources suggests that even the gaps in the E source, which have traditionally prompted source critics to identify the creative work of the JE redactor, actually indicate that the compiler was working with an incomplete text, which may have been damaged (225).

The revised proposal for the documentary hypothesis is simple in scope: four

independent and intact sources, J, E, D, and P; and one redaction to combine and preserve them. The research is based on the following presuppositions: (1) one editor combines separate sources without inserting any point of view or ideological influence; (2) the present form of the Pentateuch is incoherent; and (3) tradition is stable through time.

This view of tradition runs counter to redaction criticism, which sees the Pentateuch undergoing significant change through time as editors both preserve and transform the literature.

4.5 Summary

Identifying Priestly and Non-P Literature in the Pentateuch

The study of the composition of the Pentateuch has undergone significant change in the late-twentieth century to the present time. Interpretation has turned away from the study of ancient oral sagas and creeds that dominated form criticism and tradition history in the early-twentieth century and the focus has shifted to the text of the Pentateuch. Yet, the present study of the Pentateuch remains so diverse that it is difficult to relate or even to summarize the range of interpretations in the individual books. Current debate centers on (1) the literary evaluation of the present form of the Pentateuch; (2) the role of redactors in the formation of text; (3) the view of tradition as stable or undergoing constant change; and (4) the date of composition. Complicating the evaluation of the different approaches is the range of terminology employed to identify different authors.

David Carr (*Reading the Fractures of Genesis*) provides a framework for reviewing the different methodologies of composition in the following section, *Books of the Pentateuch*. He identifies two general bodies of literature in the Pentateuch: the Priestly and the Non-P versions.

The Priestly literature is distinctive in style; it develops the themes on creation (Gen 1:1—2:3); covenant (Gen 9:1–17; 17:1–27; Exod 6:2— 7:7); and cultic practice (Exod 12:1–20; Exodus 25–31; 35–40; Leviticus). The identification of the Priestly corpus will allow for further study of its literary unity, date of composition, and relationship to both post-Priestly editing and the Non-P version of the Pentateuch.

The Non-P version constitutes the remainder of the literature of the Pentateuch; it contains a much more diverse body of literature with distinct themes that suggest a more complex history of composition than the Priestly version. The identification of the Non-P literature will provide the starting point

to explore the diverse methodologies of source and redaction composition, the design of the literature, the dates of composition, and relationship of Non-P literature to the Priestly version of the Pentateuch.

Wherever possible, the review of the individual books of the Pentateuch in the following section will begin with the general identification of Priestly and Non-P literature, before the exploration of more detailed examples of composition.

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PART III

Books of the Pentateuch

The introduction to the five books of the Pentateuch will be in three parts. The first section will provide the outline and the central themes of the each book as a general introduction. The second section will clarify the literary design, focusing on the plot, setting, and central characters. Comparison of stories in the Pentateuch to Ancient Near Eastern literature will, at times, aid in the interpretation of the literary design. The third section will summarize the research on the composition of each book. Wherever possible, interpretation will begin with the separation between Priestly and Non-Priestly literature as a basis for illustrating the different methodologies of source criticism, form criticism, tradition history, and redaction criticism.

Genesis

5.1 Outline and Central Themes

Genesis recounts the creation of the world (Genesis 1–11) and the history of the first four generations of the Israelite ancestors (Genesis 12–50). Although the two sections contain very different types of literature, they are related as a single genealogy created by the repetition of the phrase, “these are the generations of . . .” (2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2) and “this is the book of the generations of . . .” (5:1). The distribution of the genealogies may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.1 Distribution of Genealogies in Genesis

Genesis 1—11: Creation and Origin of Humanity

Pre-Flood		Flood	Post-Flood	
2:4	5:1	6:9	10:1	11:10
Heaven and Earth	Adam	Noah	Noah and Sons	Shem

Genesis 12–50: Origin of the Ancestors

Abraham		Jacob		Joseph and his Brothers
11:27	25:12	25:19	36:1, 9	37:2
Terah	Ishmael	Isaac	Esau	Jacob

The genealogies in Genesis 1–11 are broad in scope; they separate into two parts, dividing the primeval age into time periods before and after the flood: (1) the first section traces the genealogy of the heavens and the earth (2:4) and the entire human race from Adam (5:1) to Noah (6:9); (2) the second section includes the lineage of Noah through his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japhet (10:1; Shem, 11:10).

The literary design underscores the central role of the flood story (Genesis 6–9) as the event that separates the two periods of the primeval history.

The genealogies in Genesis 12–50 are narrower in scope; they separate into three sections: the lineage of: (1) Abraham from Terah (11:27); (2) Jacob from Isaac (25:19); and (3) Joseph and his brothers from Jacob (37:2).

The stories of Abraham and Jacob include an additional genealogy of a

family member who is excluded from the central lineage: Ishmael (25:12) from the family of Abraham; and Esau (36:1, 9) from Jacob.

Sidebar 5.1 Genealogy

The Hebrew word for genealogy is *Toledot* ("generations"), which derives from the verb yalad, meaning "to bear or bring forth a child" (Gen 3:16); "to beget" (Gen 4:18); "to assist in childbirth" (Exod 1:16). *Toledot* can have a narrow meaning of the descendants in a family (Num 1:20), or a broader meaning signifying the families of the earth (Gen 10:32). *Toledot* is concentrated in the Pentateuch (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:27; 25:12, 13; 36:1, 9; 37:2; Exod 6:16, 19; 28:10; and Num 1:20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42; 3:1), and in Chronicles (I Chr 1:29; 5:7; 7:2, 4, 9; 8:28; 9:9, 34; 26:31), occurring in three distinct formal phrases:

1. "These are the generations of . . ." (e.g., Gen 2:4; 6:9; Num 3:1; I Chr 1:29).
2. "These are (X) according to their generations (Exod 6:16, 19).
3. "This is the book of the generations . . ." (Gen 5:1; many interpreters judge this phrase to be the introduction to a separate document [Genesis 5] now incorporated into Genesis).

The genealogy is supplemented with extensive narratives, which explore the evolution and conflict of the human race in the primeval period (Genesis 1–11) and the challenges of fertility and land possession of the Israelite ancestors (Genesis 12–50). Genesis often shifts from genealogy to narrative when there is family conflict (including Cain and Abel or Joseph and his brothers) or problems surrounding fertility (including infertility, ambiguity about the role of the matriarch and the rightful heir, or the problem of twins). In these instances, the ordered flow of genealogical progression is interrupted by what R. B. Robinson characterizes as the unpredictable events of "actual life."[1] The central themes of the book of Genesis are the role of the human in creation, the place of Israel among the nations of the world, and the divine promises to the ancestors of nationhood and land possession.

Sidebar 5.2 Flood Mythologies

The story of the flood is a prominent mythology throughout the ancient world. Versions of the story appear in the Sumerian *Eridu Genesis*, the Babylonian *Atrahasis* myth and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, as well as in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis). Three floods are also recounted west of the Ancient Near East in Greek tradition, including the primeval flood during the reign of the mythic king of Attica, Ogyges (Plato, Critias 111–12), the flood in which Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha are saved by Prometheus (Bibliotheca of Pseudo-Apollodorus), and the flood survived by Dardanus (recorded by Dianysius of Halicarnasssus). The mythology also appears east of the Ancient Near East in India within the account of Vishnu revealing the flood to Shraddhadeva, king of the Davida Kingdom (Shataphatha Brahamana). For a summary of the many cultural versions of the flood, see Alan Dundes (*The Flood Myth*).

5.2 Genesis 1—11: Creation and the Origin of Humanity

Literary Design

Tradition of the Flood in Ancient Near Eastern Mythology

Genesis 1–11 is written within the tradition of the flood in Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The story is widespread in Sumerian and Akkadian literature. Sumerian accounts appear already in the third millennium, when the hero, Zuisudra ("found long life") escapes the disaster in a boat and eventually is granted eternal life:

> All the windstorms, exceedingly powerful, attacked as one,
> The deluge raged over the surface of the earth.
>
> After, for seven days and seven nights,
> The deluge had raged in the land,
> And the huge boat had been tossed about on the great waters,
> Utu came forth, who sheds light on heaven and earth.
> Ziusudra opened a window of the huge boat,
> Ziusudra, the king,
> Before Utu prostrated himself,
> The king kills an ox, slaughters a sheep.
>
> . . .
>
> Ziusudra, the king,
> Before An and Enlil prostrated himself;
> Life like a god they give him,
> Breath eternal like a god they bring down for him.[2]

The Sumerian mythology includes a series of motifs that become standard features of the flood story: (1) the flood encompasses the entire surface of the earth; (2) the event destroys all humanity, except the hero, who, in this case, is a king, Zuisudra; (3) the hero survives the flood in a boat; and (4) the hero offers sacrifice to the gods after surviving.

This account also includes motifs that appear in some subsequent versions of the flood, but not in all: the boat has a window that allows the hero to see that the flood has ended and the hero is granted eternal life.

Sidebar 5.3 Bronze Age in Mesopotamia

Early Bronze Age 3300–2100 BCE	**Middle Bronze Age 2100–1550 BCE**	**Late Bronze Age 1550–1200 BCE**
Sumerian City-States (3300–2300)	Babylon Empire (1800–1600)	Assyrian Empire (1400–1200)
Akkadian Empire (2300–2100)	Hammurabi (1792–1750)	Collapse of the Bronze Age (1200–1150)
Sargon the Great (2270–2215)		

The Sumerian King List adds to the tradition of the flood by creating two periods in the institution of kingship, in which pre-flood kings rule for thousands of years (e.g., Alilim, the first king, reigns for 28,000 years), while the rule of post-flood kings shortens from centuries (e.g., Jushar, the first king of Kish, reigns for 1,200 years) to decades (e.g., Meshanepada, the first king of Ur, reigns for 80 years) or even less (e.g., Ur-ningin, the first king of the fourth dynasty of Uruk, reigns for 7 years). The mythology clarifies the belief that human life declined after the flood—from the pre-flood kings, who ruled for millennia, to the post-flood kings, who only ruled for decades.



Figure 5.1 Recorded in Sumerian language, this tablet lists kings of Sumer (ancient Southern Iraq) and neighboring dynasties.

Sidebar 5.4 Sumerian King List

The Sumerian King List was discovered at Nippur in Iraq and published in the early-twentieth century; it records the names of most of the kings of the cities in Sumer and in neighboring regions, along with the length of their reigns. The King List establishes that "kingship descended from heaven," before recounting the reigns of Sumerian kings from the beginning of history to the end of the Isin dynasty (approx. 2000 BCE). The King List separates kingship between eight pre-flood kings who reign for 250,000 years and the shorter reigns of the post-flood kings. The purpose of the King List is likely to legitimate the rulers of the Isin dynasty. A version of the King List is in the Weld-Blundell collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England. For further discussion, see Thorkild Jacobsen (*The Sumerian King List*).

The flood story continued in the Babylonian and Assyrian literary traditions. Many details in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (different versions from the eighteenth to

the seventh centuries BCE) repeat and expand motifs from the Sumerian account of the flood, including details of the boat in which the hero survives the flood and the theme of eternal life granted to the hero Utnapishtim (“he found life”).

Sidebar 5.5 Epic of Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh was discovered by the Assyrian archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam in 1853 and translated by George Smith in the 1870s. Versions of Gilgamesh originate at least from 2100 BCE and continue to be actively produced for over two millennia. Gilgamesh is the king of Uruk, an ancient city of Sumer situated on the Euphrates River. The story consists of twelve tablets that follow the exploits of the heroic king, who is two-thirds god and one-third human, and his friend, Enkidu, a wild man whom the gods eventually sentence to death. The death of Enkidu propels Gilgamesh on a quest for the secrets of eternal life from the survivor of the flood, Utnapishtim, who recounts the event in Tablet XI. See Stephanie Dalley (*Myths from Mesopotamia*, 39–159).



Figure 5.2 Neo-Assyrian clay tablet. Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet 11: Story of the Flood. Known as the “Flood Tablet.” Now part of the holdings of the British Museum.

The *Atrahasis* mythology (approx. 1700 BCE) contains less detail about the flood, but it is important for interpreting the literary structure of Genesis 1–11, since it too separates primeval history between pre- and post-flood periods in the following manner.

Table 5.2 The *Atrahasis* Mythology

Pre-Flood (I:I–II:iv)		**Flood (I:I–II:iv)**	**Post-Flood (III:v–viii)**
Creation of Humans to Relieve the Igigi Gods of Labor	Problem of Human Population and Noise	Flood Sacrifice	Population Control

Comparison between the pre- and post-flood periods identifies overpopulation as the problem of humanity. In the pre-flood period (I:i–II: iv), humans lack safeguards to control population; they reproduce in an unlimited manner, creating noise that does not allow the god, Ellil, to rest; he states: “I am losing sleep over their racket.” Ellil sends a series of plagues to reduce the population of humans, but in each case, the god, Enki, undermines the plagues, saving Atrahasis. Ellil orders Enki to destroy humans (II:v–III:v), but Atrahasis survives in a boat and sacrifices at the conclusion of the flood. Ellil is furious with Enki and instructs him to control the human population through unsuccessful birthing, by letting loose the demon, *pašittu*, and with the establishment of women who do not conceive children (III:vi–viii).

Sidebar 5.6 Atrahasis

Portions of Atrahasis were translated in the late-nineteenth century; many additional fragments of the epic were combined and translated by W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard in 1965 (*AtraHasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*). The oldest version of the mythology is likely from the eighteenth century BCE. Atrahasis consists of three tablets: Tablet 1 introduces the Sumerian gods, Anu (sky), Enlil (wind), and Enki (weather), and the creation of humans by the mother goddess Mami; Tablet II describes the overpopulation of humans; and Tablet III narrates the flood. See Stephanie Dalley (*Myths from Mesopotamia*, 1–38).

Genesis 1–11 and the Flood

The interpretation of the flood story in Genesis 1–11 follows the same three-part pattern of Atrahasis: (1) pre-flood period (1:1—6:4); (2) flood (6:5—9:17); and (3) post-flood period (9:18—11:9).

Interpretation also requires the same comparison between the pre- and post-flood periods as in *Atrahasis*. But according to Tikva Frymer-Kensky, the flood in Genesis 1–11 is "emphatically not about overpopulation."[3] If anything, Genesis 1–11 idealizes population growth; repeatedly, God blesses humans with the command to "be fruitful and multiply," first at creation, prior to the flood (1:28), and again after the flood (9:1). In Genesis 1–11, the flood is God's attempt to purge the ground of blood-pollution originating from Cain's murder of Abel, but like *Atrahasis*, it fails in its goal.

The pre- and post-flood periods in Genesis 1–11 repeat three topics in each section: (1) the progression of human violence and the pollution of the earth; (2) genealogy; and (3) the threat of mixing the realms of heaven and earth.

The contrast in each theme illustrates the aim of the primeval history to trace the decline of humanity, the growth of violence, and the infusion of blood-pollution into the earth, which threatens the separation between heaven and earth established in the original creation. The repetition of the three themes may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.3 Pre- and Post-Flood Periods in Genesis 1–11

Pre-Flood: Genesis 1:1—6:4			**Flood**
1. Decline of Humans *Garden of Eden* Genesis 1–4	2. Genealogy *Adam* Genesis 5	3. Heaven and Earth *Sons of God* Gen 6:14	Flood/Sacrifice
Post-Flood: Genesis 9:17—11:9			
1. Decline of Humans *Vineyard*	2. Genealogy *Nations* Genesis 10	3. Heaven and Earth *Babel Tower*	

Decline of Humans

Genesis 1–4 and 9:18–29 narrate the decline of humanity in the pre- and post-flood periods. In the pre-flood period, humans are vegetarian caretakers, who tend the garden of Eden, unaware and unashamed of their nakedness; in the post-flood period, Noah too is the caretaker of a vineyard, who is unaware of his nakedness, but from drunkenness not innocence, leading to family shame in his exposure.

Genesis 1–4 describes the loss of the organic relationship between humans and the earth in three episodes: (1) the creation of humans and their life in Eden (Genesis 1–2); (2) the loss of the garden and the curse of the earth (Genesis 3); and (3) the pollution of the earth with the blood of Abel (4:1–17).

Humans are created as vegetarians who care for the earth. God states: “I have given every green plant for food” (1:30). The story of Eden (Genesis 2–4) explores the organic relationship between humans and the earth; both share the same substance: “Yahweh God formed Adam (‘*adam*) from the dust of the ground (‘*adamah*)” (2:7). The couple tends the garden in complete innocence, signaled by their inability to recognize nakedness: “And the Adam and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (2:25). But the story also introduces a restriction on diet, which the humans violate by eating from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:17). The violation leads to the loss of innocence and alienation from the earth: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (3:17). The story of Cain and Abel completes the process of alienation (4:1–16). Cain is a farmer, “a tiller of the ground,” and Abel, a shepherd. When the brothers present offerings, it is not surprising that Yahweh rejects the cursed “fruit of ground” from Cain, but accepts the animal offering, which is not cursed. Cain reacts by killing Abel, spilling human blood into the creation for the first time. The act alienates Cain further from the earth: “You are cursed from the ground, which has opened its

mouth to receive your brother's blood." Yahweh adds: "You will be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth" (4:12).

The flood (Genesis 6–9) is Yahweh's attempt to combat human violence and blood-pollution: "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (6:5). Yahweh also saw that "the earth was corrupt," meaning polluted (6:11). As a result, God forewarns Noah that he intends to "make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence" (6:13). But the flood fails. Noah and his family emerge from the ark even more violent, since they are now carnivorous, ensuring the continuation of bloodletting as a way of life. Yahweh reacts to the new situation by refraining from further actions against the earth because of humans; instead, God focuses on new restrictions against drinking blood and killing other humans in order to regulate violence and blood pollution (8:20—9:7).

The sacrifice of blood at the conclusion to the flood (8:20—9:7) and the story of Noah in the vineyard (9:18–29) illustrate the failure of the flood to purge the earth of blood pollution, resulting in the permanent state of human violence in the post-flood period. The story of Noah and the vineyard provides a snapshot of post-flood humanity. Noah remains tied to the ground: "Noah, a man of the ground (‘*adamah*), was the first to plant a vineyard" (9:20). But as a vintner, Noah falls prey to his produce, becoming drunk, sleeping naked and unconscious in his tent, and opening himself to shame (9:20–22). The shame gives way to a new level of violence, when Noah exercises the power to curse—something only God did in the pre-flood period (snake, 3:14; ground, 3:17; Cain, 4:11). By exercising this newfound power, Noah introduces permanent social alienation and conflict among humans by initiating the institution of slavery: "When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers’" (9:25).

Genealogy and the Age of Humans

Human life shortens from the pre- to the post-flood period. The change in the

human life span is evident from the comparison of the genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5) to the table of nations (Genesis 10) and the genealogy of Shem (11:10–32). The pre-flood humans lived, on average, nine hundred years (e.g., Adam 930 years; Seth 912 years; Enosh 905 years and so forth), while post-flood humans decline in age from six hundred (e.g., Shem 600 years) to four hundred (e.g., Eber) and two hundred (e.g., Terah) years, with the goal that they will live one hundred and twenty years (6:3). The contrast in the ages of the human life span clarifies that the biblical authors have included the tradition of the *Sumerian King List* in Genesis 1–11, where the flood also divided the time span of the reign of kings. But, unlike the *Sumerian King List*, there are no kings in the pre- or post-flood periods of the primeval history. In Genesis 1–11, cities do not descend from heaven, nor is human history focused on kings.

Separation of Heaven and Earth

The relationship between God and humans, as well as heaven and earth, are important themes in primeval history. Genesis 1 establishes the ideal relationship in which God dwells in or above heaven (the sacred), while humans dwell on earth (the profane). The realms of the sacred and the profane are clearly separated from each other. Humans may bear the image of God, but they are mortal earth-creatures, not participating in the qualities of the divine in any way. For this reason, Noah, the hero of the flood, does not achieve eternal life, as Zuisudra in the *Sumerian Flood Story*, or as Utnapishtim in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

The separation of heaven and earth is threatened in both the pre- and post-flood eras as a consequence of human violence and the pollution of the earth. In the pre-flood period, heaven and earth become mixed when the “sons of God” descend from heaven and have intercourse with human women who give birth to the Nephilim, a hybrid race that violates the separation between God and humans (6:1–4). The movement of the story is from heaven to earth; the “sons of God” are the actors, not the human women. The mixing of the divine and the human is the culminating event that prompts Yahweh to send the flood in order

to destroy all humans and to cleanse the earth from pollution: “Then Yahweh said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years’” (6:3).

Sidebar 5.7 Nephilim

The Hebrew *Nephilim* means “fallen ones” from the verb *naphal*, “to fall.” The Nephilim appear only twice in the Hebrew Bible, both times in the Pentateuch: (1) they are the offspring of the intercourse between the sons of God and human women (Gen 6:4), and (2) they live in the land of Canaan where they are seen by the spies and identified further as descendants of Anak (Num 13:33). The linking of the Nephilim with Anak creates a larger web of relationships among primeval characters who live in Canaan, including the Nephilim (Num 13:22), Anakim (Num 13:22; Deut 2:10–11, Rephaim (Deut 2:10–11), Emim (Deut 2:10–11), and the Zumzummim (Deut 2:20). The interpretation of these strange beings was a problem already for the Greek translators, who described the Nephilim simply as *gigantas* (“giants”); other ancient authors prefer fallen angels (e.g., 2 Peter 2:4; Greek Enoch 20:2).

In the post-flood period, the separation of heaven and earth is once again threatened, when humans build a tower from earth to heaven (11:1–9). The movement of this story is just the opposite from the account of sexual intercourse between the sons of God and women. Humans are the primary actors; they seek to storm the gates of heaven: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens” (11:4). The attempt to reach heaven by building a tower from the earth signifies the growing power of humans and the threat that it poses to Yahweh: “[T]his is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (11:6). The primeval history closes with a defensive action by Yahweh, in which multiple languages are introduced to disorganize humanity: “Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech” (11:7).

Summary

The comparison of the *Atrahasis* mythology and Genesis 1–11 indicates that the primeval history is written in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of the flood story. Genesis 1–11 follows the pattern of chronicling the origins of the world as two eras separated by the flood. Most interpreters agree with this conclusion. But there is debate over the exact literary outline. For example, the distribution of the genealogies raises the question of where the pre-flood period begins. Does it begin with the creation account in Genesis 1 or with the story of Eden in Genesis 2? The reason for the ambiguity is that the "genealogy of the heavens and earth" (2:4) separates the two creation stories in Genesis 1–2, so that the creation of humans in Eden (Genesis 2) is tied more closely with the pre-flood history of humanity, while Genesis 1 stands outside of the structure of the genealogy.

There is also debate over the ending of the primeval history. Rolf Rendtorff identifies the ending with the sacrifice of Noah (8:21–22)[4]; while W. M. Clark concludes the primeval history with the covenant to Noah (9:1–17).[5] Marcus Witte extends the ending to the story of Noah and the vineyard (9:21).[6] The present summary has followed Joseph Blenkinsopp, who concludes the primary history with the tower of Babel, since the genealogy of Shem (11:10–26) includes much shorter life spans that "mark the passage from mythic to historical time."[7]

The debate over the internal structure of the primeval history is important for a more detailed interpretation of Genesis 1–11. David Carr has clarified that the ambiguity over the structure results from the history of composition, since Genesis 1–11 is the combination of at least two accounts of primeval history.[8] But even without resolving the points of tension in Genesis 1–11, Helge S. Kvanvig is certainly correct in concluding, "the crucial point is that the primeval history proper in Genesis is an antediluvian history leading up to the flood and the world order established afterwards."[9]

Composition

Genesis 1–11 contains two accounts of the primeval history. Both are written in the tradition of the Ancient Near Eastern flood story. The identification of the two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 was the cornerstone in the historical-critical interpretation of the Pentateuch. Already in the eighteenth century, Jean Astruc separated the accounts, identifying the creation of Elohim in 1:1—2:4 as the A source and Yahweh's creation of Adam in the garden of Eden as the B source (see ch. 2). The literary results of his work have endured, even though the identification and date of the compositions continue to evolve in the history of interpretation. Elohim's creation of heaven and earth (1:1—2:3) has come to be identified as the Priestly composition and Yahweh's formation of Adam in the Garden of Eden (2:4–25) is attributed to the Non-P version (see ch. 4). The two accounts contrast in: (1) the description of the deity; (2) the process of creation; and (3) the role of the human in creation.

The summary of the distinct literary characteristics will allow for the identification of the Priestly and the Non-P compositions throughout Gen 1–11, which is commonly distributed in the following manner.

Table 5.4 Priestly and Non-P Composition in Genesis 1–11

	Priestly	Non-P
Pre-Flood	Creation: 1:1—2:3 Genealogy of Adam: 5	Creation: 2:4–25 Loss of Eden: 3 Cain and Abel: 4:1–16 Genealogy of Cain: 4:17–26 Sons of God/Women: 6:1–4
Flood	Introduction: 6:9–22 Event: 7:6, 9, 11, 13–16a; 7:18–21, 24; 8:1–2a, 3b–5, 14–19 Conclusion: 9:1–17	Introduction: 6:5–6, 7*, 8; 7:1–5 Event: 7:7–8, 10, 12, 16b–17, 22–23; 8:2b–3a, 6–12, 13bConclusion: 8:20–22

Post-Flood	Age of Noah: 9:28–29 Table of Nations: 10:1a, 2–5, 6–7, 20, 22–23, 31, 32	Noah and Sons: 9:18–19 Noah and the Vineyard: 9:20–27 Table of Nations: 10:1b, 8–19, 21, 24–30 Tower of Babel: 11:1–9

Priestly Version

The Priestly version of the primeval history focuses on creation (Genesis 1) and the flood (Genesis 6–9) as the undoing of creation. The pre-flood and post-flood periods are limited to the genealogies of Adam (Genesis 5) and the table of nations (Genesis 10), or by extension, the genealogy of Shem (11:10–26).

Pre-Flood

In the Priestly account of creation (1:1—2:3), the deity is identified as Elohim (translated God in the NRSV): “In the beginning Elohim created (*bara’*) the heavens and the earth” (1:1). The Hebrew word *bara’*, “to create,” is a theological term in which God is the exclusive subject. The word is concentrated in the Priestly account of creation (e.g., 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3; 5:1) and in the exilic prophetic literature of Second Isaiah (e.g., 40:26; 42:5; 43:1; 45:18). The process of creation moves from wet to dry: “The earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from Elohim swept over the face of the waters” (1:2). Creation is a process in which water is contained in heaven (*mabul*), on earth (sea), and below the earth (deep or *tehom*).

Creation requires six days: the first three (Days one–three) establish the primordial elements (light, water, air, land) and the second three (Days four–six) list the planets and living beings that inhabit the different elements. The result is a symmetrically structured creation, in which Days one–three balance Days four–six. The sun, moon, and planets (Day four) correspond to the light (Day one); birds and fish (Day five) inhabit the water and the air (Day two); and animals and humans (Day six) dwell on the land (Day three). The creation of the human is the capstone of creation, taking place last on Day six (1:26–31). Humans do not develop or mature over time. Instead, they are created in the image of Elohim; with gender—male and female; they are given the power to rule over the creation; and they are judged to be very good. The perfectly balanced creation allows Elohim to rest (Day seven). The structure and literary design of the Priestly account of creation may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.5 Days of Creation

Pre-Creation: Dark, Wet, Void (1:1–2)	
Day 1: Light/Dark (1:3–5)	Day 4: Sun, Moon, Stars (1:14–19)
Day 2: Firmament: Water/Air (1:6–8)	Day 5: Birds/Fish (1:20–23)
Day 3: Land from Sea (1:9–10); Vegetation (1:11–13)	Day 6: Animals (1:24–25); Humans (1:26–31)
Sabbath Rest (2:1–3)	



Figure 5.4 Upper part of a clay tablet, part of the Creation legend *Enuma Elish* I, 14 + 8 lines of inscription, neo-Assyrian.

Many features of the Priestly account of creation suggest the influence of the Babylon account of creation, *Enuma Elish*, which are also the first words of the account and mean “when on high” or “when above.” Hermann Gunkel identified shared motifs including the presence of darkness before creation; the brooding spirit; the watery deep, Tehom; the motif of conflict in creation; the rule of luminaries; the structure of seven days, and the creation of humans on the sixth day.[10]

Creation is followed by the genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5), which repeats motifs from the creation, including the verb *bara’* (“to create”); the image of God in humans; the immediate creation of gender; and the divine blessing on the humans.

Table 5.6 Motif Comparison between the Creation and Genealogy of Adam

Creation of Humans: Genesis 1:26–28	Description of Adam: Genesis 5:1–2
26Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”	1This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. 2Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created.

The high view of humanity continues in the lineage of Adam: “When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years he became the father of a son *in his likeness*, according to *his image*, and named him Seth” (5:3). The ten generations from Adam to Noah balance the ten generations of the post-flood ancestors from Noah to Abraham (11:10–26), following the pattern of the *Sumerian King List*, in which pre-flood humans live longer than the post-flood generations.

Flood

The Priestly version of the flood includes three episodes: the introduction (6:9–

22); the flood (7:6, 9, 13–16a, 18–21, 24); and the conclusion (9:1–17). The structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.7 Priestly Version of the Flood

Introduction		
Corruption of Earth 6:9–12	Announcement of Flood 6:13–22	
Flood		
Preparation and Time 7:6, 9, 11, 13–16a	Effect of Flood 7:18–21, 24	End of Flood 8:1–2a, 3b–5, 14–19
Conclusion		
Blood Laws 9:1–7	Covenant 9:8–17	

The flood describes the undoing of the creation. The introduction identifies the corruption of the earth as the cause for the flood (6:9–12) followed by instructions for the building the ark as a vessel with three decks (6:13–22), suggesting it is a miniature replica of the creation (1:1—2:3). The flood begins in the 600th year of Noah's life on Month two, Day seventeen (7:6). The waters of the flood are not rain; the flood is caused when the waters in heaven (*mabul*), held back by the firmament on the second day of creation (1:6–8), and the pre-creation chaotic waters of the deep (1:2) break out upon the earth. These waters undo the structure of creation, rising 15 cubits above the highest mountain (7:20) for 150 days (7:24). Noah and his family survive the flood in the ark.

The total time of the flood is one year; it begins on Month two, Day seventeen (7:6) of Noah's 600th year of life (7:6) and it ends one year later, on Month two, Day twenty seven (8:14). Other important dates in the yearlong event include the settling of the Ark on Mt. Ararat (Month seven; Day seventeen); the original subsiding of the water (Month ten; Day one); and the appearance of the peaks of the mountain on New Year's Day (Month one; Day one) of the 601st year of Noah's life. The liturgical dating of the flood story, with the emphasis on a New Year, signals the transition of eras in human history. The central themes of the Priestly account of the flood are the restrictions on violence

associated with blood (9:1–7) and the divine introduction of covenant allowing for life after the flood. Elohim makes a covenant with Noah (6:18) and with the creation (9:8–17) to restrain from destroying the creation again, ensuring it with the sign of the rainbow.

Sidebar 5.8 Chronology of the Flood in the Priestly Version

Event	Date
Flood Begins	Year 600 (of Noah's Life); Month 2; Day 17
Flood Waters	150 Days
Ark Settles on Mount Ararat	Year 600; Month 7; Day 17
Flood Waters Recede	Year 600; Month 10; Day 17
Mountain Peaks Reappear	Year 601 (of Noah's Life); Month 1; Day 1 [New Year]
Flood Ends	Year 601; Month 2; Day 27

Post-Flood

The post-flood period provides the lifespan of Noah (9:28–29) and the list of the nations (parts of Genesis 10). The table of nations follows a strict pattern in tracing the descendants of Japhet (10:2–5), Ham (10:6–7, 20), and Shem (10:22–23, 31). Each section begins with the phrase, "these are the descendants of"; followed by the lineage. The conclusion of the genealogy separates humans by families, languages, lands, and nations. The table of nations is followed by the genealogy of Shem (11:10–26).

Non-P Version

The Non-P version contains most of the literature in the primeval history. It chronicles the decline of humanity in the pre-flood period in three stories: creation (2:4–25), loss of the garden (Genesis 3), and Cain's murder of Abel

(Genesis 4); the flood as a rainstorm (Genesis 6–8); and the continued decline of humanity in the post-flood period in three stories: Noah the vintner (9:18–27), the table of nations (parts of Genesis 10), and the tower of Babel (11:1–9).

Pre-Flood

The deity in the story of creation is Yahweh Elohim (translated "Lord God" in the NRSV): "In the day that Yahweh Elohim made the earth and the heavens" (2:4b). Creation is a more intimate process; Yahweh Elohim is more involved in the process of creation. The act of creation is described with the Hebrew verb *yasar*, "to shape," as in pottery, requiring Yahweh Elohim to handle the ground in fashioning all of the creatures of the world. The more intimate involvement in creation also influences the character of God, whose intention for the creation evolves as the story progresses. Thus, in contrast to Elohim in Genesis 1, who evaluates each act of creation as "good" or "very good," and thus complete, Yahweh Elohim evaluates the creation of the Adam as "not good" (2:18), and thus incomplete, which propels the story ahead to fill out the details of world.

Sidebar 5.9 Creation of Humans from Clay

The creation of humans from clay is a common motif in Ancient Near Eastern creation mythologies. In Egyptian mythology, the god Khmun is the deity associated with the source of the Nile River, which seasonally overflowed its banks, creating fertile soil; he fashions humans from clay on a potter's wheel, while his consort, Heket the frog-goddess who represented fertility, animates the clay with breath (Barbara Watterson, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt*, 191). In Mesopotamian religion, the wise god Enki, the lord of the earth, creates humans from the clay of Abzu, the primordial sweet waters underneath the earth; he instructs his mother Namma: "knead clay from the top of the abzu; . . . nip off the clay and you shall bring the form into existence" (Enki and Ninmah in *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* 1.1.2; University of Oxford).

The process of creation moves from dry to wet, just the opposite from Genesis 1. The state of the earth prior to creation is a dry desert, not a watery chaos: “When no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for Yahweh Elohim had not caused it to rain upon the earth” (2:5). Creation begins with the watering of the dry ground: “[A] stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground (‘*adamah*)” (2:6), which results in the Garden of Eden. All plants and all creatures are formed from the ground: “Out of the ground Yahweh Elohim made to grow every tree” (2:9) . . . “and out of the ground Yahweh Elohim formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air” (2:19).

The human is formed at the outset of creation, immediately after the ground is watered to become clay: “Then Yahweh Elohim formed Adam from the dust of the ground (‘*adamah*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Adam became a living being” (2:7). The initial creation of Adam contrasts to Genesis 1, where humans are the capstone. The contrasts continue. Adam is created androgynous, lacking gender, as compared to humans in Genesis 1, who are created male and female: “Yahweh Elohim said, ‘It is not good that the Adam should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner’” (2:18). The transformation of the human from an androgynous earth-creature to a gendered being underscores the more open-ended account of creation, in which the human evolves from the creation of Adam in Eden (Genesis 2). The human continues to develop by acquiring knowledge (Genesis 3) and eventually becoming a failed moral agent when Cain kills Abel contaminating the ground with blood pollution (4:1–16). The organic relationship between the human and the ground gives way to increasing alienation, which culminates in the mixing of heaven and earth through intercourse between the sons of god and women and the birth of the Nephilim (6:1–4).

Flood

The Non-P version of the flood separates into three episodes: introduction (6:5–6, 7*, 8; 7:1–7); flood (7:7–8, 10, 12, 16b–17, 22–23; 8:2b–3a, 6–12, 13b); and

conclusion (8:20–23). The structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.8 Non-P Version of the Flood

Introduction		
Violence of Humans	Announcement of Flood	
6:4–5, 7*, 8	7:1–7	
Flood		
Preparation and Time	Effect of Flood	End of Flood
7:7–8	7:10, 12, 16b–17, 22–23	8:2b–3a, 6–12, 13b
Conclusion		
Sacrifice of Noah	Divine Oath not to destroy earth	
8:20	8:21–22	

The introduction identifies the uncontrolled violence of humans as the reason for the flood: “Yahweh saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (6:5). The flood is a rainstorm that lasts for 40 days (7:4), before a wind dries the water (8:2b–3a). Noah investigates the aftermath through a window in the ark, sending out a raven and two doves, until the second dove returns with an olive leaf, indicating that the waters had dried up (8:6–12). These motifs also appear in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, when Utnapishtim, the hero of the flood, also sends out a dove, a swallow, and a raven from a window in the ark to confirm the end of the flood (XII iii). The flood concludes with a sacrifice from Noah (8:20) and the divine decision not to destroy the earth again because of the violence of the human heart, indicating the failure of the event to achieve its goal. The central theme of the Non-P flood story is the evil of the human heart and the divine inability to cure it: “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (8:21).

Post-Flood

Three episodes trace the further decline of humanity after the flood, thus balancing a similar progression of events in the pre-flood period. They include the story of Noah and the vineyard (9:18–27); the table of nations (parts of Genesis 10), which traces the further growth of cities introduced in the genealogy of Cain (see esp. 10:8–19), and finally, the tower of Babel (11:1–9), in which humans seek to mix heaven and earth through city-building.

Combination of the Priestly Non-P Versions

The Priestly and Non-P versions of the flood tradition raise a series of unresolved literary questions about the history of the composition of the primeval history. Researchers continue to debate the literary character of the two versions of the flood and the process by which they were brought together. The traditional solution of the documentary hypothesis is that the two versions were originally written as the independent J and P sources, combined by editors to create the present form of Genesis 1–11. According to this hypothesis, the Non-P (or J source) was written sometime in the monarchy period; the Priestly source was written independently in the exile; the two sources were merged into one story in the post-exilic period.

The problem with the documentary hypothesis is that, when read alone, the Priestly source contains gaps in the plot of the story; it does not provide a reason for the flood. The good creation (Genesis 1) continues uninterrupted into the genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5); yet, Elohim informs Moses at the outset of the flood that the earth is corrupt (Genesis 6). How did the corruption come about in the independent Priestly source? The Priestly version does not adequately address the problem of blood pollution. Humans are vegetarian in the creation story (Genesis 1) and presumably in the pre-flood period (Genesis 5); yet, Noah emerges from the ark carnivorous, which requires Elohim to institute laws restricting the consumption of blood and the killing of humans (9:1–7). What happened in the ark to bring about this radical change in the human?

How does the reader account for the gaps in the plot of the Priestly version of the flood tradition? No one clear answer emerges and contemporary

researchers explore many different solutions employing source and redaction forms of criticism. Source critical researchers note that the perceived gap in the plot of the Priestly version may be one of reader expectation, based on the present form of Genesis 1–11, rather than any problem of literary design. The independent P source may simply have introduced the motif of the corruption of the earth at the outset of the flood, without explanation. The *Sumerian King List* is somewhat similar in that it too does not really provide a reason for the flood. Another possibility is that the portions of the Priestly source may be absent in Genesis 1–11, with portions having been removed in the combining the sources.

The alternative literary solution is that the Priestly version was not an independent source, but a literary supplement to the Non-P version. In this case, the Priestly version lacks a reason for the flood or for the change in the human diet after the flood, because it presupposes the rise of human violence and the blood-pollution of the ground in the Non-P version. The purpose of the revision is to introduce the Priestly perspective on creation and the flood. More recently, interpreters have even reversed the order of the composition, with Non-P revising the Priestly version, as one of many other independent additions to the primary history, including the separate insertion of the genealogical notices (e.g., 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10).

5.3 Genesis 12–50: Origin of the Ancestors

Genesis 12–50 traces the origin of the Israelite ancestors through four generations: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob. The connection between the wide lens of the primeval history and the more intimate portrait of the ancestors is the narrowing in scope of the genealogies of Shem (11:10–26) and of Terah (11:27–32). The genealogy of Terah, in particular, sets the stage for the story of the ancestors, since he is the father of Abraham (here named Abram), Nahor, and Haran.

Terah is introduced as a migrant, who moves from the city of Ur in Babylon to the city of Haran in Northern Damascus with the aim of journeying to the land of Canaan. The third son, Haran, dies in Ur before the initial migration, while Terah dies in the city of Haran, leaving Abraham and Nahor. Abraham, his wife, Sarah (here named Sarai), and Lot, the son of Haran, resume the migration to the land of Canaan, while Nahor remains in the city Haran with his wife, Milcah. The clans of Nahor and Abraham intermarry twice in the story of ancestors: Isaac marries Rebekah; and Jacob marries Leah and Rachel.

The migration of Abraham continues throughout his lifetime. As a consequence, Abraham lives his entire life as a resident alien in the land of Canaan, as do Isaac and Jacob, while Joseph and his brothers leave the land of Canaan to acquire a guest status in the land of Egypt, setting the stage for the story of the Exodus. The constant migration of the ancestors and their lack of residency provide the background for the two central themes in Genesis 12–50: the need to produce progeny in order to become a nation and the need to possess a homeland. These themes are unrealized divine promises in the life of the ancestors, which provide the point of tension throughout the narratives; the genealogies break off when the ancestors face the challenge of infertility, the need to discern the rightful heir, or when they confront the problem of acquiring land.

The genealogies in Genesis 12–50 organize the four generations of the ancestors into three sections: (1) the lineage of Abraham from Terah (11:27—

25:18); (2) the lineage of Jacob from Isaac (25:19—37:1); and (3) the lineage of Joseph and his brothers from Jacob (37:2—50:26). The organization may be illustrated in the following diagram; the diagram includes the literary boundaries of the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers and the placement of the genealogies.

Table 5.9 Genesis 12–50 Origin of the Ancestors

Abraham		Jacob		Joseph and his Brothers
11:27—25:18		25:19—37:1		37:2—50:26
11:27 Terah	25:12 Ishmael	25:19 Isaac	36:1, 9 Esau	37:2 Jacob

The structure of the genealogies clarifies that Isaac is not the focus of a separate section. Instead, his story links the accounts of Abraham and Jacob. The story of Abraham (11:27—25:18) introduces Isaac as the promised son through the announcement (18:1–15) and fulfillment (21:1–21) of his birth; Isaac continues to play a role in the stories of Abraham in the divine command to sacrifice the boy (Genesis 22) and in the account of his the marriage to Rebekah (Genesis 24). The story of Jacob (25:19—37:1) examines the role of Isaac as father in the birth of Jacob and Esau (25:19–26); Jacob’s deception of Isaac to steal the birth right from Esau (Genesis 27); Isaac’s sending Jacob away to Rebekah’s family in Haran to find a wife (Genesis 28:); and the death of Isaac (35:27–9).

Abraham Genesis 11:27—25:18

Literary Design

Genesis 11:27—25:18 is organized around the migration of Abraham, which is broad in scope. He begins his journey from Ur in Babylon, traveling northwest to Haran (11:31). From Haran, Abraham journeys south to the land of Canaan, passing through Shechem and Bethel on his way to the Negeb (12:6–9), where most of the stories about Abraham occur. Once Abraham journeys to Egypt (12:10–20) and once he returns to Bethel to separate from Lot (13:3), but the Negeb is the setting for the remainder of the stories. Abraham settles in Hebron by the oaks of Mamre (13:8). The conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16, 21) as well as Abraham's interaction with king Abimelech (Genesis 20, 21) remain in the southern region of the Negeb, including the locations of Kadesh, Shur, and Beersheba. The purchase of the cave of Machpelah is also in the area of Hebron (Genesis 23). The map illustrates the migrations of Abraham and the geographical setting of the central stories:

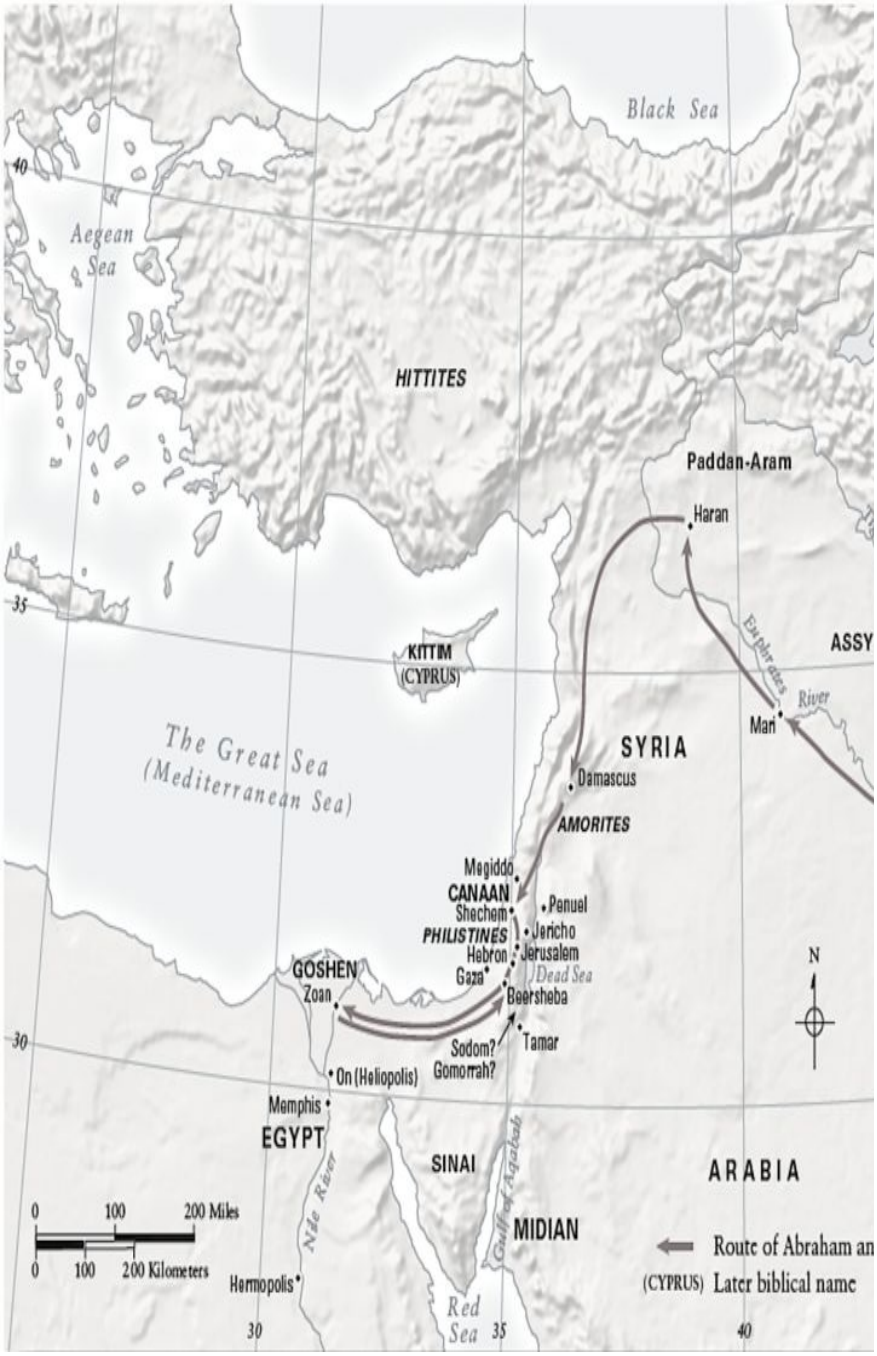

Figure 5.5 Map of Abraham Migrations.

The Abraham cycle contains an unusually broad array of stories, which has made the interpretation of its literary design difficult. Rolf Rendtorff grouped the stories into several categories, including episodes about Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13–14; 18–19), stories about Abraham in the southern desert region (Genesis 20–22), and a whole series of unrelated stories about family, migration,

and burial (parts of Genesis 12; 15; 16; 17; 23). He concluded that the repetition of the divine promises provided the literary design for the separate stories (see ch. 4). Recently, Joel Baden reinforced the conclusion that the divine promises of descendants and land are the two central themes (*The Promise to the Patriarchs*).

The recurrence of the divine promises of descendants and land provides organization to the Abraham cycle, while the accumulation of the promises makes their content extravagant. Five times (12:2–3; 13:16; 15:1–6; 17:1–7; 22:15–17) Abraham receives a divine promise that he will have descendants. The promise builds throughout the cycle until the descendants of Abraham are envisioned to be as numerous as the stars in heaven (22:17) or as the dust of the earth (13:16); God promises further that the vast number of descendants will also become a great nation (12:1–3). Four times (12:7; 13:14–15, 17; 15:7–21; 17:8) Abraham receives a divine promise that he will acquire land. As in the promise of descendants, the boundaries of the land expand from territory that Abraham is able to see with his own eyes (12:7), to all of the land of Canaan (17:8), and finally, to an area so large that it extends from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Babylon (15:18).

The extravagant promises of innumerable descendants and a vast homeland provide the backdrop for the story of the three main characters in the Abraham cycle— Abraham, Sarah, and Lot—who depart together from Haran to the land of Canaan: “Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot . . . and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan” (12:5). When the characters are related to the themes of the divine promise, the Abraham cycle may be separated into three parts: (1) the theme of descendants is developed for the most part in the household stories that focus on Abraham and Sarah; (2) the theme of land is concentrated in the episodes about Abraham and Lot and in the account of the purchase of the burial cave at Machpelah; while (3) the revelation to Abraham alone, when he is separated from Sarah and Lot, includes both the themes of descendants and land in the accounts of covenant making.

The three types of stories may be illustrated in the following chart; the stories centered on the promise of descendants are in the left column and those

focused on the promise of land in the right column; the accounts of covenant are in bold.

Table 5.10 Divine Promises of Descendants and Land in the Abraham Cycle

Theme: **Divine Promise of Descendants** Characters: Abraham and Sarah (Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Rebekah, Keturah)	Theme: **Divine Promise of Land** Characters: Abraham and Lot (Lot's Daughters; Abimelech; Ephron)
11:27–32 Genealogy of Terah	11:27–32 Genealogy of Terah
12:1–9 Migration to the Land of Canaan	12:1–9 Migration to the Land of Canaan
12:10–20 Wife-Sister Deception	
	13:1–18 Separation of Abraham and Lot
	14:1–24 Rescue of Lot
15:1–20 **Covenant**: Promise of Heir	15:1–20 **Covenant**: Promise of Land
16:1–16 Hagar and Birth of Ishmael	
17:1–27 **Covenant**: Promise of Heir Rejection of Ishmael	17:1–27 **Covenant**: Promise of Land
18:1–15 Announcement of the Birth of Isaac	
	18:16–33 Sodom and Gomorrah
	19:1–38 Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's Daughters, Incest, Moab and Ammon
20:1–18 Wife-Sister Deception	
21:1–21 Birth of Isaac Banishment of Hagar and Ishmael	
	21:22–34 Abraham and Abimelech, Water Well at Beersheba
22:1–19 Sacrifice of Isaac	
22:20–24 Descendants of Nahor	

	23:1–20 Purchase of the Burial Cave in Machpelah Death and Burial of Sarah
24:1–67 Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah	
25:1–6 Abraham's Descendants with Keturah	
	25:7–11 Death and Burial of Abraham
25:12–18 Genealogy of Ishmael	

The chart allows for three general conclusions about the literary design of the Abraham cycle. (1) The entire account is framed by genealogy. Terah (11:27–32) introduces the section to identify the main lineage, while Ishmael (25:12–18) concludes the section to eliminate his clan from the story. (2) The themes of descendants and land appear together in the opening scenes (11:27–32; 12:1–9), after which they alternate in the present literary design, so that a household story about Abraham, Sarah, and descendants is contrasted with social and political stories about Abraham, Lot, and other nations to define the promised land and its surrounding people. (3) The revelation of covenant (Genesis 15; 17) to Abraham weaves together the themes of descendants and of land, thus ensuring that the separate narratives of Sarah and Lot are one story of an emerging covenant between God and Abraham.

Abraham and Sarah: Divine Promise of Descendants

Household stories about Abraham and Sarah explore challenges to the divine promise of descendants. The challenges include the abandonment of the matriarch to foreign kings in the wife-sister deception (12:10–20; 20); the conflict over the rightful heir with the birth of Ishmael (16:1–16); the divine announcement and birth of Isaac, which leads to the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael (18:1–15; 21); the divine command to sacrifice the promised heir, Isaac (22:1–19); the need for Isaac to marry into the family of Nahor (24:1–67), and

the separation of Isaac from Abraham's non-chosen lines of Keturah (25:1–6) and Hagar-Ishmael (25:12–18).

The central drama surrounding the divine promise of descendants is the infertility of Sarah: "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (11:30). The problem gives way momentarily in Abraham's deception of pharaoh that his wife was his sister, since it endangers the divine promise with the threat of pregnancy, not infertility, while Sarah lives in the haram of pharaoh (12:10–20; see also Genesis 20). The momentary shift in theme returns to the central problem of infertility in the household conflict between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar (Genesis 16; 17; 21; 25).

Sarah offers Abraham her Egyptian slave-girl, Hagar, to be his concubine (Genesis 16) to produce an heir. The birth of Ishmael creates household conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16), as well as confusion as to whether Ishmael fulfills the divine promise of descendants (Genesis 17). The conflict intensifies when Sarah gives birth to Isaac (21:1–7), which results in the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness, where she encounters the deity, is rescued from death, and receives a separate divine promise of descendants (21:8–21).

Hagar's experience of oppression in the household of Abraham and Sarah; flight into the wilderness for relief; and divine rescue creates a series of inner-biblical connections with the story of Moses, who undergoes the same sequence of events. The parallels may be intended to criticize the oppressive actions of Abraham and Sarah; they certainly idealize Hagar and Ishmael as modeling Moses, even though Hagar and Ishmael do not represent the fulfillment of the divine promise of descendants to Abraham. The problem of the rightful heir is only resolved in the final episode when the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12–18) separates him from Isaac, who represents the continuation of the story (25:19). The two sons come back together at the end of the Abraham cycle to bury their father (25:7–11).

Sidebar 5.10 Hagar and Ishmael

Hagar and Ishmael take on complex roles in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the Genesis Rabbah, for example, from Judaism's classical period, Hagar is the daughter of pharaoh and Abraham's wife Keturah, while Ishmael is rebellious, idolatrous, and violent in his actions with Isaac. The Apostle Paul writes an allegory in which the slave Hagar and her son Ishmael represent slavery to the law in Judaism, while Isaac the child of the promise represents the freedom of the non-Jewish Christian from the law (Gal 4:21—5:1). In the Quran, Ishmael—not Isaac—is the son that Abraham must sacrifice (Genesis 22); Abraham is rewarded for his obedience with the promise of Isaac as a second son (Surah 37:100–104). In addition, Ishmael also builds the Kaaba with Abraham (Surah 2:125–27) and is remembered as a prophet (Surah 19:55). For discussion, see Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (*Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*) and Reuven Firestone (*Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*).

Abraham and Lot: Divine Promise of Land

Social-political narratives about Abraham and Lot, as well as Abraham's negotiations for water and a burial cave, develop the theme of the promise of land. Two points of tension are central to the theme: (1) It is unclear how Abraham will acquire land in Canaan as a resident alien; and (2) the joint migration of Abraham and Lot make the identification of the land promised to Abraham unclear. The story of the war to rescue Lot (Genesis 14), the negotiations for water rights at Beersheba (21:22–34) and the purchase of the burial cave at Machpelah (23:1–20; 25:7–11) explore how Abraham will possess property in the land of Canaan. Lot's separation from Abraham to the city of Sodom (Genesis 13) and the subsequent identification of the land of Moab and Ammon with Lot's family (Genesis 19) clarify the boundaries to the promised land of Canaan.

Possession of the Land (14; 21:22–34; 23)

Genesis 14 illustrates that the divine promise of land cannot be obtained through war, even if Abraham is able to conquer the world. This story of war centers on the conflict between three Mesopotamian kings (Aroich of Ellasar; Chedorlaomer of Elam; and Tidal of Goiim) and five rulers from the plains of Jordan, which includes the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim; and Bela = Zoar. The list of kings indicates the large geographical territory of the war; it includes nations that span the entire Ancient Near East.

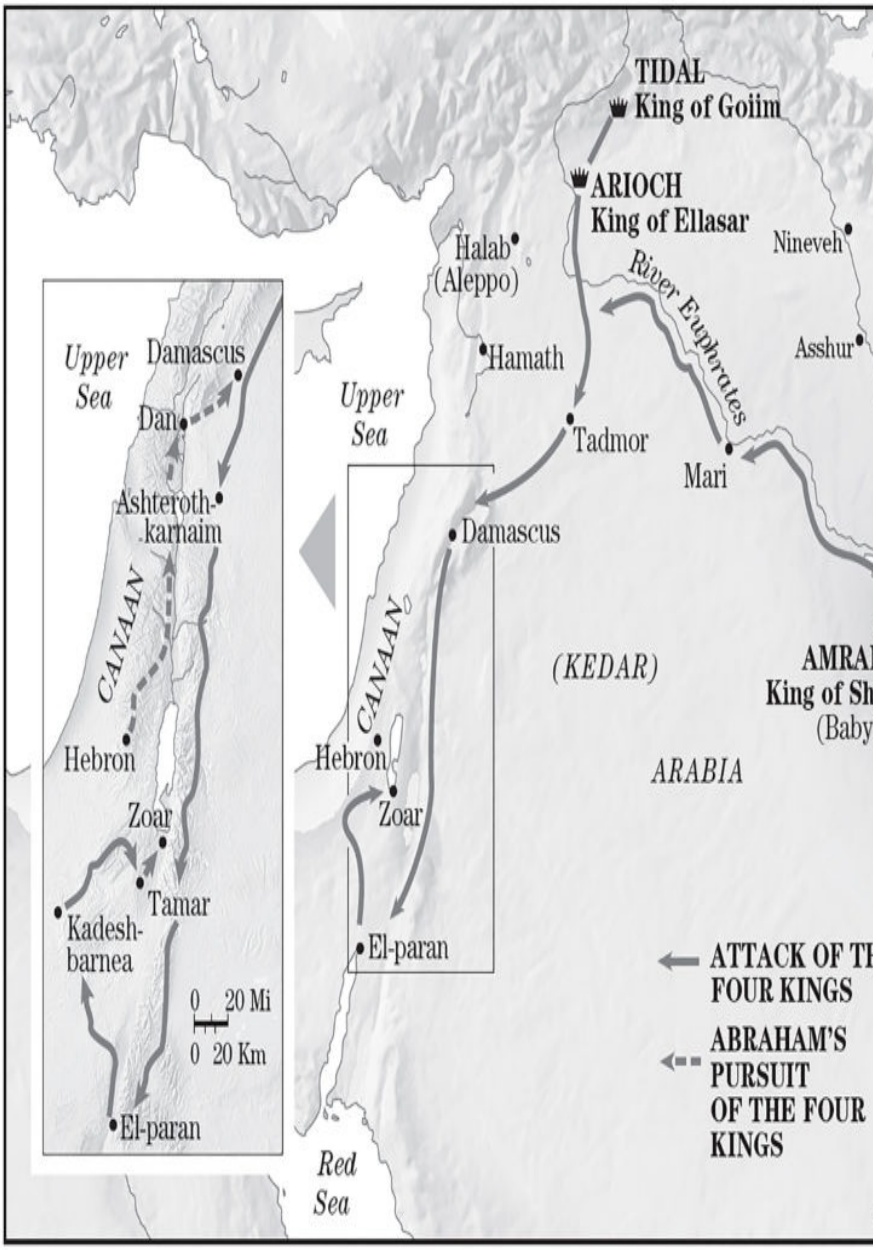

Figure 5.6 Map of Abraham's Wars in Genesis

The war is occasioned when the cities on the plains of Jordan rebel against their overlords; in response, the Mesopotamian kings defeat Sodom and Gomorrah, strip the cities of their possessions, and take the residents captive, including Lot (14:1–12). The seizure of Lot draws Abraham into the war to rescue his nephew (14:13–16). With only 318 men, Abraham pursues the Mesopotamian imperial armies, defeating them from Dan to a location north of Damascus. Victory, however, does not lead to conquest or land possession.

Instead, Abraham returns all of the possessions and the captured people to Sodom, thus rescuing his nephew. Upon his return to the Valley of Shaveh (the King's Valley), Abraham has a mystical encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem, followed by the offer of war booty from the king of Sodom, which he refuses (14:17–24). The restricted action of Abraham indicates that war cannot be the means of land possession to fulfill the divine promise. The rejection of war and conquest contrasts to the tradition of holy war that dominates the story of Moses (see for example Exod 23:20–33; Numbers 13–15; Deuteronomy 7, 20).

Abraham's negotiation for water rights at Beersheba (21:22–34) and the burial cave at Machpelah (23:1–20) provide the counter story to war and conquest as a means to possess land. The negotiation with Abimelech, the Philistine, at Beersheba (21:22–34) models the role of covenant-making and oath-keeping for land use. Abimelech, the landowner, states to Abraham: "Swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have resided as an alien," to which Abraham replies, "I swear it" (21:22–24). The purchase of the burial cave at Machpelah progresses from land use to land possession (Genesis 23). In this story, Abraham negotiates with Ephron, the Hittite. He rejects the offer of Ephron to give him the cave, and instead, demands to pay the market price of four hundred shekels. The process of public negotiation and purchase results in the initial fulfillment of the divine promise of land: "The field and the cave that is in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham's possession as a burying place" (23:20).

Boundaries of the Land (Genesis 18–19)

The inability of Canaan to support both Abraham and Lot introduces the theme of the boundaries of land, since the two are forced to separate: "Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against Yahweh" (13:12–13). The narrative traces the migration of Lot to Sodom

and the eventual divine destruction of the cities, causing Lot to flee to the city of Zoar, where he lives in a cave with his two daughters. Lot's daughters have intercourse with him while drunk, and thus, produce the nations of Moab and of Ammon. The author's negative judgment on the origins of the Moabites and the Ammonites as the result of incest is clear, but the identification of the lands of Moab and of Ammon east of the Jordan River with Lot's family also clarifies that the boundary to the land promised to Abraham lies west of the Jordan River.

Sidebar 5.11 Boundaries of the Promised Land

The Pentateuch is filled with conflicting boundaries of the promised land. In selective texts, the promise of land is so large that it includes nearly the entire Ancient Near East, stretching from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River: Yahweh promises to Abraham, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen 15:18; see also Exod 23:31; Deut 11:24). But in other texts, the promise land is restricted to territory west of the Jordan River "from the wilderness of Zin" in the south to "Rehob, near Lebo–Hamath" in the north (Num 13:21; see also Num 34:1–12). For discussion of the promised land in biblical literature, see Nilli Wazana (*All the Boundaries of the Land*), and for the role of the Jordan River as a boundary, see Rachel Havrelock (*River Jordan: The Mythology of a Dividing Line*).

Covenant with Abraham: Divine Promises of Descendants and Land

Abraham is alone in only two stories, both of which center on the theme of covenant (Gen 15; 17). The content of the two stories indicates that covenant is meant to hold together both the promises of descendants and of land as legal obligations of God to Abraham.

Genesis 15 recounts a series of revelations to Abraham while he is still childless; the encounter culminates in a covenant ceremony. The first divine revelation centers on the promise of descendants (15:1–6). It begins with the

divine self-disclosure: “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great” (15:1). Abraham responds with the complaint that God has not fulfilled the promise of descendants, and as a result, Eliezer of Damascus will inherit his estate, to which Yahweh answers: “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir” (15:4). Yahweh reinforces this statement with the promise of descendants: “Look toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them . . . so shall your descendants be” (15:5). The second divine revelation (15:7–11) shifts from the theme of descendants to land: “I am Yahweh, who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess” (15:7), to which Abraham responds: “O Yahweh God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” (15:8) God responds with instructions for a covenant ceremony of sacrifice: “Bring me a heifer three years old . . .” (15:9). The sacrifice leads to the divine guarantee of land in the form of a covenant: “On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land’” (15:18).

Genesis 17 returns to the theme of covenant when Abraham has Ishmael as his potential heir. As in Genesis 15, covenant includes both the promises of descendants and of land. The divine revelation to Abraham begins with the promises of descendants: “I am El Shaddai; walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous” (17:1–2). The deity then states the promise of land: “And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holing; and I will be their God” (17:8). The remainder of this version of the covenant clarifies that the yet unborn Isaac, rather than the firstborn son, Ishmael, will represent the fulfillment of the divine promise of descendants and of land possession in spite of Abraham’s request that “Ishmael might live in (God’s) sight” (17:18). To this God responds: “No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him” (17:19).

Sidebar 5.12 Covenant

Covenant is a translation of the Hebrew word *berit*, meaning "agreement or contract." George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion write: "A 'covenant' is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance" ("Covenant," AYB 1:1179). The oaths may be conditional, meaning that the covenant can be abrogated if one of the parties fails to fulfill the conditions of the contract; or the oaths may be unconditional, meaning the covenant cannot be broken under any circumstances. The Pentateuch contains a wide range of covenants between humans and between God and humans. The covenants between humans tend to be conditional, as the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech over water rights (Gen 21:27; see also the covenant between Laban and Jacob, Gen 31:44). The covenants between God and humans may be unconditional, as in the promises of God to Noah never again to send a flood (Gen 9:8–17), or to Abraham about the gift of land and descendants (Genesis 17), but divine promises may also be conditional, as in the establishment of covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:3–8). The theme of covenant as a treaty between Yahweh and Israel is a central theme in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 4:13; 5:2; 7:2).

Summary

The Abraham cycle establishes the central role of the divine promises of descendants and land for the entire story of the Pentateuch. Joel Baden writes: "From the moment that Abraham emerges on the scene in the beginning of Genesis to the death of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy, the patriarchal promise is the guiding force behind the entire pentateuchal narrative. The promise constitutes the first words God says to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 and the last words that God says to Moses in Deuteronomy 34:4."[11] What is striking at the end of the Abraham cycle is the minimal realization of the promises in contrast to their extravagance. The story of Abraham closes with one descendant of the promise, Isaac, and with the possession of only the cave at Machpelah.

Composition

The composition of the Abraham cycle has been the focus of research throughout the modern historical-critical study of the Pentateuch. Jean Astruc initially identified two versions of stories based on the use of different names for the deity: Abraham's false identification of Sarah as his sister occurs twice—in one case, the deity is Yahweh (12:10–20), and in another, Elohim (20:1–18). The contrast repeats in the account of covenant ("Yahweh," in Genesis 15; "Elohim," in Genesis 17) and in the conflict between Sarah and Hagar ("Yahweh," in 16:1–16; "Elohim," in 21:1–21). The stories of Elohim underwent a further separation in later research. Herman Hupfeld noted that the formal account of covenant (Genesis 17) repeated motifs from creation (Genesis 1) and from the conclusion to the flood (9:1–17), while the less formal stories of deception (20:1–18) and of the conflict between Sarah and Hagar (21:1–21) represent a different author, who emphasized Elohim's revelation through dreams. These distinctions supported the documentary hypothesis: Yahweh represented the "J" source (12:10–20; 15; 16:1–16); Elohim in the formal account of the covenant was the "P" source (Genesis 17); and Elohim in the more dramatic stories of deception and conflict was the "E" source (20:1–18; 21:1–21). These foundational texts allowed for the further separation of the sources throughout the Abraham cycle.

The following separation between the Priestly and Non-P literature will provide the background to illustrate a variety of solutions to the composition of the Abraham cycle of literature.

Priestly

The two central stories in the Priestly account of Abraham are the covenant (Genesis 17) and the purchase of the cave at Machpelah (Genesis 23). The Priestly version of the Abraham cycle lacks the more familiar narratives of Hagar and Lot. The births of Ishmael (16:1, 15 [16]) and Isaac (21:1, 3–5), as well as the separation of Abraham and Lot (12:4b–5; 13:6, 11b) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:29) are simply noted in passing. But the Priestly version does include many genealogies—Terah (11:27–32), Nahor (22:20–24), Keturah (25:1–6) and Ishmael (25:12–18). The summary of the

Priestly literature may be illustrated in the following diagram; the stories centered on the promise of descendants are in the left column and those focused on the promise of land in the right column; the accounts of covenant are in bold.

Table 5.11 Summary of Priestly Literature in Genesis

Theme: **Divine Promise of Descendants** Characters: Abraham and Sarah (Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Keturah)	Theme: **Divine Promise of Land** Characters: Abraham, Lot and Ephron, the Hittite
11:27–32 Genealogy of Terah	
	12:4b–5 Migration and Separation 13:6, 11b of Abraham and Lot
16:1,15(16) Hagar and Birth of Ishmael	
17:1–27 **Covenant: Promise of Heir and Rejection of Ishmael**	17:1–27 **Covenant: Promise of Land**
	19:29 Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
21:1, 3–5 Birth of Isaac	
22:20–24 Descendants of Nahor	
	23:1–20 Purchase of Cave at Machpelah Death and Burial of Sarah
25:1–6 Abraham's Descendants with Keturah	
	25:7–11 Death and Burial of Abraham
25:12–18 Genealogy of Ishmael	

The Priestly version moves quickly to place Abraham in the land of Canaan (11:27–32); to separate Abraham and Lot (12:4b–5; 13:6, 11b); and to announce the birth of Ishmael when Abraham is eighty-six years old (16:1, 15 [16]). These events provide the background for the central account of the covenant (Genesis 17).

Genesis 17 develops themes from the Priestly version of the creation (Genesis 1) and the flood (9:1–17). The name Elohim, in primeval history, evolves to the name El Shaddai in the revelation to Abraham: "I am El Shaddai, walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you" (17:1–2). In this new revelation, the covenant to Noah (9:1–17) is narrowed in scope to the promises of descendants and of land. The deity states: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall

come from you" (17:6); El Shaddai adds: "I will give you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan for a perpetual holding" (17:7). These are the first statements of the divine promises in the Priestly source and they occur after the birth of Ishmael, which requires God to clarify that Isaac, not Ishmael, will fulfill the promise, even though Abraham prefers Ishmael: "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" (17:18).

The second extended narrative in the Priestly version is the purchase of the burial cave at Machpelah (Genesis 23). Several events set the stage for the death of Sarah and the purchase of land. Lot plays no role in the preparation of these events. The Priestly version moves briskly to announce the salvation of Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, because Elohim remembered the covenant with Abraham (18:29)—a repetition of the same action of Elohim in saving Noah from the flood (8:1). This action is followed by the birth of Isaac, when Abraham was one hundred years old (21:1, 3–5), after which Sarah dies (Genesis 23). Genesis 23 announces Sarah's death at one hundred twenty-seven years of age and Abraham negotiates to purchase the burial cave from Ephron, the Hittite. The purchase is Abraham's first possession of land: "The field and the cave that is in it passed form the Hittites into Abraham's possession as a burying place" (23:20). The Abraham cycle concludes with the genealogy of Keturah's children (25:1–6); the death and burial of Abraham in the cave of Machpelah by his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael (25:7–11); and the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12–18).

Non-P

The Non-P version of the Abraham cycle is made up of extended narratives, including the deception of Sarah as sister (12:10–20; 20); the conflict between Sarah and Hagar over the heir (16:1–16; 18:1–15; 21:2, 6–21); the lengthy story of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (13:1–5, 7–18; 18:16–33; 19:1–28, 30–38); covenant (Genesis 15); Abraham's negotiations for water rights (21:22–34); the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22); and the marriage of Isaac (Genesis 24). The Non-P material may be summarized in the following diagram; the stories

centered on the promise of descendants are in the left column and those focused on the promise of land in the right column; the accounts of covenant are in bold.

Table 5.12 Summary of Non-P Literature in Genesis

Theme: **Divine Promise of Descendants** Characters: Abraham and Sarah (Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Rebekah, Keturah)	Theme: **Divine Promise of Land** Characters: Abraham and Lot (Lot's Daughters; Abimelech; Ephron)
	12:1–4a, 6–9 Migration to the Land of Canaan
12:10–20 Wife-Sister Deception	
	13:1–5, 7–18 Separation of Abraham and Lot
15:1–20 **Covenant: Promise of Heir**	15:1–20 **Covenant: Promise of Land**
16:1–16 Hagar and Birth of Ishmael	
18:1–15 Announcement of the Birth of Isaac	
	18:16–33 Sodom and Gomorrah
	19:1–28, 30–38 Sodom and Gomorrah Lot's Daughters, Incest Moab and Ammon
20:1–18 Wife-Sister Deception	
21:2, 6–21 Birth of Isaac Banishment of Hagar and Ishmael	
	21:22–34 Abraham and Abimelech, Water Well at Beersheba
22:1–19 Sacrifice of Isaac	
24:1–67 Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah	

Source critics identify the sources J and E in the Non-P material based on two core repetitions: (1) the conflict between Sarah and Hagar occurs twice with different names for the deity, Yahweh (16:1–16) and Elohim (21:2, 6–21); and (2) Abraham deceives foreign kings twice, stating that Sarah is his sister; in the first, the deity is Yahweh (12:10–20), and in the second, Elohim (20:1–18). The distribution of the divine name Elohim, outside of the P source, allows for the identification of the E source in the account of covenant (15:1–5, 12–16, 19–21) and in the sacrifice of Isaac (22:1–14, 19). The remainder of the Non-P narratives makes up the J source, with the exception of the rescue of Lot (Genesis 14), which researchers interpret as an independent story.

Combination of the Priestly and Non-P Versions

The composition of the Abraham cycle has undergone extensive reevaluation in recent research. The source-critical solution to the Abraham cycle continues to influence many interpreters, even while it also raises lingering questions about the literature.

The minimal amount of narrative information in the Priestly version of the Abraham cycle raises questions of whether it is an independent source or a revision of the Non-P literature. The covenant (Genesis 17) is clearly tied to the Priestly account of creation (Genesis 1) and the flood (9:1–17), suggesting a continuous narrative. But the meager information about Hagar and Ishmael (16:1, 15) and the passing notice about Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah (19:29) suggest that the Priestly literature is a revision to the more developed narratives of the Non-P version.

The isolation of an E source is even more difficult, given the limited amount of material and the inability of the literature to function as an independent version of the Abraham cycle—a partial version of covenant (Genesis 15); the wife-sister deception (Genesis 20); Hagar and Sarah (Genesis 21); and the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22).

The criterion of the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, as a resource to identify the separate sources raises additional questions about the composition of the Abraham cycle, since the distinct names are not always clearly separated. The following diagram lists the occurrences of the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim.

Table 5.13 Occurrences of Yahweh and Elohim as Divine Names

	Yahweh = Lord	Elohim = God
11:27–32 Genealogy of Terah		
12:1–9 Migration to Canaan	12:1, 4, 7	
12:10–20 Wife-Sister Deception	12:17	
13:1–18 Separation Abraham-Lot	13:4, 10, 13, 18	
14:1–24 War/Rescue of Lot	14:22	14:18, 19, 20, 22
15:1–20 Covenant	15:1, 2, 4, 6 (2), 7, 13, 18	15:2, 8

16:1–16 Hagar-Birth of Ishmael	16:2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 (2), 13	16:13
17:1–27 Covenant	17:1	17:1, 3, 7, 9, 15, 18, 22, 23
18:1–15 Announcement Birth of Isaac	18:1, 3, 13	
18:16–33 Sodom and Gomorrah	18: 17, 19, 22, 26, 30, 31, 32, 33	
19:1–38 Sodom and Gomorrah	19:13 (2), 14, 16, 24, 27	19:29
20:1–18 Wife-Sister Deception	20:4, 18	20:3, 6, 11, 13, 17
21:1–21 Birth of Isaac/Banishment Hagar		21:2, 4, 6, 12, 17, 19, 20
21:22–34 Abraham-Abimelech Wells	21:33	21:22, 33
22:1–19 Sacrifice of Isaac	22:11, 14, 15	22:1, 3, 8, 9, 12
22:20–24 Descendant of Nahor		
23:1–20 Cave of Machpelah	23:6, 11, 15	
24:1–67 Marriage of Isaac/Rebekah	24:1, 3, 7, 12, 18, 21, 26, 35, 40, 42, 44, 48, 50, 52, 56	24:3, 7, 12, 27, 42, 48
25:1–6 Abraham's Descendants with Keturah		
25:7–11 Death and Burial of Abraham		25:11
25:12–18 Genealogy of Ishmael		

The diagram illustrates that the separation of the divine names Yahweh (J) and Elohim (E) is maintained for the most part in the story of Hagar and Sarah (Yahweh in Genesis 16; Elohim in Genesis 21), but that the distinction breaks down in the account of the covenant (Genesis 15), the deception of Abimelech (Genesis 20), and the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). The same mixing of the divine names continues in the Priestly literature, with the divine name Yahweh appearing in the account of covenant (17:1) and in the purchase of the cave at Machpelah (23:6, 11, 15).

The inability to identify complete source documents and the mixing of motifs may indicate the literary process of redaction and reinterpretation, rather than from the combination of separate source documents. Samuel Sandmel suggested such a process in the Non-P version of the Abraham cycle when he identified the second occurrence of the wife-sister story (Genesis 20) as a haggadic reinterpretation of the first instance of the story (Genesis 12; see ch. 4). In this case, the two stories were not written independently as separate sources

with distinct divine names; they represent, instead, inner-biblical commentary and revision.

John Van Seters, and in a more qualified way, David Carr, also interpret the Priestly literature as commentary on the Non-P version of the Abraham cycle (see ch. 4). The covenant (Genesis 17) advances the Priestly author's interpretation of creation (Genesis 1) and of the flood (9:1–17); yet, the abbreviated comments about Sarah and Hagar (16:1, 15 [16]) or Lot (19:29) appear to be additions to the Non-P version of the Abraham cycle. The single verse about Lot's rescue from Sodom (19:29), for example, would add the Priestly theme that "God remembers covenant" to the Non-P version of the story.

Rolf Rendtorff introduced a distinct view of the literary formation of the Abraham cycle when he argued that the composition of the divine promises of descendants and of land occurred independently as a way of relating different narratives (ch. 4). By tracing the different forms of the divine promises and by evaluating the degree to which the promises are embedded in the narratives, Rendtorff identified different layers of composition as the Abraham cycle merged with the stories of Jacob, Joseph, and eventually, Moses.

The identification of the oral tradents and the authors of the Abraham cycle ranges broadly in time from the pre-monarchy to the post-exilic periods (see ch. 11 for the historical research on the ancestors). Hermann Gunkel identified the story of Abraham's lie that Sarah was his sister (12:10–20) to be an ancient oral story from the tribal period (ch. 3). Julius Wellhausen and subsequent source critics interpreted the J and E sources of the Abraham cycle as compositions from the monarchy period, perhaps tied to the rise of the Davidic monarchy (ch. 2).

More recent interpreters place the composition of the Abraham cycle in the exilic and post-exilic periods (ch. 4), which corresponds to the emergence of Abraham in exilic and post-exilic prophetic literature. Joseph Blenkinsopp writes: "It is particularly noteworthy that there is no reference to Abraham in prophetic texts prior to Ezekiel."[12] Ezekiel refers to Abraham as a symbol of hope for the exiles that they would one day return to the land: "Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is

surely given us to possess” (33:24). The same message of hope is repeated by the exilic prophet Second Isaiah, who also refers to Abraham to encourage the exiles: “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many” (41:8; see also 29:22; 51:2; 63:16). The references assume an earlier tradition of Abraham known to the audience, but the content indicates an interpretation aimed at exiles. The late dating clarifies that the central role of the divine promises of descendants and of land to Abraham is also aimed at exiles with a message of hope. Thomas Römer has clarified that the same promises appear throughout the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, linking the stories of the ancestors with the history of Israel’s loss of the land in the exile (*Israel’s Väter*).

Jacob: Genesis 25:19—37:1

Literary Design

The Jacob cycle begins with the genealogy of Isaac: “These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s son” (25:19), and it concludes with the description of Jacob as a resident alien: “Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan” (37:1). The plot describes Jacob’s migration from Beersheba to Haran and back because of conflict with Esau and the need to marry within the clan of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. The Jacob cycle is composed of three episodes that take place in different locations with distinct characters; two accounts of divine confrontation provide transition between the three episodes. The literary structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.14 Literary Design of Jacob Cycle

Jacob-Esau	Jacob-Laban	Jacob-Esau
Beersheba	Haran	Shechem
25:19—28:22	29:1—31:55	32:1—37:1

Bethel	Jabbok River
Theophany	Night Struggle
28:10–20	32:22–32

The Jacob cycle begins in the land of Canaan at Beersheba to describe the conflict between Jacob and Esau over the birthright and the blessing of Isaac (25:19—28:22). The conflict forces Jacob to flee. The middle section recounts Jacob's northern flight to Rebekah's brother Laban who lives in Haran, where Jacob marries Rachel and Leah, the daughters of Laban (29:1—31:55). The story then traces Jacob's journey back to the land of Canaan, where he resolves the conflict with Esau (32:1—37:1). The plot is reinforced by two stories of divine encounter that provide transition between the different sections: the first is at Bethel (28:10–20) as Jacob leaves the land of Canaan for Haran; and the second is at the Jabbok River (32:22–32), as Jacob prepares to reenter the land upon his return from Haran

Shared themes link the Abraham and Jacob cycles. Isaac functions as an important character in both cycles, shifting roles from the son of Abraham to the father of Jacob. The divine promises further tie the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob together. All three characters receive the extravagant promises of innumerable descendants and of the possession of land, while living as resident aliens in the land of Canaan. Abraham receives multiple promises at different locations, but Isaac and Jacob receive promises at particular places, embedding these characters in different regions

The divine promises to Isaac take place in Gerar, the land of king Abimelech (26:1–5), including the locations of Beersheba and Hebron, where Abraham also resided. Jacob twice receives the same divine promises, but at the northern location of Bethel, indicating the importance of this cultic site in the Jacob cycle of stories. When Jacob flees from Esau, Yahweh states at Bethel: "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth" (28:13–14). The Deity repeats the promises when Jacob returns from Haran and journeys for a second time to Bethel to build an altar: "I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land that I gave to Abraham and

Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to our offspring after you" (35:11–12). The divine promises indicate that the story of Jacob is centered on the northern region of Bethel, as compared to the stories of Isaac and even Abraham, who reside in the southern desert regions of Beersheba and Hebron.

Whether the divine promises take place in the north or in the south, their fulfillment remains minimal throughout the story of the ancestors. The single heir of Abraham (Genesis 18; 21) becomes twelve sons for Jacob (Genesis 29–30), while the possession of land increases from the southern burial cave of Machplah, purchased by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite (23:15), to include the northern plot of land on the outskirts of Shechem, purchased by Jacob from the sons of Hamor (33:18). Even with this purchase, Jacob remains a resident alien in the land of Canaan (37:1).

The story of Jacob contrasts in many ways with the Abraham cycle. The northern setting is only one of the contrasts to the Abraham cycle. The character development of Jacob and Abraham is especially different. Abraham deceives pharaoh (Genesis 12) and Abimelech (Genesis 20) about Sarah, but outside of these stories, he functions for the most part as a diplomat: he negotiates with Lot over land (Genesis 13); resolves the issue of war booty with the king of Sodom (Genesis 14); enters into covenant with Abimelech over land usage (Genesis 20); and purchases the burial cave at Machpelah (Genesis 23). Jacob, by contrast, functions as a trickster rather than a diplomat. The role of Jacob as a trickster is developed in different ways through his interaction with Esau (25:19—28:22; 32:1—37:1), Laban (29:1—31:55), and God (28:10–20; 32:22–32).

Sidebar 5.13 Trickster

The trickster in folklore is defined by a number of characteristics. Marginality is a central feature of trickster stories; the trickster is often presented as disadvantaged or as functioning from a position of weakness—the least likely to succeed. Susan Niditch describes the trickster as "the poor relative, youngest son, the exile, the ex-prince, the soldier of a defeated army" (*Underdogs and Tricksters*, 1987: xi). The marginal status of the trickster means that the hero must rely on self in order to

survive through deceit rather than strength. But there are qualifications. The trickster is more of a con artist than an evil protagonist, surviving by wit and cleverness.

Jacob–Esau

The Jacob cycle begins with Rebekah giving birth to the twins, Esau and Jacob, in which Jacob is born the younger son, but seeks to change his circumstances through the role of the trickster (25:19–26). The names of the twins describe their character, setting the stage for the plot of the Jacob cycle. Esau, the firstborn, was red (‘*admoni*) and hairy (*se’ar*), playing on the words Edom and Seir, where the descendants of Esau would eventually reside: “The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau” (25:25). Jacob seeks to change the order of birth in the womb: “Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob,” meaning “to supplant” (25:26). The birth sets in motion the conflict between the twins, with Jacob continuing to seek out ways to achieve the status of the firstborn. The conflict is even carried over to the parents: “Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob” (25:28).

Rebekah and Jacob repeatedly trick Isaac and Esau. In the very first story after the birth of the twins, Jacob tricks Esau out of his birthright in exchange for a bowl of red lentil soup, again playing on the name Edom (25:29–34). Then, Rebekah orchestrates an even more complex trick to steal the blessing of the firstborn from the blind Isaac, who wishes to give it to Esau (Genesis 27). In this story, Isaac sends Esau to hunt game so that he might eat the food and bless him before his death. Rebekah overhears the conversation; she masks Jacob with skins from sheep and cloths from Esau to fool the blind Isaac into thinking that Esau had returned from the hunt. The masquerade succeeds and Jacob receives the blessing intended for Esau. Esau and Isaac discover the trick too late. Isaac exclaims to Esau: “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.” To which, Esau responds: “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has

supplanted me these two times” (27:35–36). The trickster, Jacob, is forced to flee for his life, when Esau reveals his plan: “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob” (27:41).

Jacob–Laban

Rebekah advises Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Haran (27:43–45), which sets the stage for the second cycle (29:1—31:55). When Jacob escapes to Haran, he enters a world of tricksters equal to his mother, and as a consequence, he finds himself the object of tricks, rather than the trickster. The reversal of roles begins when Jacob agrees to work for Laban seven years to marry Rachel (29:18). On the day of the wedding, in the dark of the night, Laban “took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went into her” (29:23). In the light of morning, Jacob realized the trick and confronted Laban: “Why have your deceived me?” Laban’s response provides commentary on Jacob’s past deceptions: “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn” (29:25–26). Jacob served Laban an additional seven years for Rachel. When Jacob wished to leave, Laban once again tricks him. Jacob requests the speckled and spotted sheep and goats, as well as the black lambs, as his wages for service for fourteen years. Laban agrees, but then removes all the males with these characteristics to reduce their birthrate (29:25–43). Jacob counteracts Laban’s trick by making striped sticks that influence the males to produce speckled and spotted offspring. But he is forced to flee, when Laban’s sons accuse him of taking their father’s flock (31:1–2).

The Jacob-Laban cycle ends with one final confrontation and trick (Genesis 31). Laban catches the fleeing Jacob in the hill country of Gilead and accuses him of carrying away his daughters like captives (31:26) and of stealing his household gods (31:32). Jacob confesses his fear that Laban would take Leah and Rachel away from him, but not knowing “that Rachel had stolen the gods,” he adds “anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live” (31:31–32). Laban searches the tents of Leah, her maids, and Jacob, before entering the tent of Rachel, who put the gods in “the camel’s saddle and sat on them.” When

Laban searches the tent, she tricks him, stating: “Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me” (31:35). She keeps the gods and the episode concludes with a covenant truce defining the territory of Laban and Jacob: “This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm” (31:52).

Sidebar 5.14 Jacob’s Ladder

Jacob’s dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth symbolizes a sacred location where the divine and human worlds meet. Mircea Eliade interprets the linking of the worlds of heaven and earth at a specific geographical location to signify the center or the most holy place, often described as the *axis mundi*, center or naval of the world (*Images and Symbols*, 45–51). In the stories of Jacob, the northern location of Bethel represents the most holy place.

Jacob–God

The theme of the trickster continues to play a role in Jacob’s two encounters with God as he leaves (28:10–20) and reenters (32:22–32) the land of Canaan. The first appearance of God at Bethel (28:10–20) is a mystical dream in which Jacob sees heaven and earth connected with a ladder, allowing divine beings to descend and ascend to the place where he was sleeping. God then descends through the heavenly portal and promises Jacob descendants and safe return to the land from which he is fleeing:

> “I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (28:13–15).



Figure 5.8 Picture of the Jacob's Ladder in Luther Bibles (of 1534 and also 1545).

Jacob responds differently to the theophany and to the divine promises. He is terrified by the theophany and names the place Bethel ("house of God"). In so responding, Jacob becomes the founder of the northern cult of Bethel, signifying for future generations that it is a gateway to heaven (28:17). Awe gives way to a conditional vow when Jacob responds to the divine promises: "*If* God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, *then* Yahweh shall be my God" (28:20–21). The ancestors tend not to respond directly to the divine promises. Only once does Abraham complain to Yahweh about his lack of descendants (15:1–3); but this leads to "belief," not to a series of conditions: "He (Abraham) believed Yahweh; and Yahweh reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6). The guarded vow of Jacob, with its many self-interested conditions, contrasts to the "faith" of Abraham, reinforcing his character as the trickster even in the midst of a mystical religious experience.



Figure 5.9 Jacob wrestles with an angel [night-wrestler] by Gustav Doré. From Doré's English Bible (1866).

Jacob has a second nighttime encounter with a supernatural being at the Jabbok River as he prepares to reenter the land of Canaan (32:22–32): "[A] man wrestled with him until daybreak" (32:24). Jacob overpowers the opponent, forcing the night-wrestler to dislocate Jacob's hip through touch, while exclaiming: "[L]et me go, for day is breaking" (32:26). Jacob refuses the plea without getting something in return, in this case a blessing, which sets the stage for one final trick. The night-wrestler exploits Jacob's desire for a blessing to acquire his name, which gives the opponent the power over Jacob to change his name: "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (32:28). When Jacob requests the same power of the name over his opponent, he is denied it: "'Please tell me your name. But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?'" (32:29).

The night-wrestler never reveals its identity, forcing Jacob to interpret the event on his own. He identifies the night-struggle as an encounter with God, naming the location Peniel ("face of God"): "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (32:30). But when Jacob meets his brother in the light of day, he reinterprets the encounter: "For truly to see your face (Esau's) is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor" (33:10). The identity of the night-wrestler is never resolved: Was it a night-demon? God? Or was it Jacob's inner anxiety at meeting his brother? What is clear is that the encounter brings the central plot of the Jacob cycle to a

conclusion. The transformation of Jacob during the night of wrestling allows him to achieve the peace upon returning to his father's house that was the condition of his earlier vow to God at Bethel. The denouement of the plot is achieved when Jacob returns to Bethel and builds an altar to God (35:1–15).

Composition

Jacob and the Bethel Cult

The composition of the Jacob cycle is centered on the Bethel cult, since Jacob is the cult founder. Bethel is introduced in the Abraham cycle of stories as the site of his second altar (Gen 12:8; 13:3), but it is Jacob who names the site after his initial theophany: "He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at first" (28:19). When God instructs Jacob to leave Haran, the Deity is identified with Bethel: "I am the God of Bethel" (31:13). After Jacob reenters the land of Canaan, God further instructs Jacob to return to Bethel, to set up an altar on the site, and to take up residency in the area: "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there" (35:1). These repeated references underscore that the Jacob cycle originates with traditions about this northern cultic site. Erhard Blum identifies the theophany at Bethel as an independent cultic etiology of the Northern kingdom that becomes interwoven with legends of Jacob before the fall of the kingdom in the late-eighth century (*Vätergeschichte*).

Sidebar 5.15 Bethel

Bethel means "house of God" in Hebrew; it is introduced in the Abraham cycle of stories as the site of his second altar (Gen 12:8; 13:3), but it is associated most prominently with the Jacob cycle of stories (Gen 28:19; 31:13; 35:1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 15, 16), where it is also named Luz (Gen 28:19; 35:6). Bethel was the central worship site for the Northern kingdom; tradition associates Bethel with the golden calf established by Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:29, 32, 33; 2 Kgs 10:29), which is the focus of prophetic criticism by the Man of God (1 Kgs 13:1, 4, 10, 11, 32), Hosea (10:15;

12:4), and Amos (4:4; 5:5, 6; 7:10, 13), culminating in its destruction by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:15).

References outside of the Pentateuch reinforce the close tie between Jacob and the Bethel cult. The eighth-century prophet Hosea assumes the tradition of Jacob and Bethel when addressing northern Israelites: “In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor; he met him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him” (12:3–5). The eighth-century prophet Amos also builds on the tradition of Jacob and Bethel in his vision of judgment on the Northern kingdom: “When they [locusts] had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, ‘O Yahweh God, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand?’” (7:2). Amaziah, priest of the Bethel cult, denounces the vision as treason, commanding Amos “never again [to] prophesy at Bethel” (7:13). The seventh-century prophet Jeremiah further links Jacob/Israel with Bethel/God in referring to the destruction of the northern kingdom: “Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence” (48:13).

The legends about Bethel and Jacob become the resource for multiple literary versions of the founding of the Bethel cult. Jacob initially establishes the cultic site when leaving the land of Canaan in route to Haran: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God (Bethel = ‘house of God’), and this is the gate of heaven” (28:17). Jacob establishes the Bethel cult again while living in Shechem: “There (at Bethel) he (Jacob) built an altar and called the place El-bethel” (35:6). The focus on Bethel continues, when El Shaddai promises descendants and land to Jacob (35:11–14), which triggers yet another founding of the Bethel cult: “So Jacob called the place where God had spoken with him Bethel” (35:15). How does the reader account for the many versions of the same event in the composition of the Jacob cycle? The following separation between the Priestly and Non-P literature will provide the background to illustrate a variety of solutions to the composition of the Jacob cycle of literature.

Priestly

Interpreters agree that the Priestly version of Jacob's founding of the Bethel cult is contained in Genesis 35:9–15. In this account, Jacob departs from Paddan-aram when leaving Laban: "God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram" (35:10). The content of the revelation is the name change of Jacob: "Your name is Jacob, no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name" (35:10). El Shaddai then promises Jacob descendants and land: "I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply . . . and I will give the land to your offspring after you" (35:11–13). In response, Jacob names the location Bethel: "Jacob called the place where God had spoken to him Bethel" (35:15).

The Priestly authorship is most evident in the identity of the Deity as El Shaddai, since it links Jacob's founding of the Bethel cult to the Priestly version of the covenant with Abraham: "I am El Shaddai; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you" (17:1–2). Other distinctive motifs in the Priestly version are the blessing "to be fruitful and multiple" from Genesis 1 and the location of Paddan-aram as the residence of Laban (25:20; 28:2, 5, 6, 7; 31:17, 18; 35:9, 26).

The location of Laban in Paddan-aram allows for the identification of Priestly literature throughout the Jacob cycle:

1. It begins with the genealogy of Isaac and his marriage to Rebekah who originates from Paddan-aram (25:19–20);
2. The conflict over Esau's Hittite wives (26:34) prompts Isaac's blessing of Jacob in the name of El Shaddai, with the command that he journey to Paddan-aram for a wife (28:1–9);
3. Jacob eventually departs from Paddan-aram to Shechem (31:17–18);
4. After leaving Paddan-aram, he receives the theophany at Bethel (35:9–15); and
5. Finally, the sons of Jacob born in Paddan-aram are listed (35:22b–26).

The Priestly version also includes the death of Isaac (35:27–29) and the genealogy of Esau (36:1–43).

The summary indicates that the Priestly version of the Jacob cycle presents an abbreviated account of Jacob's journey from Canaan to Paddan-aram and back. Two narratives dominate: Jacob's journey to Paddan-aram for a wife (28:1–9) and Jacob's founding of the Bethel cult after returning (35:9–15). The plot linking these two events presents a series of literary problems. The trickster motifs that dominate the present form of the Jacob cycle are absent from the Priestly version, including the birth story of Jacob and Esau. As a result, Esau enters the story abruptly without identification: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah" (26:34). Even though Esau is never identified as the son of Isaac and Rebekah, the conflict over his Hittite wives is the backdrop for Isaac's blessing of Jacob with the instruction that he journey to Paddan-aram for a wife (28:1–9). Jacob's return is immediate, with no information about his marriage or his children: "Jacob arose and set his children and his wives on camels . . . acquired in Paddan-aram to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan" (31:17–18). Jacob settles near Shechem (33:18), before the Priestly version again shifts focus abruptly to state that he received a theophany at Bethel (35:9–15).

The literary identification of the Priestly version of the Jacob cycle is debated. The use of the divine name El Shaddai suggests an independent source. The divine name El Shaddai appears in Isaac's blessing (28:3) and in the revelation at Bethel (35:11), linking the Priestly version of the revelation at Bethel with the Priestly account of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17). The plot, however, suggests that the Priestly version is dependent on the Non-P account. The gaps in the plot include the failure to identify Esau, the absence of any account of Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel or the birth of his sons in Paddan-aram, and the lack of transition from Jacob's residence in Shechem to his theophany at Bethel. The problems of plot are similar to the Priestly literature in the primeval history (Genesis 1–11) and in the Abraham cycle (11:27—25:18).

Non-P

The Non-P account of Jacob's founding of the Bethel cult and of his name change is contained in three narratives: (1) the dream theophany at Bethel as Jacob leaves the land of Canaan (28:10–22); (2) the struggle with the night-wrestler at the Jabbok River as Jacob reenters the land of Canaan (32:22–32); and (3) the construction of the altar at Bethel (35:1–8).

These stories indicate several interpretations of Jacob's experience of Bethel. But the literary evidence does not allow for a clear recovery of the history of composition. Two theories dominate: the identification of the J and E sources and the interpretation of the Non-P Jacob cycle as a single narrative with a series of additions and reinterpretations.

Source criticism identifies two versions of the founding of the Bethel cult based, in part, on the different names for the Deity and the repetitions in content: J (28:10–20; 32:22–32) and E (35:1–8).

In the J version, Yahweh appears to Jacob as he flees to Haran (28:10–20): "And Yahweh stood beside him and said, 'I am Yahweh the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring'" (28:13). To which Jacob responds: "Surely Yahweh is in this place—and I did not know it!" (28:16). Jacob also responds to the divine promise with the condition that if he comes "again to my father's house in peace, then the Yahweh shall be my God" (28:21). Although the divine name Yahweh is absent from the narrative of Jacob's nighttime struggle (32:22–32), this story is also attributed to the J source on the basis of literary design, since it provides the counternarrative to the first theophany at Bethel (28:10–22), while Jacob also addresses the Deity as Yahweh prior to the event: "O Yahweh, who said to me, 'Return to your country'" (32:9).

In the E version, the divine name Yahweh is absent in the theophany to Jacob at Bethel (35:1–8). There are close literary ties, however, between this version and the first encounter (28:10–20), which suggest that a portion of the first theophany to Jacob also belongs to the E source (e.g., 28:11–12, 17–18, 20–22). The literary evidence for this conclusion is the divine command that Jacob return

to Bethel to make an altar to “the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau” (35:1). When Jacob instructs his household that they must return to Bethel, he once again identifies Bethel as the place where God appeared to him previously on his “day of distress” (35:3). The separation of the J and E versions of theophany at Bethel provides the starting point for identifying additional E material in the Jacob cycle, which includes the account of the children of Leah and Rachel (portion of Genesis 30); the confrontation between Jacob and Laban (portion of Genesis 31); the meeting of Jacob and Esau (portion of Genesis 32–33); and the death of Rachel (portion of Genesis 35).

The challenge with the identification of an independent E source is the limited material and the absence of plot. The E version, like the Priestly version, lacks an account of the birth of Jacob and Esau, leaving no introduction of Esau. The plot of the E source is even more difficult to recover, however, since it would begin with the theophany at Bethel (portion of Genesis 28) and progress to a second encounter (portion of Genesis 35), with few clear transitions, before concluding with the death of Rachel (portion of Genesis 35). The problem of plot intensifies, if the first theophany at Bethel (28:10–20) is judged to be a unified Non-P narrative, as many interpreters argue, since the return to Bethel (35:1–8) would lack the original theophany to which Jacob refers when building the altar.

The minimal material assigned to E may represent a history of tradition incorporated into a single Non-P narrative, rather than the combination of two independent sources. This is the position of Erhard Blum, who traces the literary development of the early tradition of Bethel and Jacob through a series of compositions from the eighth century BCE into the post-exilic period, based in part on the expansion of the promises to the ancestors (see ch. 4).

David Carr represents a recent example of the composition of the Jacob cycle as the development of a single story. The original composition includes the theophany to Jacob (most of 28:10–22) and the later building of the altar at Bethel (35:1–8). The plot includes:

1. The birth of Jacob and Esau (25:21–34);
2. Rebekah and Jacob's trick of Isaac and of Esau for the blessing (27:1–45);
3. The theophany at Bethel (most of 28:10–22);
4. The Jacob-Laban stories (29:1—30:20, 22–34; 31:1–2, 4–16, 19–54);
5. Jacob's approach to the land of Canaan and struggle with the night-wrestler (32:1–9, 13–32);
6. The resolution between Jacob-Esau (33:1–20);
7. The altar at Bethel (35:1–8); and
8. The residence of Jacob at Shechem (33:16–20).

The original Jacob cycle undergoes revision as it is linked to the larger story of the ancestors in Genesis and to the story of Moses outside of Genesis. Revisions within the Jacob cycle include additions from a southern Judean perspective, such as the story of Shechem (34:1–31) and the negative judgment of Reuben sleeping with his father's concubine (35:21–22a). Additions linking the Jacob cycle with the Abraham cycle include the repetition of Abraham and Isaac falsely presenting their wives as sisters to foreign kings (26:6–33) and the expansion of the ancestral promises so that they become intergenerational (e.g., 26:1–3a*a*; 28:13–15a*a*). Further expansion of the promises creates an even larger Non-P narrative, in which the Jacob cycle becomes one episode in a history that includes the story of Moses (e.g., 26:3bb–5; 32:10–13).[13]

Joseph and his Brothers: Genesis 37:3—50:26

Literary Design

The Joseph story begins with the genealogy of Jacob: “This is the story of the family of Jacob” (37:2); and it ends with the death of Joseph: “And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt” (50:26). The genealogy clarifies the central characters of the story as the fourth generation of the ancestors: Joseph and his brothers, who move in the course of the narrative from Canaan to Egypt. The central theme is Joseph’s ability to dream and to interpret the dreams of others, while the plot progresses in three stages: (1) the conflict between Joseph and his brothers in Canaan over his dreams of superiority; (2) the sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt where his ability to interpret dreams brings success; and (3) the fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams when his brothers migrate to Egypt.

The three sections of the Joseph story may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 5.15 Literary Design of the Joseph Story

Joseph and His Brothers	**Joseph and Pharaoh**	**Joseph and his Brothers**
Dream of Ruling	Interpretation of Dreams	Fulfillment of Dream
Family Conflict	Success in the Foreign Court	Resolution of Family Conflict
Canaan	Egypt	Egypt
37:3—38:30	39:1—41:57	42:1—50:26

The Joseph story opens with the theme of family conflict in Canaan (37:3–36). Joseph is introduced as a seventeen year-old helper to his older brothers, who “brings a bad report of them to their father” (37:3). His privileged status with Jacob causes his brothers to hate him; they “could not speak peaceably to him” (37:4). To make matters worse, Joseph tells his brothers of a dream about sheaves of grain, in which his portion rules over theirs: “Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf” (37:7). In a second dream, he informs his brothers “the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me” (37:10). Even Jacob, himself a

dreamer, rebukes Joseph for this dream: “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?” (37:10). This first episode concludes when the brothers sell Joseph into slavery, telling Jacob that a wild animal killed him.

Sidebar 5.16 Dreams

The reference to dreaming or a dream (Hebrew, *halom*) is infrequent in the Pentateuch, occurring only three times before the Joseph story. Abimelech has a night dream whose meaning is clear, requiring no interpretation because God speaks directly to him, warning him that Sarah is married (Gen 20:3, 6). The same is true with the dreams of Jacob (Gen 31:10) and Laban (Gen 31:24); in both cases, God speaks directly and clearly in the dream so that no interpretation is necessary. Dreams become a central motif in the Joseph story, occurring over 20 times. Unlike the dreams of Abimelech, Jacob, and Laban, the dreams of Joseph and those of other characters in the story contain no direct speech from God. God is more distant in the account of the dreams, making them more ambiguous in meaning, which requires human interpretation. For discussion of dreams, see Jean-Marie Husser (*Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*).

The second episode (39:1—41:57) recounts the success of Joseph in Egypt, not as a dreamer, but as one who interprets the dreams of others. Joseph’s success in Egypt is complicated. He initially acquires power and position in the house of Potiphar, an officer of pharaoh, because “Yahweh was with Joseph, and he became a successful man” (39:2). But Potiphar’s wife accuses Joseph of rape after she is unsuccessful in seducing him: “See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us? He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside” (39:14). Potiphar is enraged and imprisons Joseph; but “Yahweh was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer” (39:21).

In prison, Joseph emerges as an interpreter of dreams. He interprets the

dreams of the cupbearer and the baker of pharaoh, foretelling the restoration of the cupbearer to his previous position and the death of the baker (Genesis 40). Two years pass after the release of the cupbearer from prison, when pharaoh dreams of seven-year periods in which there are lean and fat cattle as well as rich harvests and drought. The dreams trouble pharaoh, prompting the cupbearer to remember Joseph and his ability to interpret: “As he interpreted to us, so it turned out” (41:13). Joseph reveals the meaning of pharaoh’s dreams as periods of fertility and drought “fixed by God,” requiring the Egyptians to store food during the time of fertility for the period of drought (41:25–36). Since the spirit of God clearly resided within Joseph, pharaoh placed him over his entire household: “Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt” (41:45).

The third episode (42:1—50:26) returns to the theme of Joseph as a dreamer rather than as an interpreter of dreams. The famine predicted by Joseph forces Jacob to send his sons to Egypt for food. “When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them” and he “remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them” (42:8–9). The story develops through a sequence of tricks, in which Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies; imprisons Simeon; commands his brother to return with Benjamin, and places the payment for the grain back into their sacks (42:10—43:25). The famine eventually forces the brothers to return to Egypt; they enter the house of Joseph and “bow to the ground before him,” fulfilling Joseph’s original dreams (43:26).

Joseph continues to trick his brothers; he places his silver cup in the sack of Benjamin, making the boy his slave for punishment (44:6–17). The brothers plead for their brother, even confessing the past sin of selling Joseph into slavery, while Judah volunteers to substitute for Benjamin (44:18–34). The deception ends when Joseph reveals his identity: “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt” (45:4), interpreting their sale of him as providence: “[I]t was not you who sent me here, but God” (45:8). Joseph commands his brothers to bring their father to Egypt and to live in the land (45:5–15). Jacob settles in Goshen (Genesis 46) before blessing pharaoh (Genesis 47), Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh, the fifth generation of Israelites (Genesis 48), and his own sons (Genesis 49). After the series of blessings, Jacob dies (Genesis 50).

The book of Genesis concludes with the death of Joseph: “And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Gen 50:26).

Composition

The story of Joseph plays an important role in the present form of the Pentateuch; it links the ancestral stories in Genesis to the account of the Exodus from Egypt. The Joseph story begins within Jacob’s family in Canaan (Genesis 37) and it ends with the death of Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 50), setting the stage for the Egyptian oppression: “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Exod 1:8).

The theme of the divine promise further ties the stories together; it relates the story of Jacob with Joseph, when God states: “‘Jacob, Jacob.’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, ‘I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph’s own hand shall close your eyes’” (46:1–4). The theme reappears in the commission of Moses, when Yahweh addresses Moses with language that echoes Jacob’s reception of the divine promise: “‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’” (Exod 3:5–6).

In spite of the unifying motifs, the style of the Joseph story contrasts with the surrounding literature, which suggests an independent narrative, raising the question of whether it always functioned as the linking story between the ancestors and the Exodus. Conflicting motifs also indicate a history of composition as the Joseph story acquired its present literary context. The following separation between the Priestly and Non-P literature will provide the background to illustrate a variety of solutions to the composition of the Joseph narrative. The summary will begin with the identification of the Priestly literature in the Joseph story before exploring the Non-P version.

Priestly

The Priestly version of the Joseph story is evident in a series of motifs that appear throughout the book of Genesis, including the interest in genealogy (37:2 and 46:8–26) and in the age of the central characters (Jacob in 47:7, 28 and Joseph in 41:46; 50:22); the theophany of El Shaddai (48:3–6); the motif of being "fruitful and multiplying" (47:27b); and the burial cave at Machpelah (49:29–31; 50:12–13). The account also introduces the new motif that Jacob and his family settle in the land of Goshen (47:5–11). The Priestly version focuses on Jacob, not Joseph; its central themes are the genealogy of the family of Jacob (48:8–26); Jacob's blessing of pharaoh (47:7–12) and of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:3–6); and the burial of Jacob in the cave at Machpelah (49:29–30; 50:12–13).

The Priestly version of the Joseph story lacks plot. It transitions abruptly from the genealogy of the family of Jacob (37:2) to the notice that Joseph was in Egypt (41:46) and the account of Jacob moving to Egypt (45:19–21; 46:5–7). The conflict between Joseph and his brothers is absent as well as the motif of Joseph's dreams. The absence of plot continues. The motif of Joseph as an interpreter of dreams is missing and the reason for the migration of Jacob to Egypt is not provided. Instead, the Priestly version focuses on the encounter between Jacob and pharaoh (47:5–11), before narrating the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:3–6), the burial of Jacob at Machpelah (49:29–30; 50:12–13) and the death of Joseph: "So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees" (Gen 50:21–22). The lack of plot means that the Priestly version could not be read as an independent source, without assuming the loss of central material. With its emphasis on Jacob, it appears that the Priestly literature provides the framework to the Non-P version of the story, perhaps to provide transition from the ancestors in Genesis to Moses and the Exodus.

Non-Priestly

The Non-P version of the story of Joseph includes most of the literature in Genesis 37–50; it is a narrative about the Northern kingdom, with a focus on the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who are the sons of Joseph and represent the fifth generation of the ancestors. Comparison with the surrounding literature suggests that the story of Joseph was an independent narrative before its insertion into the book of Genesis. This is evident in the unified style of the Joseph story as compared to the Jacob cycle (Genesis 25–36) and the exodus (Exod 1ff), both of which are composed through the collection of separate traditions. Over against this, the Joseph story exhibits a narrative design from the beginning to the end that points to a single author, even though there are clearly additions to the story.



Figure 5.10 Joseph sold by his bothers to the Ishmaelites, as in Genesis 37:28. Illustration from the 1728 Figures de la Bible; illustrated by Gerard Hoet (1648-1733) and others.

Evidence of the history of composition emerges in each of the three episodes of the Joseph story. In the opening episode (37:2—38:30), the sale of Joseph

includes both Ishmaelites (37:25) and Midianites (37:28) in a confusing manner, which suggests that one group was added; in addition, the extended story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38), departs from the central plot, indicating its separate addition to the narrative, perhaps to introduce the fifth generation of the ancestors in the line of Judah (Perez and Zerah) to balance the sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). The account of Joseph in Egypt in the second episode (39:1—41:57) likely includes theological commentary on the presence of Yahweh with Joseph in the house of Potiphar (39:2–3, 5–6a, 21–23) and in Joseph's service to pharaoh (41:39–40; 5–52). In the third episode (42:1—50:26), the extended stories of Jacob in Egypt may be an expansion, if the original version of the Joseph narrative ended with the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams (e.g., Genesis 45). Other additions to this section may include sections of Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons (part of Genesis 48) and his own sons (part of Genesis 49), as well as the tradition of the bones of Joseph as relics that must be returned to Canaan (50:24–25).

The most important insight about the composition of the Joseph story is that it was likely written as an independent narrative, separate from the Jacob cycle and the exodus. The theme of dreaming clarifies both the narrative design and the distinct literary character of the Joseph story; its distribution may be illustrated with the following diagram.

Table 5.16 Theme of Dreaming in the Joseph Story

Joseph and His Brothers Dreams of Ruling 37:3—38:30			
1. Joseph Sheaves 37:5–8	2. Joseph Stars 37:9		
Joseph and Pharaoh Interpretation of Dreams 39:1—41:57			
1. Cupbearer Vine 40:9–15	2. Baker Cake 40:16–19	3. Pharaoh Cows 41:1–4	4. Pharaoh Grain 41:6–7
Joseph and His Brothers			

Fulfillment of Dreams
42:1—50:26

1. Brothers Bow Down 42:6–9	2. Brothers Bow Down 43:26–28

The theme of dreams is developed in pairs in the three sections of the narrative. In the first episode (37:3—38:30), Joseph has two dreams about his brothers bowing down to him, first in the image of the sheaves (37:5–8) and a second time with the image of the sun and stars (37:9); these dreams are fulfilled in the final episode (42:1—50:26), when his brothers twice bow down before him (42:2–9 and 43:26–28). In the middle episode (39:1—41:57), when Joseph functions as an interpreter of dreams, there are two pairs of dreams; the first is the cupbearer (Gen 40:9–15) and the baker (40:16–19) and the second is the pharaoh's two dreams of cows (41:1–4) and grain (41:6–7). The pairings are not doublets from separate sources in the history of composition, but the result of careful literary design by an author.

The theme of dreams and dream interpretation separates the story of Joseph from the surrounding literature in Genesis and Exodus. Dreams are infrequent in the Pentateuch. In Genesis, God warns Abimelech about Sarah in a dream (20:3, 6) and instructs Laban through a dream (31:24). The most significant dream in Genesis outside of the story of Joseph is of Jacob at Bethel: "And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (28:12; see also 31:10). But this dream is a cultic theophany, and thus, different from the dreams in the Joseph story. In the story of Moses, Yahweh judges dreams to be a lower form of clairvoyance than the clear speech of God: "And [Yahweh] said, 'Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I Yahweh make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of Yahweh'" (Num 12:6–8). The book of Deuteronomy goes further and condemns dreaming as a form of revelation if the prophet does not follow the law, even if the interpretations come true: "But those

prophets or those who divine by dreams shall be put to death for having spoken treason against Yahweh your God" (13:5).

The minimal role of dreams in the Pentateuch makes its central place in the Joseph story stand out. The author may share the view expressed in Numbers 12 that dreams are riddles, but the author would certainly not agree with Deuteronomy 13 that dreams might be false even if they are fulfilled. Dreams are the central form of revelation in the story of Joseph; their truth is confirmed in fulfillment. Joseph is the most significant character in the narrative because of his ability to have dreams and to interpret the dreams of others.

The closest parallel to the story of Joseph is the book of Daniel, where the central character also experiences revelation in the form of dreams: "In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed" (7:1). Like Joseph, Daniel is also able to interpret the dreams of others. When Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream of a statue that the magicians could not interpret (Daniel 2), Daniel deciphered it, assuring the king "the dream is certain and its interpretation trustworthy" (2:45). The similarity between Joseph and Daniel extends beyond the theme of dreams; both characters are Israelites who achieve success in the court of a foreign king through the power of dreaming and dream interpretation. The parallels prompted Donald B. Redford to describe both compositions as diaspora novellas; he dates the composition of the Joseph story to the exilic period to reflect the setting of the diaspora (*A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*).

The literary design and the central role of dreams reinforce the conclusion that the story of Joseph was an independent narrative before its insertion into its present context. Literary conflicts between the Jacob cycle and the story of Joseph add support to this conclusion. There is discrepancy over the age of Jacob at the time of Joseph: he is not old in the Jacob cycle (30:23–24; 31:41), but the Joseph story states, "now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age" (37:3). Rachel dies in the Jacob cycle (35:19), but is presumed to be alive when Jacob rebukes Joseph for his dream: "Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" (37:10). Also, Jacob has only one daughter (30:21), yet

the Joseph story notes many who comfort their father after the loss his favorite son: “All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted” (37:35).

The date of composition and the extent of the original narrative continue to be debated. The story about the northern ancestor Joseph in Egypt could reflect the exile of the Northern kingdom in the late-eighth century, or it may reflect the exile of the Southern kingdom in the sixth century or later. The extent of the original story may have included some form of Genesis 37–45 since the dreams of Joseph are fulfilled (Reinhard Kratz, *Composition*), or it may extend through Genesis 37–50 to resolve the grief of Jacob over the loss of his son and the conflict between the brothers.[14] Whatever the boundaries, the original narrative would not have provided a transition from the story of the ancestors in Genesis to the story of Moses in Exodus; it would only have acquired this function when placed in its present narrative context. The literary process by which the tale of Joseph in Egypt became the bridge between the ancestors in Genesis and Moses in Exodus remains an ongoing topic of research.

5.4 Genesis and Exodus: Origin of the Ancestors and the Exodus from Egypt

The Pentateuch separates into two large stories that contrast in many ways. Genesis recounts the creation of the world and the origin of the ancestors. Although migrants, the life of the ancestors takes place in Canaan until Jacob and his family accept the hospitality of the pharaoh and move to Egypt, where Joseph functions as a leader. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy focus on Israel as a nation, not a family; Egypt is a place of oppression, not hospitality, and Moses emerges as the central character who is commissioned to lead Israel to the land of Canaan (see ch. 1).

Although the story of Joseph links these two narratives in the present form of the Pentateuch, modern interpreters have regularly raised questions about the relationship of Genesis and Exodus. J. Wellhausen noted the problems of narrative unity and style that arise from a comparison of Genesis and Exodus, not to mention the abrupt transition between the two books from family stories to a national epic.[15] In spite of the uneven narrative style and contrast in literary content, the tendency of modern interpreters has been to merge the story of the ancestors and the Exodus into a single narrative by the same author(s).

The literary relationship between Genesis and Exodus has undergone reevaluation in recent studies on the Pentateuch. John Van Seters,[16] following the lead of Frederick V. Winnet (*The Mosaic Tradition*), accentuated the literary separation between Genesis and Exodus by examining the references to the ancestors in the book of Deuteronomy, the Deuteronomistic History, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Van Seters argued that the earliest references to the ancestors in Deuteronomy are to the Exodus generation, not the patriarchal heroes, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He concluded that the merging of the generation of the Exodus and the patriarchal ancestors in Genesis was a literary innovation in the exilic period during the same period in which the ancestor Abraham comes to prominence in Ezekiel and Second Isaiah (see ch. 4).

Rolf Rendtorff reinforced the conclusion of Van Seters, working in the

opposite direction, from Genesis to Exodus. Rendtorff noted that the theme—promise of land to the ancestors—was central to the formation of the book of Genesis, but nearly absent in the book of Exodus, where it is clustered at the outset, mainly in the commission of Moses: three times in the Priestly version (2:24; 6:3, 8), four times in the Non-P literature (3:6, 15, 16; 4:5), with only two additional references later in the book (33:1; 32:13). He too concluded that the identification of the divine promise to the patriarchal ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the Exodus generation was a late literary development by a Deuteronomistic author or editor; this editor sought to relate the previously separate literary traditions ("complexes") of the patriarchs in Genesis with the story of the Exodus (see ch. 4). Thomas Römer extended the research of Rendtorff with the most detailed study to date on the changing meaning of the ancestors in the Tetrateuch, Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomistic History (*Israels Väter*).

Konrad Schmid concluded that the ancestor stories in Genesis and the story of liberation by Moses must be interpreted as two distinct origin traditions of ancient Israel, both of which are centered on the promise of land (Genesis and the Moses Story, see ch. 4)). Origin traditions recount the ethnogenesis of the Israelite people, according to Franz V. Griefenhagan. Such traditions define the boundaries of group identity by employing selective perception and memory, fashioning aspects of historical experience into a founding mythology.[17] The ancestor stories in Genesis locate the origin of the Israelites in Babylon and present an indigenous account of land possession through peaceful negotiation. The story of Moses in Exodus, by contrast, locates the origin of the Israelites in Egypt. It emphasizes the formation of the people outside of the land of promise, requiring holy war and conquest for the fulfillment of the promise of land possession. The combination of the two accounts results in the master narrative of the Pentateuch, in which the origin tradition of the ancestors in Babylon and the Moses tradition about Egyptian origins become episodes in the story of salvation history.

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2. S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 98–99. ↵
3. “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9,” 51–66. ↵
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6. *Die biblische Urgeschichte*, 49. ↵
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8. *Reading the Fractures*, 48–77. ↵
9. *Primeval History*, 200. ↵
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11. *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 7. ↵
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13. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, see pp. 339–40 for the complete lists of texts. ↵
14. Konrad Schmid, “Josephsgeschichte,” 99–106. ↵
15. *Composition*, 61. ↵
16. *Prologue to History*, 215–76. ↵
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Exodus

6.1 Outline and Central Themes

Exodus narrates Yahweh's liberation of the Israelite nation from Egyptian slavery (1:1—15:21) and leading of the people into the wilderness toward the promised land (15:22—40:38). Unlike God's intimate involvement with the ancestors throughout Genesis, Yahweh's liberation and leading of the Israelite nation is presented on a grand scale in Exodus, as an epic drama of kings, gods, and the forces of nature.

The book probes two central themes: the character of divine power and the nature of divine presence in this world. Although the two themes are interwoven throughout the entire book, each takes prominence at different stages in the story, allowing for a loose division in the outline of the book. The theme of divine power is explored for the most part in the setting of the land of Egypt (1:1—15:21). The theme of divine presence is developed in the setting of the wilderness, as Israel journeys with God from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (15:22—40:38). The two-part structure of the book of Exodus may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.1 Structure of the Book of Exodus

1:1—15:21 Power of Yahweh in Egypt		
1:1—2:25 Setting	3:1—7:7 Characters	7:8—15:21 Conflict
15:22—40:38 Presence of Yahweh in the Wilderness		
15:22—18:27 Journey	19:1—24:11 Revelation	24:12—40:38 Sanctuary

The diagram illustrates that each half of the book breaks down further into three episodes. The theme of divine power opens with the Israelite oppression in Egypt, setting the stage for the liberation of Israel ("Setting," Exodus 1–2), followed by the introduction of the major characters in the book, including Moses and Aaron over against pharaoh and the Egyptians ("Characters," 3:1—7:7). The theme of divine power progresses to the war between Yahweh and

pharaoh, in which Yahweh eventually destroys the Egyptian army in the Red Sea ("Conflict," 7:8—15:21). The theme of divine presence includes the divine leading in the wilderness from Egypt to the mountain of God ("Journey," 15:22—18:27). At the divine mountain, the central event is the revelation of law ("Revelation," 19:1—24:11), which leads to the building of the tabernacle, allowing Yahweh to dwell in the midst of the camp ("Sanctuary," 24:12—40:38).

The themes of divine power and presence go to the heart of Ancient Israelite religion. It is not surprising, therefore, that the book of Exodus contains many of the etiological stories for Israel's cultic practice, including circumcision, the death of the firstborn, Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, first fruits, Sabbath observance, as well as the building of the sanctuary with its cultic rituals.

6.2 Exodus 1:1—15:21: Power of Yahweh in Egypt

The section narrates the conflict between Yahweh and the pharaoh over the fate of Israel; it is as an epic battle and the weapons of war are the forces of nature. Yahweh summons reptiles, insects, and meteorological elements, including hail and darkness, in an initial assault on pharaoh (Exodus 7–10). When these elements fail to persuade pharaoh to release Israel from Egyptian slavery, the personification of death itself, described as “the destroyer,” descends upon the land of Egypt in darkness, slaying all Egyptian firstborn children and animals at midnight (Exodus 11–12). Even the plague of death, however, does not dissuade pharaoh from continuing the conflict. During the night, he musters his army one last time and pursues the fleeing Israelites to the Red Sea (Exodus 13), where Yahweh destroys him at dawn, this time using the sea itself as a weapon (Exodus 14). Hymns look back over the battlefield and praise Yahweh as a warrior God, who possesses power over the pharaoh and over all the forces of nature (Exodus 15).

Setting Exodus: 1:1—2:25

Literary Design

The opening scene establishes the setting for the salvation of the Israelites as one of oppression through slave labor and genocide in the land of Egypt. God is absent in the life of the Israelites during the opening episode, allowing the biblical writers to explore the themes of power and oppression from a human perspective. The story moves quickly. Years have transpired since Joseph ruled in the land of Egypt, and the Israelites' guest status has long been forgotten (1:6). A series of vignettes provides insight into the growing alienation between the Egyptians and the Israelites, prompting a range of human responses, including the fear of pharaoh and his oppression of the Israelites, the civil disobedience of the midwives against pharaoh's command for genocide (1:1–21), and the birth of Moses (1:22—2:25).

Alienation and Civil Disobedience

Exodus 1 underscores the fertility of the Israelites (1:1–7), which threatens pharaoh and leads to his oppression (1:8–21), painting a bleak picture of social alienation. Verse 6 recounts the death of Joseph, his brothers, and the entire generation. A similar account occurs in Judg 2:10, where the death of Joshua's generation also signifies the breakdown of tradition and memory. The Israelites and pharaoh have forgotten the story of the guest status of the family of Jacob in Egypt and the role of Joseph in saving the Egyptians from starvation. This loss of memory leads to fear and alienation. A new pharaoh mistrusts the Israelites, who are "fruitful and prolific" (1:7). The language of fertility ties the opening of Exodus loosely to the account of creation in Genesis 1, signaling the indirect presence of God through the continuing effects of the promise of fertility to the ancestors, even though Yahweh is not active in Exodus 1–2.

The pharaoh and the midwives provide conflicting responses to the Israelites' fertility, leading to different ethical actions (1:8–21). Pharaoh fears losing power (1:9–10), instituting forced labor (1:11–14) and eventually, genocide of all male babies (1:15–16). Social alienation spirals out of control. The midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, resist the abusive power of pharaoh; they "fear" God, prompting their civil disobedience by allowing the male babies of the Israelite women to live. When pharaoh inquires why his order of genocide is not being executed, the midwives play on his fear, accentuating the difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites that was introduced by pharaoh. They state: "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women" (1:19a). The midwives play further on pharaoh's more primordial fear, the explosive population growth of the Israelite: "[The Israelite women] are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them" (1:19b).

Sidebar 6.1 Midwives

The story of the midwives is a tale of civil disobedience. The conflict is developed through a play on the words "to see" (*ra'a*) and "to fear" (*yara'*), words often sounding similar in Hebrew. Pharaoh instructs the midwives to kill every male Hebrew child they "see"; the command is contrasted with the further information that the midwives "fear the God." The impersonal reference to "the God" is less about formal worship than the human conscience. Thus, the story of the midwives poses conscience against tyranny, raising the question: Will the midwives conform to the command of pharaoh and act upon what they "see"—the birth of Hebrew male babies condemned to death, or will they follow their conscience and act upon their "fear of the God" in saving them? The midwives act upon their "fear of the God" and in so doing model civil disobedience. But who are these heroic women? Commentators struggle to discern whether they are Egyptian or Israelite. Are they "Hebrew midwives," or "midwives of the Hebrews"? The Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) favors an interpretation of the midwives as Israelites, while the Greek

Septuagint (LXX) identifies them as Egyptians. The inability to identify the midwives may be the point of the story: all humans are compelled to act on their conscience in opposing civil tyranny. For discussion on the identity of the midwives as Hebrews, see William Propp (*Exodus1–18*, 137); as Egyptians, see C. Houtman (*Exodus* 1, 251–52); or as a model of heroic women in general, see J. Cheryl Exum ("You shall let every daughter live," 82).



Figure 6.1 Birth scene, Egyptian, Graeco-Roman Period, c. 332 BC-c. AD 305. A kneeling woman gives birth.

Birth of the Hero

The theme of fertility continues in Exodus 1:22—2:25, but the lens narrows to a single Levitical Israelite family, telling a more intimate story of the birth of one child, Moses. The introduction of Moses includes the account of his birth, adoption by the daughter of pharaoh (1:22—2:10) and early life (2:11–22).

The birth and adoption of Moses (1:22—2:10) conforms to a common legend in the Ancient Near East, in which a hero is abandoned, set adrift in water, and eventually adopted. The most striking parallel to the story of Moses is *The Legend of Sargon*, a Neo-Assyrian account from the eighth or seventh century

BCE. The legend recounts the birth of Sargon the Great, who founded the dynasty of Akkad in the late third millennium. In this story, Sargon is the child of a priestess prohibited from conceiving a child. She disobeys, conceives Sargon in secret, and floats the baby on the river in a vessel of reeds. Sargon is rescued from the river and adopted by Akki, the water drawer, who raises him as a gardener, before Sargon becomes king of Akkad. The motifs of abandonment and adoption accentuate the mysterious origin of Sargon, while his humble beginnings are meant to idealize the identity of any king in Mesopotamian tradition: Kings rise to power through heroic deeds. The parallels between *The Legend of Sargon* and Moses's birth story include anonymous parents from the priestly class, an illegal if not illegitimate birth, a river ordeal, rescue, adoption, the protection of women, and an emphasis on the heroic deeds of Moses to establish his identity. The similarities suggest that the author of Exodus wishes to explore the identity of Moses.

Sidebar 6.2 Legend of Sargon

Sargon, the mighty king, king of Akkadê am I,

2. My mother was lowly; my father I did not know;

3. The brother of my father dwelt in the mountain.

4. My city is Azupiranu, which is situated on the bank of the Purattu [Euphrates],

5. My lowly mother conceived me, in secret she brought me forth.

6. She placed me in a basket of reeds, she closed my entrance with bitumen,

7. She cast me upon the rivers which did not overflow me.

8. The river carried me, it brought me to Akki, the irrigator.

9. Akki, the irrigator, in the goodness of his heart lifted me out,

10. Akki, the irrigator, as his own son brought me up;

11. Akki, the irrigator, as his gardener appointed me.

12. When I was a gardener the goddess Ishtar loved me,

13. And for four years I ruled the kingdom.

14. The black-headed peoples I ruled, I governed;

15. Mighty mountains with axes of bronze I destroyed (?).

16. I ascended the upper mountains;

17. I burst through the lower mountains.

18. The country of the sea I besieged three times;

19. Dilmun I captured (?).

20. Unto the great Dur-ilu I went up, I . . . . . .

21. . . . . .I altered. . . . . .

22. Whatsoever king shall be exalted after me,

23. . . . . .

24. Let him rule, let him govern the black-headed peoples;

25. Mighty mountains with axes of bronze let him destroy;

26. Let him ascend the upper mountains,

27. Let him break through the lower mountains;

28. The country of the sea let him besiege three times;

29. Dilmun let him capture;

30. To great Dur-ilu let him go up.

(Internet Ancient History Sourcebook; Fordham University)



Figure 6.2 Bronze head of a king, most likely Sargon of Akkad but possibly Naram-Sin. Unearthed in Nineveh (now in Iraq). In the National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad.

The structure of Moses's birth story is inverted from the heroic legend. Moses is indeed exalted into the family of pharaoh, but only momentarily before he returns to the status of a hunted slave, when pharaoh seeks his life (2:15). The departure from the heroic pattern in the birth story of Moses provides the point of view for interpreting the theme of Moses's identity as a liberator. Many interpret the inverted structure against the backdrop of Israelite slavery and the need for Moses to become a liberator of slaves.

The identity of Moses as a liberator is explored further in the initial stories of his adult life. His initial attempt at liberation through force by killing the Egyptian fails, forcing flight his from Egypt (2:11–15a). Once Moses escapes from Egypt, he acts again as a liberator in the southern desert of Midian and rescues the daughters of Jethro, the Midianite priest, from their oppressors, who

seek to drive the women away from the source of water for their animals (2:15b–22).

The opening episode concludes by shifting the focus from Moses to the suffering of Israel, using the language of lament from the Psalms (2:23–25). The people groan under their slavery, prompting a cry for help. But the cry lacks on object, underscoring the Israelites' lack of knowledge of God. They are unable to employ the language of lament properly, because like pharaoh, they too have lost all knowledge of the past life with God (Exod 1:6). They simply "cry out." Their cry for help, however, takes on a life of its own, working its way to God (2:24–25). The groan awakens the Deity to a flurry of activity: God hears; remembers the past covenant with the ancestors; looks on the Israelites; and comes to knowledge.

Composition

The identification of the authors in Exodus 1–2 has tended to focus on repetition, distinctive vocabulary, and gaps in the plot of the literature. The following separation between the Priestly and Non-P literature will provide the background to illustrate a variety of solutions to the composition of the opening chapters of Exodus. The traditional separation of the Priestly and Non-P versions may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.2 Separation between Priestly and Non-P Literature in Exodus

The Topic	**Priestly**	**Non-P**
Israel in Egypt (1:1–7)		
1. Family of Jacob	1:1–5	_____
2. Death of Joseph		1:6
3. Israelite Fertility	1:7	_____
Pharaoh (1:8–21)		
1. Slave Labor	1:13–14	1:8–12
2. Genocide	_____	1:15–21
Moses (1:22—2:22)		
1. Birth	_____	1:22—2:10

2. Murder	_____	2:11–15a
3. Flight to Midian	_____	2:15b–22
Israel in Egypt (2:23–25)		
1. Death of Pharaoh	_____	2:23a
2. Lament	2:23b–25	_____

Priestly

Source critics agree on the identification of the Priestly literature. The list of Jacob's sons (1:1–5) is attributed to the Priestly version because the phrase, "and these are the names," is similar to the Priestly account of the family of Jacob in Genesis: "Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt" (Gen 46:8). The motifs of being "fruitful," "multiplying," and "filling the land" (1:7) repeat from the Priestly creation story (Gen 1:28).

Table 6.3 Motivic Parallelisms in Priestly Literature

Table 6.3a "Fruitful"

Exod 1:7	**Gen 1:28**
But the Israelites were *fruitful* and prolific; they *multiplied* and grew exceedingly strong, so that the *land was filled with them*	God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be *fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth* and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

The reference to "ruthless" labor (1:13–14) anticipates the same legal language in Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53, where the NRSV translates "harsh"; both translations, however, derive from the Hebrew, *perek*, "ruthless."

Table 6.3b "Ruthless" and "Harshness"

Exod 1:13–14	Lev 25:43, 46, 53
The Egyptians became *ruthless* in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were *ruthless* in all the tasks that they imposed on them.	You shall not rule . . . with *harshness*, but shall fear your God (v. 43). no one shall rule over the other with *harshness* (v. 46)

		As a laborer hired by the year they shall be under the alien's authority, who shall not, however, rule with *harshness* over them in your sight (v. 53)

Finally, the motif of an everlasting covenant that God remembers (2:23b–25) echoes earlier motifs in the Priestly version, when at the conclusion of the flood, God promises to remember the covenant (Gen 9:8–17); the theme also returns in the Priestly version of a permanent covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17).

Table 6.3c "Establishing" and "Remembering" the Covenant

Noah (Gen 9:8–17)	Abraham (Genesis 17)	Israel (Exod 2:23b–25)
Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am *establishing my covenant* with you and your descendants after you (9:9).	I will *establish my covenant* between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an *everlasting covenant*, to be God to you and to your offspring after you (17:7)	God *remembered his covenant* with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2:24).
I will *remember my covenant* that is between me and you (9:15)		

The plot of the Priestly version is minimal. When read as an independent source, it lacks an introduction of the central character Moses. It does include the names of the family of Jacob in Egypt (1:1–5), underscores their fertility (1:7), clarifies the harsh and illegal labor inflicted on them (1:13–14), and concludes by noting the groaning of the Israelites from oppression and God's memory of the covenant with the ancestors (2:23b–25).

The assessment of Priestly literature has undergone revision, based on the minimal plot structure. Frank Cross questioned whether the Priestly version could be read independently, given the absence of Moses from the introduction to the story of the Exodus.[1] Frederick V. Winnett questioned whether Exodus 1:7 was Priestly literature, since the combination of the motifs of the Israelites "multiplying" and "becoming strong" are not characteristic of the literature, and

they repeat frequently in the Non-P version (1:9, 12, and 20). He concluded that the verse was a mixture of Priestly and Non-P literature.[2] Recent interpreters have followed the literary insight of Winnett, including John Van Seters[3] and Christoph Levin.[4] The debate raises questions about the nature of Priestly tradition. Is it an independent source? Or does Priestly literature constitute a supplement to Non-P literature, thus accounting for the absence of an independent account of the birth of Moses?

Non-P

The plot of the Non-P version is far more complete than the Priestly version. It includes the notice of Joseph's death and of his generation (1:6); the stories of slave labor (1:8–12) and genocide (1:15–21); the birth of Moses (1:22—2:10); his initial attempt to liberate through murder (2:11–15a); the flight of Moses to Midian and his marriage to Zipporah (2:15b–22); and it concludes with the notice of the death of pharaoh (2:23a).

The focus of the source-critical interpretation of the Non-P literature has been to separate the E and J sources. Martin Noth, for example, singled out the story of the midwives (1:15–21) as E on the basis of the divine name Elohim and the phrase, "king of Egypt," to describe pharaoh. He attributed the remainder of the narrative to J (1:8–12, 22; 2:1–23a), although he noted points of tension in the present form of the text, such as the role of Moses's sister (2:4, 7–10a*a*) in the story of his birth.[5]

Other interpreters have moved away from the distinction of J and E. Winnett argued that the story of the midwives (1:15–21) requires the threat of the growth of the Israelite population (1:8–12): "The two stories are interdependent parts of the same narrative." The theme of harsh labor (1:8–12) evolved into the theme of the genocide of male babies (1:15–21). The literary source for both episodes, he concludes, is the birth of Moses (2:1–10), with its theme of the hero who is cast away in infancy. The three stories, therefore, cannot be separated into distinct literary sources.[6]

Characters: Exodus 3:1—7:7

Literary Design

The central event in the scene is the divine commission of Moses to liberate the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The commission is so important that it occurs twice in the course of events. Yahweh first commissions Moses in the wilderness while he is tending the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law (3:1—4:18). Moses responds to the commission by returning to Egypt and demanding the release of the Israelite people, which pharaoh refuses (4:19—6:1). The episode concludes with a second divine commission of Moses in the land of Egypt (6:2—7:7). The sequence of events establishes the central characters in the story of the Exodus, including Yahweh, Moses, Aaron, the elders, Israel, pharaoh, and the Midianites. The structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.4 The Literary Structure of Exodus 3:3—7:7

Commission of Moses in the Wilderness Exod 3:1—4:18	Failed Confrontation with Pharaoh Exod 4:19—6:1	Commission of Moses in the land of Egypt Exod 6:2—7:7

Yahweh

Yahweh enters the story as an active character. The absence of Yahweh in the opening scene (Exodus 1–2) allowed biblical authors to explore the themes of power and identity from a human perspective, thus setting the stage for the story of the Exodus. The character of Yahweh now dominates. Moses's response to the appearance of Yahweh signals the focus on divine identity: "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (3:13).

The two commissions of Moses (3:1—4:18; 6:2—7:7) provide answers to the question about the character of Yahweh. In the first appearance on the mountain of God (3:2), the messenger of Yahweh reveals the meaning of the

divine name Yahweh as a verb of action, “I am who I am” (3:14–15). In the second commission, Yahweh identifies with El Shaddai, who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:2). The revelations clarify that the God appearing to Moses is the same Deity who made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and led them in their migrations in the promised land; this same God is now aware of the Israelite suffering and prepared to liberate them from Egyptian oppression (3:5–10; 6:2–8). Once Yahweh enters the story, the Deity orchestrates all action, commissioning Moses to rescue the Israelites (3:10), providing Moses with signs of power and persuasion (4:1–17), introducing Aaron (4:14–17, 27–31), predicting the outcome of events (4:21–23; 7:1–7), and even attacking Moses in the wilderness (4:24–26).

Human Characters

All human characters are defined in relationship to Yahweh in three different ways: as the people of God (the ancestors, Moses, the Israelites, the elders, and Aaron); the opponents of God (pharaoh and the Egyptians); and the allies of God (Jethro and the Midianites); with Moses functioning as a unique hero.

The relationship of Yahweh and Moses dominates. The section explores his religious experience through a series of divine encounters. Twice, he receives special revelation of his divine commission (3:1—4:17 and 6:1—7:7), and once, he is even attacked by Yahweh during the night (4:22–24). These experiences relate the character of God and Moses to such a degree that the self-revelation of Yahweh and Mosaic authority become inseparable in the book of Exodus. Moses emerges as the leader of the Israelite people through whom all divine revelation is channeled (3:9–12; 6:2–8); all other characters, including the Israelites (4:1–17) and the Egyptians (7:5) must “believe” in the authority of Moses. The presence of God even invades the face of Moses after the revelation of law (34:29–35).

Sidebar 6.3 Moses

Moses is introduced as a complex character with three different family relationships. He is born to an Israelite family (Exod 2:1); adopted into the Egyptian family of pharaoh (Exod 2:10); and marries into the Midianite family of Jethro (Exod 2:21). Moses's name is Egyptian; yet, he is identified in a Levitical genealogy as the son of Amran and Jochebed and the brother of Aaron (Exod 6:20). Moses has two wives, an unnamed Cushite woman (Num 12:1) and Zipporah, the Midianite daughter of Jethro (Exod 2:21), with whom he has two sons, Gershom (Exod 2:22; 18:3) and Eliezer (Exod 18:4). In spite of the complex family relation-ships, the Pentateuch provides no genealogy of Moses, nor does it provide a clear burial site. Thus, no one can claim descent from Moses and only God knows where he is buried. Moses is unique among humans: "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that Yahweh sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deut 34:10–12).

The Israelites are also defined more clearly with the appearance of Yahweh. Yahweh is the God of Moses's father (3:6), the God of the Israelite ancestors in Egypt (3:15), and the God of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6, 16; 4:5), having made covenant with them and promising them the land of Canaan (6:2). Yahweh identifies the Israelites as "the people of God" (3:7, 10; 6:7) and as the firstborn offspring of God (4:22).

The Midianites are allies of Yahweh in the rescue of the Israelites. They play a minimal yet important role in the story. In the previous scene (1:1—2:25), the Midianites offered hospitality to Moses, leading to his marriage with Zipporah (2:15–22). In this scene, Moses receives his commission from Yahweh in the land of Midian (3:1). When Moses is instructed by Yahweh to return to Egypt, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, sends him away in peace (4:18). Then, on the journey to Egypt, Zipporah rescues Moses (4:24–26). When Yahweh tries to kill either Moses or Gershom, his son, in an attack during the night, Zipporah stops

the attack by circumcising her son and warding off the Deity with the bloody foreskin, stating: “Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” (4:25). Throughout these scenes the Midianites are neither the people of God, nor are they the opponents of God. They are allies of God, who even know rituals that influence divine action.

Sidebar 6.4 Midian

The Midianites play a special role in the Pentateuch; they are idealized and viewed as villains.. The Midianites possess a special knowledge of Yahweh in the story of the exodus and the revelation at Mount Sinai: Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, is closely associated with the revelation of Yahweh. He provides safe haven for Moses in fleeing from the pharaoh, offers hospitality leading to his marriage with Zipporah (Exod 2:16–22), which sets the stage for the divine commission of Moses (Exod 3:1—4:17). After the commission, Jethro blesses Moses (Exod 4:18–20) and Zipporah rescues Moses from the divine attack in the wilderness on the journey to Egypt (Exod 4:24–26). The special role of Midian continues when Israel reaches Mount Sinai (Exodus 19—Numbers 10): Jethro interprets the Israelite flight from Egypt as Yahweh’s salvation (Exod 18:10–11), and after the events, Moses requests that his father-in-law, now named Hobab ben-Reuel, lead Israel through the wilderness (Num 10:33–36). The special role of the Midianites returns in the wilderness journey, but now, the nation becomes a threat to the religious purity of Israel, requiring their extermination (Numbers 31). The complex role of the Midianites in the story of Moses has raised questions about the history of Israelite religion, whether the worship of Yahweh may have originated in Midianite culture and then adopted by the Israelites, especially since early poetry associates Yahweh’s home with the southern desert region (e.g., Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9; Deut 33:2; and Hag 3:3). For discussion, see Thomas Römer (*The Invention of God*, 51–70).

Pharaoh emerges as the opponent of Yahweh. Pharaoh and Egypt represent the old world order of kings, polytheism, and social oppression. The commission of Moses identifies Yahweh as the God of the Hebrews, who is in conflict with pharaoh. Moses is to bring out the Israelites from the oppression of pharaoh as Yahweh’s representative (3:10). Yahweh predicts that pharaoh will resist (4:21;

7:3–4). The opposition between Yahweh and pharaoh is stated most clearly in their initial meeting (5:1—6:1). The scene revolves around conflicting prophetic messenger formulas: “Thus said Yahweh/pharaoh.” The standoff sets the stage for the conflict between pharaoh and Yahweh in the following episode (7:8—15:21).

Sidebar 6.5 The Mosaic Distinction in Western Tradition

Jan Assmann describes the conflict between pharaoh and Yahweh in the Exodus as introducing the “Mosaic distinction” into the history of Western religions. The Mosaic distinction is the separation between true and false religion that accompanies the rise of monotheism. Polytheistic religions in the Ancient Near East developed in unique ways within distinct cultures, but the gods remained international because the cosmic forces that each represented could be translated from one culture to another. The story of the Exodus is revolutionary, because it replaces the cosmic gods of polytheism with the notion of one true god, who could no longer be translated from one culture to another. Thus, the Mosaic distinction introduces a counter-religion to traditional polytheism; the belief in one true god makes all other gods false and the worshippers of those gods pagans. The first to introduce a counter-religion into history was the pharaoh, Akhenaten, but it is the story of Moses and the Exodus that has become the master narrative of monotheistic counter-religion in Western history. The result, according to Assmann is that “on the map of memory Israel and Egypt appear as antagonistic worlds” (*Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, 6).

Composition

Interpreters employ a range of methodologies to identify the anonymous authors. The language, the changes in literary style, the changing use of the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, and repetition have received the most attention in the modern period of interpretation. The separation between the Priestly and Non-P literature will provide the background to illustrate a variety of solutions to the composition of these chapters in Exodus.

The most prominent repetition is the commission of Moses. Twice, he is commanded to rescue the Israelite people from Egypt (3:1—4:18; 6:2—7:7). This repetition is the starting point for the identification of multiple, anonymous authors. Interpreters are nearly unanimous in attributing the second commission (6:2—7:7) to the Priestly version. The first commission (3:1—4:18), the return to Egypt (4:19–31), and the initial confrontation with Pharaoh (5:1—6:1) are identified with the Non-P version. The distribution of the two commissions may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.5 The Commission of Moses

Non-P	**Non-P**	**Priestly**
The Commission of Moses in the Wilderness (3:1—4:18)	The Failed Confrontation with Pharaoh (4:19—6:1)	The Commission of Moses in the land of Egypt (6:2—7:7)

Priestly

The Priestly authorship is identified from the language, the literary style, and the shared motifs from other Priestly literature in the Pentateuch. The commission separates into three sections: the self-revelation of Yahweh and the initial commission of Moses (6:2–13); the genealogy of the Levites through Aaron, Eleazar, and finally, Phinehas (6:14–27); and the further commission of Moses and Aaron, in which Aaron takes on a prophetic role in the events of the Exodus (6:28—7:7). Each section contains distinctive motifs from the Priestly literature in Genesis and Exodus.

The self-revelation and commission (6:2–14) employs the divine name El Shaddai from the Priestly account of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17): “I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name ‘Yahweh’ I did not make myself known to them” (6:2–3). The reference to the land of Canaan as the place of sojourning for the ancestors (6:4) also echoes the same covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:8). God’s statement to Moses, “I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant” (6:5), repeats the motifs

of covenant and divine memory from the introduction to the Exodus (2:23b–25). The Levitical genealogy (6:14–27) continues the emphasis on genealogy from Genesis; the content reflects priestly concerns about Aaron, not Moses, since he precedes Moses in the conclusion: “It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom Yahweh said, ‘Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company’” (6:26). The commission also concludes with the common practice in the Priestly literature of providing the age of the central characters: “Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh” (7:7).

The literary development of the Priestly narrative moves briskly. It includes the introduction of Israel’s slave labor (1:1–5, 7, 13–14); the divine awakening (2:23b–25); and the commission of Moses and Aaron (6:2—7:7). All of these events take place in the land of Egypt. There is no birth story of Moses, no flight into the wilderness to Midian, no marriage to Zipporah and no failed confrontation with the pharaoh prior to the commission. Instead, Moses first appears in the narrative in his commission within the land of Egypt; the only background information on him is the genealogy, which focuses more on Aaron. The revelation of the divine name Yahweh in the commission is also tied to the larger design of the Priestly literature in Genesis. When the different uses of the divine names are traced throughout the Priestly literature, it becomes clear that the Deity undergoes development through name changes: Elohim creates (Genesis 1); El Shaddai makes covenant with the ancestors (Genesis 17); and Yahweh liberates Israel from slavery (6:2—7:7).

The style of the Priestly narrative continues the abridged literary character throughout Genesis and Exodus, raising once again the question of whether it is an independent source or a supplement to the Non-P version of the Exodus. The lengthy commission of Moses and Aaron (6:2—7:7) with its clear literary ties to other Priestly texts, such as creation (Genesis 1), covenant (Genesis 17), and divine memory (Exod 2:23b–25), suggests an independent source, but the many gaps in the plot and in the development of the central character, Moses, suggest a supplement that reinterprets the Non-P account of the exodus with a separate commission (6:2—7:7).

Non-P

The first commission of Moses (3:1—4:18), the story of his return to Egypt (4:19–31), and the initial confrontation with pharaoh (5:1—6:1) are identified with the Non-P version. Interpreters debate the number and the identity of the authors based on the evaluation of the literary unity and contrasting motifs. The different divine names and the double account of the return of Moses from Midian to Egypt illustrate the literary problems.

Divine Names

The different divine names prior to the revelation of the name Yahweh (3:13–15) have received the most attention in identifying the Non-P author(s). The divine name Elohim occurs in Exodus 3:1, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, while the name Yahweh is used in Exodus 3:2 [angel of Yahweh], 4, 7, 15. The different names are especially important for identifying the J and E sources in the documentary hypothesis. The occurrence of both in 3:4 requires that the verse be separated between J (3:4a) and E (3:4b), while the similar mixing of names in 3:15 can be attributed to E, since it represents the revelation of the name Yahweh. The result is two versions of Moses's encounter with the Deity: J (3:2–4a, 5, 7–8) and E (3:1, 4b, 6, 9–15).

Table 6.6 Moses's Encounter with the Deity in J and E

J Source 3:2–4a, 5, 7–8	**E Source** 3:1, 4b, 6, 9–15
	Ex. 3:1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
3:2 There the **angel of Yahweh** appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. [3]Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."	**3:4b God** called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." . . . 6 He said further, "I am the **God** of your father, the **God** of Abraham, the **God** of Isaac, and the **God** of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at **God**.
3:4a When **Yahweh** saw that he had turned aside to see, . . . [5]then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the	

place on which you are standing is holy ground."

3:7 Then **Yahweh** said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

3:9 "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."
11But Moses said to **God**, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship **God** on this mountain."

3:13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" **15God** also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '**Yahweh**, the **God** of your ancestors, the **God** of Abraham, the **God** of Isaac, and the **God** of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

The J source lacks a change of the divine name in the commission of Moses, since the name Yahweh is employed from the outset of Genesis. The angel of Yahweh appears to Moses in the burning bush (3:2–3). Yahweh stops Moses from trespassing into the realm of the sacred, telling him that he is standing on holy ground (3:4a), after which Yahweh informs Moses that he intends to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (3:7–8). The J version would also include the divine commission that Moses seek out the elders of Israel (3:16–22) and the series of objections by Moses, ending with the inclusion of Aaron in his mission (4:1–16).

The E version is fashioned around the change of the divine name from Elohim to Yahweh; it begins by placing Moses on the mountain with God while he tends his sheep (3:1). Moses receives a revelation from a bush (3:4b), in

which Elohim is identified with the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6). Elohim commissions Moses to deliver the Israelites (3:9–10), but Moses objects (3:11), prompting Elohim to predict Israel's future worship at the mountain of God (3:12). Moses objects further, stating that neither he nor the Israelites know the name of God (3:13), which leads to the revelation of the divine name, Yahweh (3:14–15).

Literary problems linger from the identification of J and E sources. The E source moves too quickly to the direct address: "Moses, Moses" (3:4b), leading to the commission (3:9–10) and objection of Moses with the revelation of the divine name, Yahweh (3:11–15). The J source lacks a clear setting for the appearance of Yahweh and it provides no information on Moses—he simply confronts Yahweh at a sacred location, where there is a burning bush (3:2–4a).

Erhard Blum argued that the story is too compressed to preserve sources and that the division of sources results in truncated narratives.[7] The need to separate 3:4 illustrates the problem, since it disrupts what appears to be a coherent narrative. Blum detects literary design in the distribution of the divine names in the enlightenment of Moses (3:2–6). The encounter begins as the confrontation with the angel of Yahweh (3:2) and with Yahweh (3:4), in which Moses is uninformed about the nature of the Deity, but it progresses to his enlightenment when he realizes that the experience is indeed of "the God" (where the reference to God occurs with the definite article "the"): "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at [the] God" (3:6). Umberto Cassuto detected point of view through the use of the divine names. The omniscient narrator employs the name Yahweh; Moses's perception of the Deity is indicated through the name, God, emphasizing the breakdown of tradition and memory from Exodus 1:6.[8] The absence of Yahweh in Exodus 1–2 adds strength to the literary argument, although aspects of this reading are forced, as in the abrupt shift from Yahweh to God (3:4).

The distribution of the divine names in the larger literary design of the book of Exodus presents additional literary problems, since the interplay between the names Yahweh and Elohim continues beyond the call of Moses in Exodus 3 (e.g., 18, 19, 24). If the narrative strategy of the E source culminates in the

revelation of the divine name Yahweh, F. Kohata questioned why the use of Elohim continues.[9] This practice is all the more striking when compared to the Priestly version, where the name El Shaddai gives way to Yahweh (6:2–8), without reappearing again.

Frederick. F. Winnett saw the same problem, but added that the name Elohim is clustered in literature associated with the mountain of God [= *Elohim*] (see Exodus 3, 4, 18, 19, 24), thus accounting for many of its occurrences beyond Exodus 3 (*The Mosaic Tradition*, 20–29). Winnett rejected the documentary hypothesis on this basis, suggesting, instead, that the name Elohim was part of a mountain of God tradition, not an episode in the E source; he added that the material was incorporated into the story of the Exodus by the author of the Non-P narrative. Interpreters have followed the literary solution of Winnett, although they diverge in their evaluation of the process of composition and in the degree of unity attributed to the present narrative: Erhard Blum describes the Non-P narrative as the D-Komposition; Christoph Levin, the Yahwist redactor; Joseph Blenkinsopp, the D Corpus; and John Van Seters, the Yahwist historian. They all agree in dating the Non-P literature to the exilic and post-exilic periods.

Departure from Midian

The debate over the authorship is not limited to the distribution of the divine names. An additional literary problem emerges at the conclusion of Moses's commission, where his departure from Midian is stated twice (4:18–20). First, Moses decides to return to Egypt and tells his father-in-law Jethro, who blesses him (4:18). After this event, Yahweh again commands Moses to return to Egypt, informing him that the persons seeking his life in Egypt have now died (4:19). This repetition, rather than the divine names, is the starting point for Martin Noth's identification of the J and E sources: The J author recounts the return of Moses to Egypt at the command of Yahweh (4:19) with his wife and family (4:20a), while the E author describes Moses deciding on his own to depart from Midian (4:18) with the "staff of God" (4:20b).

Table 6.7a Moses's Departure from Midian in J and E

J Source 4:19, 20a	E Source 4:18, 20b
4:19 **Yahweh** to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead."	4:18 Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."
	20b And Moses carried the **staff of God** in his hand.
20a So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt;	

The source-critical solution is complicated by an additional sequence of motifs (2:15; 2:23a; and 4:19).

Table 6.7b

2:15	2:23a	4:19
When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.	After a long time the king of Egypt died.	Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead."

The three statements appear to be related. The story of Moses's murder of the Egyptian concludes with the threat that pharaoh "sought to kill Moses" (2:15a), which prompted his flight to Midian (2:15b–22). The death of the king of Egypt is noted after Moses established a new life in Midian: "after a long time the king of Egypt died" (2:23a). Following the death notice, Yahweh commands Moses to leave Midian: "all those seeking your life are dead" (4:19). Moses's request of Jethro to return to Egypt (4:18) concludes the commission of Moses (3:1—4:18), but it disrupts the sequence of 2:15a; 2:23a; and 4:19. The disruption of the plot led Martin Noth to write: "The narrative of Moses' encounter with God (3:1—4:18) . . . seems to have been inserted." The reason is that "Yahweh's command to return in Ex. 4:19 strikingly contains no reference to a commission given to Moses," but instead simply notes the passing of time and the death of Moses's enemies (*A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 203n549). Noth concluded that there was an early version of the story of Moses in Midian, which lacked the divine commission at the mountain of God. The commission (3:1—4:18) was an independent story inserted into the narrative context.

The content of the commission of Moses reinforces its independent composition, since it introduces new themes into the opening chapters of

Exodus. W. H. Schmidt noted five: (1) the theophany of God on the cosmic mountain; (2) the commission of Moses; (3) the promise of rescue from Egypt; (4) the revelation of the divine name Yahweh; and (5) the identification of Yahweh with the God of the ancestors.[10] Konrad Schmid expands the list to include: (1) the motif of faith, and (2) the idealization of Moses as a prophet (*Erzväter und Exodus*). And J. Blenkinsopp underscores further the central theme of the promise of land.[11] The combination of these themes indicates the pivotal role of the commission of Moses in the composition of the Pentateuch. Its themes stretch back into the story of the ancestors in Genesis, while also anticipating the conquest of land in the book of Joshua.

Noth maintained the documentary hypothesis by assuming that the independent commission of Moses (3:1—4:18) was inserted into the J source at an early stage in its literary development. The identity of the author has undergone reevaluation, however, with the abandonment of the documentary hypothesis and the later dating of the literature. Interpreters identify a single Non-P version of the Exodus, which included additional literature, such as the mountain of God material noted by Winnett and the commission of Moses.

The date of the Non-P version is determined by comparison of themes to other literature. Hans H. Schmid argued that the language of the commission of Moses and its form reflect the prophetic influence of the Deuteronomistic History, indicating an exilic author. The commission of Moses is similar to Gideon in Judges 6 and to the prophet Jeremiah (ch. 1), while the divine proclamation of seeing the misery of the people (Exod 3:7) repeats in Deuteronomy (26:7) and in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kgs 14:26). The imagery of the promised land, as “broad and wide” and as “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3:8), also reflects the language of Deuteronomy, as does the list of the indigenous population of the land.[12]

Erhard Blum extended the work of Schmid, arguing that the commission of Moses (3:1—4:18) is a free composition within the *D-Komposition* (*KD*), serving a broad literary purpose for an exilic or post-exilic author, who reinterprets prophetic accounts of revelation from the book of Hosea (e.g., Hos 1:9 and 12:10) and Ezekiel 20, accounting for the complexity of themes. The

result is a pivotal role to the commission of Moses relating broadly with ancestral literature in Genesis (Gen 12:10–12; 15; 50:22–24), the larger story of the exodus (Exod 11:1–3; 12:21–27; 13:3–16; 14), while also anticipating themes in the Deuteronomistic History.[13] Konrad Schmid notes further the close relationship between Genesis 15; Exodus 3:1—4:18; and Joshua 24; the three texts interpret salvation from a prophetic perspective, underscoring the themes of faith, God as savior from death, and the promise of the land as oath (*Genesis and the Moses Story*).

The summary underscores the diverse interpretations of the composition of the Non-P version of the commission of Moses and the wide range of methodologies employed to identify the anonymous author(s). The language, the changes in literary style, and repetitions have received the most attention in the modern period of interpretation. The divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, have played a crucial role in identifying authors. But interpreters have also branched out to study the genres of theophany and prophetic commissioning throughout the Hebrew Bible as a resource for comparison. They have examined themes in the Hebrew Bible to profile the authors, such as the divine promise to the ancestors and the identification of Yahweh with the God of the fathers.

Conflict: Exodus 7:8—15:21

Tradition of Holy War

The opposition between Yahweh and pharaoh intensifies from an indirect (Exodus 1–2) to a direct confrontation that reflects the tradition of holy war (7:8—15:21). The closing hymns (Exodus 15) celebrate the power of Yahweh through the imagery of war. Yahweh destroys "the horse and its rider" hurling them "into the sea" (15:21). Yahweh is even proclaimed to be a "warrior" (15:3). The Israelite act of "despoiling" the Egyptians involves the people in war as Yahweh's military host who take booty after a victory (12:35–36). The people are even described as a military host, "armed for battle," as they march out of Egypt (14:18). These motifs reinforce an interpretation of the Exodus as a story of holy war.

Sidebar 6.6 Holy War

Holy war is a modern term describing wars fought for religion, usually against other religions or to promote a particular religion. Thus, the modern notion of holy war assumes that there can also be nonreligious or profane war. The distinction between holy and profane war did not exist in the ancient world; thus, all war had a religious dimension in the Ancient Near East. In an early study of holy war in Ancient Israel, F. Schally concluded that Israelite warfare was holy because the people saw themselves as a federation constituted around the warrior God, Yahweh, in which the action of warfare was always sacramental and linked to cultic practices (*Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel*). Gerhard von Rad developed the notion of holy war further, detecting a change from the belief that Israel participated in war with Yahweh to the understanding of war as a miracle of divine deliverance without the participation of the people. The conflict between pharaoh and Yahweh in Exodus presents holy war more as a miraculous deliverance without the aid of Israel (*Holy War in Ancient Israel*).

Literary Design

The war between Yahweh and pharaoh (7:8—15:21) separates into three episodes. It begins with the initial confrontation in the form of the plagues (7:8—10:20); they are both weapons of war and signs of Yahweh's power over nature aimed at defeating pharaoh. When the weapons of nature fail, Yahweh narrows and intensifies the attack in the second episode (10:21—14:29), first killing the Egyptian firstborn, and then, destroying the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. The final episode contains victory hymns that declare Yahweh to be a warrior, worthy of praise, because of his victory over pharaoh (15:1–21). The conflict between Yahweh and pharaoh may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.8 Literary Structure of the War between Yahweh and the Pharaoh

Plagues (7:8—10:20)	Defeat of Pharaoh (10:21—14:31)	Celebration of Victory (15:1–21)

Plagues

Yahweh hurls many plagues against pharaoh and the Egyptians as weapons of war. The stage is set for the plagues when pharaoh rejects Moses's demand that the people be freed to worship Yahweh in the desert (5:1–23). The plagues take place in three cycles, which increase in intensity as they progress from water (7:8—8:15), to land (8:16—9:7), and finally, to air (9:8—10:20). The structure of the plagues may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.9 Three Cycles of Plagues

Cycle 1 (7:8—8:15)	**Cycle 2** (8:16—9:7)	**Cycle 3** (9:8—10:20)
Nature: Water	Nature: Land	Nature: Air
Introduction: Aaron sea–dragon (7:8–13)	Introduction: Aaron gnats (8:16–19)	Introduction: Moses boils (9:8–12)
blood (7:14–24)	flies (8:20–32)	hail (9:13–35)
frogs (7:25—8:15)	cattle (9:1–7)	locust (10:1–20)

In the first cycle (7:8—8:15), Aaron represents the power of Yahweh over the water of Egypt. Pharaoh and his magicians are the opponents. The initial plague is the transformation of Aaron's staff into the *tannin*, "sea monster" (7:8–

13). The element of water remains in the two subsequent plagues, the pollution of the Nile River into blood (7:13–24) and the infiltration of frogs from the water onto the land (7:25—8:15). The initial confrontation is a stalemate between Yahweh and pharaoh; the Egyptian magicians are able to perform the same acts of power over water as Aaron: they conjure up the sea monster (7:12), turn water into blood (7:22), and bring frogs out of the Nile (8:7).

Aaron remains the protagonist in the second cycle (8:16—9:7), where the destructive power of Yahweh is redirected from the water to the land of Egypt. Aaron brings forth gnats from the "dust of the earth" (8:16–19), which surpasses the power of the magicians (8:18), causing them to recognize the power of God: "And the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God!'" (8:19). The gnats are followed by flies, which infest the "ground" of the Egyptians (8:20–32); finally, all the Egyptian livestock of the field die (9:1–7). "But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go" (9:7).

In the third cycle (9:8—10:20), Moses replaces Aaron as the representative of Yahweh. Boils appear on humans and animals from the soot in the air (9:8–12), so severe that the magicians are not able to meet Moses: "The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians" (9:11). Two additional airborne plagues follow: a hailstorm ruins the land of Egypt (9:13–35) and locusts are carried into Egypt on an east wind, destroying whatever survived the hailstorm (10:1–20). The plague of hail includes the new motif of Yahweh as the Storm-god who hurls hailstones as weapons of war, turning the ground "black" (10:15). The locusts continue Yahweh's attack as the Storm-god, signaling the coming Day of Yahweh as a form of cosmological judgment, as locusts also symbolize in the prophetic tradition (e.g., Joel), where the Day of Yahweh is also associated with darkness (e.g., Amos).

Defeat of Pharaoh

The central events and the cultic liturgies of the Exodus follow the plagues (10:21—14:31). The plot develops in three parts. The plague of darkness

(10:21–29) provides the introduction to two subsequent actions by Yahweh: The death of the Egyptian firstborn takes place at midnight (11:1—13:16); the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea occurs during the night and it culminates at daybreak (13:17—14:31). The three-part structure extends the cycle of plagues from three to four sections that may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.10 Extension of Plague Cycle

Cycle 1 (7:8—8:11) Nature: Water	**Cycle 2** (8:12—9:7) Nature: Land	**Cycle 3** (9:8—10:20) Nature: Air	**Cycle 4** (10:21—14:31) Nature: Light/Dark
Introduction: Aaron Sea-Dragon	Introduction: Aaron Gnats	Introduction: Moses Boils	Introduction: Moses Darkness
Blood	Flies	Hail	Death of Firstborn Time: Midnight
Frogs	Cattle	Locusts	Defeat of Army Time: Dawn

The events surrounding the defeat of pharaoh (10:21—14:31) precede uninterrupted from the plagues (7:8—10:20). The theme of darkness introduced in the plague of locusts provides transition into the plague of darkness (10:21–29), which continues through the death of the firstborn (11:1—13:16).

There is intensification from the plagues to the defeat of pharaoh. Yahweh acts more directly against pharaoh and the Egyptians, and as a result, the intercessory role of Moses recedes somewhat, especially in the death of the Egyptian firstborn. Yahweh’s power over nature also increases. The plagues explored the power of God over water, land, and air. The defeat of pharaoh demonstrates Yahweh’s control over the more primordial powers of light and darkness (10:21–27), human life and death (11:1—13:16), and the sea (13:17—14:31).

The Israelites also become active participants in the defeat of pharaoh as compared to their passive role in the previous cycle of plagues. They participate in their redemption by journeying with God from Egypt to the wilderness (12:27–38) and through cultic rituals, which protect them from Yahweh’s assault

on the firstborn of the Egyptians (11:1—13:16). The Passover emerges as the central liturgical event (12:1–28, 40–51)

The defeat of pharaoh culminates in the confrontation at the Red Sea, where Yahweh destroys the Egyptian army (13:17—14:31). The story includes motifs from Ancient Near Eastern religion, where the sea represents the forces of nature at war with the god of creation. The Canaanite god of fertility, Baal, wars against the chaotic forces of sea and river, the god Yamm-Nahar (Yamm = "sea" and Nahar = "river"[14]**).** The defeat of the sea god signals the victory of order, creation, and fertility in Canaanite religion. The Babylonian god Marduk also splits the sea monster Tiamat as the initial act of creation in the mythology *Enuma Elish*.[15]

The ancient Israelite writers know the traditions of the chaotic sea; it is often an opponent to God, representing chaotic forces that seek to undo creation. Isaiah 27:1 associates the sea with the sea dragon, the serpent, and Leviathan in celebrating Yahweh's punishment of the sea monster. But the mythology of the sea is also historicized as the army of the enemy, who is compared to "the roaring of the sea" (Isa 5:30). The story of the Exodus blends the mythological motifs of the sea and the historical enemy to describe the final conflict between Yahweh and pharaoh. Yahweh dries up the sea with an east wind, recalling Baal's conflict with Yamm (14:21). At the same time, the sea is split into two walls of water, mirroring the action of Marduk against Tiamat (14:22). In both instances, the sea becomes a weapon of Yahweh against pharaoh, who represents a historicized form of chaos destroyed at the Red Sea.

Celebration of Victory

The salvation at the sea is celebrated in two victory songs, the more extended version sung by Moses (15:1b–18) and the shorter account by Miriam (15:21b). Both describe the power of Yahweh over the sea in destroying the enemy and also play a pivotal role in the structure of the book of Exodus, connecting the two themes of divine power and presence.

The Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam are a response of faith by the

people at the point of transition in the book, which Susan Ackermann describes as a liminal moment in the narrative.[16] Both hymns celebrate the power of Yahweh in hurling the horse and its rider into the sea as the conclusion to the exodus. The Song of the Sea also introduces the theme of divine presence, when the final strophe (13:13–18) includes a confession about Yahweh's leading of the Israelites and planting them in the place of divine rule: "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode" (15:13). Mark S. Smith reinforces the transitional role of the Song of the Sea, writing that 15:1–12 is attached to the triumph of Yahweh in the first half of the book of Exodus, while 15:13–18 anticipates "the period of the journey following the victory at the Sea."[17]

Composition

The conflict between Yahweh and pharaoh (7:8—15:21) contains literature from several different authors. The hymns attributed to Moses (15:1–17) and to Miriam (15:21) are likely independent liturgies by separate authors. The cultic instructions concerning the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, and the divine claim on the firstborn (Exodus 12–13) represent central rituals in the history of Israelite worship. The narrative is also composed of Priestly and Non-P literature. The following chart includes the distribution of the distinct compositions based on the abridged summary of Martin Noth, who employs the terms Priestly and the JE sources (represented by the term Non-P) (*The History of Pentateuchal Traditions*; *Exodus*).

Table 6.11 Literary Composition in Priestly and Non-P Sources

The Topic	**Priestly**	**Non-P**
Plagues: 7:8—10:20		
1. Sea-Dragon	7:8–13	_____
2. Water to Blood	7:19–20, 21b–22 (Aaron)	7:14–24
3. Frogs	8:5–7 (Aaron)	7:25—8:15
4. Gnats	8:16–19	_____
5. Flies	_____	8:20–32

6. Death of Cattle	_____	9:1–7
7. Boils	9:8–12	_____
8. Hail Storm	_____	9:13–35
9. Locusts	_____	10:1–20
Defeat of Pharaoh: 10:21—14:31		
1. Darkness	_____	10:21–29
2. Death of the Firstborn	11:9–10; 12:1–20, 28, 40–51	11:1– 8; 12:21–27, 29–39; 13:1–16
3. Battle at the Red Sea	14:1–4, 8–10; 15–18, 21–23, 26–29	13:17–20; 14:5–7, 11–14, 19–20, 24–25, 30–31
Celebration of Victory: 15:1–21		
1. Song of Moses	15:1–17	
2. Song of Miriam	15:21	

Priestly

The Priestly version of the commission of Moses (6:2—7:7) sets the stage for the conflict between Yahweh and pharaoh as a polemical story aimed at the Egyptians: “The Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them” (7:5). The plagues represent the initial effort to bring about the knowledge of Yahweh in the land of Egypt: “I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt” (7:3). The defeat of pharaoh in the Red Sea achieves the goal: “And the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers” (14:18).

Plagues

The Priestly version contains three plagues: the sea–dragon (7:8–13); gnats (8:16–19); and boils (9:8–12). They repeat motifs from the Priestly version of Moses’s commission: Aaron emerges as a central character and the resistance of

pharaoh is noted in each case as not “listening.” The following diagram highlights their similar four-part structure.

Table 6.12 Plague Structure in Priestly Sources

	Snakes (7:8–13)	**Gnats** (8:16–19)	**Boils** (9:8–12)
Divine Command	Staff into Sea–Dragon (vv. 8–9)	Gnats from the Earth (v .16)	Boils from Soot in Air (vv. 8–9)
Protagonist	Aaron (v. 10)	Aaron (v. 17)	Moses (v. 10)
Magicians	1. Present	1. Present	1. Not Present
	2. Repeat the Event	2. Unable to Repeat	2. No Attempt
	3. No Interpretation	3. Interpretation: “Finger of God”	3. No Interpretation
	(vv. 11–12)	(vv. 18–19a)	(v. 11)
Resistance of Pharaoh	1. Pharaoh hardens his heart.	1. Pharaoh hardens his heart.	1. Yahweh hardens Pharaoh’s heart.
	2. Pharaoh did not listen.	2. Pharaoh did not listen.	2. Pharaoh did not listen.
	3. “As Yahweh said”	3. “As Yahweh said”	3. “As Yahweh said”
	(v. 13a)	(v. 19b)	(v. 12)

The plagues are stereotyped. (1) Yahweh addresses Moses and Aaron and commands one or the other to perform a miraculous sign with their staff, (2) which they do. (3) The action by Aaron and Moses prompts (initially) a similar action by the Egyptian magicians. (4) Each plague ends with a summary of how pharaoh would not listen to the sign, thus fulfilling a divine prediction. There are no conditions presented to pharaoh; instead, the plagues focus more on magical powers produced by Aaron or Moses and initially by the Egyptian magicians.

The plot is a competition between Aaron, Moses, and the Egyptian magicians. There is progression from Aaron (the sea-dragon and gnats) to Moses (boils) as the person executing the sign. The role of the magicians also changes.

They initially transform their staffs into sea-dragons as Aaron, but when their power fails to produce gnats, they recognize the power of God at work: “And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” (8:19). In the third plague, boils, the magicians are unable even to be in the presence of Moses. Pharaoh’s resistance also undergoes transformation. In the first two plagues, he hardens his own heart. But by the third plague, Yahweh becomes the agent of the hardening.

Defeat of Pharaoh

The defeat of pharaoh in the Priestly version focuses on the Passover (12:1–20, 28, 40–51), which leads directly into the confrontation at the Red Sea (14:1–4, 8–10, 15–18, 21–23, 26–29).

The episode begins with the divine statement that the plagues are wonders, which pharaoh would reject: “Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh will not listen to you, in order that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.’ Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; but Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land” (11:9–10). The prediction is followed by the instructions for Passover (12:1–20, 28, 40–51): “It is the passover of Yahweh. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh” (12:11b–12). The event itself is not narrated. Additional information surrounding the Passover includes the faithfulness of the Israelites in fulfilling the instruction (12:28); the four hundred and thirty years’ time period of the slavery in Egypt (12:40); the description of the Exodus as a “night of vigil” (12:41–42); and the clarification on who might participate in the event (12:44–51).

The Israelites leave Egypt in military formation, “company by company” (12:50–51), marching toward the confrontation at the Red Sea (14:1–4, 8–10; 15–18, 21–23, 26–29). The conflict is told as a series of divine predictions or commands and their fulfillment. Yahweh predicts the defeat of pharaoh at the

outset (14:1–4), and then, hardens the heart of pharaoh to pursue the Israelites to the sea at Pihahiroth (14:8–10). Yahweh commands Moses to split the waters of the Red Sea and to lead the Israelites across, recalling the same action against the sea monster Tiamat from the Neo-Babylonian mythology of *Enuma Elish* (14:15–18, 21–23). When the Egyptians pursue, Yahweh commands Moses to stretch his hand over the sea (14:26–27), causing it to return upon the Egyptian army: “The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left” (14:28–29).

Summary

It is unclear whether the Priestly version is a source or a supplement, or whether all the literature originates with the same author. The sequence of the plagues suggests an independent source. The extended information on the liturgy of the Passover and the conflict at the Red Sea reinforces the same conclusion. Yet, other features of the Priestly version suggest a supplement and reinterpretation of the Non-P version of events. Noth’s identification of the Priestly literature, for example, includes insertions of Aaron and the magician into the Non-P plagues of turning water into blood (7:19–20, 21b–22) and of bringing up frogs from the water (8:5–7), which cannot be interpreted as independent stories.

Non-P

The Non-P version of the conflict between Yawheh and pharaoh is aimed at the Israelites rather than the Egyptians; it explores the power of Yahweh as the Israelites’ savior. The aim of the episode is to bring the Israelites into the wilderness for worship. Yahweh instructs Moses to address pharaoh with the demand: “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness’” (7:16; see also 5:1, 3; 8:27). The liberation of the Israelites for worship into the wilderness takes

place in two stages: the initial phrase is the plagues, followed by the defeat of pharaoh.

Plagues

The Non-P version contains six plagues organized in three pairs, also emphasizing different elements of nature as in the Priestly version. The first pair of plagues focuses on water, including turning the Nile River into blood (7:14–24) and bringing frogs up from the water (7:25—8:15). The second pair shifts from the element of water to land when the ground is infested with flies (8:20–32) and cattle die (9:1–7). The final pair originates with the air, hail falls from the sky (9:13–35) and locust invade Egypt on the east wind (10:1–20).

The plagues are not intended to bring the Egyptians to knowledge of Yahweh; they are focused, instead, on the Israelites and their need to worship Yahweh in the wilderness, first announced in the commission of Moses (3:1—4:18). In each plague, Moses repeats Yahweh's demand that pharaoh "send out" the Israelites for the purpose of worship. Three times, the wilderness is specifically mentioned as the location for worship (5:1–3; 7:16; 8:27). Pharaoh resists the demands of Moses, leading to his defeat at the Red Sea.

The identification of the J and E sources is difficult in the Non-P plague cycle. Martin Noth attributes the entire body of literature to the J source (see the diagram). But distinct motifs and literary tensions may indicate the remnants of the E source. Brevard Childs, for example, isolates the motif of Moses's staff to identify the E source in the plagues of blood (7:15b, 17b, 20b, 23), hailstones (9:22–23a, 24, 35a), locusts (10:12–13a, 15, 20) and darkness (10:21–23), as well as the command to plunder the Egyptians of silver and gold (11:1–3) (*Exodus*, 131). The literary problem is the scarcity of material and the lack of plot. If the motifs are separate from the Non-P narrative, they may simply be additions to the text, rather than part of the independent E source.

Defeat of Pharaoh

The defeat of pharaoh includes three events: (1) the imposition of darkness over the land of Egypt (10:21–29); (2) the death of the Egyptian firstborn at midnight and the Exodus (11:1–8; 12:21–27, 29–39; 13:1–16); and (3) the conflict at the Red Sea (13:17–20; 14:5–7, 11–14, 19–20, 24–25, 30).

The story is carefully orchestrated by time. It begins in darkness: “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt’”(10:21). Darkness provides the setting for all subsequent events until pharaoh is destroyed in the Red Sea at daybreak: “At the morning watch Yahweh in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from the Israelites, for Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt’” (14:24–25).

The journey from Egypt to the wilderness takes place through three locations: Rameses, Succoth, and Etham (near the Red Sea): In Rameses, Yahweh announces the death of the Egyptian firstborn (11:1–8); Moses prepares the Israelites for the rite of Passover (12:21–27); and the death of the Egyptian firstborn occurs at midnight (12:29–33), causing the Egyptians to expel the Israelite from Egypt: “The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, ‘We shall all be dead’” (12:33). The people journey from the city of Rameses to Succoth, where Moses provides further instruction on the feast of unleavened bread and on the divine claim upon the firstborn males (13:1–16).

The final scene is the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (13:17–20; 14:5–7, 11–14, 19–20, 24–25, 30). The Israelites journey “from Succoth, and [camp] at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness” for the confrontation (13:20); pharaoh pursues (14:5–7); the Israelites fear the approach and complain to Moses about their present condition (14:11–14); the divine pillar of cloud separates the Israelites from the Egyptian, protecting the people (14:19–20); and Yahweh destroys the Egyptian army at daybreak (14:24–25). The conflict concludes with the Israelites seeing the dead soldiers, fearing Yahweh, and believing in Moses (14:30–31), thus fulfilling the divine promise to

Moses in his commission that the Israelites would believe in his authority (3:1—4:18).

6.3 Exodus 15:22—40:38:
Presence of Yahweh in the Wilderness

Yahweh leads Israel into the wilderness after the defeat of pharaoh in the Red Sea (15:22—40:48). The story is told on an epic scale, but the forces of nature change from providing Yahweh with weapons of war to signaling the presence of God with Israel. Repeatedly, Israel is rescued from crises through miracles (15:22—18:27). Polluted water is purified, water is drawn from rock, and food falls from heaven. During the revelation of Yahweh at Mount Sinai, natural forces such as thunder, lightning, darkness, and fire also signal the nearness of God to Israel and its inherent danger to humans (Exodus 19–24). The revelation culminates in the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40). The book of Exodus ends with the glory of Yahweh descending from Mount Sinai to enter the completed tabernacle on New Year's Day (40:1–2, 17), filling the sanctuary with fire and smoke (40:34–38).

Journey: Exodus 15:22—18:27

The central themes in the wilderness journey to Mount Sinai are divine guidance, the revelation of law, and the testing between Yahweh and Israel. The journey of testing turns the wilderness experience into a rite of passage.

Sidebar 6.7 Rite of Passage

A. van Gennep described the rite of passage as rituals that accompany changes in place, social position, and age. Such transitions are marked by three phases: (1) the act of separation from a social structure or cultural condition; (2) a marginal state, described as liminal from the Latin meaning "threshold"; and (3) reincorporation into a new social structure (*The Rites of Passage*). The rite of passage provides the framework for interpreting the structure of the journey: (1) the exodus from Egypt is the act of separation; (2) the proposal of law in the wilderness journey is the marginal or liminal state; and (3) the ratification of the covenant at the mountain of God represents the reincorporation into a new social structure.

Literary Design

The wilderness journey describes the trials and tests of the Israelite people and the character of their new communal life after the rescue from Egyptian oppression. The literary structure follows the different stopping points in the journey; it may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.13 Literary Structure of the Wilderness Journey

Shur 15:22–26	Elim/Sin 15:27; 16:1–36	Rephidim 17:1—18:27		Mountain of God 18:1–27	
Bitter Water Proposal of Law and Health Test of Israel	Manna Law of Sabbath Test of Israel	No Water Lawsuit Test of God	War Against Amalekites God Responds to the Test	Jethro and Worship	Jethro and Law

The central themes are the introduction of law as the resource for Israel's health and the initial testing between Yahweh and Israel. Testing appears in the first story when Yahweh purifies poisoned water (15:22–26). The miracle leads to the divine self-revelation that Yahweh will heal Israel. This initial promise is only fulfilled at the conclusion of the journey, when the copper serpent Nehushtan cures the Israelites, after they are bitten by poisonous snakes (Num 21:4–9).

Sidebar 6.8 Nehushtan

The name Nehushtan signifies metal copper (*nehoshet*) and a snake (*nahash*) in Hebrew. It was likely a cultic object of healing in the Jerusalem temple during the monarchy period, since Hezekiah is described as destroying such an icon during a reform of cultic images (2 Kgs 18:4). The story of Moses and Nehushtan (Num 21:4–9) is likely related in some way to the temple icon. The iconography of the copper serpent as a symbol of health care continues into the present time in the use of the serpent as a symbol of health care for the American Medical Association.



Figure 6.3 Moses fixes the brazen Serpent on a pole, as in Numbers 21:6-9, illustration

from the 1728 Figures de la
Bible, illustrated by Gerard Hoet
(1648-1733), and others.

But the medicinal power of Yahweh is broader than the curative role of Nehushtan, for God promises that law itself will heal the Israelites: “Yahweh said, ‘If you will listen carefully to the voice of Yahweh your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am Yahweh who heals you’” (15:26). The Israelites do not respond to Yahweh’s promise until the following episode (Exodus 19–24), when they ratify the covenant after the further revelation of law at the mountain of God (24:3–8). As a result, the journey from Egypt to Sinai represents a period of testing and courtship between Yahweh and Israel within the liminal period of the rite of passage, before the formal establishment of covenant.



Figure 6.4 AMA Symbol.

The proposal of law as the source of health leads to testing. God introduces the theme of testing in proposing law as a resource for health: “There Yahweh made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test” (15:25). The first test is the divine instruction for collecting manna (Exodus 16);

it contains a specific command about sabbath observance (16:4). Israel fails the test by ignoring the sabbath in the collection of manna. But the failure to observe sabbath is neither rebellion, nor an occasion of divine punishment during this period of courtship (16:27–31). Testing is reversed in the next story, when the people test God at Rephidim, questioning whether Yahweh is present with them: “Is Yahweh among us or not?” (17:7). Testing in this case is also not an act of rebellion. There is no punishment; instead, Yahweh responds to the test by defeating of the Amalekites (17:8–16). Even the detailed revelation of the Decalogue (20:2–17) in the following episode remains a test to see whether Israel will fear God (20:20). The initial period of testing ceases with the ratification of covenant (24:3–8).

Composition

The literature of the wilderness journey originates from a variety of separate traditions. The war against the Amalekites (17:8–16), the advice of Jethro on cultic practice (18:1–12) and administration (18:13–27) may be independent traditions incorporated into the separate Priestly and Non-P versions. The diagram illustrates Noth’s division, with the Non-P literature indicating his identification of the JE source.

Table 6.14 Noth’s Division of Priestly and Non-P Literature of the Wilderness Journey

The Topic	Priestly	Non–P
Bitter Water		15:22–26, 27
Manna	16:1–3, 6–27, 32–35a, 36	16:4–5, 28–31, 35b
No Water		17:1–7
War with the Amalekites		17:8–16
Jethro at the Mountain		18:1–27

Priestly

The Priestly version of travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai includes only one

event, the account of manna (16:1–3, 6–27, 32–35a). The story is pivotal; it links the wilderness experience of manna to the original creation (Gen 1:1—2:3) and to the future revelation of the tabernacle cult at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15–18).

The story begins with the Israelite complaint against Moses and Aaron about the lack of food in the wilderness of Sin (16:1–3), which leads to the appearance of "the glory of Yahweh in the cloud" (16:10) with the prediction: "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am Yahweh your God" (16:12). The Israelites awake in the morning to find an unknown form of dew on the ground: "What is it?" they ask —a play on the sound of the Hebrew word, manna. The question leads to instructions for the gathering of the heavenly food every day, but sabbath. Moses clarifies: "Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none" (16:26). The six-day rhythm of the heavenly food signals the initial the reemergence of sabbath from the story of creation (Gen 2:1–3).

Non-P

The Non-P version provides the basic outline of the Israelite journey from the Red Sea to the mountain of God; it contains six stories: diseased water (15:22–26), manna (15:27; 16:4–5, 13b–15, 21b, 27–31, 35a), the miracle of water from the rock (17:1–7), the war with the Amalekites (17:8–16), and two stories about Moses's Midianite father-in-law—an account of worship on the Mountain of God (18:1–12) and the administration of law (18:13–27).

The plot loosely follows two or three locations: Shur is the location for the story of diseased water (15:22–26); Elim is an oasis where no events take place (15:27); and Rephidim may be the setting for the remainder of the events; it is clearly the setting for the crisis of water (17:1–7), where it is also associated with Horeb, the mountain of God. Rephidim continues to be the setting for the war with the Amalekites (17:8–16), and it may also be the intended setting for the stories of Jethro at the mountain of God (Exodus 18), since the departure from Rephidim is not stated until the following episode: "They [Israel] had

journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain" (19:2).

The stories separate into two parts: law and testing (15:22—17:7) and Israel's relation to other nations (17:8—18:27). The themes of law and testing begin with the proposal of covenant (15:22–26); they are developed further in the story of manna: "Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not'" (16:4). The Israelites, in turn, test God at Rephidim when they lack water (17:1–7). The Non-P version broadens to explore Israel's relationship to other nations: the Amalekites are an enemy to be exterminated (17:8–16), while the Midianites are an ally providing leadership in worship (18:1–12) and in administration (18:13–27). The two perspectives toward foreign nations repeat in the story of King Saul (1 Samuel 15); he too wages a holy war against the Amalekites, because of their hostility to the Israelites in the wilderness journey, but he spares the Kenites (aka the Midianites) because of their hospitality.

The composition of the Non-P account is difficult to recover. The story of Jethro (Exodus 18), in particular, fits uneasily in the literary context, since Moses is already encamped at the "mountain of God," before Israel formally arrives there (Exodus 19–24): "Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came into the wilderness where Moses was encamped at the mountain of God, bringing Moses' sons and wife to him" (18:5). Source critics recognize the isolation of the stories of Jethro, identifying it as part of the E source, based on the use of the divine name Elohim and the phrase, "mountain of God." But the isolation of the story and the absence of a larger plot raise questions about the identification of the E source.

The story of Jethro may be a separate tradition of worship at the mountain of God, which the Non-P version has incorporated to provide transition to the revelation of God (Exodus 19–24). This was the conclusion of Winnett. Stories about Moses's father-in-law frame the account of revelation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–Numbers 10): Jethro provides guidance in worship and in law before Sinai (Exodus 18), and Moses requests the leadership of Hobab (aka

Jethro) after Sinai (Num 10:29–32). The framing suggests that Exodus 18 and Numbers 10:29–32 may once have been a continuous story. The original unity of the stories would explain the reappearance of Moses's father-in-law in Numbers 10:29–32 after he supposedly departed to his own country: "Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country" (Exod 18:27). The selection of judges in Deuteronomy (1:9–18) after the revelation at the mountain of God (1:6), as compared to its location in Exodus before Israel arrives at Mount Sinai (Exodus 18), suggests that the continuous story about Moses's father-in-law may have occurred in its original form after the revelation at Mount Sinai.

Revelation: Exodus 19:1—24:11

Literary Design

The revelation at Mount Sinai is a story of theophany, in which Yahweh descends and appears to Israel on the divine mountain, requiring Moses to ascend to the summit many times in order to receive law, while the Israelites encamp below: “Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God” (19:2b–3a). The successive trips of Moses between Yahweh and Israel provide the literary structure to the story of revelation. The result is the accumulation of revelations through the repeated trips by Moses, including the divine proposal of covenant to Moses (19:3–6); the divine decision to halt revelation (19:20–25); the divine speaking of the Decalogue to Israel (20:1–17); the private revelation of the Book of the Covenant to Moses (20:22—23:33); and the appearance of God to the leaders (24:9–11).

Sidebar 6.9 Cosmic Mountain

Mount Sinai is an example of cosmic mountain mythology in the Ancient Near East, in which a location acquires religious veneration as the meeting place between heaven and earth. As the location where heaven and earth meet, the summit of the cosmic mountain is also the meeting place of the gods, the source of water and fertility, the battleground of conflicting natural forces, and the place where divine decrees are issued. For this reason, temples are often built on cosmic mountains to provide the dwelling place for a god on earth. The Canaanite god Baal, for example, lives on the cosmic Mount Zaphon, which is also the location of his temple. Mount Sinai is a cosmic mountain because Yahweh descends and dwells at its summit to meet with Moses; it also becomes the location for the tabernacle, which allows the Glory of Yahweh to descend from the summit to dwell on earth. Yahweh has other cosmic mountains in the Hebrew Bible, including—most prominently—Mount Zion, the location of the Jerusalem temple. For discussion of cosmic mountain mythology, see Richard Clifford (*The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and in the Old Testament*).

Julius Wellhausen saw the problem of repetition that results from the successive trips of Moses; he noted that the “natural movement” and “consistent sequence” of the Exodus give way to a “labyrinth of stories” at Mount Sinai without natural progression.[18] Subsequent interpreters agree. Baruch Schwartz concludes that the account of revelation cannot be read “without insurmountable problems.”[19] The reason, according to Benjamin Sommer, is that the text “presents a bewildering aggregate of verses describing Moses’ ascents and descents on the mountain.”[20]

The repetitive trips of Moses to the summit of the mountain provide the problem and the key to the literary structure of Exodus 19:1—24:11. The trips relate the two worlds of heaven and earth in the setting of the divine mountain, creating a narrative in which the scenes of the story do not progress in one direction, but are juxtaposed to each other, providing a different perspective on the same core event—the revelation of divine law on the mountain as a basis for covenant. The literary design may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.15 Literary Structure of Exodus 19:1—24:11

Proposal of Covenant	Theophany	Covenant Ceremony
19:1–8a	19:8b—20:20	20:21—24:11

The first scene (19:1–8a) begins with the ascent of Moses: “Then Moses went up to God and Yahweh called to him from the mountain” (19:3). The scene divides between Moses and Yahweh at the summit of the mountain (19:3–6) and Moses and the Israelites at the base (19:7–8a). The content of the divine speech to Moses is the proposal of covenant: “[I]f you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples” (19:5a). Moses conveys the divine proposal to the people, who accept the offer: “So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that Yahweh had commanded him. The people all answered as one: ‘Everything that Yahweh has spoken we will do’” (19:7–8a).

The second scene (19:8b—20:20) begins when Moses reports the people’s acceptance to God: “Moses reported the words of the people to Yahweh” (1:8b).

Yahweh responds by announcing a theophany, in which the Israelites will hear divine words that will cause them to trust in Moses: “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after’” (19:9). After a period of preparation (19:10–15), “Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain” (19:17).

The theophany begins as a storm (19:16) but evolves into a conversation between Moses and God that the people overhear: “As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder” (19:19). The content of the conversation is the public revelation Decalogue: “Then God spoke all these words” (20:1).

The revelation of the Decalogue is the final test of the Israelite people before they enter into covenant with Yahweh. At the conclusion of the theophany, “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin’” (20:20). The response indicates that the people pass the final test:“When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die’” (20:18–19).

The third scene describes the covenant ceremony (20:21—24:11). It begins when the public revelation of the Decalogue (20:1–17) progresses to the private revelation of the Book of the Covenant to Moses: “Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was” (20:21).

The covenant ceremony includes the commission of Moses (20:22a); the need for the Israelites to “see” the experience of theophany as the revelation of the Decalogue (20:22b); the revelation of the Book of the Covenant (20:21—23:19); the promise of land (23:20–33); and the concluding ritual (24:1–11). These events parallel the structure of the proposal of covenant (19:3–8a). The parallel structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.16 Parallel Structure between the Proposal of Covenant and Covenant Ceremony

The Topic	The Proposal of Covenant 19:3–8a	The Covenant Ceremony 20:22—24:8
Commission of Moses	19:3 “Thus you will say”	20:22b “Thus you will say”
Call “To See” a Past Action of God	19:4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians.	20:22b You have seen that I spoke to you.
Offer of Covenant	19:5a The Proposal: If you obey my voice and keep my covenant . . .	20:21—23:19 The Law: The Book of the Covenant (24:7)
Promise of Reward	19:5b–6a The People: You will be my personal possession . . .	23:20–33 The Land: I will send my messenger before you . . . to bring you to the place . . .
Proclamation by Moses	19:7 Moses “called”	24:3a, 7a Moses ”called”
People’s Acceptance	19:8a We will do . . .	24:3b, 7b We will do . . .

The parallels include: (1) The commissioning of Moses to speak to the Israelites: “Thus you will say” (19:3; 22:b). (2) The content of Moses’s commission includes a call for the Israelites to “see” a past event of God: the proposal of covenant recalls the Exodus (19:4), while the covenant ceremony points back to the public revelation of the Decalogue (20:22b). (3) The theme of covenant is introduced as a proposal (19:5a), followed by the Book of the Covenant (20:21—23:19). (4) The promise of reward progresses from the special status of the people (19:5b–6a) to the possession of land (23:20–33). (5) Moses conveys the divine message (19:7; 24:3a, 7a). And (6) the people unanimously accept the word of Moses as covenantal law (19:8a; 23:3b, 7b)

The parallel structure indicates thematic development in the account of the revelation in Exodus 19–24. The episode opens with the proposal of covenant (19:1–8a) focused on the future promises of God to the Israelites. The offer of covenant (19:5a) contains no specific laws; the point of focus is, instead, on the future reward, which is aimed at the character of the Israelite people should they enter into covenant. Yahweh states: “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (19:5b–6a). The episode closes with a covenant ceremony (20:21—24:8), where the focus shifts from future promises to the establishment of

covenant based on the Book of the Covenant (20:21—23:19). The reward shifts from the character of the Israelite people as a "personal possession" in the proposal of covenant (19:5b–6a) to the promise of land (23:20–33).

The revelation of the Decalogue (19:8b—20:20) allows for the transition from the proposal of covenant (19:1–8a) to the covenant ceremony (20:21—24:11). The divine revelation evolves from oral to written law and from a proposal of covenant to its codification in a book: "And Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh" (24:4). "Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that Yahweh has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient'" (24:7).

Composition

Tradition History

The diverse genres of theophany and law in Exodus 19–24 have given rise to tradition-historical hypotheses about the origin of the account of revelation and law in the literature (see ch. 3). Julius Wellhausen focused primarily on the literary developed of Exodus 19–24. Yet, he also presented a more tradition-historical hypothesis with the conclusion that the promulgation of law was originally associated with the setting of Kadesh, not Sinai. The basis for his conclusion was literary; he judged the revelation at Sinai to be a large insertion into the Pentateuch, which separated the legal traditions with Jethro in Exodus 18 and in Numbers 10:29ff. The earliest version of Exodus 19–24, according to Wellhausen, was an account of the appearance of God, not the promulgation of law. He followed the earlier research of de Wette in concluding that the book of Deuteronomy represented the combination of law, covenant, and narrative, which became the springboard for the Priestly author to make law the primary event of the revelation at Sinai.[21] Thus, for Wellhausen, the prominent role of law in Exodus 19–24 was a late development in the history of Israelite religion.

Gerhard von Rad expanded and transformed the hypothesis of Wellhausen,

influencing the interpretation of Exodus 19–24. He argued that the literary break between the stories of Jethro in Exodus 18 and in Numbers 10 provided a window into a more profound tradition-historical distinction. The Kadesh-cycle of stories (Exodus 18; Numbers 10) associated with Jethro was part of the tradition of the Exodus from Egypt; the Sinai-cycle of stories (Exodus 19–24, 32–34) represented a separate tradition of revelation and law.[22]

The two cycles were the result of the separate cultic traditions of the Exodus-conquest and the revelation of law at Sinai, each of which precedes the literary formation of the Pentateuch/Hexateuch. The celebration of the Exodus-conquest originated in the cultic practice at Gilgal. The tradition was preserved in the historical credos (Deut 6:20–24; 26:5b–9; and Josh 24:2b–13), which commemorated salvation history with the themes of the promise to the ancestors, the Exodus, and the conquest. The tradition of law at Kadesh was an episode in the Exodus-conquest tradition. Von Rad concluded that the account of the revelation of law at Sinai was a separate cultic legend, associated with worship at Shechem. Its central themes included the approach of the Deity, the address of God to the people in the form of law, the promise of blessing, and the sealing of the covenant. The hypothesis of von Rad modified the conclusion of Wellhausen, placing law in the earliest stages of Israelite religion.

The focus of von Rad on ancient pre-literary traditions influenced the study of Exodus 19–24. Scholars focused on the origin of Israelite tradition in cultic rituals, rather than on the composition of the literature. The focus on the cult gave rise to debate over the setting and the function of the Sinai tradition and the relationship of myth and ritual in the formation of the tradition. Sigmund Mowinckel located the cultic legend of Sinai in the New Year Festival in Jerusalem, as opposed to Shechem (*Le décalogue*). H. J. Kraus argued that the separate cultic legends of salvation history and the revelation at Sinai merged already in the pre-literary period as the cultic centers moved during the tribal period (*Worship in Israel*).

Literary Study

The problems surrounding the recovery of ancient tradition, oral transmission, and the nature of tribal worship prompted interpreters to move away from form criticism and tradition history and to return to the literary study of Exodus 19–24. The following diagram follows the separation of literature in the research of Noth, whose identification of the Priestly and JE sources is classified as the Priestly and Non-P versions (*The History of Pentateuchal Traditions*; *Exodus*).

Table 6.17 Noth's Source Separation for Exodus 19–24

Topic	Priestly	Non–P
Arrival	19:1–2a	19:2b
Proposal of Covenant		19:3–8a
Theophany and Decalogue		19:8b—20:20
Covenant Ceremony and Book of the Covenant		20:21—24:11

Priestly

The identification of Priestly literature in Exodus 19–24 is minimal in source criticism; it is limited to the notice of the arrival at the wilderness of Sinai and the date: "On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness." Noth's identification goes back to earlier source critics such as Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhasuen. Noth follows many other interpreters in concluding that the notice of arrival is presently in reverse order and that 19:2a should precede 19:1. The interpretation of the Priestly account of the Israelite arrival at Sinai (19:1–2a) sets the stage for the appearance of the glory of Yahweh in the following episode (24:15–18), where the content of the revelation is of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31).

The limitation of the Priestly source to the arrival at Sinai (19:1–2a) and to the theophany of the glory of Yahweh (24:15–18) presents a number of literary problems. When read as an independent document, the Priestly source lacks an account of the covenant at Sinai. The theme of the covenant may be indicated in

the reference to the “tablets of testimony” (31:18) that Moses takes from Mount Sinai after receiving the plans for the tabernacle, but it is not developed in the independent Priestly source.

Non-P

The Non-P version of Exodus 19–24 is often separated into the J and E sources. Wellhausen identified the E source in the theophany (19:10–19) and in the revelation of the Decalogue (20:1–20), where the divine name Elohim is prominent. The proposal of covenant (19:3–9) was also in the tradition of E, but Wellhausen left open the possibility that it might also be the composition of a later editor, writing in the style of the Deuteronomy. The E source continued with the divine command that Moses write the law (24:1–2, 11–14). The J source included the ascent of Moses (19:20–25), the revelation of the Book of the Covenant (20:23–26; 21–23), and the covenant ceremony (24:3–8).[23] Wellhasusen concluded that the two sources were expanded, reorganized, and combined by the Yehowistic redactor (JE), an author in the tradition of the book of Deuteronomy, whose literary creativity makes the separation of the E and J sources difficult in the present form of the text.[24] Noth represents a refinement of Wellhausen; he attributes the arrival (19:3a); and only parts of the preparation (19:13 [motif of trumpets]) and the theophany (19:16 [motif of trumpets]), 17, 19) to the E source; and he isolates a distinct version of the arrival (19:2b), preparation (19:10–13a, 14–16), and theophany (19:18; 20–25) to the J source; the proposal of covenant (19:3b–8) was a later addition in the style of Deuteronomy (*History of Pentateuchal Traditions*; *Exodus*).

Lothar Peritt signaled a change in the interpretation of Exodus 19–24 by focusing more carefully on the redactor of the literature, who was already identified in the work of Wellhausen as the Yehowist (JE). Perlitt concluded that the entire theme of covenant throughout Exodus 19–24 was the composition of a Deuteronomistic editor writing at the end of the monarchy period or even later in the exile, and thus, not part of the J or E sources. Perlitt based the conclusion on the study of the theme of covenant throughout the Hebrew Bible, which he

judged to be a late development in the literature and not an original feature of Israelite religion. Perlitt also compared the language, the literary structure, and the theological outlook of Exodus 19–24 to the book of Deuteronomy, concluding that Exodus 19–24 was closely related to the presentation of covenant in Deuteronomy, especially in three places: (1) the proposal of Covenant (19:3–8), (2) the Decalogue (20:1–17), and (3) the covenant ceremony (24:3–8).

The idealization of Moses as the teacher of covenantal law (19:3) in the proposal of covenant is central to the book of Deuteronomy (see ch. 9), where Moses is repeatedly presented as teaching (e.g., Deut 4:1, 5, 11, 14). The call for the Israelites to "see" a past event (19:4) repeats in Deuteronomy 4:3, 9; 10:21; 11:7. The form of the offer of covenant, "if you obey my voice" (19:5), is a common phase in Deuteronomy (Deut 11:13; 15:5; 28:1), as is the emphasis on the "words of Yahweh" (19:6b; see Deut 4:12; 5:5, 22). The divine promise that the Israelites will become God's "personal possession" (19:5b) in exchange for covenant loyalty conforms to a central vision of the people of God in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). The fear of the people in hearing the words of the Decalogue (20:18–20) is the same response as in Deuteronomy (Deut 5:22–29). The parallels continue in the Book of the Covenant (20:22—24:8), including the idealization of Moses (20:22a), the call to "see" a past action of Yahweh (20:22b), covenant (24:7), and the emphasis on the "words of Yahweh" (24:3, 7).[25]

Perlitt represents a modification of source criticism, since he continued to assume the presence of separate sources in Exodus 19–24. Subsequent interpreters have built on the research of Perlitt, while also rejecting the hypothesis of source criticism (see examples of these researchers in ch. 4); they include Blum, who identifies the Non-P literature in Exodus 19–24 as an episode in the *D-Komposition*; Blenkinsopp attributes the Non-P portions of Exodus 19–24 to the Deuteronomic Canon, which spans the Enneateuch (Genesis—2 Kings); and Van Seters identifies the author of Exodus 19–24 as the exilic Yahwist, who is reinterpreting the account of revelation from the book of Deuteronomy.

Sanctuary: Exodus 24:12—40:38

Mountain of God and Temple

The establishment of covenant (19:1—24:11) sets the stage for the construction of the sanctuary and the cultic rituals that will allow Israel to live in relationship with Yahweh (24:12—40:38). The transition from the revelation of law and the establishment of covenant to the construction of the sanctuary begins at the conclusion of the Book of the Covenant (24:1–11), when Yahweh singles out Moses to ascend to the summit of the mountain: "Then he (God] said to Moses, 'Come up to Yahweh'" (24:1–2). The purpose is for the leaders of Israel to feast with God on the divine mountain (24:9–11), which takes place immediately after the establishment of the covenant (24:3–8).

The vision of the heavenly temple (24:9–11) signals the change in theme. The construction of the sanctuary will replicate the heavenly temple on earth, and thus, allow a holy God to dwell safely in the midst of the Israelite people. When the leaders ascend the mountain of God (24:9–11), the central themes shift from the covenant ceremony to the divine sanctuary: "[A]nd they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness" (24:11). This vision locates the leaders under blue sapphire stone, which is a common feature of temples in the Ancient Near East. Baal's temple, for example, is also described with the terms "clarity of stone"[26] and "pavement."[27] After the theophany of God in the heavenly temple, the leaders perform the cultic rituals of eating and drinking with God: "God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank" (24:11). These details prepare for the central theme of the sanctuary in the final section of the book of Exodus (24:12—40:38). Moses and the leaders of Israel experience the theophany of God's heavenly temple on the divine mountain; but the goal of the final episode is to

construct a similar sanctuary at the base of the mountain so that Yahweh might dwell in the midst of the people.

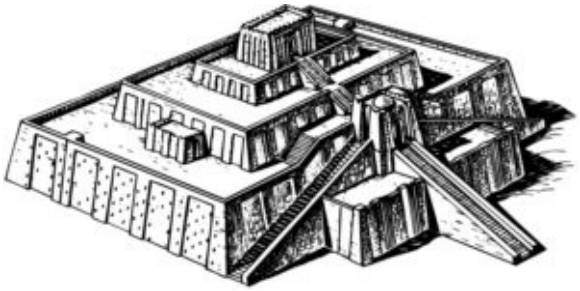

Figure 6.5 Drawing of an ancient ziggurat.

The symbolism of the temple on the mountain of God influences the interpretation of the sanctuary (24:12—40:38). The close relationship between the mythology of the cosmic mountain and temples, according to M. Eliade, is that both connect heaven and earth, allowing God to dwell in the midst of the people. The architectural plans that Moses receives on the mountain (Exodus 25–31) are a pattern of God's heavenly home. Yahweh instructs Moses to build the sanctuary on earth "in accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it" (25:9). The construction (Exodus 35–40) will provide the place for Yahweh to dwell on earth. Yahweh states: "Have [the Israelites] make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (25:8). The result is that the sanctuary in the wilderness will connect heaven and earth, providing a safe means for Yahweh to take up residency with the Israelite people. The sanctuary will also store the covenant tablets, becoming the location from where God will issue the divine decrees. All communication with God is channeled through cultic rituals in the tabernacle.

Sidebar 6.10 Temple Construction

The two parts of the book of Exodus are fashioned after the model of the victorious god who celebrates by building a temple, as in the conflict between the Canaanite gods Baal and Yamm (*CTA* 1–4). In Exodus, Yahweh's victory over the pharaoh (Exod 1:1—15:21) is followed by the journey to the divine mountain for

temple construction (Exod 15:22—40:38), which culminates in a new era in creation marked by the New Year (Exod 40:1, 17). The construction of the tabernacle follows the Ancient Near Eastern literary tradition, in which temple construction weaves together the temple, city, law, and king into one institution with divine authority. A cylinder inscription of king Gudea of Lagash provides an early example, describing the king as receiving a revelation from the god, Ningirsu, to build the temple Eninnu. The account includes: (1) the reason for temple construction with the consent of the gods; (2) the preparation for construction including the acquisition of all supplies; (3) the construction; (4) the dedication; (5) the prayer and the blessing to ensure prosperity; and (6) the conditional blessings and curses to ensure temple repair by future kings (Victor Hurovitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 33–57). The construction of the tabernacle follows the same pattern: (1) the revelation to Moses (Exod 24:15—31:18); (2) the preparation of material (Exod 35:20—36:7); (3) the construction (Exod 36:8—39:32); (4) the consecration (Exodus 40; Leviticus 8); (5) and the blessing (Lev 9:22–23) (*I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 110–13).

Literary Design

The literary design intertwines the themes of covenant and sanctuary. The episode separates into three themes that may be illustrated in the following manner.

Table 6.18 Literary Design in Exodus 24–40

Writing the Tablets	**Breaking the Tablets**	**Rewriting the Tablets**
(24:12—31:18)	(32:1—33:23)	(34:1—40:38)
Codification of Covenant	Breach of Covenant	Renewal of Covenant
Plans for Sanctuary	Loss of Sanctuary Plans	Building of Sanctuary

Covenant

The theme of covenant is developed through the motif of the tablets: “The two tablets of the covenant . . . were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets” (32:15–16). The motif of the tablets begins the episode, when Yahweh instructs Moses to ascend the mountain: “Come up to

me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction" (24:12). The covenant is broken when Israel constructs the golden calf as their god, while Moses is absent from them at the summit of the divine mountain: "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'" (32:1).

When Moses descends the mountain and sees the golden calf, he destroys the tablets: "As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (32:19). The story eventually leads to the renewal of the covenant, which is signaled when Yahweh instructs Moses to ascend the mountain to receive a new version of the tablets: "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke" (34:1). The theme of the covenant reaches resolution when Moses descends the mountain "with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand" (34:29).

Sanctuary

The theme of the sanctuary is interwoven with the fate of the tablets; it too undergoes a three-part development from planning (Exodus 25–31), loss of the plans (Exodus 32–33), and construction (Exodus 34–40). The ascent of Moses on the mountain to receive the tablets also includes the plans for the sanctuary: "Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights" (24:18). While on the mountain, Moses receives the architectural plans for the sanctuary: "And have [Israel] make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (25:8). The plans are described in Exodus 25–30 and written on the tablets: "When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God" (31:18). Thus, when Moses breaks the

tablets in reaction to Israel's construction of the golden calf, he also destroys the plans for the tabernacle (32:19). When Moses receives a new copy of the tables, they too contain the plans for the tabernacle: "Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (34:29).

The episode ends with the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 35–40): "In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up" (40:17). Moses then takes the tablets and places them in the sanctuary: "[Moses] took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above the ark; and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as Yahweh had commanded Moses" (40:20–21).

Problem of Holiness

The merging of the themes of covenant and sanctuary allow for the descent of God into the sanctuary at the close of the book of Exodus: "[Moses] set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle" (40:33–34). Thus, the book of Exodus ends with the initial establishment of the covenant and of cultic religion in the wilderness. Yahweh has rescued Israel from slavery (1:1—15:21); led them in the wilderness journey to the mountain of God (15:22—18:27); revealed law and established covenant (19:1—24:11), and supervised the construction of the tabernacle sanctuary (24:12—40:38). These events culminate in the presence of Yahweh within the midst of the Israelite people.

The establishment of covenant and of the presence of God in the sanctuary lead to the expectation that God would now fulfill the promise of health offered at the outset of the wilderness: "I am Yahweh who heals you" (15:26). But healing does not take place; instead, the book of Exodus ends with a paradox. The healing power of God has entered the sanctuary, but humans are quarantined

from its health care—even the leader, Moses: “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle” (40:35). The inability of Moses to enter the sanctuary introduces the problem of holiness in Ancient Israelite religion, which underscores the incompatibility between God and humans; the sacred and the profane; and the pure and impure. The lack of resolution in the book of Exodus surrounding the problem of holiness indicates its close relationship to the book of Leviticus, which explores cultic rituals and personnel that allow humans to access the healing power of God in the sanctuary.

Composition

There is broad agreement on the identification of the distinct sources in Exodus 24:12—40:38 from the nineteenth century. Julius Wellhausen identified the tabernacle and its cultic law as the P source (25:1—31:17; 35–40). He identified the ascent of Moses in Exodus 24:15–18 as the introduction to the legal corpus, which followed immediately from the arrival of the Israelites at the divine Mountain (19:1–2a). The JE literature included the divine instruction that Moses and Joshua receive the tablets in (24:12–14; 31:18), the building of the golden calf (Exodus 32), the intercession of Moses (Exodus 33), and the renewal of the covenant (Exodus 34) [28] The identification of the Priestly and JE (Non-P) literature may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 6.19 Topics in Exodus 24–40 by Source

The Topic	Priestly	Non-P
Writing the Tablets		
1. Ascent of Moses	24:15b–18	24:12–15a; 31:18
2. Revelation of Tabernacle	25:1—31:17	
Breaking the Tablets		
1. Golden Calf		32:1–35
2. Intercession		33:1–23
Rewriting the Tablets		
1. Renewal of Covenant		34:1–35

Contrasting motifs support the division of the Priestly and Non-P versions. The most important is the divine sanctuary: it is the tent of meeting (33:7–1) in the Non-P account and the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31; 35–40) in the Priestly version. The distinct sanctuaries represent differing views of divine mediation into the cult site. The tent of meeting represents the oracular and aniconic cultic presence of God; it resides outside of the camp; Joshua functions as its priestly custodian; and the revelation of God is in the form of direct speech to Moses: "When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and Yahweh would speak with Moses" (33:9). The Priestly version envisions the sanctuary as the tabernacle, with complex architecture and furnishings; Aaron and his sons replace Joshua as the priestly custodians; it is situated at the center of the Israelite camp and the mediation of the glory of Yahweh takes place in sacred rituals performed by priests. Yahweh commands Moses: "Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests" (29:1).

The sanctuaries are associated with distinct mountains of revelation: the tent of meeting is at Mount Horeb (33:6) and the tabernacle at Mount Sinai (24:15b–18a). The name of the tablets is also different in each version: the "tablets of stone" (24:12; [31:18] 34:1, 4, 28) in the Non-P account are the "tablets of testimony" (31:18; 32:15; 34:29) in the P version. The "tablets of stone" contain the divine words in the Decalogue emphasizing the presence of God as speech; the "tablets of testimony," by contrast, contain the entire architectural plans of the tabernacle and its instructions for cultic rituals.

The comparisons indicate that the Non-P and P versions present conflicting views of the sanctuary for mediating the presence of God on earth. The Non-P account idealizes the presence of God as speech; the sanctuary as the tent of meeting, the law is written on the tablets of stone, and the descent of God to earth takes place at Mount Horeb; these motifs conform to the account of theophany in the Non-P account, when God speaks directly to the people in issuing the Decalogue (19:9, 19; 20:1–20). The Priestly version emphasizes more the visual presence of God; the sanctuary is described as the tabernacle; the

cultic legislation is written on the tablets of testimony; and the revelation takes place on Mount Sinai, all of which provides for the descent of the glory of Yahweh.

Priestly

The Priestly literature includes an account of the appearance of the glory of Yahweh on Mount Sinai (24:15b–18), the revelation of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31) and its construction (Exodus 35–40). Recent interpreters, including Eckert Otto,[29] Reinhard G. Kratz (*Composition*) and Thomas Pola (*Priesterschrift*), identify the ending of the Priestly version of the Pentateuch with the account of the construction of the tabernacle. In this case, the structure of the Priestly version extends from Genesis through Exodus in order to correlate world creation (Genesis 1) with temple construction (Exodus 40), a common pattern in Ancient Near Eastern mythology. Others extend the Priestly version into Leviticus (Christophe Nihan), Numbers (Jean Louis Ska), Deuteronomy (Christian Frevel), or even Joshua (Joseph Blenkinsopp).

The Priestly account of revelation (24:15b–18) repeats themes from the story of manna (Exodus 16) and creation (Gen 1:1—2:3). The appearance of the Deity is in the form of the glory of Yahweh, first prefigured in the story of manna (16:7, 10), while the account follows the structure of creation (Gen 1:1—2:3), with the cloud hovering for six days, before Moses enters on the seventh: “The glory of Yahweh settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud” (24:16).

The plot of the P source is minimal: When the appearance of the glory of Yahweh (24:15b–18) and the account of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31; 35–40) are read as an independent source, the plot does not include an account of the writing of law on the tablets (24:12–14), the building of the golden calf and the destruction of the tablets (32:1–35), or the renewal of covenant (34:1–35); it simply moves directly from the revelation of the tabernacle to its construction. Yet, there is a Priestly term for the tablets: the “tablets of testimony” (31:18; 32:15; 34:29): Moses receives the tablets of testimony at the summit of the

mountain (31:18); he destroys them upon seeing the golden calf (32:15); and he receives new tablets of testimony (34:29). The distribution of this motif suggests that the Priestly version may be a supplement, which has incorporated the Non-P account covenant breaking and its renewal (Exodus 32–34), or that the motif of the tablets of testimony is a post-Priestly addition by which a later editor has sought to relate the Priestly source to the Non-P version.

The source critics in the nineteenth century judged the description of the tabernacle to be an historical fiction from the exilic period, perhaps influenced by the destroyed Jerusalem temple. They judged the description of the cultic practice to be theoretical reflection by priests on past practice, a process that continues in the literature of the post-exilic period in the book of Jubilees and in the New Testament book of Hebrews. This view, however, has come under partial modification as interpreters explore the historical roots of the cultic objects, the ritual practices, and the role of sacred tents in Israel and in the Ancient Near East. Menham Haran, for example, has argued that the cultic objects, such as the Urim and Thummim, the altar and the ritual role of the priests provide insight into the worship practices of Israel in the monarchy period (*Temples and Temple Service*). David Wright also reinforced the earlier roots of the Priestly rituals through comparative studies of similar cultic practice throughout the Ancient Near East (*The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*). The result of the comparative research is that the rituals are no longer viewed simply as fictional or theoretical reflection from the exilic period, but as material that may have originated in the monarchy period while also undergoing revision and reinterpretation during the exilic and post-exilic periods.

The description of the tabernacle is extensive; it is revealed to Moses (Exodus 25–31) and much of the detail is repeated in the description of its construction (Exodus 35–40). This repetition is unusual in the Pentateuch. *The Legend of Keret* in the Urgaritic literature provides an example of large-scale repetition in composition, which is somewhat similar in style to the description of the tabernacle. But the repetition of the tabernacle presents additional

problems of literary consistency that has prompted interpreters to identify more than one author in the composition of Exodus 25–31 and 35–40.

The identification of multiple authors in the description of the tabernacle goes back to Wellhausen,[30] although it was J. Popper who argued that the author of the account of construction (Exodus 36–40) was not the same as the writer of the account of revelation (Exodus 25–31); and that Exodus 36:8—38:20 formed the core of the account (*Der biblische Bericht über die Stiftshütte*). Martin Noth identified an even more complex history of interpretation, separating the description of the tabernacle in the P source (designated P^g) from supplements (designated P^s), as illustrated in the diagram (*History of Pentateuchal Traditions*).

Table 6.20 Literary Source Complexity in the Description of the Tabernacle

	P Source (P^g)	**Supplement to P (P^s)**
Revelation of Tabernacle	25:1—29:46	
		30:1—31:17
	31:18	
Construction of Tabernacle	35:1a,4b, 5–10, 20–27, 29–31a, 32,33	35:1b–4a, 11–19, 28, 31b, 34, 35
	36:2–7	36:1
	37:1–24	37:25–29
	36:8–38	
	38:1–7, 9–22, 24–31	38:8, 23,
	39:1–32, 43	39:33–42
	40:1, 2, 9, 17–25, 28, 29a, 33	40:3, 8, 10, 16, 26, 27, 29b, 30–32, 34–38

The debate over the authorship of Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 continues into the present time. I. Knohl, for example, has argued that the description of the tabernacle includes two levels of composition, the earlier Priestly Torah and a later revision by the Holiness School (*The Sanctuary of Silence*). The description of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–30 derives for the most part from the Priestly Torah, where the revelation is directed to Moses alone, with the people playing no role in its construction or in its cultic rituals. A later tradition, the Holiness

School, broadens the focus of the revelation to include the entire Israelite people within the scope of holiness so that the people assist in the construction of the sanctuary.

The additions of the Holiness School include the requirement that the people provide materials for construction (25:1–7), the stated purpose of the sanctuary for God to dwell with the people (25:8–9; 29:38–46), the ritual atonement of the people (30:10), the people's provision of oil (27:20–21), their participation in the construction of the sanctuary and cult, including the vestments (28:3–5); the sanctuary (31:1–11; 35–40); the observance of Sabbath (31:12–17); and the tablets of testimony (31:18). The editing of the Holiness School indicates a transformation in holiness within the Priestly tradition, according to Knohl, from a narrow focus on ritual purity in the sanctuary to a broader focus on moral purity in the people and in the camp.

Non-P

The plot of the Non-P version of the sanctuary separates into four scenes: (1) Exodus 24:12–15a; 31:18 contains the command that Moses ascend the mountain to receive the tablets, described as the "tablets of stone" (24:12; 31:18); (2) Exodus 32:1–35 recounts Moses breaking the tablets upon seeing the golden calf (32:15); (3) Exodus 33:1–23 introduces the tent of meeting as the setting in which Moses intercedes for Israel (33:7–11); and (4) Exodus 34:1–35 describes how Moses receives new tablets that contain the Decalogue (34:28).

The plot is disjointed in many places. For example, Moses persuades Yahweh not to destroy Israel because of the golden calf (32:9–14), yet he destroys the tablets after descending the mountain (32:15); also, the tent of meeting appears suddenly as a cultic site outside of the camp without introduction or explanation (33:7–11). Such gaps in the plot indicate that the Non-P version is composed by multiple authors, although the history of composition is debated.

The classic identification of the composition of Exodus 32–34 was formed gradually by Julius Wellhausen under the influence of Abraham Kuenen.[31]

Wellhausen originally identified the revelation of law in Exodus 34 as a separate body of literature from the J and E sources, but he later followed the lead of Kuenen and attributed the law in Exodus 34 to the J source. The result was that the Non-P account of Israel at the mountain of God (Exodus 19–24, 32–34) contained parallel versions of the revelation of the Decalogue: the E version was the public revelation (20:1–17) and the J version was the private revelation to Moses (34:14–26); the E version was written in the form of ethical law; while the J version was written more as cultic law.

Once the core repetition of the Decalogue was identified, the J and E sources were further separated in Exodus 32–34. The E source provided the basic structure of the account of the golden calf (32:1–6, 15–21, 35) and of the intercession of Moses after the event (33:1–11), while the J source was a supplement to E when the sources were combined, with its version of the Decalogue now providing the law of covenant renewal. Wellhausen also recognized the significant influence of a later editor (JE), who wrote in the style of the book of Deuteronomy. Examples included the intercession of Moses with Yahweh during the crisis of the golden calf (32:9–14) and the exchange between Moses and Aaron about the calf, along with the purging of the camp by the Levites (32:21–29).

The departure from source criticism has intensified the comparison of the Non-P version of Exodus 32–34 with Deuteronomy and with the Deuteronomistic History. For example, the story of the golden calf not only contains the Deuteronomistic additions about the intercession of Moses (32:9–14) and the role of the Levites in the camp (32:21–29), but versions of the entire story also appear in Deuteronomy (9:7—10:11) and in the Deuteronomistic History (1 Kgs 12:26–32). The traditional solution to this repetition was to identify the core version in Exodus 32 as the parent text for Deuteronomy 9:7—10:11 and 1 Kings 12:26–32. The departure from source criticism, coupled with the later dating of the Non-P version of Exodus 32–34, provided the basis for John Van Seters, for example, to reverse the literary relationship and to interpret Exodus 32 as the latest version of the story of the golden calf, not the original.

The same process of reevaluation has also emerged in the study of the laws

in Exodus 34. L. Perlitt questioned the interpretation of Exodus 34:11–26 as an old and independent law code, noting that the language reflected more the style of Deuteronomy; he noted, in particular, that the introduction the to law, "observe what I command you today" (34:11), repeats a stereotyped formula from Deuteronomy (4:40; 6:6; 7:11; 12:28).[32] Steven L. McKenzie agreed: "The mandate to 'observe what I command you today' occurs nearly word for word through Deuteronomy (4:40; 6:6; 7:1; etc.)." He continues: "In fact, the passage as a whole is very similar to Deuteronomy 7."[33] The later dating favors an interpretation of Exodus 34:11–26 as a composition that is dependent on the book of Deuteronomy, rather than its source.

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Leviticus

7.1 Outline and Central Themes

The book of Leviticus opens with divine speech to Moses from the tent of meeting, continuing the setting of Mount Sinai: “Yahweh summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting” (1:1). The central theme is to overcome the problem of holiness at the conclusion of Exodus, when Moses was unable to enter the sanctuary after the glory of Yahweh descended from Mount Sinai: “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:35). Leviticus provides the solution to the problem of holiness; it describes the cultic rituals and the selection of priestly personnel that will allow Israel to access its therapeutic power first promised at the outset of the wilderness journey: “I am Yahweh who heals you” (Exod 15:26). The establishment of the covenant and the construction of the sanctuary in Exodus set the stage for religious healthcare; the cultic rituals in Leviticus provide the means for Yahweh to heal. The conclusion of Leviticus signals the completion of the revelation at Sinai and the central focus on the people of Israel: “These are the commandments that Yahweh gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai” (27:34).

The theme of holiness is explored from two perspectives in the book of Leviticus. The first half focuses on cultic holiness within the sanctuary (Leviticus 1–16); the second half broadens in scope from cultic holiness to its implications in the life of the Israelites (Leviticus 17–27).

Holiness and the Sanctuary

Holiness is the central theme in Leviticus. Yahweh underscores the theme stating: “I Yahweh am holy” (19:2; 20:26; 21:8); even the name Yahweh is holy: “(The priests) may not profane my holy name” (20:3; 22:2). The sanctuary is a “holy place” (6:29) from where Yahweh reveals holiness: “Through those who are near me I will show myself holy” (10:3). As cultic personnel, the priests become holy: “(Priests) shall be holy to their God . . . for they offer Yahweh’s offering by fire, the food of their God; therefore they shall be holy” (21:6); even the vestments of the priests are holy: “And (Moses) set the turban on (Aaron’s) head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy crown, as Yahweh commanded Moses” (8:9).

The rituals of the sanctuary are grounded in holiness. The instructions for sacrifices identify portions that are holy, meaning the offering is a divine possession (2:3); the holy portions must be eaten in a holy place (6:16); holy objects must be quarantined and protected (6:27); the task of the priests is to safeguard holiness, separating it from the profane world and from impurity (10:10) whether improper food (11:44), menstrual blood (12:4), or eating food dedicated to the sanctuary (19:8). Lay Israelites too are repeatedly commanded to strive toward holiness as an ideal (11:44; 19:2) by not profaning the holy name (20:3; 22:32), observing holy feast days (23:2), and tithing the holy portion of the flock (27:32).

The overview indicates that Yahweh and holiness form an intricate web throughout the book of Leviticus, which requires definition. Jacob Milgrom provides a point of departure: “Holiness is (God’s) quintes-sential nature, distinguishing him from all beings.”[1] The statement identifies holiness with God, while also separating holiness from humans and from all other aspects of creation. But at the same time, the statement also indicates that holiness cannot be equated with God; it is a central characteristic of God, but not the Deity. Baruch Levine underscores the distinction further stating that holiness describes God’s “active attributes,” not the divine being (*Leviticus*, 256). The divine

command to the Israelite people, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45), illustrates the distinction between God and holiness. The command is not for the Israelites to become God, but to be holy. Holiness and God are inseparable in the Leviticus, but they are not the same. Further definition of holiness, its subtle relationship with God, and its separation from humans provide a window into Leviticus.

The root meaning of “holiness” (*qodesh*), according to David Wright, is “to be separate” (“Holiness,” 237). The verbal form of the word, “to be holy” (*qadash*), illustrates the root meaning. The verb first appears at the close of the Priestly account of creation (Genesis 1) to establish sabbath as a distinct day from the previous six: “God blessed the seventh day and *hallowed it*” (2:3). Although the verb is correctly translated “to make hallow,” the root meaning is that God “separated” the sabbath from the other six days, creating a permanent distinction between them. An alternative translation might be: “God blessed the seventh day and separated it.” The first six days of creation focus on the objects and living creatures within the created or profane world, but no act of creation takes place on the seventh day. The focus, instead, is on God resting in the divine realm, prompting worship (= sacred activity) in the human world. The holiness of the seventh day is rooted in its separation from the previous six days.

The same meaning of “separation” occurs in the law of the tithe of animals, where holiness appears as a noun (*qodesh*): “Any such (animal) that may be given to Yahweh shall be holy” (Lev 27:9). The holiness of the animal is not in its special quality; any animal meeting the requirement of the tithe might be given, and thus, be holy. The status of holiness is the separation of the animal from the flock in the act of donation to Yahweh. Once separated from the flock, it becomes the possession of Yahweh. The arbitrariness of the selection of the animal is illustrated in the extension of the law: “Another shall not be exchanged or substituted for it, either good for bad or bad for good; and if one animal is substituted for another, both that one and its substitute shall be holy” (Lev 27:10). The holiness of sabbath and of the tithe does not signify an innate quality, but the act of separation from the profane world.

Holiness in Leviticus assumes two degrees of separation from humans: (1)

the sacred and the profane and (2) the pure and the impure. These appear in the instruction of Moses to Aaron on the responsibility of the priesthood: “You are to distinguish between the holy (sacred) and the common (profane), and between the unclean (impure) and the clean (pure)” (10:10). Milgrom illustrates this two-part separation with the following diagram.[2]

Sacred	Profane
Pure	Impure

Sacred and Profane

The separation between the sacred and the profane represents a fundamental distinction between holiness and creation. The sacred is the world of God, where holiness is an intrinsic, life-giving power. Holiness can also be a characteristic of the region of heaven, since it represents the dwelling place of God. The profane is the world of humans, where holiness is absent; hence its root meaning, “to be separate.”

The Priestly creation story (Genesis 1) illustrates the spatial separation between the sacred and the profane. In this utopian world, all aspects of creation are good, but not holy; this is also true for humans; they too are good, blessed, and even image-bearers of God, but not holy (1:26–30). The entire created world is good, but not holy, meaning that the life-giving power of holiness is qualitatively distinct from humans and from the entire created world. Holiness is introduced on the seventh day, as a moment in time when humans on earth mimic the resting of God in heaven through worship. Holiness in this case is not an object within creation; it does not even take place in a sanctuary (holy place); worship is, instead, a rhythm of life that occurs throughout the entire creation when humans on earth and God in heaven are both resting in harmony.

The message of Genesis 1 is clear. The sacred and the profane are inherently different in quality and in spatial location; they are not to be mixed, not even in the utopian world of Genesis 1. The need to keep separate the sacred and the profane is underscored negatively at the outset of the flood story (Genesis 6–9): The merging of the two realms through sexual intercourse between the sons of God and human woman, giving birth to the hybrid Nephilim (“fallen ones”), is one of the reasons that God seeks to destroy the world through the flood (6:1–4).

The permanent separation between the sacred and the profane prompts Milgrom to define holiness as “that which is withdrawn from common (profane) use,”[3] which means that humans do not have direct access to holiness. The separation between the sacred and the profane is permanent; it might be described as an ontological distinction within creation. Thus, when Yahweh

repeatedly declares in Leviticus, “I am holy” (11:44), it is a proclamation of life-giving power that is separate from humans and potentially even dangerous.

Sidebar 7.1 Holiness and Taboo

The separation between the sacred and the profane gives rise to taboos. Taboo is a Polynesian word that describes restrictions on eating or on certain actions because of the belief that such actions would violate sacred rules.

Pure and Impure

The second level of separation in holiness is more biological and social, resulting from pollution entering the human world. The introduction of impurity may be illustrated in the story of Cain and Abel with the shedding of blood (Genesis 4). When Cain kills Abel, the blood of Abel leaves his body and enters the ground. Blood is not holy, but it does represent the life force of humans. Once it leaves the body of Abel, the blood cries out from the ground as it becomes a contaminate, rather than a life-force: "And Yahweh said, 'What have you (Cain) done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!'" (4:10).

The murder of Abel indicates that one source of pollution in creation is "blood out of place"; it introduces violence into creation that eventually influences the diet of humans, from being vegetarian to becoming carnivorous. In the Priestly version of the flood story, God introduces restrictions on the consumption of blood to Noah after the flood when he emerges from the ark as a meat eater, rather than a vegetarian: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life" (Gen 9:3–5).

The presence of pollution into the creation results in the further separation between God and humans. The ontological separation between the sacred and the profane is widened to include the distinction between the pure and the impure. Milgrom clarifies the new situation: Humans now are not only mortal; they also become diseased and thus repelled by God, intensifying the danger between holiness and humans (*Leviticus 1–16*, 718–36, 1000–1009). Mary Douglas adds that the biological and social distinction between the pure and the impure also introduce the contrast between the wholeness and order of divine holiness and the world of disorder and decay occupied by humans.[4] Milgrom

extends the contrast to include life and death; thus holiness must not only be quarantined from disorder (Leviticus 11), but also from human disease (Leviticus 13–15), moral disease (Leviticus 19), and death itself (Numbers 19). [5]

Jonathan Klawans builds on this work of Douglas and Milgrom, noting that the contrasts require yet a further distinction between ritual and moral impurity in human experience, with each representing different degrees of pollution or defilement: Ritual impurity is unavoidable; it arises from childbirth, disease, genital discharges, contact with the dead; its contagion is impermanent and its cure may be achieved through ritual action; moral impurity is more virulent; it results from human action, such as murder (Num 35:33–34), idolatry (Lev 19:31; 20;1–3), or sexual violations (Lev 18:24–30); its contagion influences the person, the sanctuary and even the land and it can only be cured through atonement.[6]

The separation between the sacred and the profane and the pure and the impure makes any contact between holiness and humans volatile and dangerous, especially since holiness and impurity are active forces that compete for power, and thus, they cannot occupy the same space. Yet, humans need the life-giving therapy of holiness to recover health, since it is the resource that is able to decontaminate the anti-life power of impurity—a virus that produces ritual and moral disease. The paradox of holiness is that God declares to Israel: “I am Yahweh who heals you.” Yet, holiness is incompatible with the pollution that is part of human existence. As a result, Israel needs holiness for moral and physical health, but how do they access its healthcare?

Priestly Sanctuary

The core of Priestly religion is to devise a means for holiness to occupy space in the created world so that it might function as a healthcare resource, while ensuring "that [it] is withdrawn from common use," and thus, protected from impurity. The solution is to construct a sanctuary, where holiness is able to reside, yet be quarantined and protected from the pollution of the profane world, and once built, to devise rituals that allow access to its healing power. This is the goal of the Priestly version of the Pentateuch: Exodus addresses the first goal of constructing a sanctuary; Leviticus focuses on the second goal of devising rituals that allow access to the healing power of holiness. The summary of holiness and the sanctuary in Exodus and in Leviticus illustrates how closely the two books function together in the Priestly version of the Pentateuch.

The motif of holiness is nearly absent in the Pentateuch until Israel arrives at Mount Sinai and Moses receives the revelation for the sanctuary (Exodus 25–31), which he then builds (Exodus 35–40). The motif becomes prominent at this point because many features of the sanctuary are designated as holy (separate from the profane world): the structure (26:33; 36:1); the inner space (28:43: 39:1); the furniture (40:9); the altar (40:10); the oil (30:24); the incense (30:35; 37:29); the priestly vestments (28:36) and so forth. Yahweh states that his "glory" is the source of the sanctuary's holiness: "I will meet with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified (= made holy) by my glory" (29:43). The sanctification takes place at the conclusion of Exodus, when the glory of Yahweh enters the structure, but there is no meeting between Yahweh and Israel as predicted. Instead, the glory of Yahweh separates and quarantines the structure from all humans, accentuating the incompatibility of holiness with the profane and the impure: "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle" (40:35).

The sanctuary and its cultic objects may be illustrated in the following diagram.

The sanctuary is described from two perspectives in Exodus 40:35, as tabernacle and as tent of meeting: “the glory of Yahweh filled the *tabernacle*”; but “Moses was not able to enter the *tent of meeting*.” These terms describe the sanctuary throughout the revelation to Moses in Exodus 25–31, where the Priestly version uses them in two different ways to explore cultic holiness. The distribution may be illustrated in the following diagram, which clarifies that the term, *tabernacle*, is limited to the description of the sanctuary complex (25:1—27:19), including the architecture of the sanctuary and its furnishings. The term *tabernacle* is replaced by the term *tent of meeting* when the subject matter shifts to cultic rituals and to the ordination of the priesthood (27:20—31:11).

Table 7.1 Sanctuary in Exodus 25–31

PART I: TABERNACLE	**Sanctuary**	**Description**
Material	25:1–7	
Purpose	25:8–9 To Dwell	25:8 *Sanctuary* (miqdash) 25:9 *Tabernacle* (mishkan)
Furnishings:		
1. Ark	25:10–22	
2. Table	25:23–30	
3. Lampstand	25:31–40	
Architecture:		
1. Tabernacle	26:1–37	*Tabernacle* (18 times)
2. Altar	27:1–8	—
3. Courtyard	27:9–19	27:9, 19 *Tabernacle*
PART II: TENT OF MEETING	**Rituals, Personnel**	**Description**
Oil Material	27:20–22 28:1–5	27:21 *Tent of Meeting* (‘*ohel mo’ed*)
Priestly Vestments:		
1. Ephod	28:6–14	
2. Breastplate	28:15–30	
3. Robe	28:31–35	
4. Plate	28:36–38	
5. Tunics and Undergarments	28:39–43	28:43 *Tent of Meeting*
Priestly Ordination:	29:1–43	29:10, 30 *Tent of Meeting*

		29:4, 11, 32, 42 Entrance of the Tent of Meeting
Purpose	29:44–46 To Know	29:44 *Tent of Meeting*
Priestly Rituals:		
1. Altar of Incense and Day of Atonement	30:1–10	
2. Census and Tax	30:11–16	30:16 *Tent of Meeting*
3. Basin for Washing	30:17–21	30:18, 20 *Tent of Meeting*
4. Anointing Oil	30:22–33	30:26 *Tent of Meeting*
5. Incense for Holy of Holies	30:34–38	30:36 *Tent of Meeting*
Builders	31:1–11	31:7 *Tent of Meeting*

The separate terms for the sanctuary provide insight into the Priestly view of divine cultic presence and the manner by which holiness is accessed for healthcare. “Tabernacle” describes the cultic site from the point of view of the Deity. It characterizes the earthly sanctuary from the perspective of God’s heavenly dwelling. The initial occurrence of the term establishes the point of view, when the tabernacle is identified as a “copy” or “pattern” (25:9) of the heavenly dwelling and as a “sanctuary” (= “holy place,” 25:8). The divine perspective on the sanctuary is indicated at the close of the book of Exodus, when it states that the “glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle.” The “tent of meeting” describes the cultic site from the perspective of humans who access holiness through rituals. It is introduced in the divine command that the Israelites provide oil for the lampstand; it also describes the role of priests, their ordination and ritual practice, as well as the construction of the cultic site.

The two perspectives on the sanctuary, as tabernacle and as tent of meeting, indicate the manner by which the glory of Yahweh and humans interact in the cultic site: The descent of the glory of Yahweh into the tabernacle and the human approach into the tent of meeting bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane, allowing for the healing from impurity first promised by Yahweh in the wilderness (Exod 15:26) and repeated at Mount Sinai: “you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). The book of Exodus ends with the completion of the sanctuary structure, allowing only “the glory of Yahweh [to] fill the tabernacle.” Although Yahweh reveals plans for cultic rituals and for

the ordination of the priesthood (27:20—29:46), Moses does not establish these cultic institutions in Exodus. As a result, the tabernacle does not become the tent of meeting at the end of the book: “Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting.”

The book of Leviticus will allow the tabernacle to become the tent of meeting by instituting the rituals and the cultic personnel that enable humans to have access to holiness. Forty-one times in Leviticus the sanctuary is described as the tent of meeting in the creation of cultic rituals (e.g., 1:3; 4:4; 6:16), the ordination of the priesthood (e.g., 8:33; 9:5); the establishment of rules for purity (e.g., 12:6; 14:23; 15:14; 16:23) and the formulation of the laws of holiness for the laity (e.g., 19:21; 24:3). Only three times is the sanctuary described as a tabernacle, when the topic shifts away from the perspective of ritual practice to acts of consecration (8:10; 15:31) and to the presence of God in the sanctuary (17:4). The aim of Leviticus is to activate the therapeutic power of holiness by introducing cultic rituals and personnel that make the tabernacle of the glory of Yahweh also a tent of meeting for Israel.

7.2 Leviticus 1–16: Cultic Holiness

Cultic holiness (Leviticus 1–16) is separated into three parts that progress clearly in thematic development. The section opens with the description of the cultic rituals that provide health care for Israelites (Leviticus 1–7). The means of health care is followed by the appointment of the cultic personnel; the ordination of the priests creates professional health care providers, which allows for the inauguration of worship at the tent of meeting (Leviticus 8–10). Once worship begins and the process of health care through sacrifice takes place, regulations for maintaining purity are provided to combat pollution and to allow for its disposal so that the therapeutic system of cultic holiness may continue through time (Leviticus 11–16). The outline of cultic holiness may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.2 Leviticus 1–16 Cultic Holiness

Leviticus 1–7	Leviticus 8–10	Leviticus 11–16
Cultic Rituals	Ordination and Worship	Regulations for Impurity

Sidebar 7.2 Ritual

Ritual derives from the Latin *ritualis*, which in Roman usage described the correct or proven way of doing something. Ritual describes the performance of ceremonial acts or rites prescribed by tradition or sacred decree. Rituals function in all aspects of political and religious life; they are carefully choreographed, governed by strict rules, and public in display.

Cultic Rituals

The cultic rituals for the tent of meeting are presented as divine instruction to Moses: “Yahweh summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them’” (1:1). The framing of the instructions as divine speech provides persuasive authority to the cultic rituals, according to James W. Watts.[7] The rituals include five offerings, which separate into two groups. The first group includes three types of gift offerings: burnt offering (1:1–17); grain offering (2:1–16); and well-being offering (3:1–17). The second group includes two types of atonement offerings: sin offering (4:1—5:13) and guilt offering (5:14—6:7). Once the ritual instructions for the five types of offerings are described, additional regulations for each offering are outlined specifically for the priests: burnt offering (6:8–13); grain offering (6:14–23); sin offering (6:24–30); guilt offering (7:1–10); and well-being offering (7:11–38). The organization of the cultic rituals may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.3 Cultic Rituals in Leviticus 1–7

Gift Offerings 1:1—3:17			**Atonement Offerings 4:1—6:7**	
Burnt 1:3–17	Grain 2:1–16	Well-Being 3:1–17	Sin 4:1—5:13	Guilt 5:14—6:7
Priestly Instruction 6:8—7:38				
Burnt 6:8–13	Grain 6:14–23	Sin 6:24–30	Guilt 7:1–10	Well-Being 7:11–38

The cultic rituals contain detailed instructions for proper practice; they highlight particular actions while also accentuating the need for precise and correct performance with regard to the food, whether animal or grain; the manipulation of blood; the exclusion of leaven; the location of sacrifices; the process of preparation; the portions that must be given to Yahweh; and what might be eaten by the priests or the laity. Although the instructions are carefully

detailed, they also present problems of interpretation, since the authors do not provide commentary on the meaning of the ritual actions. As a result, the reader is often left to discern the underlying theological significance of rituals without aid from the text.

The focus on action, rather than ideas, led Walter Burkert to define ritual as "action redirected for demonstration."[8] The most "redirected actions" in Leviticus 1–7, according to Ronald S. Hendel, are "killing, cooking, and eating."[9] But because of the ritual focus on proper action, the interpretation of the rituals remains ambiguous, yielding different meanings to different interpreters. Stanley Stowers illustrates the problem of interpretation by posing the question of the meaning of the American dinner—perhaps the most common ritual action involving eating in the United States.

> Would any answer such as, to assuage hunger or to solidify the family or to accept God's bounty with thanks, be sufficient? Would just knowing any of these actually give us an understanding of the complex cultural institution of evening meals in American homes? Is eating dinner the expression of ideas? . . . Americans can eat dinner perfectly well without any theory of dinner.[10]

While allowing for the ambiguity of ritual practice, several themes emerge as important topics of interpretation: (1) the order of the offerings; (2) the meaning of sacrificial blood; and (3) and the function of the offerings of atonement.



Figure 7.2 Reconstruction of an ancient Israelite horned altar (based upon the remnants of the

original one) as it was used to sacrifice animals.
Location: Tel Be’er Sheva.

Order of the Gift Offerings

The gift offerings are presented in the order of burnt offering, grain offering, and well-being offering. The burnt offering (1:3–17) is a translation of the Hebrew, ‘*olah*, related to the verb “to ascend.” The name likely derives from the fact that the entire offering was burned on the altar, and thus, ascended to God as “an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Yahweh” (1:9); no human, priest or lay, eats from the burnt offering. The grain offering (2:1–16) is a tribute of choice flour of which only a portion is presented to God on the altar; what is left becomes food for the priests. The well-being offering (3:1–17) is the sacrifice of an animal in which the worshipper participates in the meal; this is the only way that domestic livestock are eaten, making the sanctuary the place where animals are butchered (17:3–8). The well-being offering is communal in nature, since the sacrifice includes a festive meal.

Sidebar 7.3 Sacrifice

The English “offering” is also described as “sacrifice” from the Latin to do something (*facere*) sacred (*sacra*).

The burnt offering is almost always listed first when there is a sequence of offerings. The prominence cannot be attributed to use, since the total consumption of the victim on the altar would have impoverished priests and lay Israelites with frequent use. James W. Watts adds: The well-being offerings, which “were eaten by wor-shippers and priests must have outnumbered the offerings burnt whole upon the altar.”[11] Yet, the order suggests that the burnt offering was the paradigmatic offering in ancient Israel, since the entire animal is

burned on the altar and given to God. Nicole J. Ruane states the burnt offering represents the essence of the Latin word, "sacrifice," because the entire consumption of the victim means that it is made (*facere*) holy (*sacer*), and thus, becomes acceptable to God.[12]

The priority of the burnt offering has given rise to a variety of interpretations. Jacob Milgrom suggests that the burnt offering may originally have been the only sacrifice,[13] but over time, it came to represent the most holy offering, because the entire victim was sacrificed on the altar to Yahweh, thus introducing gradations of holiness in the sequence of offerings. Gradations of holiness are established by the presence of the glory of Yahweh in the holy of holies within the tabernacle, which represents the most intense location of holiness. Holiness disseminates from this central point in lesser degrees of potency throughout the sanctuary and outside of the structure to the altar. The entire offering of the victim represented the highest ideal of worship, and thus, interacts more intensely with holiness.[14]

Anson Rainey also underscored degrees of holiness in the order of the offerings reflected in the participants; the burnt offering was first and most holy because it was restricted from consumption, while priests or lay persons participated in the grain and well-being offerings.[15] Baruch Levine argued that the order also established a liturgy of ritual priority; the burnt offering was first because as a whole burnt offering, it was meant to attract the attention of the Deity: "[I]ts purpose was to secure an initial response from Him (God)." In this case, "God is perceived as breathing the aromatic smoke of the *'olah* and responding favorably to the overtures of His devotees."[16] The shared meal of the well-being offering would follow only after the successful entreaty to God in the burnt offering.

James W. Watts underscores the cultic function of the priority of the burnt offering: "[T]he *'olah* exemplifies the temple cult of the priests, apart from the lay people's participation in it, as pure gift to the deity devoid of almost any profit to the priests. The implication of its rhetorical prominence then is that the

ʻolah represents the purist form of divine service"—the ideal of selfless devotion to Yahweh.[17]

Sacrificial Blood

The blood of the sacrificial victim plays a central role in the burnt offering as well as in the well-being, sin and guilt offerings. In the burnt offering, the blood of the victim must be drained and "dashed against all sides of the altar" (1:5, 11, 15). The same requirement is stated in the well-being offering (3:2, 8), with the additional command: "[Y]ou must not eat any fat or any blood" (3:17).

Blood plays an even more complex role in the atonement offerings. The most detailed ritual account of blood occurs in the description of the sin offering of the individual, where the focus is on the priest, who is required: (1) to take the blood of the sacrificial victim into the tent of meeting; (2) to sprinkle it "seven times before Yahweh in front of the curtain of the sanctuary"; (3) to "put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is in the tent of meeting before Yahweh"; and (4) to "pour the remainder out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (4:4–7). Variations of the ritual also take place with sin offerings for the community (4:16–18) and the ruler (4:25). Contact with the blood of the sacrifice may even be contagious, requiring the priest to wash garments spattered with blood in a holy place (6:27).

The ordination of priests is also interwoven with blood, which is placed on items in the sanctuary and on the priests. Moses: (1) purifies the altar with the blood of the sin offering in the ordination of the priests (8:14–17); (2) he dashes the blood of the burnt offering of the first ram of ordination on the altar (8:18–21); (3) he places the blood of the second ram of ordination on the ear lobe, thumb, and toes of the priests before dashing the remaining blood on the altar (8:22–24); and (4) he sprinkles the blood from the altar on the vestments of the priest to consecrate them (8:30). Once ordained, Aaron performs the ritual offerings: "The sons of Aaron presented the blood to him (Aaron), and he dipped

his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar" (9:8).

Jean-Paul Roux provides a point of departure for interpreting the manipulation of blood in sacrifice. Blood plays an important but ambiguous role in religion; it may be "perceived as being simultaneously pure and impure, attractive and repulsive, sacred and profane." "Blood is at once a life-giving substance and a symbol of death" and "handling blood is sometimes forbidden, sometimes mandatory, but usually dangerous." For this reason, "rites involving blood require the intervention of individual specialists."[18]

Sidebar 7.4 Blood in the Ancient World

The power of blood manipulation is evident throughout the ancient world, where it may be connected with death or with life. Dennis J. McCarthy cites instances when blood is associated with the dead in Greek religion "where the 'strengthless dead' attain a semblance of life by drinking blood from the offering" (*Odyssey* x–xi), or in the Babylonian version of the story of Etana, where the hero prays to Shamash, the sun god, proclaiming "the netherworld has drunk the blood of my lambs" ("The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice," 172). These rites resemble the mythology of the vampire in contemporary culture. But Stanley K. Stowers also notes the role of blood in Greek religion as an agent of purification ("On the Comparison of Blood in Greek and Israelite Ritual," 183–88). In this case, blood cleanses or purifies the living participant, not the dead, as in contemporary medical blood transfusions.

Blood was singled out in the Priestly version of the conclusion to the flood, when God granted meat to Noah as part of the diet of humans: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you" (Gen 9:3); which is followed immediately by a prohibition against eating blood: "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen 9:4). Marc Vervenne concludes that blood "remained menacing and potent, full of latent life" in Priestly tradition even when it was removed from the body.[19] The complex manipulation of blood in sacrifice is

tied to its intrinsic life force, which originates with the Deity, thus accounting for its restriction from human diet after God concedes meat to humans. The Priestly teaching on blood would strongly reject the role of blood in feeding the dead.

The Priestly regulations repeatedly restrict Israelites from eating blood (3:17; 7:26). But blood is not only restricted from the diet of humans, it also becomes a detergent or antidote to some forms of impurity that infect humans. Blood rituals performed by priests, therefore, are able to release the power of holiness in the tabernacle, making the sanctuary a tent of meeting and a source of healthcare for humans. Leviticus 17:11 provides the most detailed summary of the prohibition against eating blood and its role in activating the healing power of holiness: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.”

Atonement Offerings

The atonement offerings (Leviticus 4–5) depart from the general character of the gift offerings (Leviticus 1–3). The gift offerings describe general forms of cultic ritual that take place at unspecified times and for a variety of reasons. The instruction for the burnt offering is directed for any occasion when an Israelite might bring an offering of livestock to Yahweh (1:2); no reason for the offering is provided. So too with the grain and well-being offerings; their instructions are directed to “anyone (who) presents a grain offering to Yahweh” (2:1) or “if the offering is a sacrifice of well-being” (3:1). The conditions for presenting the offerings are not stated; only the procedures are clarified.

The atonement offerings specify a host of unintentional actions to which the sacrifices provide remedy; the detailed description of blood rituals is intended to provide healthcare to individuals, the community, the ruler, or to whomever might be suffering the consequences of sin or guilt. As is the case with the description of cultic rituals throughout Leviticus 1–7, the focus on action, rather than ideas, yields a variety of interpretations of the atonement offerings. Two

offerings are described: the sin offering (4:1—5:13) and the guilt offering (5:14—6:7).

Sidebar 7.5 Atonement

Atonement is a translation of the Hebrew verb, *kipper*, meaning "to cover," or "to wipe clean."

The sin offering (4:1—5:13) is a translation of the Hebrew, *ḥaṭṭā't*. Gordon Wenham notes that the Hebrew normally translates, "to sin," hence the meaning, "sin offering." Examples of the meaning "to sin" occur in Leviticus 4: "Speak to the people of Israel, saying: 'When anyone *sins* unintentionally in any of Yahweh's commandments'" (4:2). But Wenham adds that the problem with this translation is the lack of clarity in the meaning of the "sin offering" because many other offerings also address the problem of sin, including the burnt and well-being offerings.[20] The question remains: What does the sin offering do?

Jacob Milgrom clarifies the function of the "sin offering" as the ritual that purifies the sanctuary from human pollution. He notes that humans are cleansed from physical impurity by bathing and from moral impurity by a remorseful conscience. These different forms of impurity in humans, however, also contaminate the sanctuary where holiness resides, regardless of where the sin occurs. Thus, the "sin offering" is really a "purification offering" of the sanctuary to cleanse it from the accumulation of pollution that continually penetrates its space; the analogy may be to virulent staff infections in hospitals. Without constant purification, holiness would be overwhelmed by infection and eventually be forced to abandon the sanctuary, leaving the Israelites without its healthcare benefits.[21]

The impurity of humans has different degrees of potency that are carefully outlined in the instructions for the "purification offering." Thus, just as there are gradations of holiness, there are also gradations of impurity (Jensen, *Graded*

Holiness). Different ritual procedures are required for individual priests (4:3–12), the community (4:13–21), the ruler (4:22–26), and lay Israelites (4:27–31), who sin involuntarily: “When anyone sins unintentionally” (4:2). The sacrifices are also adjusted to fit the economic status of the worshipper, ranging from animals (5:1–6) to turtledoves and pigeons (5:7–10) or even to flour in the case of the poorest (5:11–13).

The key to interpret the degree of pollution generated by the different forms of unintentional sin is the role of blood in the purification offering, since “blood is the ritual cleanser that purges the altar of impurities inflicted on it by the offerer.”[22] The power of blood as a detergent is described as “wiping clean,” from the Hebrew word, *kippur*. Blood wipes clean the human pollution that enters the sanctuary, thus allowing holiness with its health care resource to remain in the sanctuary.

The different degrees of impurity created by the individual and the community account for the distinct uses of blood in cleaning the altar and the sanctuary in the purification offerings. Milgrom provides the following diagram to illustrate the power of pollution to penetrate into the sanctuary and the different ways in which blood cleanses it.[23]

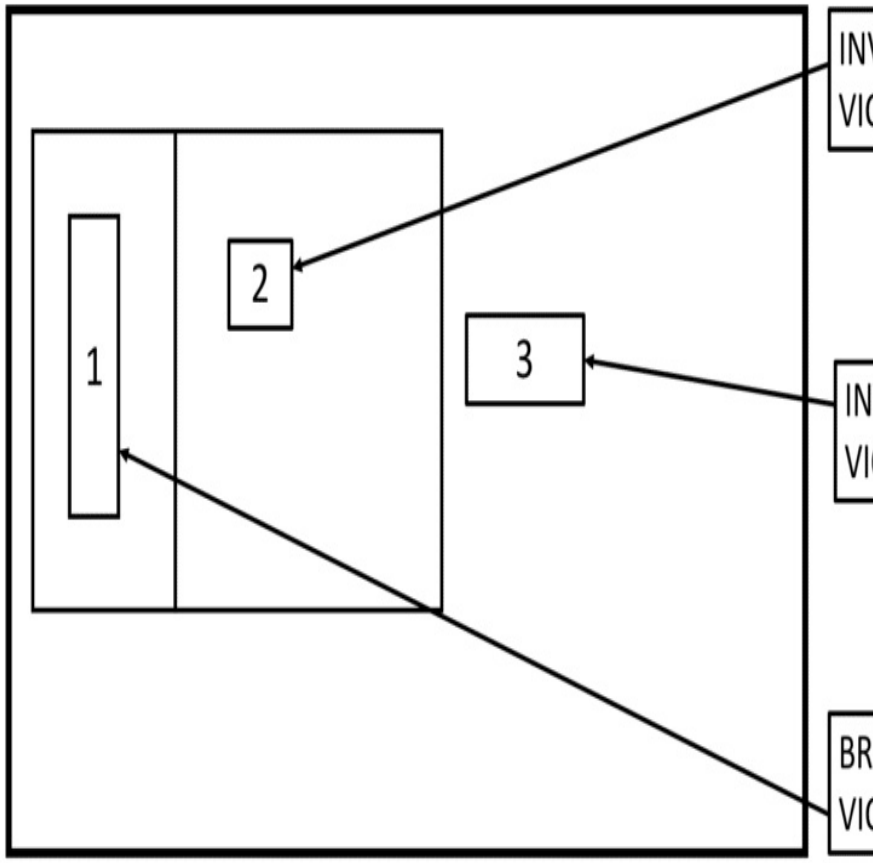

Figure 7.3 Degrees of Holiness.

The diagram indicates three degrees of pollution and purification through the use of blood as a detergent.

Involuntary individual violations (4:27–35) pollute the sacrificial altar. In this case, the individual transfers the sin to the animal by laying hands on it: “You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering” (4:29). After the transfer, the priest slaughters the animal and decontaminates the altar with blood: “The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and he shall pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar” (4:30).

Involuntary communal violations (4:13–21) pollute beyond the altar into the sanctuary. The elders of the community lay hands on the bull (4:15). Once

slaughtered, the priest takes the blood into the tent of meeting and decontaminates the altar of incense before the curtain: “[A]nd the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before Yahweh, in front of the curtain” (4:17); afterward the priests also cleanses the altar of burnt offering: “He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before Yahweh in the tent of meeting; and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (4:18).

More severe intentional sins (16:11–19) penetrate into the holy of holies polluting the ark. The purging of the ark requires the high priest to sprinkle blood first on the front of the mercy seat (16:14–15) to atone or wipe clean the sanctuary, and then, on the altar to clean it (16:18–19). This ritual is the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

The guilt offering (5:14—6:7) is a translation of the Hebrew word *‘asham*. This offering addresses unintentional violations of holiness against Yahweh: “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘When any of you commit a trespass and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of Yahweh’” (5:14–15). The guilt offering addresses the need and the means to compensate for the trespass. For this reason, interpreters also describe the guilt offering as the “reparation offering.” The compensation for violating holiness is very precise; it requires “a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel; it is a guilt offering” (5:15). The details of the reparation offering include the slaughter of the animal, the dashing of the blood on the sides of the altar, the burning of the kidney on the altar “as an offering by fire to Yahweh,” and the consumption of the meat by the male priests (7:1–6).

The five offerings in Leviticus 1–7 put in place a system of health care by which Israelites are able to purify themselves through the power of cultic holiness and to maintain the purity of the sanctuary from pollution. The section concludes with a summary statement: “This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the offering of ordination, and the sacrifice of well-being, which Yahweh commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, when he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to Yahweh, in

the wilderness of Sinai” (7:37–38). The list includes the “offering of ordination,” which is described in the following section (Leviticus 8–10).

Ordination and Worship

The legislation concerning cultic rituals (Leviticus 1–7) gives way to narrative that describes the ordination of the priests and the inauguration of worship (Leviticus 8–10). Leviticus 8–10 separates into three sections by chapter: Leviticus 8 describes the ordination of the priests over a seven-day period; Leviticus 9 recounts the inauguration of worship at the tent of meeting on the eighth day; and Leviticus 10 returns to the topic of priestly leadership in the cultic site, focusing in particular on matters of ritual compliance. Each topic in Leviticus 8–10 repeats themes from the book of Exodus.; the structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.4 Literary Structure of Leviticus 8–10

Priests and Ordination Leviticus 8	Worship and the Glory of Yahweh Leviticus 9	Priests and Ritual Compliance Leviticus 10

Priests and Ordination

The ordination of the priests is described in Leviticus 8. The literary structure of Leviticus 8 is similar to the instructions for ordination from Exodus 29; the two texts relate as instruction and fulfillment.

Table 7.5 Structural Parallelism between Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8

Topic	**Instruction: Exodus 29**	**Fulfillment: Leviticus 8**
Material	29:1–3	8:1–5
Vestments	29:4–9	8:6–13
Bull of Sin Offering	29:10–14	8:14–17
Ram of Burnt Offering	29:15–18	8:18–21
Ram of Ordination	29:19–41	8:22–36

Two themes are central to the ordination of the priests: sacred clothing and the purification of the priest’s body with blood. Priests become holy from this

two-part process and thus are separated from the profane world as they transition into the sacred realm of the sanctuary.

Vestments

The ordination of the priesthood is grounded in their selection by God to wear holy clothing. The opening divine command in Exodus 28 that Moses separate Aaron and his sons from the Israelite people to serve as priests (28:1) is followed immediately with the instruction that Moses "make sacred garments" (28:2). The fulfillment of the command begins with the washing of the priests and dressing them in the holy vestments (8:6–9); the focus is on Aaron as the high priest, but all priests are vested with special clothing.

Sidebar 7.6 Vestments

Vestments are "special clothes . . . used to transform the priest into a ritual celebrant," who is "capable of bridging the gap between the physical world and the world of the spirits" (J. E. Vollmer, "Religious Clothing in the East," 537–40).

Sacred garments are crucial in the ordination of the priesthood; the office of priest is inseparable from the vestments. They are both infused with holiness through the vestments, while the vestments also protect the priest in the presence of the glory of Yahweh, much like the gear of firemen protects them from the heat of a blaze. The clothes make the person! In putting on the garments, Aaron and his sons become ordained, allowing them to mediate in the sanctuary and at the altar between God and the Israelite people. The central role of vestments in the priestly ordination comes to the foreground in the death of Nadab and Abihu; the divine fire destroys the two priests, but not their vestments (10:1–2).

Blood Purification

The instructions for the vestments set the stage for the rite of ordination. The rite requires one bull, two rams, unleavened wheat and oil (Exod 29:1–3; Lev. 8:1–5) and it takes seven days to complete, reinforcing again the importance of the number seven in the Priestly version of the Pentateuch.

The ritual is structured into four stages: (1) the vestments are placed on the priest (Exod 29:4–9; Lev 8:6–13); (2) a bull is sacrificed as a sin offering (Exod 29:10–14; Lev 8:4–17); (3) a ram is offered as a whole burnt offering (Exod 29:15–18; Lev 8:18–21); and (4) another ram is offered as the sacrifice of ordination which culminates in a meal with God (Exod 29:19–41; Lev 8:22–36). The sacrifices follow the same general structure: (1) the location is at the door of the tent of meeting; (2) the priests lay their hands on the animal; (3) the animal is slaughtered; (4) and there is a blood ritual of cleansing.

The sacrifice of ordination (Exod 29:19–41; Lev 8:22–36) stands out in the ordination ritual of the priests. The manipulation of the blood of the ram is crucial to the rite of passage of priests from the profane to the sacred. Unlike other sacrificial rituals where blood purifies the altar or aspects of the sanctuary, the blood of ordination is applied directly on the priests and the vestments: “Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. After Aaron’s sons were brought forward, Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet” (8:23–24). After dashing the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar, “Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his vestments, and also on his sons and their vestments” (8:30). The result of the blood purification of the priests and their vestments is that priests become holy—a divine possession: “Thus he (Moses) consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments” (8:30).

Worship and the Glory of Yahweh

The creation of cultic rituals (Leviticus 1–7) and cultic personnel (Leviticus 8)

sets the stage for the inauguration of worship, which will provide Israel with the health care resources of holiness (Leviticus 9), thus finally solving the problem that ended the book of Exodus. Worship requires both the descent of the glory of Yahweh into the tabernacle and the entrance of humans into the tent of meeting. The preparation for worship extends back to the wilderness journey and it progresses in four stages to the act of worship; the process may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.6 Descent of the Glory of Yahweh

Exodus 16:5–10	Exodus 25:15–18	Exodus 40:34–35	Leviticus 9:22–24
Manna/Sabbath	Theophany	Sanctuary	Altar
Wilderness	Mount Sinai	Tabernacle	Tent of Meeting

The descent of the glory of Yahweh into the profane world as a resource for healthcare takes place in four stages.

1. The glory of Yahweh first appears in the reemergence of sabbath during the gift of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). In this story, the Israelites complain about the absence of food; and when Aaron informs the people of the divine response of manna “the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud” on the horizon of the wilderness (16:10). The rhythm of manna in the cycle of six days of food with no food on the sabbath reintroduces the structure of creation from Genesis 1 into the setting of the wilderness.
2. The glory of Yahweh next appears on the summit of Mount Sinai to provide Moses with the plans for the sanctuary (Exod 24:15–18); the time period of the theophany again repeats the structure of creation from Genesis 1, with the cloud covering the mountain for six days, and on the seventh day, “the appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (24:17).
3. The glory of Yahweh descends from Mount Sinai into the sanctuary after its construction: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34–35). But without the safeguards of cultic rituals or cultic personnel: “Moses was not able to enter the tent of

meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle" (40:35).

4. The establishment of cultic rituals (Leviticus 1–7) and cultic personnel (Leviticus 8) allows for access into the tent of meeting, which in turn, extends the healing power of holiness into the altar. The result is the first act of worship: "Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people. Fire came out from Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw the glory of Yahweh, they shouted and fell on their faces" (9:23).

Priests and Ritual Compliance

Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, violate in some way the role of the priest in cultic rituals at the altar: "[T]hey offered unholy fire before Yahweh." As a result, the fire from the altar consumes them: "[T]hey died before Yahweh" (10:1). Moses provides the interpretation of the incident, stating to Aaron that cultic holiness is directed to all the people; it is not a private experience of the priesthood:

> This is what Yahweh meant when he said,
> 'Through those who are near me I will show myself holy,
> and before all the people I will be glorified'"(10:2).

The violation is followed by three speeches: (1) Moses on death and mourning (10:4–7); (2) Yahweh on the responsibility of priests (10:8–11); and (3) Moses on sacrificial food for priests (10:12–20). Moses commands the priests, Mishael and Elzaphan, to remove the ashes of Nadab and Abihu from the sanctuary, using the vestments of the two priests, which ceased to protect them from the divine fire during their unlawful offering. The garments themselves remain fireproof allowing them to be passed on to the next ordained priests (10:4–5). Once the dead priests are removed, Moses restricts Aaron and his sons to the tent of meeting and forbids them to mourn the dead upon the threat of death (10:6–

7). The speech of Yahweh to Aaron follows outlining the central responsibility of priests to distinguish the sacred and the profane and the pure and the impure (10:8–10). Extended speeches by Moses complete the chapter on the proper food for priests from different sacrifices (10:12–20).

Regulations for Impurity

The central task of the priests is to distinguish sacred from profane and pure from impure (10:10). Leviticus 11–16 provides the initial criteria for priests to fulfill the task. The divine instructions shift between Moses (12:1; 14:1; 16:1) and Moses and Aaron (11:1; 13:1; 15:1). The section catalogues different forms of impurity, including the diet of laity (Leviticus 11), the effects of birthing on women (Leviticus 12), skin diseases (Leviticus 13–14), and genital discharges from men and women (Leviticus 15). All of these forms of impurity represent liminal experiences in one way or another that blur momentarily the normal life routine with something extraordinary and potentially threatening to the healthcare resources of holiness, thus requiring ritual action.

The purpose of monitoring impurity and combating it ritually is to protect holiness in the tabernacle from pollution, which in turn, allows it to function as a resource for healthcare. Yahweh states the rationale to Moses and Aaron: “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst” (15:31). The regulations for impurity conclude by outlining the annual cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The organization of Leviticus 11–16 may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.7 Literary Organization of Leviticus 11–16

Leviticus 11	**Leviticus 12**	**Leviticus 13**
Moses and Aaron	Moses	Moses and Aaron
Lay Diet	Women and Birthing	Skin Disease
Leviticus 14	**Leviticus 15**	**Leviticus 16**
Moses	Moses and Aaron	Moses

Skin Disease Genital Discharges Day of Atonement

Two themes emerge in the regulations on impurity: the central role of embodied religion and the annual cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement, where the tabernacle functions as a body. Both themes focus on physical pollution to protect holiness from impurity.

Embodied Religion

In the Priestly religious worldview, there is no separation between the physical and the spiritual, between the body and the soul. The invasion of holiness into the sanctuary occupies physical space; its goal is health care for the whole human—physical, moral, individual, and communal. The rejection of any dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual represents an "embodied" form of religion, in which "the locus of the sacred is the body," whether conceived as individual, community, or temple.[24]

Sidebar 7.7 Embodied Religion

The focus on the body in Priestly religion to discern the effects of the sacred conflicts with contemporary study in which "religion is . . . interpreted as primarily belonging to the sphere of the spiritual." Religion does indeed embrace the spiritual, but Peter Jonkers and Marcel Sarot add that it also addresses issues of sexuality, reproduction, disease, and food: "Hence the human body is always involved in the concepts and practices of religion" (*Embodied Religion*, 1). The human body is never a neutral object in embodied religion; it is always an ambiguously active subject because there is a bodily character to the divine–human relationship, which may be affected by physical pollution. The ambiguity arises because the body is the locus for potential sanctification or defilement, according to Sarah Coakley, requiring regulations about what enters and exists in the body ("Introduction: Religion and the Body," 1–12).

The power of embodied religion is especially evident in the regulations for

impurity in Leviticus 11–15. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz go so far as to conclude that the regulations represent a "religion of the body."[25] Mary Douglas captures the complex interweaving of the physical and the spiritual in the body: "Just as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true . . . that the body symbolizes everything else," including the sanctuary.[26] In Leviticus 11–15 this means "the body of the worshipper is made analogous to the sanctuary and the altar. Whatever will render the altar impure will do the same for the Israelite's body."[27]

Leviticus 11–15 outlines potential impurities to the human body from two perspectives: laws regulating what might penetrate the body from outside through diet (Leviticus 11) and the identification of dangerous fluids leaving the body or disease that breaks the boundaries of the body (Leviticus 12–15). Both forms of impurity are dangers to the human body and they threaten the purity of the sanctuary also conceived as a body.

The food laws in Leviticus 11 address the problems of shedding blood and of the human diet. The problems are first addressed at the conclusion of the flood, when God restricted blood from the diet of all humans (Gen 9:1–4). Leviticus 11 returns to the carnivorous diet and restricts the Israelite consumption of certain kinds of meat in addition to blood, thus separating the nation from humanity in general. The dietary laws are, according to Jacob Milgrom, the Priestly "method of taming the killer instinct in humans."[28]

The laws are very detailed, yet they remain difficult to unravel into a complete system of meaning. The delineation of clean and unclean animals in Leviticus 11 follows the classification of land, water and air creatures from Genesis 1. Land animals that walk on split hoofs and chew the cud are edible for Israelites, which excludes the camel, rock badger, hare, and pig (11:2–8); water creatures with fins and scales are edible (11:9–12); and air creatures excluded from the Israelite diet appear to be birds of prey (11:13–23). The degree of impurity from the ingestion of banned food varies: land animal are "unclean"; while water and air creatures are "detestable" (11:24–47). The rationale for restricting the diet of lay Israelites is to avoid physical impurity (11:43), because Yahweh is holy (11:44–45).

Leviticus 12–15 shift the focus from what might enter the body through diet to explore the loss of bodily fluids that might pollute (Leviticus 12, 15) or skin disease that breaches the limits of the body (Leviticus 13–14). Female bleeding after birth creates impurity that requires purification rituals of different duration, depending on whether the infant is male or female (Leviticus 12). Also female menstruation and male discharge of semen create impurity, requiring rituals of purification (Leviticus 15). Both fluids contrast to repro-duction, and thus, represent a form of anti-life that is threatening to holiness in the sanctuary. The impurities from blood flow or semen discharge (Leviticus 12, 15) frame a list of skin diseases (often translated as leprosy) that make a person unclean (Leviticus 13–14). Leviticus 13 identifies the skin diseases (13:2–44), prescribes clothing, physical appearance, and social behavior that the person must perform (13:45–46), before addressing the problem of mold that might also render clothing unclean (13:47–58). Leviticus 14 outlines the rituals required for a person to be declared clean from skin disease (14:2–32) and for a house to be clean from mold (14:33–53).

Day of Atonement

The regulations for purity shift in focus from the human body to the tabernacle conceived as a body also in need of purification.[29] The wiping of blood on the altar in the gift offerings (Leviticus 1–3) and in the atonement offerings (Leviticus 4–5) provides purification of the sanctuary on a regular basis from unintentional actions. Yet, a certain degree of defilement remains. The sanctuary is also contaminated by intentional sins whose impurity is able to penetrate into the inner sanctum (holy of holies) of the sanctuary. Once a year, the entire body of the sanctuary must be decontaminated to protect holiness from impurity; the ritual is described as the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The annual ritual allows holiness to provide health care to Israel indefinitely. The Day of Atonement completes the regulations on impurity (Leviticus 11–16) and the entire section on cultic holiness (Leviticus 1–16); it provides a significant point of transition in the literary structure of Leviticus.

The designation, Day of Atonement, for the ritual of purification in Leviticus 16 derives its name from the calendar of yearly worship in Leviticus 23: “Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement (*hakippurim*)” (23:27). The Hebrew, *kippur* signifies the purification of the sanctuary through the act of “wiping it clear.”

The cleansing of the sanctuary is the task of the high priest. The ritual begins with reference to the death of Nadab and Abihu (10:1–2) along with a caution to Aaron about approaching the inner chamber of the sanctuary, whose purification is the goal: “Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat” (16:1). The divine command indicates the focus on the ark and the important role of the high priest as representative of the people in fulfilling the ritual.

Blood rituals in the burnt offering and in the atonement offerings purify the altar outside of the tent of meeting (4:27–35) and even the altar of incense within the sanctuary (4:13–21). But more severe intentional sins (16:11–19) pollute the ark where the holiness of the Deity “appears in the cloud upon the mercy seat.” The Priestly description of the ark occurs in the revelation of the cult to Moses (Exod 25:1–22; 26:33–4; 30:6, 26; 31:1–9). It is the place from where the health care of the glory of Yahweh emanates, and where God promises to meet with Moses and to give instruction to the people (Exod 25:22). Exodus 37:1–9 describes the ark as lavish with pure gold, both insight and outside of the box, and with an additional molding of gold. Pure gold is further used to fashion the top of the ark, described as the atonement cover, (*kapporet*), sometimes translated, “mercy seat,” as in Leviticus 16:2. The goal of the ritual of the Day of Atonement is to wipe clean the mercy seat with blood because of its contamination from human impurity.

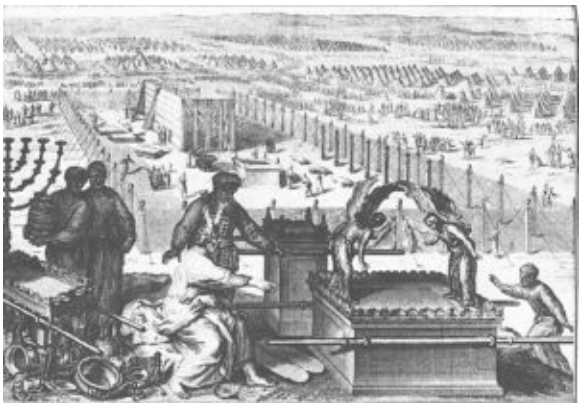

Figure 7.4 An artist’s rendering of the ark of the covenant with Israel camp and tabernacle in the background.

The high priest is the ritual celebrant for the Day of Atonement; much of the ritual concerns the preparation and purification of the high priest to enter the innermost chamber of the sanctuary. The preparation includes bathing as a form of purification (16:4), special vestments of linen (16:4), and the sin offering of a bull (16:3, 11–14). These rituals prepare the high priest to be the ritual celebrant who touches and purifies the ark. The blood of the sin offering is used to wipe clean the mercy seat of the ark from its accumulation of pollution throughout the year (16:18–19).

The focus of the ritual of the Day of Atonement is on the people of Israel as well as the high priest as celebrant. The participation of the people is indicated with additional rituals involving two goats (16:7–10). The goats are placed at the entrance of the door of the tent of meeting; the casting of lots indicates which goat is for Yahweh and which for Azazel. The goat for Yahweh becomes the sin offering for the people; the blood of this goat is sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark to make “atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel” (16:15–16). Once the sanctuary is purified, the sins of the Israelite people are transferred to the living goat through touch—Aaron lays hands on the goat—which is then banished into the wilderness (16:20–22); it is set free for Azazel (16:27). Upon completion of the ritual of transfer and riddance, Aaron and the lay participants bath, change clothes, and perform

sacrifices of atonement (16:23–26). The ritual of the Day of Atonement is a permanent yearly statute (16:29–34).

Sidebar 7.8 Azazel

Azazel is difficult to interpret; the Greek translation, "scapegoat," emphasizes the act of sending the sins of the people away. The parallel between Yahweh and Azazel suggests a demon or deity, but the Priestly aversion to demons suggests a being with little power, according to David P. Wright (*Disposal of Impurity*, 21–30); later tradition further mythologizes Azazel to refer to a more powerful demonic creature or fallen angel.

The creation of cultic rituals (Leviticus 1–7), the separation of cultic personnel through rituals of ordination (Leviticus 8–10), and the establishment of a yearly ritual of cleansing the sanctuary (Leviticus 16) allow holiness to become a continuing healing agent for the Israelite people. The laws of holiness (Leviticus 17–27) in the second half of the book of Leviticus explore the effects of holiness on the life of lay Israelites.

7.3 Leviticus 17–27: Laws of Holiness

The second half of Leviticus broadens in scope from cultic holiness to its implications in the life of the Israelites (Leviticus 17–27). The laws of holiness are wide-ranging and loosely organized; they include topics on the slaughter of animals and diet (Leviticus 17); sexual relations for laity and for priests (Leviticus 18; 20; 21); contact with the dead (Leviticus 21); times of festivals (Leviticus 23); land use (Leviticus 25) and vows (Leviticus 27). The laws are directed for the most part to the laity, not the priests. The central theme of holiness is summarized in the divine instruction to Moses: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy” (19:2; see also 20:7; 20:26; 21:8). Only priests achieve the state of holiness in Leviticus; thus the command to be holy is an ethical ideal for lay Israelites who receive cultic healthcare. The demand for lay Israelites to achieve holiness is intended to protect the identity of the Israelites as the people of God and to establish the ethical requirements for living a holy life in the promised land of Canaan.

The summary of the Laws of Holiness will separate into three parts: Introduction; Holiness and the Land; and Holiness and the People. The literary structure of the section may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.8 Leviticus 17–27 Laws of Holiness

17:1–16 Sacrifice and Blood	18:1–30 Sexual Laws	19:1–37 Communal Laws	20:1–21 Sexual Laws	21:1—22:30 Laws for Priests	23:1–44 Festivals
24:1–9 Lay Gifts	24:10–23 Blasphemer	25:1–55 Land and Sabbath	26:1–46 Blessing and Curse	27:1–24 Vows	

Introduction

Leviticus 17 provides the introduction to the Laws of Holiness. The laws concerning sacrifice, the consumption of meat, and the restriction on eating blood provide transition from Cultic Holiness. Two laws are prominent in Leviticus 17: the need to sacrifice only at the central sanctuary (17:2–9) and the prohibition against eating blood (17:10–16). The subject matter of both laws anchors Leviticus 17 firmly in the context of the cultic laws in Leviticus 1–16. Gordon Wenham notes that Leviticus 17 "draws together themes that run through the previous sixteen chapters: in particular it explains the special significance of blood in the sacrifices." He adds, however, that the focus is no longer on the priests; instead, Leviticus 17 "concentrates on the mistakes a layman is apt to make."[30] The combination of cultic concerns in sacrifice, with a focus on the laity rather than on the priests, signals transition in the book of Leviticus from cultic holiness to its influence in the life of the Israelite people in the land. Two themes emerge in Leviticus 17, providing focus for the entire section of the Laws of Holiness: the influence of holiness on the land and on the identity of the people who live in the land.

The influence of holiness on the land of Canaan in Leviticus 17 is signaled by the inclusion of the resident alien in the laws. Jan Joosten clarifies "the *gēr* ('alien') is the sojourner, who for some reason has left his country to settle elsewhere. Being landless, he is more or less dependent on the local inhabitants," which in the case of Leviticus 17–27 is the Israelites who are presented as living in their own land.[31] The resident alien is nearly absent in the laws of Cultic Holiness (Leviticus 1–16), appearing only once in the observance of the Day of Atonement (16:29). But when the focus shifts from the cult to living a holy life in the land, the resident alien is regularly included. The law of centralized sacrifice, for example, states: "Anyone *of the house of Israel or of the aliens* who reside among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to sacrifice it to Yahweh, shall be cut off from the people" (17:8–9). The same scope continues in the prohibition against

blood: “If anyone *of the house of Israel or of the aliens* who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people” (17:10). The inclusion of the resident alien in the laws of centralized sacrifice and in the prohibition against eating blood indicates the broader focus on the land; the Laws of Holiness are aimed at all people who live in the land, the Israelite and the alien alike.

The shift from cult to people also introduces the theme of the unique identity of those who live in the land and receive the healthcare benefits of cultic holiness. The theme of identity is signaled by the change in the meaning of “atonement” in the divine statement on the prohibition against eating blood: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you *for making atonement for your lives* on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement” (17:11). In the laws of Cultic Holiness (Leviticus 1–16), “atonement” means “to purge” or “to wipe clean” the sanctuary with blood (e.g., Leviticus 4–5), which is intended to protect the cultic site from accumulating pollution. In the Laws of Holiness (Leviticus 17–27), where the focus is more on the people than the cultic site, “atonement” means to “ransom” the person from his or her sin. The change in meaning is signaled by the phrase “making atonement for your lives.” The focus in this phrase is no longer on purging the sanctuary, but on the redemption of the person. Baruch J. Schwartz clarifies the shift in meaning: the blood of the sacrifice now acts as “‘ransom for your lives,’ as payment in place of your lives, which would otherwise be forfeit.”[32] The ransom of Israelites and resident aliens separates the people in the land from other nations, introducing the theme of identity.

Holiness and the Land

The theme of the promised land of Canaan is concentrated in the Laws of Holiness, where it represents an idealized vision of the profane world. Jacob Milgrom writes: “the land is never called ‘the holy land.’”[33] Instead, the land is Yahweh’s personal possession, as the Deity states: “the land is mine” (25:23). It is a gift of which Yahweh repeatedly reminds the Israelites: “when you enter the land that I am giving you” (25:2). As a gift from the owner, those who live in the land become resident aliens, as Yahweh clarifies for Israel: “the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (25:23). The sanctuary and the promised land of Canaan represent the separation of the sacred and the profane in the book of Leviticus; yet, the two realms are related throughout the Laws of Holiness, because the promised land is idealized as a pure form of the profane world, where humans live in close proximity to cultic holiness with its health care benefits.

The single reference to the land in the section on Cultic Holiness (Leviticus 1–16) provides a point of departure for interpreting the complex relationship between cultic holiness and the promised land of Canaan. The law regarding disease in a house (14:34–57) is placed in the future setting of the land of Canaan in order to relate holiness to impurity outside of the sanctuary. The law begins by underscoring that the land of Canaan is a divine gift: “When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a leprous disease in a house in the land of your possession . . .” (14:34). The statement underscores that the idealized vision of the land of Canaan as divine gift still includes the threat of impurity, not only to the sacred within the tabernacle, but also to any house in the profane land. The threat of impurity requires monitoring and health care within the profane world, which resembles many features of cultic rituals where impurity was monitored to protect the sacred: the disease must be reported to the priest (14:35), who empties the house (14:36); examines the walls of the structure (14:37); seals the house for seven days (14:38); scrapes

the walls (14:41); disposes of unclean material (14:42); and sacrifices, smearing the blood on the walls to purify the house (14:48–53).

The regulation regarding the detection and eradication of disease in a house within the land of Canaan (14:34–57) suggests a complex relationship between cultic holiness and the everyday life of lay Israelites in the land. The sanctuary is sacred; the land is profane. Yet, the two are related, because Yahweh's sanctuary is located in the land, making it Yahweh's possession.[34] Thus, both are threatened by impurity; both are purified with blood; and both require priests to function as ritual agents in the process. The goal of the ritual process in each case is different, however: The purification of the sanctuary is to protect the realm of the sacred from pollution that might drive the glory of Yahweh from the tabernacle (16:29–34). The purification of the house is to protect the profane land from defilement that might force it to expel the Israelites as a virus; in another context, Yahweh warns: "the land will vomit you out for defiling it" (18:27). The threat of impurity to the land provides the rationale for the divine command to lay Israelites that they must strive toward holiness in all their actions: "You shall be holy, for I Yahweh am holy" (19:2). Only priests become holy, but by striving toward holiness lay Israelites combat pollution that threatens the purity of the promised land of Canaan. Milgrom writes: "Israel's behavior alone will sanctify the land or defile it."[35]

The demand to live a holy life gives rise to a wide range of laws that are tied to the land. Incest potentially pollutes the land (18:25); harvest from the land may not be total (19:9); the fruit of trees may not be eaten for the first three years (19:23); aliens in the land must be respected (19:33); business practices must be honorable (19:36); children may not be sacrificed to Molech (20:4); sacrifices to Yahweh must include only healthy animals (22:24); the holy times and seasons must be observed (23:10, 22, 39, 43), including Sabbath (25:4); property must be returned to original owners in the jubilee year (25:9); worship of idols is forbidden (26:1); and tithes are demanded (27:30). Observance of these laws will result in a utopian quality of life in the land: "the land will yield its fruit and you will eat your fill and live on it securely" (25:19; see also 26:4–6); violation of the laws will result in the loss of the land: "I will devastate the

land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it” (26:32).

Holiness and the People

The people of Israel are the primary object of the divine commandments in the Laws of Holiness. Some commands are directed to the priesthood alone (21:1, 16; 22:1) or to the priesthood and the laity (17:2; 22:17). But for the most part, the speeches are addressed to lay Israelites, identified as the "congregation" (19:2) and as the "people of Israel" (18:2; 20:1; 23:1, 9, 23, 33, 44; 24:1; 25:1; 27:1, 34): "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them'" (18:2).

The people of Israel become the possession of Yahweh through the Exodus: Yahweh states: "I . . . brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am Yahweh" (22:33). Salvation from Egypt separates the Israelites from the nations: "You shall be holy to me; for I Yahweh am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine" (20:26). The call for Israel to be holy and to be separate from the nations is confirmed by covenant. Yahweh states: "I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you" (26:9). Covenant does not transfer holiness to the people of Israel, however, as is the ordination of the priesthood; instead, it requires that the laity seek a holy life by observing the legislation in the Laws of Holiness. Living a holy life in the land will confirm loyalty to Yahweh: "Thus you shall keep my commandments and observe them, I am Yahweh" (22:31). Holy living will also separate Israel from the nations: "You shall not follow the practices of the nation(s) that I am driving out before you" (20:23).

The sanctity of the tabernacle is central to the success of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel; it is the resource for holiness, which is able to empower the Israelite people to strive toward a life of holiness in the land: "You shall be holy for I Yahweh am holy." Israel Knohl clarifies that the call to holiness in this case is not the ritual or cultic holiness achieved by priests; it is, rather, ethical holiness exercised in the land.[36] Jan Joosten describes the ethics of holiness as a dynamic process by which lay Israelites adjust their lives to the commandments of Yahweh, allowing them to live in proximity to the

sanctuary.[37] The reward for obedience is a utopian life in the land: “If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit” (26:3–4).

Transgression of the covenant threatens pollution to the sanctuary, as in the sacrifice to Molech (20:3). The focus of transgression in the Laws of Holiness, however, is on the danger of lay Israelites in defiling the land through the worship of idols (19:4), swearing falsely (19:12), consulting mediums (19:31), and especially through sexual incest violations (Leviticus 20–22). These and other actions will result in the loss of the land: “I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste” (26:32–33).

The Laws of Holiness continue the embodied form of religion from the regulations for impurity (Leviticus 11–16). There is a difference in the identification of the body, however. The regulations for impurity examined the individual’s body as a potential source of pollution to the sanctuary. The Laws of Holiness catalogue the sexual violations of the communal body of Israel (Leviticus 20–22) as potential sources of defilement to the land. The impact of sexual violations on the land is evident in the regulation against prostituting a daughter: “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute (*zanah*), that the land not become prostituted (*zanah*) and full of depravity” (19:29). In this law, the effect of sexual abuse on the daughter is translated directly onto the land; the result is an environment of depravity that engulfs humans and land alike.

The primary cause of the defilement of the land is incest within the communal body. The Laws of Holiness linger on this topic and even return to it twice (Leviticus 18, 20). The point of view of the legislation is the Israelite male who is forbidden sex with mother, stepmother, sister, grandchild, stepsister, aunt, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and so forth (18:6–23; 20:10–21). Repeated acts of incest break down the separation of Israel from the nations, profane the name of Yahweh, and over time, defile the land, which will “vomit out” Israel (18:24–

30; 20:22). The legislation on the communal body ends with the divine warning: “You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out” (20:22).

Conclusion

The Laws of Holiness conclude with blessings (26:3–13) and curses (26:14–33), whose outcome is controlled by the laity—not the priests or even the Deity. Either the land will be rich and fertile because the people of Israel succeed in achieving a holy life (26:4), or the land will enjoy a sabbatical of rest because the people of Israel fail in the goal and are expelled from it (26:34).

7.4 Composition

Leviticus is the only book in the Pentateuch that contains literature exclusively from the Priestly tradition; Non-P literature is absent. Yet, the book of Leviticus is not a unified composition. Interpreters separate Leviticus 1–16 and 17–27 into discrete compositions with different authors. Leviticus 1–16 is identified with the Priestly version of the Pentateuch (P); Leviticus 17–27 contains distinctive views on holiness and its influence in the life of the Israelite people—for this reason, interpreters have tended to identify the second half of the book as the Holiness Code (H). Both bodies of literature also contain additional cultic traditions from different periods in the history of Ancient Israel. Although interpreters agree in general on the identification of P (Leviticus 1–16) and H (Leviticus 17–27), they disagree on the literary process and the date of composition that has led to the present form of the book of Leviticus.

Priestly Version

Leviticus 1–16 is not a unified composition; it contains independent ritual legislation (e.g., Leviticus 1–7; 11–15) reflecting practices throughout the Ancient Near East that are now incorporated into the P version of the Pentateuch. However the ancient rituals may have evolved in the cultic history of Israel, the composition of Leviticus 1–16 is closely linked with the Priestly literature in Genesis and Exodus. Interpreters debate whether the literary development may be attributed to one author or to a series of redactors, but in either case, most recognize the overall literary strategy of the Priestly version of Genesis—Exodus—Leviticus.

The summary of Leviticus 1–16 underscores ties to the Priestly account of creation (Genesis 1) in the food laws (Leviticus 11); the flood (Genesis 9) in the prohibition against eating blood (Leviticus 1–7); the revelation of God (Exodus 16; 24; 40) in the fire of the glory of Yahweh (Leviticus 9); the sanctuary (Exodus 25–31; 35–40) in the setting for the ritual instructions (Leviticus 1–16); the priesthood (Exodus 28–29) in the account of ordination (Leviticus 8–9); and the Day of Atonement (Exod 30:10) in the ritual instruction (Leviticus 16).

On the basis of the many thematic developments, Christophe Nihan has argued that the Priestly version of the Pentateuch actually ends with the account of the Day of Atonement. He writes: “Through the establishment of the sanctuary and sacrificial cult, which culminates in P in the Day of Atonement, the intimacy between God and humans that existed in the antediluvian world is reestablished.”[38] Others judge the Priestly version to continue into Numbers, Deuteronomy, or even Joshua, but most would agree with Nihan’s conclusion that Leviticus 1–16 advances the central themes of the Priestly version of the Pentateuch, linking the sanctuary and its cultic rituals with the restoration of the original creation of the world.

Holiness Code

Already in the nineteenth century, Leviticus 17–27 was identified as a distinct body of literature from the Priestly version of the Pentateuch. August Klostermann noted the concentration of the divine self-revelation, “I am Yahweh,” in Leviticus 18–26 (e.g., 18:2, 4, 30; 19:10, 12; 20:24, 26; 21:12, 15, 23; 22:2, 8, 30; 23:43; 24:22; 25:2; 26:44, 45), often related to the holiness of God and its demands on the people of Israel (e.g., 19:2; 20:7; 21:8; 22:16) as themes that were absent in Leviticus 1–16. He added that the blessings and curses in Leviticus 26 suggested the formal conclusion to an independent body of legislation. The absence of the formula in Leviticus 17 and 27 and the function of Leviticus 26 as a conclusion to a law code led to the hypothesis that Leviticus 18–26 was an independent body of legislation, which Klostermann identified as the Holiness Code for the first time.[39] Most interpreters agreed that the vows in Leviticus 27 represented a later addition to the law code; but the laws of sacrifice in Leviticus 17 were eventually included as the introduction to the legislation.

Combination of P and H

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26) has traditionally been judged to be an older, independent body of legislation that was incorporated into the Priestly version of the Pentateuch, resulting in the present form of the book of Leviticus. Baruch A. Levine illustrates the traditional point of view: "H represents the primary stratum of the [Priestly source]."[40] The conclusion emerges in part from the festival calendar in Leviticus 23. Levine notes that the calendar contains an early form of sacrifice associated with the celebration of first fruits (23:9–22), described variously as the "raised," "elevation," or "wave" offering, from the Hebrew word, *tenuphah* (23:15–17, 20–22): "And from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the *elevation offering*" (23:15). The "raised offering" was a common type of sacrifice in the Ancient Near East, according to Levine, which also appears in the offering of first fruits in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 26). In the Priestly version of cultic sacrifice, the raised offering drops out of use and gives way to the burnt offering (see Leviticus 1–7); and this process of change is evident in the editing of the law of first fruits in Lev. 23:9–22. Editors insert the burnt offering (23:12–13, 18–20) into the celebration of first fruits to bring the older practice of the "raised offering" from the Holiness Code into conformity with later Priestly teaching: "On the day when you raise the sheaf, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a *burnt offering* to Yahweh" (23:12). The process of editing illustrates that "H represents the primary stratum of the Priestly source."

The composition of the Priestly version of Leviticus 23, according to Levine, is located well into the post-exilic period, since the Holiness Code already presupposes the centralization of cultic worship from Deuteronomy (12; 16) advocated in the late monarchy period.[41] The centralization of worship is evident in Leviticus 17: "If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, and *does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting*, to present it as an offering to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has

shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people" (23:3–4). Levine writes: "The rule that all sacrifices must be offered at the altar standing at the opening of the Tent of Meeting makes sense only if we assume that the authors of Leviticus 17 were endorsing . . . the Deuteronomic doctrine of cultic centralization."[42] Given this, "the earliest strata of the [Priestly source] would have been composed in the near-exilic period, or, as is more likely, subsequent to that time, during the exile or after the waves of return following 538 BCE, when the Cyrus edict was issued."[43]

The traditional view of the Holiness Code (H) and its literary relationship to the Priestly (P) version of the Pentateuch has continued to undergo critical reevaluation. Karl Elliger argued that H was a supplement of P, rather than an older source.[44] Israel Knohl represents an even further development of this perspective (*Sanctuary of Silence*). He argued that H, which he identified as the "Holiness School" rather than the "Holiness Code," was not an earlier independent law code incorporated into P; it was rather a later revision of Priestly cultic practice and theology, because the latter had not related cultic ritual to the ethical life of the laity. In writing Leviticus 17–26, the Holiness School revised Priestly teaching by integrating the power of cultic rituals into the ethical life of lay Israelites (e.g., Lev 19:11–12) and by relating cultic holiness with the land (e.g., 23:10–21; 25).

Knohl also cites the festival calendar in Leviticus 23 as evidence that H revises P, but his focus of interpretation is different from that of Levine, who traced the changing terminology for sacrifice in the legislation of first fruits. Knohl notes that the "raised offering" in the legislation on first fruits is unique to Leviticus 23:9–22 (it is absent in the Priestly calendar in Numbers 28–29), but he simply attributes it to the revision of H, rather than to the changing history of ritual sacrifice. More important for Knohl is the changing role of sabbath from P to H. Comparison between the two Priestly cultic calendars (Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28–29) leads to the conclusion that the designation of sabbath as an "appointed festival" in Leviticus 23 (e.g., 23:2, 4, 37, 44) is the result of the editorial work of the Holiness School to revise Priestly teaching, which had not attributed the same cultic status to sabbath as to the festivals (e.g., Passover, Day

of Atonement). In revising the Priestly teaching on sabbath, the Holiness School "compares the holiness of the Sabbath with that of the sanctuary and grants the Sabbath pride of place, " as the means of relating cultic holiness to the life of the people.[45]

Knohl added that the editing of the Holiness School extended beyond the traditional boundaries of the Holiness Code; it was also present in Leviticus 1–16, where the demand for holiness in the laity also appears (e.g., 11:43–45) and where Priestly rituals were expanded to include the laity (e.g., 3:17; 7:22–36; 15:31). The complete list of the literature in Leviticus from the Holiness School may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 7.9 Literature from the Holiness School in Leviticus

Holiness School (H)	Priestly Version (P)
1:1; 3:17; 6:10–11; 7:19b; 22–36; 10:6–11; 11:43–45; 13:34; 15:31; 16:29–34	1–16
17–22	
23:2–3, 9–22, 28–32, 38–43	23
24–26	

The teaching of the Holiness School even extended beyond the boundaries of Leviticus; it represented a revision of the entire Priestly version of the Pentateuch. Prominent examples of editing outside of Leviticus include the extension of the covenant with Abraham to include the land (Gen 17:7–8); the call of Moses (Exod 6:2—7:6); the instruction of Passover for the laity (Exod 12:1–20, 43–49); the theophany of the glory of Yahweh to all the people (Exod 24:12–18); the inclusion of the people in the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 25:1–9; 27:20–21; 28:3–5; 29:38–46; 30:10); the teaching on sabbath (Exod 30:1–17); the presentation of animals for sacrifices by leaders of the laity in the dedication of the tabernacle (Num 6:22—10:28); the conflict over holiness (Num 16:1–11, 16–24, 26–27a, 35) and so forth.[46] The historical setting for the H revision of P was the prophetic critique during the late monarchy period, in which Priestly tradition was judged to be too esoteric and removed from the ethical life of the people of Israel. The cultic reforms under Hezekiah may be the

social setting for the broader teaching of the Holiness School, according to Knohl, especially given the shared views of holiness with the prophet Isaiah.[47]

The composition of the book of Leviticus has become a central area of study. The interpretations of Baruch A. Levine and Israel Knohl illustrate prominent and contrasting approaches in contemporary scholarship, but they merely represents two poles with regard to the date and the literary composition of Leviticus, of which there are presently many variations, some of which are listed in the bibliography.

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18. “Blood,” 154. ↵
19. “The Blood is the Life and the Life is the Blood,” 453. ↵
20. *Leviticus*, 88. ↵
21. *Leviticus*, 30–31. ↵

22. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 30. ↵
23. *Leviticus*, 31. ↵
24. Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment,” 5. ↵
25. *Purity and Holiness*, 5. ↵
26. *Purity and Danger*, 122. ↵
27. *Leviticus as Literature*, 134. ↵
28. *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 103. ↵
29. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 80. ↵
30. *Leviticus*, 240. ↵
31. *People and Land*, 55. ↵
32. “Prohibitions,” 51–58. ↵
33. *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 139. ↵
34. Joosten, *People and Land*, 189. ↵
35. *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 139. ↵
36. *Sanctuary of Silence*, 180–86. ↵
37. *People and Land*, 117. ↵
38. *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 106. ↵
39. *Pentateuch*, 368–418. ↵
40. “Leviticus,” 16. ↵
41. “Leviticus,” 13–14. ↵
42. “Leviticus,” 13. ↵
43. “Leviticus,” 15. ↵
44. *Leviticus*, 16. ↵
45. *Sanctuary of Silence*, 19. ↵
46. The complete list of literature may be found in *Sanctuary of Silence*, 104–5. ↵
47. *Sanctuary of Silence*, 199–224. ↵

Numbers

8.1 Outline and Central Themes

The book of Numbers continues the setting of Sinai in the opening divine speech to Moses: “Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt” (1:1). The instruction from the tent of meeting ties Numbers to Leviticus, where Yahweh also spoke to Moses from the tent of meeting (Lev 1:1). The difference between the two books is that the divine commands in Leviticus emanate from Mount Sinai, while the speech in Numbers is more generally located in the “wilderness of Sinai,” thus providing the name for the book in the Hebrew (MT) version: “in the wilderness.” The date reaches further back tying Numbers to the events in Exodus:

Table 8.1 Relation of Dates between Exodus and Numbers

TEXT	EVENT	DATE
Exod 12:1	Passover/Exodus	Month 1, Day 14, Year 1 of Exodus
Exod 40:2	Construction of Tabernacle	Month 1, Day 1, Year 2 after Exodus
Num 1:1	Census of People	Month 2, Day 1, Year 2 after Exodus

Numbers recounts the journey of the Israelites from the “wilderness of Sinai” to the “plains of Moab,” located on the border of the promised land; it concludes with the summary statement: “These are the commandments and the ordinances that Yahweh commanded through Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho” (36:13). The setting of Moab ties Numbers to Deuteronomy, where Moses replaces Yahweh in instructing the Israelites in divine law: “Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law as follows” (Deut 1:5).

The introduction (1:1) and the conclusion (36:13) highlight the important role of Numbers in linking the Priestly legislation in Leviticus with the laws in Deuteronomy, forming the two law codes into a single Torah, even though each book contains distinct and even conflicting legislation on the sanctuary, the priesthood, and religious practice. The literary strategy to relate the distinct law codes is the account of the journey from Sinai to Moab, which takes place over a

forty-year period and spans two generations: “And Yahweh’s anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of Yahweh had disappeared” (32:13).

The first generation experienced the exodus from Egypt and received the Priestly legislation in Leviticus; they die on the wilderness journey as a result of rebellion against Yahweh and Moses, when they fear to enter the promised land (Numbers 13–14). The second generation did not experience the Exodus first hand and did not receive direct revelation from Yahweh at Mount Sinai; they take center stage at the close of the book of Numbers, as they prepare to enter the promised land: “These were those enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho. Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had enrolled the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. For Yahweh had said of them, ‘They shall die in the wilderness’” (26:63–65). It is this second generation that also receives instruction from Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, when Yahweh states to Moses: “Not one of these—not one of this evil generation—shall see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors. . . . And as for your little ones, who you thought would become booty, your children, who today do not yet know right from wrong, they shall enter there; to them I will give it, and they shall take possession of it” (Deut 1:35, 39).

The central themes and the literary structure of Numbers are difficult to discern. Thomas Römer states that the book “has no obvious arrangement.”[1] As a result, Numbers yields a variety of structures that accentuate distinct themes. The divine promises of land and of nationhood provide illustration. The fulfillment of the promise of nationhood is central in Numbers; it is evident in the census of the people that frames the book (Numbers 1 and 26). Numbers begins with the census of the first generation of Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai; the number of males over the age of twenty is 603,550 (1:46). After their death, another census records the second generation on the plains of Moab; the number of males over the age of twenty is 601,730 (26:51). According to Dennis Olson, the census provides an important structuring device in the book, yielding

a two-part organization: Numbers 1–25 is a story of the "Old Generation of Rebellion," who die in the wilderness; Numbers 26–36 introduces the "New Generation of Hope," who prepare for entry into the promised land.[2]

The divine promise of land is also an important theme in Numbers; it is developed through the account of travel, as clarified by Horst Seebass (*Numeri*). The geographical organization of the book yields a three-part structure: Numbers 1:1—10:10 takes place in the setting of the wilderness of Sinai; it contains divine revelation concerning the camp structure, the organization of the Levites, and the central role of the sanctuary. Numbers 10:11—21:35 recounts the wilderness journey as a story of conflict and rebellion that leads to the death of the first generation. Numbers 22:1—36:13 describes the second generation of Israelites on the plains of Moab preparing to enter Canaan. Although the promised land organizes the overall plot of the journey, each section also explores more specific themes: Numbers 1:1—10:10 develops further the theme of holiness from the book of Leviticus. Numbers 10:11—21:35 is structured around conflict stories over the lack of food and water, thus repeating stories from the initial wilderness journey from Egypt to Sinai in Exodus 15–18, it also records internal disputes over leadership. Numbers 22:1—36:13 shifts the focus to external threats from other nations on the plains of Moab as Israel prepares to enter the promised land, while also shifting the lens from the wilderness camp to the distribution of land in Canaan.

The overlapping structures in Numbers related to the themes of the promised land and nationhood may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.2 Overlapping Structures in Numbers

1–25 First Generation					26–36 Second Generation
1:1—10:10 Wilderness of Sinai		10:10—21:35 Wilderness Journey		22:1—36:13 Plains of Moab	
1:1—6:27 Holiness and Camp	7:1—10:10 Holiness and Tabernacle	10:11–36 Departure from Sinai	11:1—21:35 Rebellion and Death	22:1—25:18 Threats on the Plains of Moab	26:1—36:13 Preparation for the Promised Land

The top row highlights the two-part structure that emerges from the census of the first and second generations; the middle row clarifies the three-part geographical structure of the wilderness journey; and the bottom row breaks down the book into smaller thematic units that will provide the central themes for summarizing the literary design of Numbers.

8.2 Numbers 1:1—10:10: Wilderness of Sinai

Literary Design

Numbers 1:1—10:10 explores the influence of divine holiness on the social organization of the Israelite camp. In the present structure of the Pentateuch, the focus on the camp is part of the larger thematic development of holiness (see ch. 7, “Leviticus”); it may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.3 Thematic Development of Holiness

Exodus 19–40 Construction of the Tabernacle	Leviticus 1–16 Cultic Rituals and Ordination of Priests	Leviticus 17–27 Laws of Holiness for Lay Israelites	Numbers 1–10 Camp Organization and Commission of Levites

The theme of holiness was introduced in the account of theophany on Mount Sinai, which culminated with the construction of the sanctuary (Exodus 19–40); it was developed further with the creation of cultic rituals and the ordination of priests (Leviticus 1–16). Once the cult and its rituals were established, the narrative shifted to the laws of holiness for lay Israelites (Leviticus 17–27). Numbers 1:1—10:10 extends the theme further, clarifying the effects of holiness on Israel’s social structure (1:1—6:27) before returning to the topic of holiness in the sanctuary (7:1—10:10). The organization of the tribes and their position within the camp take on a sacramental quality requiring the selection of Levites to surround the sanctuary, creating a protective buffer because of the close proximity of Israel to holiness.

Holiness and Camp

Numbers 1:1—6:27 separates between the camp legislation (1:1—6:27) and sanctuary law (7:1—10:10); it explores the social implications of holiness in three sections: the organization of the people and the camp around the sanctuary (1:1—2:34); the role of the Levites in relationship to the sanctuary and to the

people (3:1—4:49); and legislation to prevent defilement of the camp (5:1—6:27).

Camp Organization

Numbers 1–2 focuses on the Israelite people, not the priesthood. The section develops two themes that are related to the sanctuary: the census of the Israelites and their arrangement in the camp by tribes. In the development of each theme, the Levites are separated from the other tribes (census, 1:47–53; camp arrangement, 2:48–54). The themes are introduced as divine commands: the census is directed to Moses: “Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites” (1:2); the arrangement of the camp is a divine command to Moses and Aaron: “Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments’” (2:1).

The census of the Israelite nation is related to the sanctuary; it fulfills a command from Exodus 30:11–16, when Yahweh demanded a census to establish a sanctuary tax: “This is what each one who is registered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary” (Exod 30:13).

Sidebar 8.1 Shekel

Shekel is a unit of weight, not a coin; its average weight was approximately 11 grams.

The tax functions as a ransom for the individual Israelites: “each person shall give a ransom for his life” (Exod 30:12). The purpose of the census is to acquire the precious metals necessary for the construction of the sanctuary; it is fulfilled in Exodus 38:25–38, when 603,550 males contribute the precious metals for building the sanctuary and its furnishings. Numbers 1 shares a series of motifs with Exod 30:11–16 and 38:25—28: it too counts males twenty years of age and

older; describes the registration with the verb “to muster” (*paqad*); and includes the total number of males twenty years and older as 603,550. The literary design, however, creates a tension in the plot of the events at Sinai, since Numbers 1 represents an additional census after the original command and fulfillment in Exodus.

Numbers 1 also introduces a new motif from the accounts in Exodus. The purpose for the census shifts from the construction of the sanctuary to the preparation for war; it states that those counted were “able to go out (*yaṣa’*) to war (*ṣaba’*)” (1:45). The military language recalls similar imagery from the Priestly account of the Passover, where the Israelites were also described as leaving Egypt during the night vigil organized as a military force: “on that very day all the companies (*ṣaba’*) of Yahweh went out (*yaṣa’*) from the land of Egypt” (Exod 12:41).

Numbers 1 departs further from the accounts in Exodus by listing the tribes, which appears to be the focus of the text. The order of the tribes begins with the firstborn, Reuben. The order of the tribes, the names of the leader of each tribe and the number of males twenty years of age and older may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.4 Tribes in Numbers

	TRIBE	**LEADER**	**NUMBER**
1	Reuben	Elizur ben Shedeur	46,500
2	Simeon	Shelumiel ben Zurishaddai	59,300
3	Gad	(*Eliasaph ben Deuel*)	45,650
4	Judah	Nahshon ben Amminadab	74,600
5	Issachar	Nethanel ben Zuar	54,400
6	Zebulun	Eliab ben Helon	57,400
7–8	Joseph: Ephraim	Elishama ben Ammihud	40,500
	Manasseh	Gamaliel ben Pedahzur	32,200
9	Benjamin	Abidan ben Gideoni	35,400
10	Dan	Ahiezer ben Ammmishaddai	62,700
11	Asher	Pagiel ben Ocran	41,500
12	Naphtali	Ahira ben Enan	53,400

TOTAL	603,550

The census progresses in two parts: it begins with the list of the leaders of each tribe (1:5–16); and is followed by the numbering of the males (1:17–46). The names of the leaders are in a different order than the tribes, with the leader of Gad (Eliasaph ben Deuel in italics) listed in the eleventh position before Naphtali as compared to the placement of the tribe of Gad in the third position after Simeon. The names of the leaders are confined in the Pentateuch to Numbers 1–10, where they assist in gathering the people for the census (Numbers 1), leading the people in the military march (Numbers 2; 10), and presenting offerings to the sanctuary (Numbers 7). The census proceeds in a stereotyped format that includes: (1) lineage; (2) clan; (3) ancestral house; and (4) the total number of males twenty years and older able to go to war. The large numbers in the census are most likely symbolic, but difficult to interpret. At the very least, the number of Israelites indicates the fulfillment of the divine promise of nationhood introduced in Genesis 12:1–3.

Once the Israelites are numbered, the divine instruction shifts to the arrangement of the campsite in Numbers 2. The sanctuary is situated at the center of the Israelite camp, with the tribes distributed evenly on its four sides, as illustrated in the following diagram.

The tribes camping on the east side are Judah, Isaachar, and Zebulun (vv. 3–9); on the south, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad (vv. 10–16); at the center closest to the sanctuary are the Levites (v. 17); on the west, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin (vv. 18–24); and on the north side, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali (vv. 25–31).

The design of the camp indicates the further development of degrees of holiness, in which the sanctuary represents the center of holiness for the Israelite tribes organized around it. The Levites are separated from the tribes to safeguard the sanctuary, protecting holiness from the danger of encroachment. The geographical distribution of the tribes suggests value, with the east side of the camp receiving the most value. The first tribe listed in each group is assigned a leadership role over the "regimental encampment," which has its own insignia or banner. The arrangement of the camp indicates the primary position of the tribe of Judah, with the tribe of Reuben becoming the leader of the second regimental encampment. Thus, the arrangement of the campsite shifts the order of the tribes from the census, where the tribe of Reuben was listed first. The arrangement of the campsite also provides the order for marching.

Levites

Numbers 3–4 changes the focus from the number and the camp arrangement of lay Israelites to the Levites. The focus on the Levites requires clarification. All priests are Levites, since all priests are descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob's first wife, Leah (Gen 29:31–35). The genealogy of Levi is recorded in Exodus 6:14–25; it may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.5 Genealogy of Levi

	Levi	
Gershom	Kohath	Merari
Libni, Shimei	Amran, Izhar, Hebron, Uzziel	Mahli, Mushi
	Aaron, Moses	

The genealogy separates into three clans: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari; it is intended to identify Aaron and Moses as the fourth generation; and the sons of Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar as the fifth generation. Numbers 3–4 is related to the genealogy of Levi, identifying Aaron and his sons (3:1–5) and following the structure of the three clans (e.g., 3:14–37; 4:34–42). But it also departs from the genealogy of Levi by introducing a distinction between Aaron, the priest, and the Levites, who are designated as a distinct class of sanctuary personnel: "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, so that they may assist him'" (3:5–6).

The aim of Numbers 3–4 is to describe the new position of the Levite, who becomes a subordinate cultic personnel, and to clarify the relationship of Levites to Aaronide priests and to lay Israelites. Christian Frevel writes: "Apart from the Levites in the book of Numbers there would be no Levitical *cultic personnel* in the wilderness sanctuary besides the priests in the cult of the tabernacle."[3] The literary structure of Numbers 3–4 follows the pattern of divine command and fulfillment, in which each new section begins with the stereotyped introduction, "Yahweh spoke to Moses . . ." (e.g., 3:5, 11, 14, 40, 44; 4:1, 17, 21). The theme of holiness provides the background to the section; the divine command for a census of the Levites provides the plot: "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying: 'Enroll the Levites'" (3:15). The Levites are numbered twice (3:14–37; and 4:1–46), indicating the: (1) Levitical clans; and their (2) number; (3) location in the camp; and (4) work assignment. The results may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.6 Literary Structure of Numbers 3–4

Clans	**Gershon** Libnites Shimeites	**Kohath** Amramites Izharites Hebronites Uzzielites	**Merari** Mahlites Mushites
Number	7,500	8,600	6,200
Placement in Camp	West	South	North
Head of House	Eliasaph son of Lael	Elizaphan son of Uzziel	Zuriel son of Abihail

Task	Tent of Meeting	Utensils	Frames

The first census (3:11–51) relates the Levites to lay Israelites. The divine claim on the firstborn provides the background for the census.

Sidebar 8.2 Firstborn

The firstborn male acquired a sacred status in ancient Israel. Yahweh states to Moses: “Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine” (Exod 13:1). The demand repeats in the Book of the Covenant specifying only firstborn males: “The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me” (Exod 22:29). Whether the law required sacrifice is unclear, although additional laws forbidding child sacrifice point to the practice (e.g., Lev 18:21; 20:3; Deut 18:10). The version of the law in Exodus 34:19–20 separates firstborn animals from humans, allowing the sons to be redeemed, which is also the case in Numbers 3.

Yahweh states to Moses: “I consecrate for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both human and animal; they shall be mine” (3:13). The reason for the divine claim on the firstborn is their survival during the night of Passover. The purpose for counting the Levites is that they substitute for the firstborn, allowing the firstborn males to remain with their families. Yahweh states: “I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all firstborn” (3:11).

The second census (4:1–46) clarifies the role of the Levites in assisting the Aaronide priests. Yahweh states to Moses at the outset that the Levites would serve the priesthood in front of the tent of meeting (3:7), which likely included guard duty to protect the sanctuary. They also care for the tabernacle and carry it on the wilderness journey. The purpose of the second census is to outline the tasks of the three different clans of Levites: Kohathites carry the most holy objects, while Gershonites and Merarites transport the remainder of the tabernacle and its court. The tasks clarify the different degrees of holiness among the clans.

Legislation to Prevent Camp Defilement

The legislation in Numbers 5–6 builds on the census and the arrangement of the camp in Numbers 1–4. The two sections are related by the common problem how Israel is to live in close proximity to holiness. In Numbers 1–4, holiness in the sanctuary at the center of the camp gave rise to the social organization of Israel, the arrangement of the tribes around the tent of meeting and the role of the Levites as guards of the sanctuary. Numbers 5–6 introduces legislation aimed at protecting holiness from defilement that might arise from the actions of Israelites within the camp (for discussion of holiness and purity, see ch. 7).

The concept of degrees of holiness provides the structure to the laws of defilement in Numbers 5–6. They are arranged in relationship to the sanctuary, moving from the edge of the camp to its center in order to explore different forms of defilement that have distinct degrees of power to threaten holiness. The section begins with social laws of defilement that take place outside of the camp (5:1–4), before moving to actions within the camp (5:5—6:21). The laws of defilement within the camp progress ever closer to the sanctuary, examining social interactions (5:5–10), marriage relationships (5:11–31), and finally, the Nazirite who represents the only way that a lay person could achieve holy status (6:1–21). The section ends with the priestly blessing on the camp (6:22–27). The spatial organization of the laws of defilement may be illustrated with the following diagram.

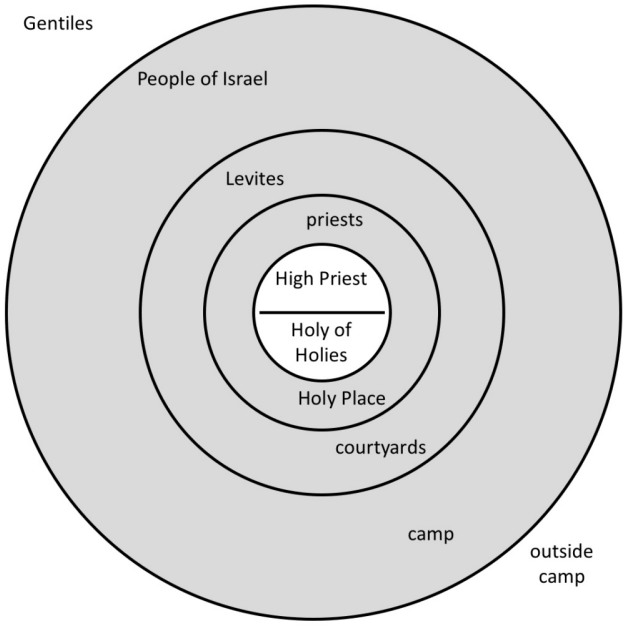

Figure 8.2 Degrees of Holiness. Taken from John H. Walton: “Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus.” Bulletin for Biblical Research 11 (2001), 293-304.

The laws of defilement may be summarized in the following manner. Numbers 5:1–4 lists three types of impurity that threaten the camp: skin disease, abnormal bodily discharges from the genitals; and contact with the dead. This legislation repeats themes from Leviticus.

Numbers 5:5—6:21 shifts focus from impurity excluded from the camp to actions within the camp that threaten holiness; the laws of defilement within the camp progress in three stages.

First, defrauding threatens the purity of the camp (5:5–10). Yahweh states: “When a man or a woman wrong another, breaking faith with Yahweh, that person incurs guilt” (5:6). The purpose of the law is to clarify the process of restitution, allowing the person to remain in the camp.

Second, adultery threatens the purity of the camp in a more intense manner, narrowing the scope of human relationships to a husband and a wife (5:11–31). The law is written from the male point of view; it is aimed at a wife suspected of “going astray” (5:12). The purpose of the law is to test the fidelity of the wife through a judicial ritual; it contains a series of magical ordeals no longer clear to

the modern reader, such as “grain offering of jealousy,” “grain offering of remembrance,” “holy water,” and “water of bitterness.” The outcome of the ritual may be intended to produce a miscarriage if the woman is guilty of adultery, although the text is not clear on this point. The overall aim of the legislation is to protect holiness from defilement within the camp.

Third, the Nazirite is a layperson who achieves holy status for a limited period of time through a vow. The holy status of the Nazirite brings the person into the realm of the sacred, and thus, within the sphere of the sanctuary at the center of the camp. This is reflected in the restrictions on the Nazirite from drinking wine, cutting his or her hair, and touching a corpse during the period of the vow (6:1–8). The focus of the legislation concerns cleansing the Nazirite from accidental defilement (6:9–12) and outlining the proper procedures for ending the vow (6:13–20).

Sidebar 8.3 Nazirite

The word Nazirite means “to be separate,” thus overlapping with holiness which also connotes separateness. The Nazirite is potentially any woman or man from the congregation who makes a vow to be separate or dedicated to Yahweh, resulting in the holy status of the persons for a set period of time. The status of the Nazirite, according to the prophet Amos, is the result of divine commissioning much like that of a prophet (Amos 2:11). Prominent Nazirites include Samson (Judges 13) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1).

The legislation to prevent camp defilement concludes with the priestly blessing on the camp. The movement of this text is the reverse from the laws of defilement, which moved from outside of the camp (5:1–4) to its center (5:6—6:20). The priestly blessing emanates from the priests at center of the camp outward to bless all lay Israelites within the camp. The blessing repeats the same liturgical action at the altar of the tent of meeting (Lev 9:22), reinforcing the extension of holiness from the sanctuary and its altar to the entire camp.

Sidebar 8.4 Priestly Blessing

The Priestly blessing or benediction consists of the following three lines of poetry:

> Yahweh bless you and keep you;
> Yahweh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
> Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

The blessing was found in a burial chamber at Ketef Hinnom, a site located southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. The blessing was written on two silver amulets used to ward off evil, which date from the early-sixth century BCE. This reference to the Priestly blessing may be the oldest citation of any text from the Pentateuch.

Holiness and Tabernacle

Numbers 7:1—10:10 develops the literary structure from Numbers 5–6. The legislation to prevent camp defilement progressed from the edge of the camp (5:1–4) to the sanctuary at the center (5:5—6:21); the focus in Numbers 7:1—10:10 is directed toward the sanctuary itself. The subject matter also changes from the social organization of Israel to cultic rituals associated with the sanctuary. Two sections follow: Numbers 7–8 describe the dedication of the tabernacle and the Levites; Numbers 9:1—10:10 clarify the celebration of Passover and the wilderness march.

Dedication of the Tabernacle and Levites

The section begins with the setting up of the tabernacle: “On the day when

Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle" (7:1). The action repeats a similar event from Exodus: "In the first day in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up" (Exod 40:17). The repetition sets the stage for the dedication offerings, in which each tribe presents the same gifts, with Judah leading the list (7:2–88). The gifts may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.7 Dedication Offerings

Grain Offering	Incense	Burnt Offering	Sin Offering	Well-Being
1 Silver Plateful (130 shekels weight) 1 Silver Basinful (70 shekels weight)	1 Gold Dish (10 shekels weight)	1 Bull 1 Ram 1 Male Ram (1 year old)	1 Male Goat	2 Oxen 5 Rams 5 Male Goats 5 Male Lambs (1 year old)

Baruch Levine notes that the tabular format of the records conforms to the manner in which temples kept track of their holdings; the list, therefore, may represent an example of bookkeeping from the temple archives.[4]

The section ends with transition from the offerings presented outside of the sanctuary to an account of theophany within the tent of meeting: "When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak *with him*, he would hear a voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat" (7:89). The account of theophany fits uneasily in the present narrative context. There is no mention of the deity with whom Moses speaks—the verse simply states "with him." The NRSV resolves this problem by adding the divine name: "the LORD (=Yahweh)." The account of theophany is filled with priestly imagery from the description of the ark in Exodus 25:10–22, including the identification, the "ark of the testimony" (translated incorrectly in the NRSV as "ark of the covenant"), and the description of the "two cherubim" on the "mercy seat" or cover of the ark.

Passover and the Wilderness March

The focus on the sanctuary continues in Numbers 9:1—10:10 with three topics: Passover (9:1–15), the role of the cloud over the sanctuary during the wilderness march (9:15–23); and cultic use of trumpets (10:1–10).

The topic of Passover (9:1–14) builds on the original legislation from the

account of the exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:1–20). The problem is the need for a second Passover for persons who are unclean from corpse contamination, and thus, unable to observe the ritual at its appointed time. Yahweh states that these persons will be allowed to observe Passover one month later: “In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight, they shall keep [Passover]” (9:11).

The interpretation of the cloud over the sanctuary (9:15–23) expands the Priestly teaching at the conclusion of the book of Exodus, where the cloud was described as filling the tabernacle (40:34–38). The aim, however, is not to describe the relationship of the cloud to the glory of Yahweh, but to clarify the role of the cloud as the guide through the wilderness. The two silver trumpets (10:1–10) function as signals for the wilderness march (10:3–7) and they call the Israelites to war in the promised land (10:8–10). The section concludes with the revelation of the divine name: “I am Yahweh your God” (10:10).

Composition

Numbers 1:1—10:10 is similar to the book of Leviticus in that it contains only Priestly literature; Non-P literature is absent in the section. Evidence of Priestly composition includes the description of the sanctuary as the "tabernacle" (e.g., 9:15); the designation of the people as the "congregation" (e.g., 1:2, 16, 18); the identification of the "ark of testimony" (7:89); the covering of the ark with the cherubim (7:89); and the emphasis on Aaron and the priesthood.

Yet, like Leviticus, Numbers 1:1—10:10 is not a unified body of literature. The literary design underscores a series of problems in plot that suggest the work of multiple authors, such as the census (Numbers 1) after its earlier completion (Exodus 38), the setting up of the sanctuary (Num 7:1) when it had already taken place (Exod 40:17), and the theophany to Moses upon the completion of the tabernacle (Num 7:89) when these events were already narrated (e.g., Exod 40:34–38; Lev 9:22). New themes also suggests the work of a distinct author(s), including the emphasis on war in the census (Numbers 1), the function of the trumpets in the land (Num 10:1–10), and the separation of the Aaronide priests and Levites (Numbers 1–4). The separation of priests from Levites likely originates with the exilic prophet Ezekiel, according to Baruch Levine; the book notes that the Levites are demoted from serving at the central temple because of their sin—a veiled reference to worship at the high places (Ezek 44:9–14). The detailed separation of Aaronide priests and Levites in Numbers 1–4 would represent a later post-exilic development.[5]

Source critics have always recognized the lack of unity in Numbers 1:1—10:10. Martin Noth concluded: "all kinds of material were added in 5.1–9.14, material which can no longer be regarded as belonging to the various 'sources'" (by which he means the P source).[6] George Buchanan Gray described three types of literature in the section: the Priestly source (P^g); later supplements to P^g (P^s); and independent laws (P^x). The Priestly source (P^g) includes the organization of the camp and the institution of the Levites (Numbers 1–4);

supplements to P (P^s) include the many dates which conflict with similar events in Exodus (e.g., 7:1; 9:1, 5, 15), the laws of purity that are not closely related to Leviticus (e.g., 5:5—6:21) and the extension of the Passover law (9:1–14); additional independent laws and literature (P^x) may include the priestly blessing —an older piece of liturgy now incorporated into P^g (6:22–27) and perhaps also the instruction associated with war (9:9).

Recent redaction critics, such as Thomas Römer (“Das Buch Numeri”) or Reinhard Achenbach (*Die Vollendung der Tora*), move in a different direction than past source critics, describing the entire composition of Numbers as a long process of post-Priestly additions and commentary that eventually form the book. The Priestly source is judged to end with the revelation and construction of the tabernacle in Exodus or with the establishment of cultic law in Leviticus. All literature in Numbers that reflects Priestly style is not part of the Priestly source. The absence of the class of Levites in the book of Leviticus as compared to the clearly defined hierarchy between Aaronide priests and Levites in Numbers, for example, indicates that Numbers 1–10 is written later than Leviticus. The purpose of the extended editorial composition of Numbers is to relate the Priestly legislation (e.g., Genesis, Exodus, parts of Leviticus) to the Non-P book of Deuteronomy (*Leviticus and Numbers*), thus forming a single Torah from the conflicting bodies of legislation.

8.3 Numbers 10:11—21:35:
First Generation and the Failed Journey in the Wilderness

Literary Design

The theme of holiness and its influence on the camp gives way to stories of the Israelite journey through the wilderness. The journey separates into two parts: the departure from Sinai (10:11–36) and the rebellion and death of the first generation (11:1—21:35).

Departure from Sinai

The departure from Sinai is dated: “In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle” (10:11). The date follows the completion of the second Passover, a seven-day festival that began on Month 2, Day 14, Year 2 (9:1–3). The focus is on the organization of the Israelites for the wilderness march as a militia, thus linking this section to the census (Numbers 1) and to the organization of the camp (Numbers 2). The order of the wilderness march may be illustrated with the following diagram.

Table 8.8 Order of Wilderness March

STANDARD 1 (**Front**)
Judah (Nahshon ben Amminadab)
Issachar (Nethanel ben Zuar)
Zebulun (Eliab ben Helon)
TABERNACLE
Gerhsonite Levites
Merarite Levites

STANDARD 2
Reuben (Elizur ben Shedeur)
Simeon (Shelumiel ben Zurishaddai)
Gad (Elisaph ben Deuel)
HOLY OBJECTS
Kohanthite Levites

STANDARD 3

Ephraim (Elishama ben Ammihud)
Manasseh (Gamaliel ben Pedahzur)
Benjamin (Abidan ben Gideon)

STANDARD 4 (**Read Guard**)
Dan (Ahiezer ben Ammishaddai)
Asher (Pagiel ben Ochran)
Naphtali (Ahira ben Enan)

The march continues the military imagery from the arrangement of the camp, with the leader of each section described as the "standard of the camp" (10:13). The march repeats the names of the tribal leaders from the census; the order places Judah in the lead position, as in the arrangement of the camp (Numbers 2), rather than Reuben, who was the first tribe in the census (Numbers 1). The tabernacle and its holy objects are transported by Levites at the center of the marching formation.

Just when the tribes are organized for the march "company by company" and they "set out" (10:28), the action ceases and the scene changes abruptly from the entire Israelite nation to the more intimate setting of Moses and his father-in-law, here named Hobab (10:29–32). The setting also shifts from Sinai to Mount Yahweh: "So they set out from Mount Yahweh three days' journey" (10:33–36). The disruption of plot and setting is accompanied by further confusion over the central characters: the Midianite father-in-law of Moses in Exodus was named Jethro (Exod 2:15–22); here, he is "Hobab ben Reuel" (Num 10:29). The central aim of this new account of departure is to clarify that the ark, rather than Hobab, leads Israel in its wilderness journey:

> Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say,
> 'Arise Yahweh, let your enemies be scattered
> and your foes flee before you.'
> And whenever it came to rest, he would say,
> 'Return Yahweh of the ten thousand thousands of Israel.'
> (Num 10:35–36)

Rebellion and Death

Numbers 11:1—21:35 recounts the wilderness journey of the first generation of Israelites from Sinai; it is a story of rebellion and death, organized around

episodes of complaint, which George Coats described as the “murmuring stories” (*Rebellion in the Wilderness*). Threatening situations in the wilderness cause Israel to protest their present condition and to desire the return to slavery in Egypt: “We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing” (11:5). The murmuring stories, or a Thomas Römer states “Egyptian nostalgia” (“Egyptian Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21”), began in the first stage of the wilderness journey from Egypt to Sinai (Exodus 15–17). Already during the confrontation at the Red Sea, the Israelites murmured to Moses: “[I]t would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Exod 14:12). The murmuring continued with the threat of diseased water (15:22–26); the lack of food (16); and the absence of water (17:1–17). In each of these cases, Yahweh responds to the complaint as a test of faith. But testing ceases at Sinai with the ratification of the covenant and the establishment of the cult. Once these foundations of religion are in place, murmuring becomes rebellion rather than a test—as is evident in the golden calf story, when murmuring leads to the death of 3000 Israelites (Exodus 32).

The second stage of the wilderness journey from Sinai (Num 11:1—21:35) repeats the earlier murmuring stories about food (11:4–35 = Exodus 16), water (20:2–13 = Exod 17:1–17), and the problem of health in the desert (21:4–9 = Exod 15:22–26). The repetition underscores the new situation in which Yahweh and Israel have formalized their relationship at Sinai through the establishment of covenant laws and cultic rituals. As a result, murmuring in the wilderness journey from Sinai signals the rejection of Yahweh, which culminates in the death of the first generation. Yahweh states to Moses: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they” (14:11). The two stages of the wilderness journey may be illustrated with the following diagram.

Table 8.9 Stages of the Wilderness Journey

Stories of Testing (Exodus)
Wilderness Journey: Part 1

Murmuring and Testing Exodus 15–17			Law, Cult, and Covenant at Mount Sinai Exodus 18–Numbers 10		
Shur	Elim/Sin	Rephidim	Mountain		
Health 15:22–26	Food/Manna 16	No Water 17:1–7	Golden Calf 32:1–35		
Stories of Rebellion (Numbers)					
Wilderness Journey: Part 2					
Murmuring and Death Numbers 11–21					
Taberah Hattaavah	Kibroth–Paran	Kadash	Kadesh	Kadesh Road	Red Sea Road
General 11:1–3	Food/Meat 11:4–34	Land 13–14	Priests 16	No Water 20:1–13	Health 21:4–9

The diagram clarifies the two stages to the wilderness journey. The first (Exodus 15–17) contains three stories of murmuring over health (Exod 15:22–26), food (Exodus 16), and water (Exod 17:1–7). The second (Numbers 11–21) repeats the stories of conflict over food (Num 11:4–34), water (Num 20:1–13) and health (Num 21:4–9). The more central themes of conflict, however, focus on leadership (Numbers 11–12; 16–17) and the loss of the promised land (Numbers 13–14).

Leadership

The theme of Mosaic leadership is examined from a variety of points of view: Numbers 11–12 explore the prophetic leadership of Moses; Numbers 16–17 shift in perspectives to priestly leadership; while Num. 20:1–13 evaluates the failure of leadership.

Prophetic Leadership

Numbers 11–12 describes the nature of Moses's prophetic leadership. Numbers 11:1–3 sets the stage; it introduces the central characters— the people, Yahweh, and Moses—and establishes the mood of rebellion, divine punishment, and intersession by Moses. The people complain about "misfortune"; Yahweh responds in anger, destroying parts of the camp with fire; and Moses intercedes on behalf of the people through prayer.

Numbers 11:4–34 introduces a new complaint, this time over the lack of meat: "If only we had meat to eat!" (11:4). The story moves quickly from the murmuring of the people to the complaint of Moses about the burden of leadership; he states to Yahweh: "Why have you treated your servant so badly? . . . If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery" (11:11, 15). The complaint builds off two previous stories from Exodus: Jethro's advice to Moses on the distribution of leadership (Exodus 18) and Moses's intercession for divine guidance based on his favored status in the eyes of Yahweh (Exodus 33). The literary connection to Exodus 33 is especially strong, since both stories locate the tent of meeting outside of the camp and both explore the power of Moses to intercede. Yahweh instructs Moses to choose seventy elders and to bring them to the tent of meeting outside of the camp, where they will receive a portion of his spirit in order to "bear the burden of the people along with him" (11:17).

Sidebar 8.5 Tent of Meeting

The Pentateuch describes two distinct wilderness sanctuaries: the tabernacle and the tent of meeting. (1) The tabernacle is the Priestly account of the sanctuary; it is revealed to Moses (Exodus 25–31) and built at Mount Sinai (Exodus 35–40). When the Priestly authors describe the ritual process by which Israel meets Yahweh in the tabernacle (as in the book of Leviticus for example), they characterize the tabernacle as the tent of meeting to describe the effectiveness of priestly rituals. (2) The tent of meeting is also the name for a different wilderness sanctuary unrelated to the Priestly tabernacle. The tent of meeting sanctuary first appears unexpectedly in Exodus 33:7–11 as a tent shrine that Moses pitches outside of the camp: "Now

Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting" (33:7). Instead of the communication with Yahweh through priestly rituals in the tabernacle, the tent of meeting symbolizes a more prophetic form of religion in which Yahweh simply speaks to Moses directly: "When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and Yahweh would speak with Moses" (33:9). The tent of meeting sanctuary is also the cultic site for the stories in Numbers 11–12; and for the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:14–23.

When poured out, the spirit of Moses spills accidentally beyond the seventy elders onto two individuals within the camp, Eldad and Medad (11:26–30). Joshua wishes to restrict the power of the spirit: "My lord Moses, stop them!" (11:28). Moses rejects any restriction of his charismatic spirit, responding: "Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would put his spirit on them!" (11:30).

Numbers 11 and 12 fit awkwardly together. Moses has no sooner told Joshua of his wish that all the people be prophets when Miriam and Aaron challenge his exclusive role of speaking for God: "Has Yahweh spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (12:2). Opposition by Miriam and Aaron may arise from their function as prophets in the exodus, where Miriam was described as a prophet (Exod 15:21) and Aaron also functioned as a prophet during the plagues (Exod 7:1). The challenge to Moses's prophetic leadership is rooted in his marriage to a Cushite, perhaps a violation of marriage law although the text is unclear. Yahweh resolves the dispute at the tent of meeting, stating that Moses is more authoritative than prophets because he speaks with God face to face, while prophets are restricted to visions (12:8–10). The episode reinforces the conclusion of the Pentateuch, where the special status of Moses is once again reaffirmed: "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face" (Deut 34:10).

Priestly Leadership

Numbers 16–17 recount the challenge to the priestly leadership of Moses and especially Aaron. The story is complex, weaving together two conflicts over leadership: Dathan and Abiram from the tribe of Reuben accuse Moses of abusing power in general (16:12–14); Korah from the tribe of Levi accuses Moses and Aaron of abusing priestly power through their hording of holiness: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above Yahweh's assembly?" (16:3). The complaint of Dathan and Abiram is obscured in the present form of the story, so that the challenge to priestly power by Korah becomes the central theme.

Yahweh, rather than Moses and Aaron, responds to the challenge through a theophany: "And the glory of Yahweh appeared to the whole congregation" (16:19). Yahweh commands Moses and Aaron to move away from the entire congregation so that they might all be consumed by fire. Moses and Aaron intercede to restrain the divine wrath to Korah and his followers, who are destroyed (16:31–36). The censors of Korah and his followers are hammered as plates over the altar as "a reminder to the Israelites that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, shall approach to offer incense before Yahweh" (16:40). The story reinforces the separation between Aaronide priests and Levites first established in Numbers 1–10.

Failed Leadership

Numbers 20:2–13 provides a critical story of leadership, in which Moses and Aaron abuse their power and are denied entry into the promised land. The story follows the pattern of murmuring. The Israelites complain over the condition of life in the wilderness (20:4–6). Moses and Aaron seek divine guidance and are told to "bring water out of the rock" for the people to drink (20:8). Moses disobeys the divine instruction by striking the rock in anger and by accusing the people of being rebels. In response, Yahweh forbids Moses and Aaron from entering the promised land, stating: "because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israel" (20:12). Aaron subsequently dies at Mount

Hor on the border of Edom (20:22–29), while Moses is instructed to prepare for his death at the “mountain of the Abarim range” (27:12–14).

Loss of Promised Land

Numbers 13–14 are pivotal in the book of Numbers; these chapters explain why the first generation of Israelites to leave Egypt lost the gift of the promised land. The following diagram, adapted from Thomas Römer[7] illustrates the central role of the story within the structure of the wilderness journey.

Table 8.10 Structure of the Loss of the Promised Land

A 11:1–3	Introduction: People revolt, divine anger, Mosaic intercession		
B 11:4–34	Food: Moses revolt against Yahweh		
C 12:1–15	Revolt against Moses		
D 13–14	People revolt against the exodus; loss of land		
C’ 16–17	Revolt against Aaron and Moses		
B’ 20:1–13	Water: Moses and Aaron revolt against Yahweh		
A’ 21:4–9	Conclusion: People revolt, divine anger, Mosaic intercession		

The diagram clarifies that the conflict over the land (13–14) is the central event (D) in the literary design of the wilderness journey. It is framed by conflicts over the leadership of Moses and Aaron (C, C’) as well as food and water (B, B’). General stories of conflict frame the entire journey, providing an introduction and conclusion (A, A’).

The conflict over the land begins with the divine instruction to Moses that he send out men into the land of Canaan (13:1–20), which includes a list of the leaders from each tribe. Most names on the list are unique to this passage. Noteworthy is the listing of Caleb and Hoshea (= Joshua), who emerge as heroes in the story. The organizing plot of the story is the need to send out men from each tribe to evaluate the land and its indigenous population (13:21–33). The details of the mission are unclear, however, since several versions of the event are woven together in the narrative. In one, the group travels to the northern boundary of Lebo-hamath: “So they went up and spied out the land from the

wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath" (13:21). In another, they travel only to the southern border of the land: "They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron" (13:22). Separate evaluations of the land also follow. In one, the spies declare the land rich in resource (13:27–31); it even "flows with milk and honey," but they also note the fearful indigenous nations who will prevent a successful conquest of the land. In another, the men report the land itself to be bad, so bad in fact that it eats its inhabitants (13:32–33). Taken together, the two reports indicate a rejection of the goodness of the promised land and a fear to follow Yahweh in holy war against the inhabitants. The two versions of the loss of the land may be illustrated in the following manner.

Table 8.11 Two Versions of the Loss of the Promised Land

Location	Paran	Kadesh
Purpose of Mission	Evaluate the Land	Reconnaissance for Conquest
Scope of Mission	Whole Land	Southern Border
Report of Spies	Land is Evil	Land is Good; Inhabitants are Fearsome

Numbers 14:1–45 recounts a variety of responses to the report of the spies. The people react by murmuring (14:1–4). They complain about the divine leading into the wilderness, fear for their children's lives, and wish that they had remained in Egypt. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces (14:5), signifying anger against the Israelites (compare the similar action in 16:4). Joshua and Caleb counter the complaint of the people by reaffirming the goodness of the land (14:7), the power of God to fulfill the promise of land (14:8), and the need for people to engage in holy war (14:9).

The most extended response is by Yahweh (14:11–38). It develops in two parts, marked by the repetition to Moses: "How long . . ." (14:11 and 27).

In the first response (14:11–25), Yahweh complains that the people have rejected divine leading and do not believe in divine power, even though they have seen signs of it in Egypt and in the wilderness. As a result, Yahweh decides to destroy all the adult Israelites except for Caleb and to make a new nation from Moses. Moses intercedes for the nation (14:13–19), repeating many of the arguments that he used to rescue the people from divine destruction after the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32): He cautions that by killing the Israelites, the

nations would conclude that Yahweh is unreliable and unable to fulfill the promise of land; he also calls upon the merciful character of Yahweh to forgive sin, first revealed to him on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:6–7). Yahweh agrees to forgive (14:20–24). The entire nation will not be destroyed instantly, but they are also denied the gift of the land. The gift is transferred to their children, while the first generation of Israelites is commanded to travel back into the wilderness on the Red Sea road (14:25).

In the second response (14:26–38), Yahweh provides more detail on how divine punishment will be enacted, stating that persons will be punished according to what they actually said, accentuating individual responsibility for sin over the collective guilt of the people (14:28). Those who murmured and were over the age of twenty will die in the wilderness (14:29). Joshua and Caleb are the only exceptions. The children will inherit the land, instead of their parents (14:31). And the length of the punishment is determined by the offense. Thus, the forty days in which the land was explored is translated into forty years of wilderness wandering (14:34–35). Finally, the leaders who provided a bad report of the land will die instantly (14:36–37).

The story concludes with a failed attempt at holy war (14:39–45). When Moses tells the people of the divine decision to defer the gift of the land, they panic, confess their sin, and decide to invade (14:40). Moses condemns this decision as yet another transgression against God, which can only lead to the slaughter of the people, since God will not fight for them (14:41–43). The scene presents a bleak picture: The people enter the hills for battle, while the ark of Yahweh remains in the camp (14:44). The inevitable consequence closes the narrative: “Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them, pursuing them as far as Hormah” (14:45).

Law in the Wilderness

The wilderness journey weaves together narrative and law, so that events of conflict often conclude with legislation that points a way forward beyond the

present situation. Reinhard Achenbach notes that this technique of insertion is intended to apply sacred law as a solution to the conflict in the narrative.[8] The loss of the land (13–15) and the conflict over priestly leadership (16–19) provide illustration.

Loss of Land

The narrative account of the loss of the land (13–14) culminates in death (14:39–45). But the narrative is followed by legislation (15) that points beyond death to Israel's future life in the land: two laws are placed in the land (15:1–16 and 17–31), before a third law returns to Israel's present setting of the wilderness march (15:32–36). The promise of land is reaffirmed in the introduction to the first two laws: "When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you" (15:2, 17). The first law outlines the required ingredients for different sacrifices that apply to both native Israelites and resident aliens (14:1–16); the second clarifies the required donation from produce (14:7–31). Both laws look beyond the present setting of the wilderness to the fulfillment of the promise of land, in spite of the failure of the first generation. The final episode merges narrative and law (14:32–41) to clarify sabbath observance for the first generation in the setting of the wilderness: "While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day" (14:32). The narrative explains that the incident is without a precedent, requiring Yahweh to adjudicate the solution with new revelation to Moses: "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside of the camp" (15:35). The legislation concludes with the divine command that the Israelites sew blue tassels to the corners of their garments as an aid in remembering the law (15:37–41).

Priestly Leadership

The challenge to priestly leadership (16–17) is also followed by legislation (18–19) that offers solutions to the conflict within the narrative. The entire section of Numbers 16–19 develops the conflict over priestly leadership in three parts: (1)

the challenge of Korah, along with Dathan and Abiram, to the exclusive role of Aaronide priests in approaching holiness (16:1–40); (2) the complaint of the people over priestly leadership resulting in a plague, which causes the people to fear the divine presence in the tabernacle (16:41—17:13); and (3) legislation that provides guidelines for approaching the sanctuary in a safe manner (18:1—19:22). In this way, law and narrative are woven together.

Numbers 18 is a divine speech to Aaron, rather than Moses, which outlines the safeguards that will protect the Israelite people from perishing in the presence of God. Yahweh states that priests protect the Israelites from divine holiness when they perform their duties at the sanctuary and at the altar (18:1–7). Aaronide priests are to receive compensation for performing their sacred duties, especially since they are not allowed to own land (19:20). The compensation is from the most holy offerings (18:8–10), holy offerings (18:11–14), and from a temple tax on the redemption of firstborn humans and animals (18:15–18). Levites also receive a tithe for their service of maintaining the sanctuary and performing guard duty (18:21–24), but they are also required to pay a separate tithe to the temple (18:25–32).

Numbers 19 addresses the contaminating influence of death on holiness. Adriane Leveen notes that the legislation may be read as a response to the conflicts over priestly leadership that led to the death of Korah and his company and to the Israelite people from the divine plague (“Lo we perish”). These conflicts conclude with the people exclaiming: “Everyone who approaches the tabernacle of Yahweh will die. Are we all to perish?” (17:13).

Numbers 19 outlines procedures for Israelites to be purified from the polluting effects of death, allowing them to remain living in the camp and within the sphere of holiness. Numbers 19:1–13 describes the ritual of riddance or exorcism, which decontaminates persons from defilement through contact with the dead. The ritual requires a red cow without blemish, which has never been yoked—used for profane labor. The high priest must slaughter the cow and burn it in fire, outside of the camp. The blood of the cow must be sprinkled seven times in the direction of the sanctuary. This is an unusual ritual for several reasons. It suggests a sacrifice, even though the actions are removed from the

altar, and the blood of the cow is burned in the fire along with the skin, flesh and dung, which is not done in rituals at the altar. The presence of blood in the ashes of the cow is a ritual detergent, along with cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson, aimed at purifying those contaminated by death. The ingredients create the "water of cleansing," which allows the contaminated Israelite to reenter the camp, even while it contaminates those who perform the ritual. Numbers 19:14–22 clarifies the circumstances under which someone becomes defiled from contact with the death (19:14–16) and it provides more detailed instructions for using the water of cleansing (19:17–22).

Composition

Numbers 10:11—21:35 contains Priestly and Non-P literature for the first time in the book of Numbers; Numbers 1:1—10:10 was composed only of literature within Priestly tradition. The composition of Numbers 10:10—21:35 is difficult to discern, however, because the literature departs in form and organization from the books of Genesis and Exodus. Martin Noth wrote: “If we compare Numbers with the other books of the Pentateuch, what strikes us most of all here is the lack of longer complexes.” What he means is that the sections of the book and the individual stories do not clearly form a larger narrative plot, as is the case in Genesis and Exodus. The conflict over prophetic leadership (Numbers 11–12), for example, is not closely tied to the loss of the land (Numbers 13–14) or to the conflict over priestly leadership (Numbers 16). Each episode can be read in isolation from the others. This led Noth to the further conclusion: “If we were to take the book of Numbers on its own, then we would think not so much of ‘continuous sources’ (e.g., J, E, and P) as of an unsystematic collection of innumerable pieces of tradition.”[9]

The comments of Noth introduce two related literary problems in the contemporary interpretation of the wilderness journey from Sinai in Numbers 10:10—21:35: (1) the process of composition, and (2) the literary function of the wilderness journey from Sinai in Numbers within the formation of the Pentateuch. The first issue concerns the manner by which the stories with multiple versions were written and the relationship of the stories to each other in Numbers. Examples include the departure from Sinai (10:10–29), the loss of the land (13–14) and the conflict over leadership (16). The second question concerns the extensive repetition of stories and laws in Numbers and in other books in the Pentateuch. The exchange between Moses and his father-in-law, Hobab (10:29–36), relates in some fashion with the story of Jethro (Exod 2:15–22; 4:18–20); the selection of elders to assist Moses in leading (11:4–34) repeats aspects of the earlier selection of elders (Exodus 18; see also Deut 1:9–18) and the stories of

complaint over food (11:4–34), water (20:1–13), and health (21:4–9) repeat earlier accounts from Exodus (Exod 15:22–26; 16; 17:1–7).

Two literary solutions are prominent among contemporary interpreters. Source criticism interprets the narratives composed of multiple versions (e.g., Numbers 10; 13–14; 16) as the combination of independent sources (J, E, and P); the repetition of stories between Numbers and other books is part of the literary design of the sources which extend throughout the Pentateuch or Hexateuch. Redaction criticism interprets the narratives composed of multiple versions and the repetition of stories from other books as independent compositions by editors who fashion the wilderness journey from Sinai in the late stages of the formation of the Pentateuch; the aim of the editors is to relate the distinct laws in the Priestly literature and Deuteronomy into a single composition. The conflict over leadership in Numbers 16 illustrates the distinct approaches for interpreting the composition of Numbers 10:11—21:35.

George Buchanan Gray and Source Criticism

George Buchanan Gray represents a source-critical solution to the interpretation of Numbers 16.[10] Gray identifies the distinct accounts of the conflict over leadership in part on the large cast of characters that confront Moses and Aaron (16:1–2), which includes Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 additional men. Gray separates Korah and the 250 leaders from Dathan and Abiram, noting that “the two parties always act separately, and are finally cut off by entirely different acts of God.” He notes further that the separation of characters is reinforced in Deuteronomy 11:6, where Dathan and Abiram are also mentioned alone.[11]

Numbers 16 includes literature from each phase of the book’s three stages of composition: the combined sources of J and E (JE), the independently composed Priestly source (P^g), and post-Priestly additions (P^s). In the history of composition, the theme of authority shifts in topic from Moses (JE), to lay holiness (P^g), and finally, to the status of the Levites in relationship to Aaronide priests (P^s). The literary analysis may be illustrated in the following diagram:

Table 8.12 Literary Analysis of Numbers 16

	JE 16:1–2 (partial); 12–15, 25, 26a*b*, b, 27b–32a, 33 (minus last line); 34	**P^{g}** 16:1–2 (partial), 3–7a, 18–23, 24 (tent of Yahweh), 26a*a*, 27a (tent of Yahweh), 35	**P^{s}** 16:1:a , 7b, 8–11, 16–17, 36–40
Characters	Dathan and Abiram Moses (16:1–2 partial)	Korah and 250 Lay Leaders Moses and Aaron (16:1–2 partial)	Korah and Levites Aaron (16:8)
Complaint	Leadership of Moses (16:12–15)	Lay Holiness (16:3)	Status of Levites (16:9–11)
Confrontation	Natural/Unnatural Death (16:25, 26b, 27b–30)	Censors, Incense, Fire (16:4–7 minus Levites)	Censors, Incense (16:16–17)
Result	Swallowed by Ground (16:31–32a, 33aba, 34	Death by Fire (16:18–23, 24 [tent of Yahweh], 26a, 27 [tent of Yahweh], 35)	Censors as Plates on altar (16:36–40)

In the Non-P (JE) version of the story, written during the monarchy period, the challenge of Dathan and Abiram is directed against Moses alone, whom they accuse of abusing civil power: “Is it too little that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also lord it over us?” (16:13). Moses denies the accusation in a speech to Yahweh: “Pay no attention to their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed any one of them” (16:15). When Dathan and Abiram refuse to meet Moses at the tent of meeting, the later devises a test. If Dathan and Abiram die a natural death, their accusation is true; but if Yahweh creates something new and they are swallowed up by the earth, their claim is false: “As soon as he (Moses) finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up” (16:31–32a).

The debate over leadership remains the central topic in the independent P source (P^{g}), written by a single author approximately 500 BCE. Gray notes that the theme of the story in the P source is no longer the conflict between Dathan, Abiram, and Moses; it is, rather, the challenge of lay holiness to priestly leadership stated by Korah with the 250 leaders against Moses and Aaron: “You have gone too far! All the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and Yahweh

is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of Yahweh?" (16:3). Moses adjudicates the challenge at the tent of meeting with a test: "Do this: take censers, Korah and all your company, and tomorrow put fire in them, and lay incense on them before Yahweh; and the man whom Yahweh chooses shall be the holy one" (16:6–7). The next day, the glory of Yahweh appears in the tent of meeting and Yahweh destroys the 250 persons who claimed holy status: "And fire came out from Yahweh and consumed the two hundred fifty men offering the incense" (16:35).

The conflict over priestly authority undergoes further revision within the "Priestly school" (P^s), which reflects changing ritual practices between Levites and Aaronide priests associated with the altar of incense.[12] The supplements to the Priestly source (P^s) identify Korah as a Levite, rather than simply as the leader of the 250 lay leaders (16:8–11, 16–17 36–40). Moses states to Korah at the tent of meeting: "Hear now, you Levites! Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to allow you to approach him in order to perform the duties of Yahweh's tabernacle, and to stand before the congregation and serve them? He has allowed you to approach him, and all your brother Levites with you; yet you seek the priesthood as well! Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against Yahweh. What is Aaron that you rail against him?" (16:8–11). In this version, the censors are now identified as belonging to the Levites; Moses commands Eleazar the priest to hammer them to the altar as a sign that "no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, shall approach to offer incense before Yahweh" (16:36–40).

Reinhard Achenbach and Redaction Criticism

Reinhard Achenbach represents a redaction-critical interpretation of Numbers 16.[13] The distinct versions of Numbers 16 are not independent sources, as Gray argued. Numbers 16 is the result of a history of redaction, in which the story is modified and reshaped over time through additions that reflect changing social and religious conflicts over authority in the post-exilic period. Achenbach

identifies three stages of composition in Numbers 16: (1) Hexateuch Redaction (HexRed); (2) Pentateuch Redaction (PentRed); and (3) Theocratic Compilation (ThB). The literary analysis may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.13 Redaction-Critical Analysis of Numbers 16

	HexRed 16:2*, 12–15, 25, 26, 27b*, 28–32a, 33ab*a*, 34	**PentRed** 16:2a*b*, 3–4, 16a*a**b, 17 [7a*b*], 18, 19b, 23–24a, 27a, 35	**ThB** 16:1, 5–7*, 8–11, 16*, 19a, 20–22, 24b, 27b*, 32*, 33b*b*, 36–40
Characters	Dathan and Abiriam Moses (16:2*)	250 Lay Leaders Moses and Aaron (16:2ab)	Korah and Levites Aaron (16:1)
Complaint	Leadership of Moses (16:12–15)	Lay Holiness (16:3)	Status of Levites (16:5–7*, 8–11)
Confrontation	Natural/Unnatural Death (16:25, 26, 27b*–30)	Censors, Incense, Fire (16:4, 16a*a**,b, 17 [7ab], 18, 19b)	Mediation for the Innocent (16:16*, 19a, 20–22)
Result	Swallowed by Ground (16:31–32a, 33ab*a*, 34)	Death by Fire (16:23–24a, 27a, 35)	Death Limited to Guilty (16:24b, 27b*, 32*, 33bb

Achenbach agrees with a number of the conclusions of Gray, including: (1) Numbers 16 is the central text for identifying the composition of Numbers[14]; (2) the cast of characters confronting Moses and Aaron is unusually large and careful study of the different groups will reveal both the history of the composition of the narrative and of the book of Numbers as a whole[15]; (3) comparison to Deuteronomy (such as the setting of the wilderness; or reference to Dathan and Abiram) aids in recovering the history of composition in Numbers[16]; (4) the literary analysis of Numbers 16 contains three stages of composition; and (5) the development of the theme of authority even follows the same general pattern as Gray progressing from Moses (HexRed), to lay holiness (PentRed), and finally, to the status of the Levites over against priests (ThB).

But at this point, Achenbach departs from Gray, both in literary analysis and in the identification of the compositions. Achenbach, like Gray, identifies a Priestly source; but he interprets the scope of the source differently. The P source begins with the account of creation (Genesis 1), but it extends only to the establishment of the tabernacle cult in Exodus (29 or 40) or perhaps in Leviticus (9 or 16). Achenbach does not settle on any particular text, but he concludes that

the P source is constructed on the mythological model that links world creation (Genesis 1) with sanctuary construction (Exodus 29; 40; or Leviticus 9; 16). As a result, all of the literature in Numbers is post-Priestly composition, since the P source is absent altogether in the account of Israel's wilderness journey from Sinai. The composition of Numbers 16 reflects institutional conflicts over worship and authority in the post-exilic province of Yehud during the Persian period through a sequence of post-Priestly redactions.

The Hexateuch Redaction (HexRed) is the original version of Numbers 16, written in the mid–fifth century BCE during the rise of the Persian Empire. The confrontation between Dathan-Abiram and Moses addresses conflicts among exiles over Mosaic authority, whether it extended intergenerationally and was able to bring exiles back to the land. The setting of the conflict within the larger literary account of the wilderness journey from Sinai is intended to join the Priestly source in Genesis–Leviticus with the separate composition of Deuteronomy–Joshua, thus forming a literary Hexateuch, which is meant to underscore the continuing reliability of the promise of land.

The Pentateuch Redaction (PentRed) is a Zadokite response in the fifth century to the emphasis on lay holiness that accompanied the mission of Nehemiah; this theme is represented in the conflict between Moses-Aaron and the 250 lay leaders; Korah is not yet a character in the narrative. The conflict over cultic leadership is resolved with the test of censers at the tent of meeting, when the 250 lay leaders are destroyed by divine fire (16:35). This version is identified as the Pentateuch Redaction (PentRed), in part, because the author separates Joshua from Deuteronomy, thus forming the Pentateuch in order to focus on Torah and the unique role of Moses.

The Theocratic Revision (ThB) presents the final literary revision of Numbers 16; it is responsible for the inclusion of Korah into the conflict as the leader of the Levites. The revision reflects the growing power of the high priest in the wake of the events associated with Ezra during the fourth century BCE; it underscores the distinction between Aaronide priests and Levites and the authority of the high priest over the twelve tribes of Israel.

Summary

Source criticism and redaction criticism overlap in many areas in describing the composition of Numbers 16–17. Both trace the conflicts from civil leadership (Dathan/Abiram and Moses) to priestly leadership (Korah and Moses/Aaron). But the composition of the wilderness journey from Sinai in Numbers is given a very different role in the formation of the Pentateuch. Source criticism interprets the wilderness journey as a central theme throughout the formation of the Pentateuch. The source-critical interpretation of Gray reads the wilderness journey from Sinai as an intrinsic theme in the formation of the Pentateuch at all stages of development from the JE source in the monarchy period, through the independent Priestly source (P^g), to the post-Priestly (P^s) redaction. Thus, some form of the wilderness journey from Sinai in the book of Numbers was always part of the Pentateuchal story. The redaction criticism of Achenbach interprets the wilderness journey from Sinai in Numbers as a late literary creation to link a form of Genesis–Leviticus with Deuteronomy–Joshua. Thomas Römer summarizes the redaction-critical model of interpretation in the following manner: "'Israel's sojourn in the wilderness' was not one of the traditional themes which gave rise to the Pentateuch. On the contrary, the idea of a long period characterized by numerous conflicts and rebellions is a later invention, linked with the creation of the book of Numbers."[17]

8.4 Numbers 22:1—36:13: Second Generation and the Preparation for the Promised Land

Literary Design

The third and final section of Numbers is signaled by a change of setting from the wilderness to the plans of Moab: “The Israelites set out, and camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho” (22:1). With the new setting, the point of tension changes from internal conflicts within the wilderness camp to external threats from other nations and preparation for life in Canaan. The two sections of Numbers 22–36 may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.14 Structure of Numbers 22–36

22–25	26–36
Threats from Other nations	Preparation for the Promised Land

Numbers 22–25 examines two dangers posed by other nations: the threat of being cursed (22–24) and the seduction to worship other gods (25).

Table 8.15 Dangers in Numbers 22–25

22–25	
Threats from Other Nations	
22–24	25
Threat of Curse	Threat of Seduction to Worship Other Gods
Balak of Moab and Balaam of Pethor	Moabite Women and Midianite Marriage

Numbers 26–36 is composed of loosely arranged laws and stories that explore Israel’s future life in Canaan, including a new census of the second generation (26), followed by a series of inheritance laws (27, 32, 36), guidelines for worship (28–29), vows (30), and instructions for holy war (31). The organization may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 8.16 Numbers 26–36: Preparation for the Promised Land

26	27:1–11	27:12–	28–29	30	31

Census	Zelophehad Daughters	23 Joshua as Leader	Cultic Calendar	Vows	War Against Midian
32 Borders East of Jordan	33 Travel	34 Borders West of Jordan	35:1–15 Levitical Cities	35:16–34 Laws of Homicide	36 Zelophehad Daughters

Threats on the Plains of Moab

The initial threat to Israel on the plains of Moab is from Balak, king of Moab, who fears the strength of Israel and requests the seer, Balaam, to curse them (22–24). Twice, he seeks to hire Balaam who rejects the initial offer (22:1–14), but accepts the second (22:15—24:35). A peculiar feature of the story is that Israel plays no active role in the drama, and thus, remains unaware of the threat. Yahweh, on the contrary, is an active character, protecting Israel through a series of revelations to Balaam. The whole story ends with Israel unaware of what transpired.

The first episode establishes the threat of Israel to Balak (22:1–14). When word reaches Balak of the defeat of the Amorite kings, Og and Sihon, he fears the Israelites and he sends messengers to hire the diviner Balaam of Pethor to curse them: “Come now, curse this people for me, since they are stronger than I; perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land; for I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed” (22:6).

Balaam is unable to make a decision without instruction from his God; but he promises: “I will bring back word to you just as Yahweh speaks to me” (22:8). The identification of Yahweh as Balaam’s god is surprising, especially since he has no knowledge of the Israelites, to whom he refers simply as “a people”: “King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, has sent me this message: ‘A people has come out of Egypt and has spread over the face of the earth; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out’” (22:10–11). Balaam’s intercession makes clear that he knows Yahweh independently of the salvation history of Israel. The divine response to Balaam

reinforces the conclusion; Yahweh never refers to the Israel by name, but simply instructs Balaam not to curse “the people,” because they are blessed (22:12). The episode concludes with Balaam rejecting the request for employment. The Israelites remain unaware of the threat posed by Balak and the role of Yahweh in their protection.

The second episode is more complicated (22:15—24:25). Balaam accepts Balak’s request for hire (22:15–21); a folktale follows in which Balaam confronts the messenger of Yahweh on his donkey (22:22–35); and Balaam delivers four oracles (22:36—24:24), before returning to his home (22:35).

The language intensifies in the second attempt of Balak to hire Balaam (22:15–21). The messengers return, pleading and even demanding the assistance of Balaam, assuring him that no price is too high (22:16–17). Balaam’s response is equally emphatic: “Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of Yahweh my God, to do less or more” (22:18). As in the first story, Balaam leaves the messengers to consult Yahweh during the night (22:19). This time God instructs Balaam to return with the messengers, but to speak only the words that God commands him (22:20). Balaam saddles his donkey, accompanies the messengers (22:21), and repeats the divine instruction to Balak upon his arrival: “I have come to you now, but do I have power to say just anything? The word God puts in my mouth, that is what I must say” (22:38).

Numbers 22:22–35 disrupts the plot with an additional account of Balaam’s journey to Balak, this time alone with his servant rather than with the messengers of Balak. The central theme of the story is the blindness of the seer to the threat of the divine being in his path, which his donkey sees clearly. The disruption of plot is further reinforced by the contradictory action of the deity, now identified as the messenger of Yahweh, who is angry at Balaam for undertaking the journey (22:22) even though he previously instructed the seer to do so (22:20). The portrayal of Balaam also changes from a diviner who carefully discerns the will of Yahweh to blind and impatient seer, whose donkey is more clairvoyant than he.

The original plot resumes with Balaam meeting Balak: “When Balak heard

that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, on the boundary formed by the Arnon, at the farthest point of the boundary" (22:36). Balaam states that he can only speak the words that God puts in his mouth. Four oracles follow at different locations: at Bamoth-baal Balaam blesses the people (22:41—23:12); on Mount Pisgah he blesses the people again (23:13–26); at Poer, he describes the fertility of the Israelite nation and warns that those who curse Israel will be cursed and those who bless Israel will be blessed (23:27—24:13); and in looking out toward the wilderness, Balaam foretells the destruction of the enemies of Israel (24:14–24). Balak responds in anger to each of the oracles before Balaam returns to his own country (24:25). Israel plays no role throughout the narrative.

Israel plays a central role in the second threat on the plains of Moab (25). The story begins with the account of Israelite idolatry with Moabites at Shittim (25:1–5). The idolatry is anchored in sexual imagery: "The people began to have sexual relationship with the women of Moab" (25:1). The following verse links the sexual imagery with the theme of false worship, resulting in the Israelites becoming "yoked" to the Baal of Peor (25:3). The divine response is anger: All the chiefs of the people are singled out for judgment by the deity (22:4); their punishment is to be hanged in the sun, suggesting a public execution (22:5).

The scene is followed by a loosely related incident (25:6–19). An Israelite man, Zimri son of Salu from the tribe of Simeon (25:14), marries a Midianite woman, Cozbi daughter of Zur (25:15), thus mirroring the marriage of Moses to Zipporah. The couple enters the camp in the sight of the entire congregation, while the people are mourning before their tents. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron, kills the couple in the tent by stabbing the woman through her belly, also piercing the man. The execution of the couple halts a plague, which has already killed twenty-four thousand Israelites. Divine speech supports the action of Phinehas by giving him a "covenant of peace" and promising that his family will be priests forever (22:10–13). The story concludes with the divine command that Moses show hostility toward Midian, because of the deceit of the Midianites in the intermarriage with Israel (25:16–18). The command is paradoxical, since Moses is married to the Midianite, Zipporah

daughter of the priest Jethro (Exod 2:15–22), who functioned as Moses's advisor (Exodus 18 and Num 10:29–35). The divine command prepares for the war against Midian (Numbers 31).

Preparation for the Promised Land

Numbers 26–36 signals further transition from the wilderness wandering of the first generation to the preparation for the land by the second. The section begins with the census of the second generation (26), providing a parallel to the first (1). There is also change of leadership; Eleazar replaces Aaron as high priest (26:1) and Joshua succeeds Moses as the one to lead Israel into the promised land (27:12–13).

The census (26) introduces the central theme of inheritance. Yahweh states that the purpose of numbering each tribe is to determine the distribution of the land: "To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance according to the number of names" (26:52–55). The census includes: (1) the order of the tribes; (2) the name of the tribal ancestor of the first generation; (3) the names of the clan leaders of the second generation; and (4) the total number of males over twenty.

The emphasis in the census is on the names of the clan leaders, especially Reuben, Judah, Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Asher. In the case of these tribes, the names of clan leaders extend beyond the second generation; in each account, the genealogy creates literary ties to stories that clarify rules of inheritance. The following diagram provides illustration: the extension of the names of clan leaders is written in **bold** and placed in parenthesis (). One clan leader of Asher is a woman; this reference is written in *italics*.

Table 8.17 The Census in Numbers 26

ORDER	TRIBE	CLAN LEADERS	NUMBER
1	Reuben	Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, Carmi Pallu (**Eliab**) Eliab (**Nemuel, Dathan, Abiram**)	43,730
2	Simeon	Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin, Zerah, Shaul	22,300

3	Gad	Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ozni, Eri, Arod, Areli	40,500
4	Judah	Er and Onan (died), Shelah, Perez, Zerah Perez (**Hezron, Hamul**)	
5	Issachar	Tola, Puvah, Jashub, Shimron	64,300
6	Zebulun	Sered, Elon, Jahleel	60,500
7	Joseph: Manasseh	Machir (**Gilead**) Gilead (**Iezer, Helek, Israiel, Shechem, Shemida Hepher**) Hepher (**Zelophehad**) Zelophehad (No Sons; 5 Daughters—**Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, Tirzah**)	52,700
8	Ephraim	Shuthlelah, Becher, Tahan Shuthelah (**Eran**)	32,500
9	Benjamin	Bela, Ashbel, Ahirm, Shephupham, Hupham Bela (**Ard, Naaman**)	45,600
10	Dan	Shuham	64,400
11	Asher	Imnah, Ishvi, Beriah, *Serah* (*daughter*) Beriah (**Heber, Malchiel**)	53,400
12	Naphtali	Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, Shillem	45,400
	TOTAL		601,730

The instances where tribal leaders are extended beyond the second generation create links between the census and other literature. The inclusion of Dathan and Abiram, for example, ties the genealogy of Reuben to the conflict over leadership (Numbers 16).

More important for the theme of inheritance is the reference to the death of Er and Onan and the inclusion of Perez in the census of Judah, since these relate to the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), where the levirate law is a central theme. The literary tie likely affirms the continuing practice of the levirate law for inheritance.

Sidebar 8.6 Levirate Law

The levirate law (Deut 25:5–6) states that when a husband dies without leaving offspring, the oldest living brother must produce children with his sister-in-law to carry on the clan of the lost brother. The levirate law is practiced in patriarchal societies; the male child of the widow and the eldest brother become the heir of the deceased husband's property.

Even more striking is the census of the leaders of Manasseh. The order of Manasseh and Ephraim is reversed from the census of the first generation, making Manasseh the seventh tribe. The number seven often signifies important events in the Pentateuch, such as the completion of creation (Gen 2:1–3), the revelation of the tabernacle (Exod 24:15–18), or the law of the Jubilee of inheritance (Leviticus 25)—the event that occurs every forty-nine years (representing the numbers 7 X 7).

The significance of Manasseh in the seventh position is intensified in the linear genealogy of the tribe, which also extends to the seventh generation: (1) Joseph; (2) Manasseh; (3) Macir; (4) Gilead; (5) the six offspring of Gilead; (6) Zelophehad; and (7) the daughters of Zelophehad. The daughters of Zelophehad are the seventh generation of the seventh tribe (7 X 7), calling to mind the Jubilee law of inheritance in their demand to inherit land as daughters. The central role of the daughters of Zelophehad in the census is carried through the following narrative, where their demand frames the remaining literature in Numbers 27–36 (27 and 36).

Sidebar 8.7 Linear and Segmented Genealogies

Linear genealogy is vertical in structure; it connects an individual to an ancestor. The depth of a linear genealogy may vary, but only one person will be listed to represent each generation (e.g., Joseph– Manasseh–Macir–and so forth). Segmented genealogy is both vertical and horizontal; it relates an individual to an ancestor (vertical) and to siblings (horizontal), creating a family tree (e.g., the Levitical genealogy in Exod 6:14–25).

Finally, the genealogy of Asher likely explores the same theme of land inheritance by women, when it lists Serah as the daughter of Asher, perhaps illustrating the right of daughters to inherit indepen-dent of the levirate law.

The remaining literature in Numbers 26–36 is loosely organized. The framing of the section with the demand of the daughters of Zelophehad to inherit (27:12–23 and 36:1–12) clarifies the central role of land inheritance, especially as it applies to women.

In the opening episode (27:12–23), the daughters present their legal case at the door of the tent of meeting, explaining that their father died in the wilderness leaving no sons to inherit. In order to perpetuate the family name, they request the right of inheritance. There is no legal precedent for adjudicating the claim, forcing Moses to seek a ruling from God who supports the legal claim of the daughters. The Deity instructs Moses to transfer the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters.

At the conclusion (36:1–13), the elders of the tribe of Manasseh present Moses with a problem in the earlier ruling. In the original form of the law, the land owned by the daughters of Zelophehad would be transferred to their husbands upon marriage; this would lessen the total inheritance of the tribe of Manasseh. To counter the problem, Moses writes an addendum, affirming the inalienable right to the possession of land by the original tribe. This territory of land is described for the tribes east (32) and west (34) of the Jordan River.

The focus on women extends beyond land possession to the further right of Israelite women to make vows (30) independently of their father or husband.

Numbers 26–36 returns to the topic of women one more time in the war against Midian to describe the status of non-Israelite virgins to be wives of Israelite men (31).

The story opens with God instructing Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites in response to the intermarriage at Baal Peor (25:6–18). One thousand soldiers are chosen from each tribe. The battle, led by Phinehas, results in the death of all the Midianite males (31:7), the five kings of Midian—Evi,

Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba (31:8)—and Balaam son of Beor (31:8). The booty includes all the Midianite women and children, all the cattle and flocks, and all the goods (31:9). Moses is angry, however, especially toward the Midianite women (31:13–18). He states that all male children and non-virgin women must be killed, but that virgins are acceptable booty, meaning that the male warriors may marry them, reinforcing the close tie between this story and the account of Israel's sin at Baal Poer (26:6–18).

The remainder of the literature in Numbers 26–36 describes the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua (27:12–23); the cultic calendar for worship in the land (28–29); the summary of the route of the wilderness journey (33); the number and location of the Levitical cites of refuge or asylum in the land (35:1–15), along with the laws of homicide (35:16–34). The book of Numbers closes with the statement that the commandments in it are divine and that they were delivered to Moses on the plains of Moab (36:13).

Composition

Numbers 22–36 resists traditional solutions of composition. The Balaam story (22–24) illustrates the unique history of composition to this section of Numbers. The central theme of the Balaam story is the external threat that Balak of Moab poses to Israel when he requests that Balaam curse the nation. The plot follows a series of revelations to Balaam, in which Yahweh instructs the seer to bless Israel rather than curse them. Divine revelation to a non-Israelite diviner is unusual in the Hebrew Bible and it creates tensions that can be traced in the history of the composition of the story.

Legend of Balaam at Tell Deir ʻAlla

The discovery of the legend of Balaam in 1967 at Tell Dier ʻAlla provides the point of departure for interpreting the composition of the Balaam story. Klaas A. D. Smelik notes that this independent legend of Balaam was written on lime plaster likely covering a pillar or a wall of an eighth-century BCE temple in the area of the Jabbok and the Jordan rivers.[18] The writing suggests a positive portrayal of Balaam as a diviner who sees a coming disaster, in which the goddess Shagar and the Shaddai gods cause a drought on earth, accompanied by reversals in nature and in society—darkness eclipses light, weak birds overpower stronger ones, the wise are laughed at by pupils, and the poor take the place of the rich. The vision is not altogether clear since parts of the text are missing; but it is clear that the vision causes Balaam to fast and to weep. The Dier ʻAlla text indicates that Balaam is a legendary character from the eighth century BCE who functions within the larger cultural context of ancient Israel. It also suggests that he is positive character who is able to discern the action of the gods; there is no indication that he is a sinister or negative diviner who deceives, as portrayed in the present form of Numbers 22–36.

Balaam and Moab

The story of Balaam (22–24) is composed of poetic oracles, a folktale, and narrative. Each genre of literature adds to the interpretation of the Balaam story and the larger literary design of Numbers 22–36.

The oracles of Balaam are represented in four poems about the fertility of Israel (23:7–10); the security of Israel (23:18–24); the success of Israel in war and in achieving the land (23:3–9); and the destruction of Israel's enemies (24:15–24). The poems present a positive portrait of Balaam as a seer who speaks for Yahweh. The first poem provides illustration:

> Balak has brought me from Aram,
> The king of Moab from the eastern mountains:
> "Come, curse Jacob for me;
> come denounce Israel!"
> How can I curse whom God has not cursed?
> How can I denounce those whom Yahweh has not denounced?
> (23:7–8)

The poem makes clear that Yahweh, the God of Israel, speaks through Balaam and that the diviner is restricted in his oracles by revelation from Yahweh.

The positive portrait of Balaam continues in the narrative that provides literary context for the poems. For example, when the messengers of Balak seek to hire Balaam to curse Israel, the diviner repeatedly inquires of Yahweh before responding, instructing the messengers: "Stay here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, just as Yahweh speaks to me (22:8, 18–19).

The antiquity of the poems and their relationship to the narrative context are debated. Martin Noth[19] and more recently Baruch A. Levine[20] judge the poems to have been composed independently of the narrative; George Buchanan Gray concludes that the poems were written in conjunction with the narrative.[21] However one judges the history of composition, it is clear that both the poems and the narrative depict Balaam in a positive light, as a foreign diviner who consults with Yahweh before making decisions and delivering oracles; in no place is he presented as a deceiver.

Balaam and the Messenger of Yahweh

The folktale of Balaam's journey to Moab introduces a more critical interpretation of the diviner, in which his donkey is more clairvoyant than he (22:22–35). The folktale is a later insertion into the Balaam narrative; this is evident from the way in which it disrupts the plot. In the original narrative, Balaam consults with God who instructs him to journey to Moab: "That night God came to Balaam and said to him, 'If the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them; but do only what I tell you to do'" (22:20). Balaam then leaves for Moab (20:21) and he meets Balak (22:36). The folktale disrupts the sequence of this plot structure with the insertion of an additional account of Balaam's journey to Moab (22:22–35).

In the folktale, the Deity is angry over Balaam's journey—even though God has just instructed him to undertake the journey: "God's anger kindled because he was going" (22:22). The divine anger leads to the confrontation with the now disobedient seer: "the messenger of Yahweh took his stand in the road as his adversary" (22:22). Only Balaam's donkey sees the threat and the animal turns aside three times to save Balaam's life. The blind Balaam becomes increasingly angry at this donkey for halting on the journey and he beats the animal until Yahweh finally opens his eyes to the danger of the messenger of Yahweh. The folktale concludes with Balaam confessing his sin (22:34), before completing the journey to Balak (22:35), which resumes the original plot: "When Balak heard that Balaam had come" (22:36). Thus, the folktale introduces a more critical interpretation of Balaam, who must realize the limitations of his clairvoyance and confess his sin. But at no time is the diviner presented as a deceiver.

Balaam and Midian

The negative portrayal of Balaam is developed further with additions that link the Balaam story to subsequent events in Numbers 22–36. In the original version of the Balaam story, Balak the king of Moab represents the threat to Israel: "Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab was in

great dread of the people" (22:2–3). Later editors expand the threat to include the Midianites as allies of Moab (22:4); they now participate in hiring Balaam to curse the Israelites: "So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand" (22:7).

The inclusion of the Midianites as co-conspirators with Moab ties the Balaam story to the larger literary context of Numbers 22–36, since the Midianites reappear as a threat to the Israelites in the story of intermarriage (25:6–18), which leads to the war against Midian (31). The story of the intermarriage between Israelites and Midianites (25:6–18) is similar in composition to the editing of the Balaam story; it too introduces the Midianites into a story that originally only explored the threat of the Moabites in the account of Israelite men having sex with Moabite women (25:1–5).

The Midianite story of intermarriage (25:6–18) introduces the motif of deceit as a threat to Israel. Yahweh judges the marriage between the Israelite Zimri son of Salu and the Midainite Cozbi daughter of Zur, as a form of deceit that requires the extermination of the Midainite nation: "Harass the Midianites, and defeat them; for they have harassed you by the trickery with which they deceived you in the affair of Peor and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian" (25:17–18). The war against Midian (31) is the fulfillment of the divine command: "Avenge the Israelites on the Midianites" (31:1). The report of the battle links the war against Midian back to the story of Balaam, who is also killed in the war along with the Midainite males: "They did battle against Midian, as Yahweh had commanded Moses, and killed every male . . . and they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword" (31:7–8).

Summary

The Balaam story (22–24) illustrates the complex composition of Numbers 22–26. The account of Balaam includes poems, narratives, a folktale, and additional editing that weaves the story within the larger literary design of Numbers 22–36. In the process, Balaam is transformed from a diviner who follows the direction of Yahweh to a deceiver who must be killed along with the Midianite nation.

Although the process of composition and reinterpretation is clear, the identification of the authors of the Balaam story resists traditional models.

The inclusion of the Midiantes as co-conspirators with the Moabites (22:4, 7) and the linking of the Balaam story with the account of intermarriage (25:6–18) and war against the Midianites (31) suggest Priestly authors. The reason is the prominent role of the priest Phinehas in killing the couple and in leading the war against Midian. Further support for Priestly authorship is the prominence of Priestly literature in Numbers 22–36, including the cultic calendar (28–29), the leadership role of priests in allocating the land (32, 34), and the sacrifices for priests (35). But comparison to the Priestly literature in Exodus or Leviticus suggests that the composition of Numbers 22–36 is the work of later writers in Priestly tradition and not the author of the Priestly source. This is also the case with the stories of the Midianites in the account of Balaam (22), the story of intermarriage (25:6–18) and the war against Midian (31). For this reason, source criticism has tended to identify this literature as supplements to the P source (P^s), as illustrated in the work of George Buchanan Gray.[22] Redaction criticism also identifies the literature as post-Priestly; Reinhart Achenbach, for example, assigns the majority of the literature in Numbers 22–36 to the latest stage of composition to the book of Numbers, described as the post–Priestly Theocratic compilation.

Source criticism has also sought to identify the J and E sources in the narrative versions of Balaam, based on the different uses of the divine names Yahweh and Elohim (“God”). The diagram illustrates the variety of the names for the deity and their distribution in the Balaam story.

Table 8.18 Names for the Deity in the Balaam Story

Episode	Yahweh	Elohim	Other Divine Names
First Request for Hire 22:1–14	22:8, 13	22:9, 10, 12	
Second Request for Hire 22:15–21	22:18, 19	22:18 20	
Journey on Donkey		22:22	**Messenger of Yahweh**: 22:22, 23, 24, 25, 26,

22:22–35			27, 28, 31, 32, 34
First Oracle 22:36—23:12	22:28, 31; 23:3, 5, 8, 12	22:38; 23:4	
Second Oracle 23:13–26	23:16, 17, 26	23:21	**El** (“God”): 23:19, 22, 23
Third Oracle 23:27—24:11	24:1, 6	23:27; 24:2	**El** (“God”): 24:8 **Shaddai** (“Almighty”): 24:4
Fourth Oracle 24:12–25	24:11, 13		**El** (“God”): 24:8, 16, 23 **Elyon** (“Most High”): 24:16 **Shaddai** (Almighty”): 24:16

The diagram underscores the variety of the divine names, including Yahweh, Elohim (“God”), El (“God”), Elyon (“Most High”), and Shaddai (“Almighty”). It also clarifies that the term, “messenger of Yahweh,” is confined to the folktale (22:22–35). The intermixing of the names Yahweh and Elohim throughout the poetry and the narrative has prompted interpreters to identify separate sources; Noth, for example, questioned whether the sources E (22:2–21; 22:41—23:27) and J (22:22–40; 23:28—24:19) might be identified based on the divine names.[23] But the distribution resists a clear separation: Yahweh appears in the E source (e.g., 22:8, 13; 23:3, 5) and Elohim in the J source (e.g., 22:38; 24:2). Baruch Levine concludes that the “divine names often alternate with each other in the ongoing narrative, making it virtually impossible to identity discrete sources on the basis of such usage.[24]

The composition of the Balaam story (22–24) and its role in the larger narrative (22–36) brings the study back to the insight of Noth at the outset of his commentary that the book of Numbers represents “an unsystematic collection of innumerable pieces of tradition.”[25]

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1. "Israel's Sojourn in the Wilderness," 427. ↵

2. *Numbers*, 3–7. ↵
3. “Ending with the High Priest,” 140. ↵
4. *Numbers 1–20*, 264. ↵
5. *Numbers 1–20*, 104–5. ↵
6. *Numbers*, 6. ↵
7. “Egyptian Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21,” 69. ↵
8. “Complementary Reading of Torah,” 203. ↵
9. *Numbers*, 4. ↵
10. *Numbers*, 186–218. ↵
11. *Numbers*, 187. ↵
12. *Numbers*, 193. ↵
13. *Tora*, 37–129. ↵
14. *Tora*, 34. ↵
15. *Tora*, 39–40. ↵
16. *Tora*, 51–54 ↵
17. “Israel’s Sojourn,” 443. ↵
18. *Writing from Ancient Israel*, 79–92. ↵
19. *Numbers*, 8. ↵
20. *Numbers 21–36*, 209–33. ↵
21. *Numbers*, xxx–xxxiii. ↵
22. *Numbers*, xxxii–xxxix. ↵
23. *Numbers*, 8. ↵
24. *Numbers 21–36*, 138. ↵
25. *Numbers*, 4. ↵

Deuteronomy

9.1 Outline and Central Themes

The heading to Deuteronomy indicates that the book is composed of speeches by Moses: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan” (1:1). The speeches take place in one day, Year 40, Month 11, Day 1 after the Exodus (1:3), and Moses dies at the conclusion: “Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died. . . . The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended” (34:7–8).

Deuteronomy represents the final teaching of Moses on the last day of his life. It is, according to Dennis Olson, the last will and testament of Moses (*Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*). The mourning period of 30 days after the death of Moses (Year 40, Month 11, Day 1) completes the 40 years of the wilderness wandering, bringing the book of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole to a close with a eulogy on the unique character of Moses: “He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that Yahweh sent him to perform” (34:11).

The literary context of Deuteronomy is also important for interpreting the book. The story of Moses in the Pentateuch spans two generations of Israelites. Moses rescues the first generation from slavery in Egypt and leads them into the wilderness. Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers recount these original events, including the death of the first generation because of their fear to follow Yahweh into the promised land. Deuteronomy contains the teaching of Moses to the second generation of Israelites. The teaching explores the significance of the Exodus and the meaning of the revelation of law for the second generation of Israelites—the surviving children of the first generation. The difference between the two generations is significant: the first generation experienced the salvation from Egypt and the revelation of law firsthand but died in the wilderness; the second generation can only know these events through the teaching of Moses. The following diagram illustrates the literary context of Deuteronomy in the larger design of the Pentateuch; it traces the leadership role of Moses over the two generations of Israelites.

Table 9.1 Leadership of Moses over Two Generations of Israelites

First Generation Exodus—Leviticus—Numbers				Second Generation Deuteronomy
Exodus Exodus 1–15	Wilderness Journey Exodus 15–18	Revelation of Law Exodus 19–40 Leviticus Numbers 1–9	Wilderness Journey Numbers 10–36	Exodus Wilderness Journey Revelation of Law

The literary design clarifies the unique function of Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch; it is intended to explore the meaning of the Exodus, the wilderness journey, and the revelation of law from a more distant point of view in history, when the community of faith is now detached from the original events; this is the situation of the second generation. Without firsthand experience, the only way for the second generation to know the power of Yahweh's salvation is through the teaching of Moses, who recounts the past events from Exodus and Numbers; his aim is to persuade the second generation to follow Yahweh even though they lack direct experience of the primary events of salvation and revelation.

The literary function of Deuteronomy results in frequent references back to the events in Exodus and Numbers throughout the speeches of Moses, creating a web of repetitions among these books. The ability of Moses to refer back to the original events in Exodus–Numbers establishes his authority and the reliability of his teaching in Deuteronomy. He warns the second generation: "So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you" (4:1).

Bernard M. Levinson provides a helpful roadmap for interpreting the frequent references back to the Exodus and the wilderness journey in Deuteronomy: "The concern of the authors of Deuteronomy was not to explicate older texts but to transform them." He explains further: "The authors of Deuteronomy had a radically new vision of the religious and public polity and sought to implement unprecedented changes in religion and society."[1] Thus, once the authority of Moses as teacher is established, the authors of Deuteronomy transform the accounts of salvation in Exodus and Numbers through the retelling of the original events with a radically new vision of

religion; central themes include the nature of revelation, the holiness of the entire nation rather than simply the priesthood, the cultic presence of the word, the centralization of worship, the formation of covenant, and the spirituality of law codified in writing. W. M. L. de Wette recognized the distinctive character of religion in Deuteronomy already at the outset of the modern critical period of interpretation.

Literary Structure

The literary structure of Deuteronomy is difficult to discern because of the mixing of narrative, law, liturgy, and poetry throughout the book's long and complex history of composition. The emphasis in the heading (1:1) on Moses speaking to the Israelites does, however, provide insight into the present structure of Deuteronomy as four speeches of unequal length, which may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 9.2 Literary Structure of Deuteronomy

Speech 1 1:1—4:43: Lessons from History and the Revelation of the Word	**1:1** "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness."
Speech 2 4:44—28:68: Divine Word as Law	**4:44** "This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites."
Speech 3 28:69—31:29: Passing On Mosaic Leadership and Instruction to the Covenant People	**29:1** "These are the words of the covenant that Yahweh commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb."
Speech 4 31:30—34:12: Concluding Song and Farewell Blessing	**31:30** "Then Moses recited the words of this song, to the very end, in the hearing of the whole assemble of Israel." **33:1** "This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death."

The interpretation of Deuteronomy will follow the four-part structure of the speeches of Moses. The sections progress from the past (1:1—4:43) to the present (4:44—28:68; 29:1—31:29), and finally, to the future (31:30—34:12). Section one reviews the history of the exodus and the wilderness journey to illustrate the failure of the first generation in following Yahweh and the potential power of the revelation of the divine word to the second generation (1:1—4:43). Sections two and three address in more detail the present setting of the second generation who did not experience the Exodus but are now preparing to enter the promised land. The speeches propose a new form of religion for the second generation, in which revelation is limited to divine words in the form of laws (4:44—28:68); Mosaic leadership is passed on to Joshua and the law is written down as the covenant for the second generation (29:1—31:29). Section four

points ahead to the future life of Israel in the land when Moses shifts from teaching about the law to singing a hymn (31:30—32:52) and blessing the people (33:1—34:12).

9.2 Deuteronomy 1:1—4:4: Lessons from History and the Revelation of the Word

The introduction to the book of Deuteronomy is also the opening to the initial speech of Moses: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness” (1:1). The speech focuses on the past; it recounts the failure of the first generation as a warning to the second not to repeat the fate of their ancestors. The style of the speech is direct, personal, and aimed at persuasion; Moses addresses the people repeatedly in the second person, “you,” whether he is recounting the history of the first generation or the present situation of the second. The result, according to Richard Nelson, is that “Deuteronomy has an idealized timeless quality, collapsing the contemporaries of Moses into the current audience of the book,” creating confusion about the intended audience.[2]

In the narrative world of Deuteronomy, the first generation has died in the wilderness; they represent the ancestors as in the speech of Moses: “And because [Yahweh] loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power” (4:37). The speech is difficult to locate in time when read in isolation. Thomas Römer has clarified that only infrequently do the ancestors refer to the patriarchs in Genesis —Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*IsraelsVäter*). The larger literary design of Deuteronomy clarifies that the ancestors in this speech and throughout most of the book of Deuteronomy are the Exodus generation. The speech shifts between the Exodus generation and their children so that what begins as a reference to the past ancestors becomes an address to the children of the Exodus generation; they are the descendants who Yahweh is bringing out of Egypt “by his great power.”

After the extended introduction (1:1–5), the lessons from history are organized around six geographical locations, divided evenly between the failure of the first generation and the present circumstances of the second. The failure of the first generation is reported as a sequence of events from Horeb (1:6–18) through Kadesh-Barnea (1:19—2:13a) to the Wadi Zered (2:13b–15), where they

die. The success of the second generation begins with Moab at Ar, when they leave the wilderness (2:16–23), continues through the holy war against Sihon at the Wadi Arnon (2:24—3:22), and concludes at Beth-Peor, where Moses recounts of revelation at Horeb (4:1–43). The literary design may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 9.3 Literary Design of Deuteronomy 1–4

A Horeb: Departure after Revelation (1:6–18)

B Kadesh–Barnea: Fear of Holy War (1:19—2:13a)

C Wadi Zered: Death in the Wilderness (2:13b–15)

"Just as soon as all the warriors had died off from among the people"

C' Moab at Ar: Leaving the Wilderness (2:16–23)

B' Wadi Arnon: Success in Holy War (2:24—3:22)

A' Beth–Peor: Recounting the Revelation at Horeb (4:1–43)

The geographical locations provide contrast between the first and second generations. The death of the first generation at the Wadi Zered (C, 2:13–15) provides the hinge for the second generation to leave the wilderness from Moab at Ar (C', 2:16–23). Two additional contrasts include the revelation at Mount Horeb (A, 1:6–18; and A', 4:1–43) and the demand to follow Yahweh in war without fear (B, 1:19—2:13a; and B', 2:24—3:22).

Revelation at Horeb

Horeb frames the first speech of Moses; it represents the starting point for the history of the first generation (A, 1:6–18) and returns as the topic of instruction to the second at Beth–Peor (A', 4:1–43). There is literary design in the repetition. The first generation is introduced as leaving Horeb, not as receiving revelation: "Yahweh our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain'" (1:6). The importance of Horeb as the mountain of revelation is clarified only at the end of the speech, when Moses explains the content of the revelation to the second generation: "[Y]ou once stood before Yahweh your God at Horeb" (4:10).

Horeb represents the divine mountain of revelation in Deuteronomy; it contrasts with the identification of Mount Sinai as the location for the original event in Exodus (e.g., Exod 19:11, 18, 20; 24:16; 34:2). The instruction of Moses (4:1–40) assumes the past revelation of God from Exodus 19–24, as is evident in the statement noted above: "You once stood before Yahweh your God at Horeb" (4:10). The reference to the past introduces repetition, as though Moses is recounting the original event to the second generation. But the repetition does not reproduce the past story in Exodus; instead, it provides the springboard for reinterpretation to the second generation, noted earlier by Bernard Levinson, which in this case is signaled by the new name for the mountain as Horeb (e.g., 1:2, 6, 19; 4:10, 15).

Sidebar 9.1 Horeb and Sinai: Two Mountains of Revelation

The Priestly literature and Deuteronomy locate the wilderness revelation of Yahweh on the distinct cosmic mountains of Sinai and Horeb. The separate settings represent contrasting views of revelation and the presence of Yahweh in worship. Mount Sinai describes revelation as a visual event of fire in the form of the glory of Yahweh that descends into the Priestly tabernacle. Mount Horeb describes the same

revelation as an event of divine speech, which is symbolized as the divine Name in the sanctuary. The diagram illustrates the contrasts.

Table 9.4 Contrasting Views of Revelation and Worship

Theme	Priestly Literature	Deuteronomy
Divine Mountain of Revelation	Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15–18)	Mount Horeb (Deut 4–5)
Divine Cultic Presence	Glory of Yahweh (Exod 24:15–18)	The Name (Deut 12; 16:1–17)

For further discussion, see Trygge N. D. Mettinger (*The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies*).

Horeb comes to represent the experience of divine revelation as speech. Yahweh states to Moses: “Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words” (4:10). The divine word is transmitted directly to all the people: “Then Yahweh spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words” (4:12). The speech of Yahweh does not require the mediation of priests or sacramental rituals as in the revelation of the glory of Yahweh in the tabernacle at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15–18; Lev 9:22–24). Moses clarifies the core experience: “You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (4:12). The divine word revealed at Horeb cannot be contained in objects or represented in images of any kind (4:15–20); it can only be transmitted in covenantal laws written on stone tablets (4:13). Once revealed, moreover, Moses explains that the word penetrates the people so that “god [is] near . . . whenever we call to him” (4:7). This truth must be taught to each new generation (4:10), which requires continual instruction as illustrated by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, when he delivers the four speeches to the second generation on the last day of his life.

Fear and Holy War

Holy war defines the character of the first and second generations. The failure of the first generation to undertake holy war at Kadesh-Barnea (B, 1:19—2:13a) is counter-balanced by the successful holy war of the second generation at the Wadi Arnon (B', 2:24—3:22); fear determines the difference between the two generations.

The first generation sends spies in preparation for following Yahweh in war against the indigenous nations of the land; the original account is in Numbers 13–14. In Deuteronomy, Moses recounts the spy story from Kadesh-Barnea (1:19—2:13a). He notes that the preparation for war required the people not to fear the nations in the land: "See, Yahweh your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession . . . do not fear or be dismayed" (1:21). But the people give in to the fear of the nations; they refuse to follow Yahweh into the land; and they forfeit the land.

The second generation follows Yahweh out of the wilderness into the Transjordan; they wage a successful holy war against Sihon and Og upon crossing the Wadi Arnon (2:24—3:22). Rather than fearing the nations, Yahweh declares the reverse: "[T]he dread and fear of you [will be] upon the peoples everywhere under heaven; when they hear report of you, they will tremble and be in anguish because of you" (2:25). After defeating Sihon and in preparation for war against Og Yahweh again commands Moses: "Do not fear him" (3:2). The second generation follows Yahweh into battle and defeats Og. The reason for their courage is that they fear Yahweh more than the nations; this fear arises from the revelation of the divine word whose purpose is for the people "to fear [God] as long as they live on the earth" (4:10). Subsequent sermons define this fear further as walking in the way of Yahweh (8:6; 10:12), worshiping only Yahweh (10:20), following the law (17:19), and reading law (28:58).

9.3 Deuteronomy 4:44—28:68: Divine Word as Law

The second speech of Moses comprises the heart of the book (4:44—28:68). The introductory heading indicates the focus on law: “This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites. These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances that Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt” (4:44–45). Law in the second speech of Moses resists a simple definition. It embraces many words, including law (torah), decrees (*‘edut*), statutes (*huqqim*), and ordinances (*miswah*), all of which form covenant (*berit*).

Sidebar 9.2 Dynamic Character of Law

The lively character of law in Deuteronomy is conveyed through metaphors of motion and speech. Law is alive, deriving from the voice of God. The words are codified in writing, including the ten words of the Decalogue (4:13; 10:4), the torah of Deuteronomy (28:58), and book of Torah (28:61). Once codified, the law is anything but static; it creates fear (4:10) and love (6:5), as well as providing a way through life upon which humans are able to walk (8:6). The metaphors underscore the dynamic quality of law as a pathway for change through time.

The setting for the speech remains Beth-peor where Moses has already explained the revelation at Horeb as an experience of the divine word (4:1–40). The second address clarifies further the content of the divine word at Horeb as the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5–11); it also provides additional legislation revealed to Moses alone (Deuteronomy 12–26), before concluding with a series of blessings and curses to encourage compliance (Deuteronomy 27–28).

Repetition of the subheading, “statues and ordinances” (4:45; 6:1; 12:1) provides literary design to the speech. The headings separate the law into three sections: (1) Decalogue (4:45—5:33); (2) the command to love God (6:1—11:31); and (3) the cultic and moral law code (12:1—26:19). The section

concludes with a list of blessings and curses, encouraging adherence to the law (27:1—28:68). The structure may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 9.5 Second Speech of Moses

4:44—5:33: Decalogue	**4:45** “These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances that Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt.”
6:1—11:31 Love God	**6:1** “Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that Yahweh your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land.”
12:1—26:19: Cultic and Moral Law Code	**12:1 “**These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land”
27:1—28:68: Keeping the Commandments	**27:1 “**Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today.”

Decalogue

The speech on the divine word as law opens with the recounting of the revelation of the "ten words" (Decalogue) in the wilderness at Horeb (4:45—5:33). Moses recites the law (5:6–21), reminding the second generation that it was revealed publicly: "These words Yahweh spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more" (5:22). The public revelation witnessed by Israel "face to face" with Yahweh makes the Decalogue the foundational law code for all further legislation contained in the book.

The Decalogue divides loosely into cultic and social law. The opening words of God (5:6) are a self-introduction, "I am Yahweh," a common form by which deities are introduced in the Ancient Near East. The self-introduction indicates that the entire Decalogue is a revelation of the divine name Yahweh in two parts: (1) the first section (or tablet, 5:6–15) explores the meaning of the name for cultic worship (e.g., exclusive worship, no images, the power of the name, sabbath observance), while (2) the second section (5:16–21) outlines the social implications of the name (e.g., honor parents, no murder, adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting). The central themes of each section inform all subsequent cultic and moral law in the book of Deuteronomy.

The first tablet of the Decalogue outlines the nature of cultic practice in Deuteronomy. It begins with the self-revelation of the name, followed by the divine claim upon the Israelites signifying the divine ownership of the people: "I am Yahweh, *your God*." The ownership of the Israelites is grounded in God's rescue from Egypt, "I brought you out of the land of Egypt." Divine redemption from slavery underscores how foundational liberation is to understanding the divine name in the book of Deuteronomy. The emphasis on liberation stands out even more clearly when the versions of the sabbath law in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are compared. They may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 9.6 Comparison of Sabbath Law in Exodus and Deuteronomy

	Exodus 20:8–11	**Deuteronomy 5:12–15**
The Command	**20:8** Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.	**5:12** Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, ***as Yahweh, your God command.***
The Guidelines 1. Time of Labor	**20:9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work.	**5:13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work.
2. The Scope of the Law	**20:10** But the seventh day is a sabbath to Yahweh your God you shall not do any work you, or your son or your daughter, your manservant or maidservant your livestock or the resident alien within your towns	**5:14** But the seventh day is a sabbath to Yahweh your God you shall not do any work you, or your son or your daughter or your manservant or maidservant or ***your ox, your donkey***, or any of your livestock or the resident alien within your towns ***so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.***
The Rationale	**20:11** For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day.	**5:15** ***Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and Yahweh, your God, brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore Yahweh your***

Therefore Yahweh blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.	***God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.***

The sabbath command separates into three parts: (1) Both versions contain the command to sanctify sabbath (Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12), with the version in Deuteronomy referring back to the original revelation: “As Yahweh your God has commanded you.” (2) The guidelines for fulfilling the command include rest for the same persons; Deuteronomy clarifies that household slaves require the same period of rest as the master: “So that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.” (3) The rationale for sabbath is different. Sabbath is tied to creation (Gen 1:1—2:4) in Exodus 20:11; in Deuteronomy 5:15 it emerges from the experience of liberation which the second generation must remember through observing the act of resting, while also freeing their animals and slaves from work.

The emphasis on liberation provides the basis for the exclusive worship of Yahweh (e.g., 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:6, 11). The demand for exclusive worship takes place in a henotheistic world, where there are many gods allotted to the nations (29:25) with distinct cults (8:19).

Sidebar 9.3 Polytheism, Henotheism, Monotheism

Polytheism is the belief in and worship of multiple male and female gods organized into complex relationships (e.g., the pantheon). *Henotheism* is the belief in and worship of a single god, while also accepting the existence of other gods who may be worshipped by different people. Henotheism requires monolatry, the demand that each group worship their own god exclusively. *Monotheism* is the belief in and worship of one god.

These gods may include the sun, moon, or even the host of heaven (17:3). The command for exclusive worship concedes the world of many gods and divergent cults; it does not require the denial of such gods, only Israel’s absolute

allegiance to Yahweh for having redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. Sole allegiance to Yahweh in worship extends further to the rejection of idols and images (5:8), resulting in the aniconic nature of the cult of Yahweh in Deuteronomy.

Sidebar 9.4 Aniconic Religion

Aniconic religion demands the absence of visual and material representations of the natural and the supernatural worlds. Trygge N. D. Mettinger defines aniconism further by introducing a distinction between a cult where there is simply no iconic representation (*de facto* aniconism) and a more intolerant rejection of the iconic representation of deities (iconoclastic or programmatic aniconism) (*No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, 18–27).

The divine name Yahweh also transforms social law. The command to honor parents intertwines the worlds of worship and social ethics (5:16), providing transition to the more socially oriented commands in the second tablet, including murder (5:17), adultery (5:18), stealing (5:19), false testimony (5:20), and coveting (5:21).

The Decalogue is not a new law in Deuteronomy; it represents an historical revelation to the first generation that is foundational to the life of the second. The literary design of the Decalogue provides illustration. Moses anchors the Decalogue in the past: “Yahweh our God made a covenant with us at Horeb” (5:2). The power of the Decalogue however is not in history, but in its dynamic influence upon the second generation. Moses states: “Not with our ancestors did Yahweh make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today” (5:3).

The authority of Moses resides in his ability to recount the past experience of revelation to the present generation of Israelites. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, Moses provides the link to the past, repeating core events of salvation of the first generation. But as the comparison of sabbath law illustrates,

the repetition is often a springboard for a new interpretation of cultic and moral religion. The book of Deuteronomy becomes even more innovative when the teaching of Moses is based on his private revelation, which occurs at the urging of the first generation: “Go near, you yourself, and hear all that Yahweh our God will say. Then tell us everything that Yahweh our God tells you, and we will listen and do it” (5:27). The remainder of Deuteronomy comprises the private revelation to Moses.

Love God

The transition from the Decalogue (4:45—5:33) is marked by the new introduction: “Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that Yahweh your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land” (6:1). The temporal focus shifts from the past “when [Israel] came out of Egypt” (4:45) to the future when Israel would be living “in the land” (6:1). The second speech (6:1—11:31) does not highlight a law code like the Decalogue; it focuses, instead, on one general law (6:4)—the command that Yahweh is the God of Israel known as the Shema from the words, “Hear, O Israel.” The core declaration is expanded to include the command to love Yahweh whole heartedly (6:4–9).

Sidebar 9.5 Shema

The content of the Shema (Deut 6:4) is difficult to interpret. It may be a declaration of henotheism; there are many gods, but Yahweh is the only God of Israel: “Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh *alone*” (NRSV and NJPS); or it may be a declaration of monotheism that Yahweh is the only God: “Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is *one*” (NIV). The Shema is expanded in Jewish tradition to include the more extended teaching in Deut 6:4–9 requiring Israel to recite the prayer “when you lie down and when you rise.” The Shema is recited twice daily in the Jewish prayer service, once in the morning and again in the evening.

The command to love Yahweh frames the teaching, forming the introduction (6:1–25) and the conclusion (10:12—11:32), providing the hermeneutical lens for reading the legal corpus in Deuteronomy 12–28, where love of God undergirds the law (e.g., Deut 13:4; 19:9; 23:6). Moses introduces the law with the exhortation: “Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. You shall

love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (6:4–5). Moses returns to the law of love at the conclusion when he explores the promise of blessing (11:14–15) and the victory of Israel in war (11:22) if they adhere to the command: "If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving Yahweh your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul—then he will give the rain for your land" (11:14–15) and "drive out all [the] nations before you" (11:22). The main body clarifies what it means to love Yahweh when Israel enters the land (7:1–26), supplemented with warnings from the wilderness journey (8:1–20) and the worship of the golden calf (9:1—10:11). The structure may be illustrated in the following manner.

Table 9.7 Command to Love God

Introduction	**Body**			**Conclusion**
Law of Love 6:1–25	Life in the Land 7:1–26	Wilderness Lessons 8:1–20	Warning of the Calf 9:1—10:11	Law of Love 10:12—11:32

The command to love God in the introduction (6:1–25) and the conclusion (10:12—11:32) builds on the henotheism of the Decalogue. In a world of many nations with separate gods, the Israelites must remain loyal to Yahweh exclusively: "Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone" (6:4). Exclusive loyalty demands love: "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (6:5). William Moran clarifies that the language of love reflects international treaties in the Ancient Near East, in which the vassal state is commanded to love the overlord (suzerain), meaning obedience to the treaty conditions.[3] When read as a treaty document, Israel must love Yahweh their overlord who liberated them from Egyptian slavery, adhering to the treaty document of Deuteronomy.

Sidebar 9.6 Suzerainty Treaty

Suzerain describes a superior feudal lord to whom a lesser ruler (vassal) is dependent. The unequal relationship between suzerain and vassal is formalized among Hittites, Egyptians, and Assyrians in the Ancient Near East. The suzerainty

treaty follows a standard structure: (1) preamble providing the titles of the suzerain; (2) historical prologue recounting the past beneficial acts of the suzerain to the vassal; (3) stipulations that must be followed by the vassal; (4) the requirement to read the document; (5) invocation of divine witnesses; and (6) blessings and curses on the vassal that accompany the treaty. For discussion, see Michael L. Barre ("Treaties in the ANE," 653–56).

The law of love goes beyond the conditions of a treaty, however; it also requires an internal transformation of the whole person—heart, soul, and strength. As a result, law and spirituality merge in Deuteronomy. The command to love Yahweh explores the emotion of law; love bonds Israel and God together as in a marriage. As a result, Yahweh is not simply an overlord to be obeyed, but a "jealous God" (6:15), or as Moshe Weinfeld translates "an impassioned God," who loves Israel, reveals law, and responds to disobedience as an offended lover. [4]

Sidebar 9.7 Law and Love

Z. W. Falk describes the merging of law and love: "The commandments are meant not only as norms of behavior but also as objects of contemplation to lead toward the perception and love of God" ("Spirituality and Jewish Law," 130).

The marriage imagery likely derives from Hosea, who also described the rejection of God as an illicit love affair (2:7, 10–13), in which God, the offended lover, fluctuates between love (2:14) and hate (9:15). Deuteronomy develops the same theme. The worship of other gods is a form of adultery to which Yahweh responds as an offended lover: "Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because Yahweh your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of Yahweh your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth" (6:14–15).

The body of the speech (7:1—10:11) provides illustrations and warnings to clarify what it means to love Yahweh. The first episode (7:1–26) explores the ethical requirements of loving Yahweh in the land. The foundation for ethics is the transformation at Horeb where the entire nation became “a people holy to Yahweh” (7:6). The holiness of the nation contrasts to Leviticus where the transfer of holiness was confined to the sanctuary and the priests who mediated rituals for the health of the community. The laity is not holy in Leviticus; it is commanded, instead, to strive toward holiness through ethical behavior empowered by cultic rituals: “You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). In Deuteronomy, the shared experience of the divine word at Horeb transfers holiness to the entire nation; all the people become sacred and thus separate from the profane world. As a result, the second generation becomes a “treasured possession” of Yahweh (7:6), who must be protected from the impurity of the profane world; they must remain separate from the nations; they must “make no covenant with them and show them no mercy” (7:2); they must “not intermarry with them” (7:3).

The additional episodes (8:1–20; 9:1—10:11) recall the past to encourage ethical behavior in the land. The central theme in both sections is the command to remember (8:2, 18; 9:7, 27) and not to forget (8:11, 19; 9:7) the lessons of the past. Both sections create a web of inner-biblical interpretation with central stories from Exodus and Numbers, including the wilderness experience of the first generation (Exodus 15–18; Numbers 11) and the worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Moses recalls the testing of Israel in the wilderness (8:1–20): “Remember the long way that Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments” (8:2). The wilderness illustrated the care of Yahweh in providing food and clothing, which must not be forgotten in the land (8:11). The worship of the calf (9:1—10:11) must also be remembered (9:7); it underscores the disobedience of the people (9:8–14), the intersession of Moses (9:15–29) and the writing of law to guide the people to live in the land (10:1–5).

Cultic and Moral Law Code

The command to love (6:1—11:31) transitions to the central law code (12:1—26:19) with the introduction: “These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land” (12:1). Loosely organized laws follow until Moses repeats the command to observe “statutes and ordinances” in the conclusion: “This very day Yahweh is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul” (26:16).

The literary organization of the law code is difficult to discern because of the shifting topics and the history of composition in Deuteronomy 12–26. Stephen Kaufman noted that the association of ideas, words, and phrases influences the organization of law codes throughout the Ancient Near East and that such a practice is also evident in Deuteronomy.[5] Alexander Rofé also explored the way in which the association of content between laws influences the design.[6] Jeffrey H. Tigay builds on this research,[7] providing the following general divisions to the law code.

Table 9.8 Tigay’s Literary Organization of the Law Code

Cultic–Religious Teaching 12:2—16:17	Civil–Religious Authorities 16:18—18:22	Judicial–Military Instruction 19:1—21:9	Civil–Domestic Life 21:10—25:19	Liturgical Declarations 26:1–15

Cultic–Religious Teaching

The central teaching on cultic and religious practice (12:2—16:16) weaves together three themes: the demand for worship at one central sanctuary, the identification of the “name” as representing the divine presence in the sanctuary, and the ability of lay Israelites to slaughter animals without offering the victim as a sacrifice at the sanctuary. These are radical innovations that combine to transform the cultic and religious life of Israel.

Worship at One Sanctuary

Deuteronomy 12 opens with the demand that Israel destroy all the cultic sites on mountains or by sacred trees (12:1–4). The clearing away of multiple locations for sacrifice is replaced by the demand to worship at one central sanctuary: “But you shall seek the place that Yahweh your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there” (12:5). The demand continues throughout the section, appearing in the laws of holiness (14:23, 24, 25), the command to sacrifice the firstborn (15:20), and the calendar of pilgrimage festivals (16:2, 6, 11, 15, 16).

One sanctuary means that pilgrimage to the central cultic site becomes the primary ritual for corporate worship. The calendar of yearly festivals provides illustration: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths” (16:16). Pilgrimage to the sanctuary is not new; the command repeats a similar law from the Book of the Covenant (Exod 23:14–17). In Deuteronomy, however, the pilgrimage is redirected to the central sanctuary, rather than to local cultic sites. The centralization of the sanctuary consolidates the control of religious practice under the priesthood at one cultic location, but it also disempowers regional Levitical priests, who lose their sanctuaries and now require welfare for livelihood: “Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land” (12:19).

Sidebar 9.8 Cult Centralization

Central to Deuteronomy is the teaching that there can be only one sanctuary: “But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there” (12:5). The location of the sanctuary is never clarified in Deuteronomy; but when the book is read with the Former Prophets (the Deuteronomistic History), the central sanctuary is the Jerusalem temple.

“Place of the Name”

The identification of divine cultic presence as the “name” repeats in the chapter on cultic centralization (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26) and it continues throughout the section. The identification of divine cultic presence as the “name” develops the aniconic emphasis of revelation at Horeb, as the experience of divine speech without form (4:1–40; 5:1–33). As a result, the book of Deuteronomy pays little attention to the architecture of the central sanctuary or its cultic objects as compared to the Priestly tabernacle (Exodus 25–40), even though reference to the central sanctuary dominates the text. The architecture of the sanctuary is described once simply as the tent of meeting (31:14–15) and its central cultic object is an “ark of acacia wood” containing written law on the “two tablets of stone” (10:1–5).

Sidebar 9.9 Sanctuary as the “Place of the Name”

Deuteronomy describes the cultic presence of Yahweh as the “name” (*shem*). The Passover law provides an example of the formula used to describe the divine presence of the name: “You shall offer the Passover sacrifice for Yahweh your God, from the flock and the herd, *at the place that Yahweh will choose as a dwelling for his name*” (16:2).

Shedding Blood

One sanctuary for the entire nation introduces the problem of slaughter and the consumption of meat. The shedding of blood in the slaughter of animals is a sacred action that must take place at a sanctuary under the supervision of a priest. The elimination of regional sanctuaries makes the sacred process of slaughter difficult, if not impossible. The solution is significant; it is to separate

slaughter from the sanctuary making the consumption of meat a profane action for the first time in the history of Israelite religion: “Whenever you desire you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, according to the blessing that Yahweh your God has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it” (12:15 and 20–22). Two restrictions remain: (1) blood may not be consumed even though it may now be poured out into the ground like water: “The blood . . . you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water” (12:16 and 23–24); and (2) all tithes must still be brought to the central sanctuary: “Nor may you eat within your towns the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, the firstlings of your herds and your flocks, any of your votive gifts that you vow, your freewill offerings, or your donations” (12:17–18 and 26–27).

Civil–Religious Authorities

The revelation of the divine word at Horeb and its codification as law introduces a series of transformations in civil and religious leadership in which distinct positions of authority are redesigned to function in service to the written law.

Civil Authorities

The first office of leadership to be noted is the judge (16:18—17:13): “You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes” (16:18). The dual description of the office as “judge” and “official” may underscore the role of written law in executing justice since “official” can refer to the scribe who works with written texts. The judicial procedures are located in the community of the tribes (16:18–20), at the city gate (17:2–7) and in cases of dispute at the central cultic site (17:8–14), which retains supreme authority over civil and religious leader, including the king. The office of the king is subordinated to the rule of law (17:14–20); the king must have a copy of the law at all times “so that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes” (17:19).

Cultic leaders

The Levitical priest (18:1–8) is empowered through the experience of divine speech at Horeb, and thus, “minister(s) in the name of Yahweh his God” (18:7). Prophets remain idealized, especially the prophet who mirrors the office of Moses in mediating divine law (18:15–22): “Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” (18:15). But even the idealization of the prophet is qualified under the influence of written law as authoritative revelation, since it raises the problem of discerning divine truth in oral speech: “You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that Yahweh has not spoken?’” (18:21). The solution upholds the office of the prophet, but it also eliminates oral prophecy as an authoritative form of revelation: “If a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that Yahweh has not spoken” (18:22). True prophecy, in this case, will be known only by its fulfillment. Such a criterion means that no prophecy can have authority at the time of its proclamation. Instead, the evaluation of prophecy requires the study of history, since only history can evaluate its truth claims, according to Deuteronomy.

Judicial–Military Instruction

The section explores human death in the land from homicide (19:1–19), war (20:1–20), and the discovery of a body in the open field (21:1–9).

Human Death and Bloodguilt

The laws of homicide (19:1–19) and the discovery of a carcass in the open field (21:1–9) address the power of shed blood to pollute the community and the land, creating bloodguilt.

Sidebar 9.10 Bloodguilt

Blood has life; when it is wrongly taken through an unjustified act of murder or negligence, it creates a stain or defilement described as bloodguilt. The defilement penetrates the guilty person, introducing imbalance into society and even in nature, which must be restored by a close relative of the slain person, often described as the "avenger of blood." The better translation, according to David Sperling, is "restorer of blood," since the killing of the person with bloodguilt restores (Hebrew, *go'el*, "restore, redeem, ransom") the balance of nature and society by taking back the blood of the murdered relative. For discussion see Sperling ("Blood, Avenger of," 763–64; and "Bloodguilt," 764).

The laws of homicide are tied to the designation of cities of refuge "so that any homicide can flee to one of them" (19:3). The legal tradition in Ancient Israel designated local cultic sites as places of refuge for persons to flee for protection if they committed a homicide. The protection was necessary because shed blood required expiation by the next of kin who was identified as the "avenger (or redeemer) of blood" (19:6). The local sanctuary provided protection from the avenger of blood while judges determined whether the homicide was intentional or an accident, since the execution of an innocent person by the avenger of blood would pollute the land further and thus create yet another instance of "bloodguilt" (19:10). The creation of the cities of refuge is likely a consequence of cultic centralization, since local sanctuaries are eliminated in Deuteronomy; these cities replace the local sanctuaries as judicial centers of protection.

The discovery of a dead body in the open field also creates bloodguilt on the nearest village (21:1–9) as a form of environmental pollution. The village is absolved of bloodguilt through the ritual killing of a heifer in a wadi with running water accompanied by the declaration: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it. Absolve, O Yahweh, your people Israel, whom you redeemed; do not let the guilt of innocent blood remain in the midst of your people Israel" (21:7–8).

War and Bloodguilt

The shedding of blood in war does not pollute in Deuteronomy, instead it functions as a sacred ritual led by priests (20:1–20). The liturgy of war is outlined in three parts: (1) Priests instruct the army on the presence of Yahweh in the battle and the demand not to fear the enemy (20:2–4). (2) Officials exclude warriors who are not able to remain focused on the presence of Yahweh in the battle, including anyone with a new house or vineyard, anyone engaged to be married, or anyone who fears the enemy (20:5–9). (3) The teaching on war separates between cities outside and inside of the promised land. Outside cities (20:10–15): Surrender for peace must be offered and if accepted the population becomes slaves. If the city resists, it must be besieged; its males are killed; and the women, children, livestock and valuables become spoils of war. Inside cities (20:16–18): Must be destroyed and all of the population must be placed under the ban (the law of genocide): “You shall annihilate them” (20:17). The reason is to protect the holiness of the people from pollution: “[S]o that [the nations] may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against Yahweh your God” (20:18). Even under the ban, however. the trees of a city must not be destroyed (20:19).

The book of Deuteronomy returns to the topic of war two additional times. It clarifies the rules for marrying a captive woman and the rights of the woman after marriage (21:10–14). The sacred nature of warfare is clarified in legislation about the war camp (23:9–14). The purity of the war camp must be protected from nocturnal emissions and from defecation. Soldiers with nocturnal emission must leave the war camp for one day (23:10–11). Soldiers must defecate outside of the camp and bury the excrement (23:12–13). The purity of the camp is necessary because “Yahweh . . . travels along with your camp.” Thus, it “must be holy” (23:14).

Civil–Domestic Life

The domestic and civil laws in Deuteronomy 21:10—25:19 range widely in topic and they resist a clear outline. The laws may be summarized loosely into

three broad categories: family and sexual laws; community and social laws; and cultic and natural laws.

Family and Sexual Laws

Family law addresses the right of the firstborn to inherit property in a polygamous marriage (21:15–17) and the punishment for an insubordinate son (21:18–21). The focus of family law, however. is on marriage and sexual conduct. The laws stipulate how an Israelite male can marry a foreign woman captured as booty in war (21:10–14). The means for proving virginity and laws of divorce among Israelites are carefully described (22:13–21); the punishment for adultery is stated (22:22); the laws of rape in the city and in the country are explained (22:23–29); incest is forbidden (22:30); a divorced and remarried woman may not remarry her original husband (24:1–4); and when a male dies, the next of kin male must produce children with the deceased's wife to perpetuate the family (25:5–10). Additional sexual laws include the prohibition of a wife to grab the testicles of her husband's opponent in the fight (25:11–12) and the ban on cross-dressing (22:5).

Community and Social Laws

These laws explore the quality and character of community: lost animals must be returned to owners (22:1–4); houses must be built safely (22:8); health care surrounding leprosy is monitored (24:8–9); newlywed husbands are given deferment from war (24:5); and neighbors are allowed to eat each other's crops (23:25–26). Fair business practices include prohibiting lending with interest (23:20–21); enforcing repayment of loans (24:6); clarifying the method for taking and holding of property (24:10–13); the demand for timely payment of wages (24:14–15); and honest weights and measures (25:13–16). Broader ethical issues include asylum for escaped slaves (23:16–17); laws against kidnapping (24:7); the social responsibility to protect aliens, orphans, and widows (24:17–18); and the limitation of excessive punishment especially flogging (25:1–3).

Cultic and Natural Laws

These laws clarify those excluded from the sanctuary, including males with crushed testicles (23:1); illegitimate children (23:2); Ammonites and Moabites (23:3–6); and the Amalekites who must be exterminated (25:17–19). Daughters are forbidden to be temple prostitutes (23:17) and no prostitute of any kind can serve as payment for a vow (23:18), although vows to the cult must be paid in a timely manner (23:22–24). Laws of nature include the prohibition against mixing seeds (22:9–11); not muzzling an ox while it works (25:4); saving the mother of young birds (22:6–7); and not allowing a carcass to pollute the land (21:22–23).

Liturgical Declarations

The law code (Deuteronomy 12–26) concludes with liturgical rituals at the central sanctuary (26:1–15), thus returning to the theme of cult centralization from the opening chapter (12:2–28). Two liturgical events are described which add rituals at the central cultic site that do not appear in the calendar of pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16): the ritual of first fruits (26:1–11) and the third year tithe (26:12–15).

The ritual of first fruits (26:1–11) is described as a foundational ritual upon entry into the land, but it likely represents a yearly event: “When you have come into the land that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess . . . you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground . . . and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Yahweh your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (26:1–2). The recitation of the liturgy that accompanies the presentation of first fruits repeats the central themes of the book of Deuteronomy: the land was promised to the ancestors; Israel was liberated from slave labor in Egypt; and Yahweh led Israel into the land of promise (26:3–11). The gift of first fruits is shared with the poor, including the Levite and the resident alien. The year of the tithe occurs every third year at the central sanctuary (26:12–15). Israelites are commanded to present a tithe of their

produce every year to the central sanctuary (14:28–29), but in every third year, the tithe becomes charity for the Levite, the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow.

Keeping the Commandments

The discourse on the divine word as law (4:44—28:68) concludes with blessings and curses. The section opens with the call to obey the law: “Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today” (27:1). Moses instructs the law to be written on a primitive altar of uncut stones, underscoring once again the aniconic character of religion in Deuteronomy (27:2–8). The writing of law sets the stage for the liturgy of blessing and cursing with the tribes divided between the two northern mountains of Ebal (Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali) and Gerizim (Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin) near Shechem (27:11–14).

The curses (27:15–26 and 28:15–68) frame the blessings (28:1–14). The blessings arise from obeying the written law on the stones. Blessing includes prosperity in the city and in the field; fertility and healthy births; abundant food; safe travel; and protection from enemies. Disobeying the law leads to curses that become increasingly grim: Idolatry; dishonoring parents; moving boundary markers; misleading a blind person; depriving justice from orphans, resident aliens, and widows; incest; bestiality; sleeping with one’s mother-in-law; killing a neighbor; and taking a bribe, all lead to curses (28:15–26). The curses are described in ever more graphic detail (28:15–68); they include disaster in the city and in the field; plagues; drought; defeat by foreign nations; exile from the land; and distress to the point of cannibalism that culminates in the return to Egypt: “Yahweh will bring you back in ships to Egypt, by a route that I promised you would never see again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer” (28:68).

9.4 Deuteronomy 29:1—31:29: Passing on Mosaic Leadership and Teaching the Covenant

The introduction to the third speech shifts the focus from law (4:44—28:68) to covenant: “These are the words of the covenant that Yahweh commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb” (29:1). The linking of the two themes is intentional since law is pivotal to covenant in Deuteronomy. The first occurrence of covenant in the book cements the relationship when Moses states: “[Yahweh] declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two stone tablets” (4:13). The statement clarifies that law is the foundation for the covenant at Horeb (5:2). Covenant describes the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel: Yahweh chose Israel from among the nations (7:6; 10:15); rescued them from Egyptian slavery (4:37); revealed the Decalogue to them, and promised not to forget the covenant (4:31). In exchange, Israel must remember Yahweh’s liberation (e.g., 5:15; 7:18) and the divine leading through the wilderness (8:2); they must also fear Yahweh by keeping the covenant laws (e.g., 4:10; 5:29; 6:24). Covenant also characterizes worship where the central cultic object is the “ark of the covenant” (10:8; 31:9), which contains the “book of the law” (31:26).

The speech of Moses (29:1—31:29) introduces a new covenant at Moab distinct from the first covenant at Horeb (21:1). It is unclear, however, what the authors intend by the contrast, since no new law is presented at Moab. The insight of Richard Nelson noted earlier that Deuteronomy collapses the life experience of the first and second generations[8] is helpful at this point; it suggests that the covenant at Moab is not so much about new law, but the need to teach the covenant law from Horeb to each new generation. Moses makes this explicit: “I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before Yahweh our God, but also with those who are not here with us today” (29:14). The need to teach the Horeb covenant to future generations influences the structure of the speech at Moab; it divides between

the address of Moses (Deuteronomy 29–30) and the story of his succession (Deuteronomy 31).

The first section of the speech (Deuteronomy 29–30) explores the meaning of covenant through time. It begins in the past (29:1–9): The second generation at Moab must remember the Exodus from Egypt, the wilderness journey, the defeat of Og and Sihon. Remembering should encourage them to "observe the words of the covenant" (29:9). But the covenant is not about history; it is about life in the present time (29:10–29): "You stand assembled today, all of you, before Yahweh your God . . . to enter into the covenant of Yahweh your God, sworn by an oath, which Yahweh your God is making with you today" (29:12). The speech concludes with predictions about the future (30:1–20): Even if the people go into exile, God will restore them if they return to the covenant (30:1–5) and God will make their life in the land prosperous again (30:6–10). Moses concludes: the covenant is never distant wherever the people may be (30:11–14); thus they must choose life in the covenant over death (30:15–20).

Moses also outlines how the covenant at Horeb will remain active in the future (Deuteronomy 31) through the transition of his leadership to Joshua (31:1–8, 14–15, 23) and the writing down of the laws for future generations to recite (31:9–13, 16–22, 24–29). The chapter modulates between these two themes with the transition in leadership, weaving together the accounts of Moses writing down the law. The organization of the chapter may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Table 9.9 Organization of Deuteronomy 31

Transition of Leadership 31:1–9	Writing 31:9–13	Transition of Leadership 31:14–15	Writing 31:16–22	Transition of Leadership 31:23	Writing 31:24–29

The completion of Moses's teaching sets the stage for his death and the transition to a new leader; he informs the people: "Yahweh told me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan'" (31:2). Deuteronomy 31 describes the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua in three stages (31:1–19; 14–15, 23). Moses commissions Joshua in public to replace him: "Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land" (31:7–9). The cultic setting

for transition is established at the tent of meeting before Yahweh (31:14–15). And Yahweh commissions Joshua repeating the words of Moses: “Be strong and bold, for you shall bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them; I will be with you” (31:23).

The commissioning of Joshua is coupled with three accounts of Moses writing down the law in preparation for his death. First, Moses writes the law and gives it “to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh,” instructing them to read the law every seventh year at the central sanctuary (31:9–13). Second, Yahweh instructs Moses to write a song that may serve as judgment against the people when they reject Yahweh after entering the land (31:16–22): “That very day Moses wrote this song and taught it to the Israelites” (31:16). Third, Moses commands the Levites to place the written law in the ark of the covenant (31:24–29), stating: “Let it remain there as a witness against you” (31:24). He adds: “For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, turning aside from the way that I have commanded you” (31:29).

9.5 Deuteronomy 31:30—34:12:
Concluding Song and Farewell Blessing

The final speech of Moses transitions from teaching to singing; it divides between a hymn (31:30—32:52) and a blessing (33:1—34:9). The hymn begins with the introduction: “Then Moses recited the words of this song, to the very end, in the hearing of the whole assemble of Israel” (31:30). The hymn recounts history from the beginning of time to Israel’s life in the land (32:6–14); the sin of Israel (32:15–18); Yahweh’s punishment (32:19–25); and the eventual forgiveness (32:26–43). A blessing follows: “This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death” (31:1). The blessing moves back and forth between military security (33:7, 11, 12, 17, 20, 25) and prosperity (33:13–16, 19, 21). Singing gives way to the account of Moses’s death in the plains of Moab on Mount Nebo at one hundred and twenty years of age: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh know face to face” (34:10).

9.6 Composition of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy and the Josianic Reform

De Wette's identification of Deuteronomy with the Josianic reform in Judah at the close of the monarchy period has remained a central building block in the interpretation of the book's composition (see ch. 2). It remains the "Archimedean point in the history of the Pentateuchal literature," according to Moshe Weinfeld.[9]

De Wette concluded that Deuteronomy represented the "book of the law" found in the temple during its repairs under Josiah: "The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the Yahweh'" (2 Kgs 22:8). De Wette realized that the discovery of the long lost law book of Moses was a literary fiction; but he also concluded that Deuteronomy, or some form of the book, did provide the basis for the reform of the Jerusalem cult in the seventh century BCE. Josiah states to the leaders: "Go, inquire of Yahweh for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found." The account of Josiah's reform focuses on three aspects of the religious life of Judah: (1) the destruction of all images in the Jerusalem temple (2 Kgs 2:1–7); (2) the destruction of all local cultic sites in order to unify worship at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:8–15); and (3) the focus on Passover as the primary pilgrimage festival (2 Kgs 23:21–25).

The radical innovations in worship associated with Josiah reflect the central message of Deuteronomy, which also advocates aniconic religion and the destruction of images (Deuteronomy 7); the centralization of the cult (Deuteronomy 12); and the primary role of Passover in the festival calendar (Deuteronomy 16). The summary of the reform states that Josiah fulfilled "the words of this covenant that were written in this book" (2 Kgs 23:2–3), repeating the emphasis on covenant from Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 5). The description of the Josiah's actions also repeats central motifs from Deuteronomy when it

states that he followed Yahweh, “keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul” (2 Kgs 23:2–3; see Deut 6:4–5).

The insight of de Wette has undergone modification, yet it remains a “cornerstone of Pentateuchal criticism,” according to Ernest W. Nicholson.[10] Nicholson expands the close literary ties between Deuteronomy and the Josianic reform to include the following themes[11]:

Table 9.10 Thematic Connections in Deuteronomy and the Josianic Reform

Topic	Deuteronomy	2 Kings 23 (Josiah Reform)
Abolition of the Asherim	7:5; 12:3; 16:21	23:4, 6, 7, 14
Host of Heaven	27:3	23:4, 5
Destruction of the ‘pillars’	7:5; 12:3	23:14
Heathen high places	7:5; 12:2	23:13
Sun and moon worship	17:3	23:5, 11
Sacred prostitution	23:17	23:7
Molech cult	12:31; 18:10	23:10
Foreign gods	12:13	23:13
Necromancy	18:11	23:24
Passover	16:1–8	23:21–23

Deuteronomy and Law

De Wette interpreted Deuteronomy narrowly within the context of the Pentateuch. He judged the earlier traditions of the Pentateuch in the Elohist and Yahwist documents to reflect a law-free form of religion that gave way to law, for the first time in the Josianic reform (see ch. 12). Subsequent research in comparative religion and law in the Ancient Near East provides additional insight into the composition of Deuteronomy.

Ancient Near Eastern Treaties

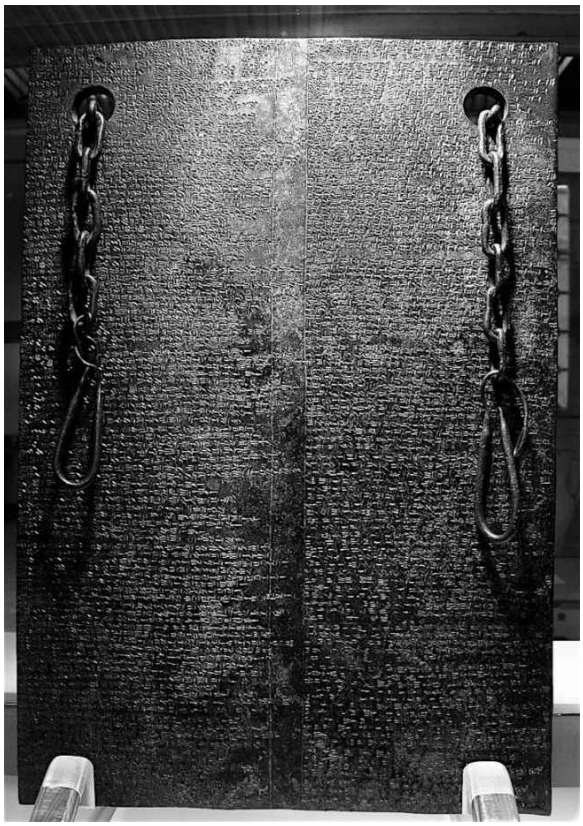

Figure 9.1 Bronze Tablet from 1235 BCE (Museum of Anatolian Civilizations – Ankara, Turkey). Cuneiform document excavated at Hattusa. The tablet outlines a treaty between Tudhaliya IV and Kurunta of Tarhuntassa in 1235 BCE. Tarhuntassa is to remain sovereign and ruled by Kurunta and his sons. Conversely, Tarhuntassa is not to imitate Tudhaliya's "Great Kingdom". The "Thousands of Gods" are given as the treaty's witnesses.

Gerhard von Rad departed from the research of de Wette by examining more closely the form of the book of Deuteronomy (*The Problem of the Hexateuch*). He identified four sections: (1) historical and parenetic introduction (Deuteronomy 1–11); (2) presentation of law (12:1—26:15); (3) sealing of the covenant (26:16–19); and (4) blessings and curses (Deuteronomy 27–28). Von Rad identified this formal structure as reflecting a more ancient cultic ceremony of covenant renewal contained in Exodus 19–24. A. D. H. Mayes concludes: "Von Rad's results represented the beginning of a new era of research into Deuteronomy."[12]

The discovery of Ancient Near Eastern treaties builds on the research of von Rad, but shifts the focus of study from cultic origins to suzerainty treaty documents that resemble the form of Deuteronomy. The research of George E. Mendenhall on Hittite vassal treaties from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE identified the suzerainty treaty form in Exodus 19–24, rather than Deuteronomy ("Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition"). The discovery of Neo-Assyrian treaty documents from the ninth–seventh centuries BCE introduced comparison to Deuteronomy, evident in the research of Moshe Weinfeld on the treaties of Esarhaddon (672 BCE); he concluded: "[T]he author of Deuteronomy formulated the Covenant of the Plains of Moab on the pattern of political treaties current in his own time."[13] The composition of Deuteronomy as a vassal treaty between Yahweh and Israel is meant to interpret the nature of the covenant relationship between the parties. Weinfeld summarizes the treaty form in Deuteronomy in the following manner.

Table 9.11 Treaty Form in Deuteronomy

Preamble	1:1–6a; 5:6a
Historical Prologue	1:6b—3:29; 5; 9:7—10:11
Stipulation of Allegiance	4:1–1–23; 6:4—7:26; 10:12–22
Covenant Clauses	12–26
Invocation of Witnesses	4:26; 30:19; 31:28
Blessings and Curses	28
Oath-Imprecation	29:9–28
Deposit	10:1–5; 31:24–26

Periodic Reading	31:9–13
Duplicates and Copies	17:18–19; 31:25–26

The comparison of Deuteronomy to Ancient Near Eastern treaties is wide ranging. Interpreters debate whether Deuteronomy reflects a direct literary relationship to Neo-Assyrian treaties or a more general influence of the tradition. In either case, the impact of suzerainty vassal treaties on the composition of Deuteronomy is clear. A. D. H. Mayes[14] reinforces the conclusion, noting a range of motifs in Deuteronomy that also appear in the treaties: the command to love Yahweh (6:5); the need to know God (9:24); the encouragement to "walk after," "fear," "obey the voice of," "serve," and "cleave" to Yahweh (13:4); as well as the promise of peace and prosperity (23:6). Mayes cautions, however, that the treaty form alone cannot account for the composition or the literary form of Deuteronomy, since the book is presented as the testament of Moses before his death, rather than an official treaty between political powers.[15]

Book of the Covenant and the Inner-Biblical Composition of Law

The literary relationship between law codes in the Pentateuch is also important for interpreting the composition of Deuteronomy, especially the repetition of laws between Deuteronomy and the Book of the Covenant (21:1—23:19). Von Rad provides a partial list of similar laws.[16]

Table 9.12 Repetition of Laws between Deuteronomy and Book of the Covenant

	Book of Covenant Exodus 21:1—23:19	**Deuteronomy**
Slave Law	21:1–11	15:12–18
Homicide	21:12–14	19:1–13
Kidnapping	21:16a	24:7
Selling Humans	22:16b	22:28, 29
Care for Widow and Orphan	22:21–24	24:17–22
Money Lending	22:25	23:19–20
Restoring Cloak at Dusk	22:26–27	24:10–13
Sacrifice of Firstborn	22:29–30	15:19–23

Meat Law	22:31	14:3–21
False Witness	23:1	19:16–21
Fair Judges	23:2, 6–8	16:18–20
Return Animals to Owners	23:4–5	22:1–4
Not Oppress Resident Alien	23:9	24:17–18
Fallow Fields in Seventh Year	23:10–11	15:1–11
Sabbath Observance	23:12	15:13–15
No Other Gods	23:13	6:13
Pilgrimage Festivals	23:14–17	16:1–17
First Fruits	23:19a	26:2–10
Not Boil Kid in Mother's Milk	23:19b	14:21b

Frank Crüsemann states the general conclusion among interpreters that "the Book of the Covenant is older than Deuteronomy and so is the oldest law book in the Old Testament."[17] The composition of the Book of the Covenant sets the stage for exploring the composition of the laws in Deuteronomy as inner-biblical exegesis of the older law code.

The Book of the Covenant has traditionally been viewed as a compilation of law from the pre-monarchic (e.g., Albrecht Alt) or monarchic (e.g., J. W. Marshall) periods. In either case, it was judged to be an older law code in the history of Israel that underwent editing and expansion to reflect social change in Israel. The comparative study of law modified the view of composition by exploring the dependency of the Book of the Covenant on Ancient Near Eastern law. Raymond Westbrook judged the Book of the Covenant to be an academic document representing the static tradition of law codes in the Ancient Near East. He concluded from this that the Book of the Covenant did not provide insight into a particular social context, nor did it reflect the process of social change within ancient Israel; it was, instead, "a coherent text comprising clear and consistent law, in the same manner as its cuneiform forbears."[18]

David P. Wright refined the composition of the Book of the Covenant by comparing it specifically to the Code of Hammurabi; he argued for direct literary dependency based on the similarity of the laws and the literary structure of the two documents (e.g., the law concerning the ox that gores in Exod 21:28–32 and

Laws of Hammurabi, 250–52). He too concluded that the Book of the Covenant is an academic work, but he also departed from Westbrook, noting that differences between the two law codes indicate that the Book of the Covenant "is an ideological work," which transformed its source text to reflect the hermeneutical and social perspective of the author. Wright describes the ideological transformations of the Code of Hammurabi in the Book of the Covenant to be similar to the "hermeneutics of legal innovation" that Bernard M. Levinson identified "in Deuteronomy's reformulation of laws from the Covenant Code."[19]

Sidebar 9.11 Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi is an extensive law code from the Babylonian period, enacted by Hammurabi in the eighteenth century BCE. In the Prologue, the king states his divine election to promote justice in the land. The corpus contains 282 laws written on a nearly eight-foot tall stele. The laws cover a broad range of topics that provide many parallels to Pentateuchal legislation; examples include false accusation (LH 1–5); theft (LH 6–25, 259–258); military service, land lease, and property damage (LH 26–65); bond payment (LH 100–126); marriage and sex (LH 127–161); inheritance (LH 162–184); adoption (185–193); bodily injury (LH 194–214); medical malpractice (LH 215–227); faulty construction (LH 228–235); and workers' pay (LH 261–282). See the translation by Martha T. Roth (*Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*).

Levinson argued that the laws in Deuteronomy were composed, in part, through the process of inner-biblical reinterpretation of the laws from the Book of the Covenant. The purpose of inner-biblical exegesis is to advocate a new religious and political outlook as though it is derived from the authoritative text, even if the interpretation exceeds the claims of the source document.[20] Comparison of similar laws in the Book of the Covenant and in Deuteronomy should, therefore, provide insight into the way in which the ideological perspective on religion in Deuteronomy departs from the Book of the Covenant.

The preface to the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22–26) provides an example of inner-biblical exegesis in Deuteronomy. The preface to the Book of the Covenant contains a law that allows for worship at multiple cultic sites, when Yahweh states: “You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; *in every place* where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you” (Exod 20:24). The law is clear; it allows for multiple cultic sites for slaughter: *in every place* the Israelites might construct an earthen altar for sacrifice, Yahweh promises to be present. The syntax of the law is somewhat unusual, however, since the word, “place,” is written with the definite article in Hebrew; the more precise translation should be “in every [the] place.”

Levinson notes that the authors of Deuteronomy 12:13–15 provide an exegesis on the unusual phrase, “in every [the] place,” to negate the law of multiple cultic sites in the Book of the Covenant in favor of centralized worship. They refashion the phrase to prohibit sacrifice “in every place” and to demand centralized worship “in the place”; they also resolve the problem of sacrifice by using the phrase one additional time to allow for secular slaughter “in all [your city gates].”[21] In this way, an authoritative text on multiple worship sites for slaughter from the Book of the Covenant is the resource for its negation in the composition of Deuteronomy. Similar inner-biblical exegesis of the Book of the Covenant continues throughout the laws in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History

Martin Noth explores the repetition of stories at the beginning of Deuteronomy to examine the composition of the book, focusing in particular on the function of the first speech (1:1—4:43). For example, the book contains two accounts of the revelation at Horeb. Moses initially describes the experience (4:1–40) at the conclusion of his first speech (1:1—4:43), and then, he repeats it (5:1–33) with the inclusion of the Decalogue at the outset of the second speech (4:44—28:68). Noth concentrated on the first account of revelation at Horeb (Deuteronomy 4) and the recounting of history (Deuteronomy 1–3) that precedes it (Deuteronomy 1–3[4]); he concluded that this section was not really a prelude to the central law code (Deuteronomy 5–28), but an introduction to the larger history of the monarchy recounted in the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). On this basis, Noth identified two significant stages of composition to the book of Deuteronomy: the core law code (Deuteronomy 5–28) and the introduction (Deuteronomy 1–3[4]). The aim of the introduction was not to prepare for the law code; it was rather to incorporate the law code into a sweeping history of Israel's life in the land, culminating in the destruction of the nation (Deuteronomy–2 Kings). He writes: "[T]he history of the Mosaic period [Deut 1–3(4)] does not seem intended to illustrate the various admonitions and warnings, as, at time, in Deut 5–11." He continues: "[W]e conclude that Deut 1–3(4) is not the introduction to the Deuteronomic law but the beginning of the Deuteronomic historical narrative."[22]

Noth identified the author of Deuteronomy 1–3(4) as the Deu-teronomist; he wrote in the middle of the exilic period (587–535 BCE). The notice of the release of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings 25 under the rule of the Babylonian king, Amel-Marduk, (562–560 BCE) provided the date. The aim of the Deuteronomist was to provide a theological account for the fall of the kingdom of Judah and the subsequent Babylonian exile. The law in Deuteronomy provided the theological standard for tracing the moral and political decline of Israel from the period of

the tribes (Joshua and Judges) through the monarchy (1–2 Samuel; 1–2 Kings), thus accounting for the loss of the kingdom and the exile.

The Deuteronomist framed the law code in Deuteronomy (5–28) with an introduction (1–3[4]) and conclusion (parts of 31 and 34) creating the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings). The literary unity of the Deuteronomistic History was achieved through the insertion of speeches by leading characters and by summary conclusions at key points in the story. The following diagram provides illustration.

Table 9.13 Literary Unity of the Deuteronomistic History

	Deuteronomy	**Joshua**	**Judges**	**Samuel**	**Kings**
Speeches by Heroes	Moses: 1–3	Joshua: 1, 23		Samuel: 1 Samuel 12	Solomon: 1 Kings 8
Summaries	Transition in Leadership 31, 34	Conquered Nations 12	Failure of Tribes 2:11ff		Fall of Northern Kingdom 2 Kgs 17:7ff

The speeches by heroes include Moses (Deuteronomy 1–3), Joshua (Joshua 1, 23), Samuel (1 Samuel 12), and Solomon (1 Kings 8). The speeches repeat important themes from Deuteronomy, such as the need to observe the law, the warning not to rebel against the voice of God or to forget the law, the threat of punishment, and the promise of divine forgiveness if the people repent. The speeches are complemented by summary statements, including the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31, 34), the list of conquered nations (Joshua 12), the failure of the tribes to conquer the land (Judg 2:11ff), and the fall of the Northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17:7ff).

Noth realized that the composition of Deuteronomy was more complex than the stages represented by the Deuteronomic law code (Deuteronomy 5–28) and Deuteronomistic framing (Deuteronomy 1–3[4], 31, 34). Thomas Römer lists many places in Deuteronomy 1–3 where Noth identified further additions, including 1:3, 4, 5; 21, 28, 31a, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39a*a*; 2:7, 9a*b*b–12, 18, 19,

24a*b*b, 25, 29bb, 30b, 3; 3:2, part of 8, 9–11, 13b, 14–22.[23] These additions, however, remained secondary to Noth's interpretation of Deuteronomy.

The continuing interpretation of the composition of Deuteronomy has focused on the additions that appear throughout the narratives and the laws of Deuteronomy, creating a more complex profile of the book's formation. Central issues in the composition of Deuteronomy include the use of singular and plural forms of the pronoun "you" when Moses is addressing the people (Christopher T. Begg) and the changing literary style and theological outlook. Gottfried Seitz identified distinct stages of composition in Deuteronomy by distinguishing the literary style of the superscriptions.[24] One group of superscriptions (4:45; 6:1; 12:1) represents the initial stage of composition that focused on the Deuteronomic laws. A later group of superscriptions (1:1; 4:44; 29:1) introduces more narrative material into Deuteronomy, when the book was incorporated in the Deuteronomistic History. Subsequent interpreters, such as A. D. H. Mayes, [25] build upon and modify the research of Seitz, identifying multiple stages of composition. Mayes identifies: (1) the original form of Deuteronomy which includes most of the law in Deuteronomy 12–25; (2) the insertion of the Decalogue (5:1—6:3) as the introduction to law in the first Deuteronomistic redaction (Deuteronomy 1); and (3) the additional description of the revelation at Horeb (4:1–40) in the second Deuteronmimstic redaction (Deuteronomy 2). The two Deuteronomstic redactions are aimed at placing the book of Deuteronomy within the setting of the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy through 2 Kings). The picture of Deuteronomy that emerges is a more complex and dynamic history of the composition that continues well into the post-exilic period.

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PART IV

Reading the Pentateuch

This section will illustrate four different ways in which the Pentateuch is read. Although the Pentateuch is interpreted in many more ways than the four topics in this section, the chapters will illustrate the influence of readers in shaping the focus of the interpretation of the Torah. Chapter 10 will examine the transformation of the Pentateuchal literature into the Torah, when it becomes the central religious document of post-exilic Judaism.

Chapter 11 will explore the ways in which the historical-critical study of the composition of the Pentateuch has also influenced the evaluation of the history of Ancient Israel.

Chapter 12 will trace the changing theological interpretations of the Pentateuch in Christian and Jewish traditions from early Protestantism to the present time.

Chapter 13 will broaden the lens to explore selective themes in the reception history of the Pentateuch, including its influence in the American experience of colonization and the reaction of women to its patriarchal outlook in their struggle to achieve equal opportunity in civil and religious law in America.

10

Pentateuch and Torah

The review of the five books of the Pentateuch has illustrated that the composition of the literature takes place in part during the monarchy period and that it may even contain traditions from the period of the Israelite tribes. This chapter will focus more narrowly; it will shift from the broad history of the composition of the books to the late transformation of the Pentateuch into the Torah of Moses during the post-exilic or second temple period.

Sidebar 10.1 Second Temple Period

The history of Israel may be organized by the events surrounding the Jerusalem temple. The First Temple is in the monarchy period; the Second Temple begins with the rebuilding in the post-exilic period after the return from exile and continues through its destruction by the Romans (70 CE). The important dates surrounding the history of the Jerusalem temple may be illustrated in the following diagram: Column 1 describes the history of the Jerusalem temple; Column 2 identifies the standard periods in the history of Israel (interpreters debate the events of the tenth century); and Column 3 lists the successive Ancient Near Eastern empires that impact Israel and Judah.

Table 10.1 Dates Surrounding the Jerusalem Temple

Temple History	**Israelite Chronology**	**Ancient Near Eastern Empires**
First Temple: destroyed (587) by Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562)	Monarchy (1000–587)	Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–612) Neo-Babylonian Empire
	Exile (587–539)	(626–539) Persian

		(Achaemenid) Empire (550–330)
Second Temple: founded (520 BCE) and destroyed by Rome (70 CE)	Post-Exile (538–)	
		Battle of Actium/Hellenism (323–31) Rome (31–)

The authorization of the Pentateuch as the authoritative Torah is significant. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson state that the Torah becomes "one of the defining pillars of the religious practices of Jews and Samaritans" in the post-exilic period ("How, When, Where, and Why Did the Pentateuch Become the Torah?" 2).

The chapter will explore the transformation of the Pentateuch into the Torah of Moses in three parts: (1) "Ezra and the Torah" summarizes the literary evidence within the Hebrew Bible for the promulgation of the Pentateuch as Torah; (2) "Persia and the Torah" explores current research on the external social setting that may have influenced the formation of the Torah; and (3) "Judaism and the Torah" examines the foundational role of Torah in creating identity among diverse communities in the Second Temple period.

10.1 Ezra and the Torah

The emergence of the Pentateuch as the Torah of Moses is associated with Ezra the scribe in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These books contain a variety of unrelated literature, including material associated with the return of the Babylonian exiles to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1–6); the mission of Ezra to establish the authority of the Torah of Moses (Ezra 7–10); and the mission of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1–13). The diverse material is edited into a single narrative that recounts three successive journeys from Babylon to the province of Yehud over a one hundred-year period beginning with the reign of Cyrus the Great (539–530 BCE) and ending during the reign of Atraxerxes I (465–423 BCE); each episode culminates in an assembly in Jerusalem.

Sidebar 10.2 Province of Yehud

Yehud describes the province to which the exiles returned. The province of Yehud derives from the Aramaic, *yehud medinta'* (Ezra 5:8), which corresponds to the Hebrew, "province of Judah." After the fall of the kingdom of Judah, the Neo-Babylonians fashioned the region into an administrative province, naming it Yehud. The Persians continued the same practice after defeating the Neo-Babylonians in 539 BCE. The province of Yehud encompassed a much smaller area than the kingdom of Judah from the Monarchy period: its boundaries extended from Hebron in the south to Bethel in the north; and from the Jordan River in the east to the highlands region in the west (it did not extend to the Mediterranean).

Sidebar 10.3 Persian Kings

The chronology of the Persian kings:

Cyrus (539–30 BCE)

Cambyses (530–22 BCE)

Darius I (522–486 BCE)

Xerxes (486–465 BCE)

Atraxerxes I (465–423 BCE)

Darius II (423–404 BCE)

Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE)

Artaxerxes III (359–338 BCE)

Darius III (336–331 BCE)

The literary design of Ezra and Nehemiah may be illustrated in the following diagram:

Table 10.2 Literary Design of Ezra and Nehemiah

JOURNEY #1 (Ezra 1–6): The Edict of Cyrus in 539 BCE (1:1–4) inaugurates the first return from Babylon to rebuild the temple. The Babylonian exiles settle into their cities (1:5—2:70) before assembling in Jerusalem to rebuild the temple in 515 CE during the reign of Darius 1 (3:1—6:22).

JOURNEY #2 (Ezra 7–10): The Edict of Artaxerxes in 458 BCE (Ezra 7) empowers Ezra to return from Babylon to establish the authority of the Torah of Moses (Ezra 8). Ezra assembles the people in Jerusalem to enforce restrictive marriage law (Ezra 9–10).

JOURNEY #3 (Nehemiah 1–13): Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah permission to repair the walls of Jerusalem in the twentieth year of his reign—444 BCE (Nehemiah 1–7). Upon completion, Ezra assembles the people in Jerusalem to read the Torah of Moses. In a covenant renewal service (Nehemiah 8–10), Ezra and Nehemiah together dedicate the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:26, 36).

Sidebar 10.4 Edict of Cyrus

The Edict of Cyrus is the proclamation that Judean exiles were encouraged to return to Yehud to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem; this proclamation appears twice in the Hebrew Bible: at the conclusion of Chronicles (2 Chr 36:22–23) and at the outset of Ezra (Ezra 1:1–4). Interpreters debate whether the biblical Edict of Cyrus is related to the Cyrus Cylinder discovered in 1879 by Hormuzd Rassam during

excavations in Mesopotamia. The Cyrus Cylinder is a royal inscription containing the declaration to the Babylonians that Cyrus was the legitimate ruler and that he intended to support the Babylonian temples, including the returning of the gods to their residence. The Babylonian context of the Cyrus Cylinder makes it unlikely that the proclamation extended more broadly over the entire Persian Empire, as is suggested from the Hebrew Bible. For discussion, see Lester L. Grabbe ("The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?").

The tradition of Ezra is woven into Journeys #2 and #3. Ezra is the central character in Journey #2 when he returns from Babylon with an edict from Atraxerxes to establish the Torah of Moses as the law of the land (Ezra 7–10). He also reappears in the story of Nehemiah in Journey #3 as the reader of the Torah of Moses in the covenant renewal ceremony (Nehemiah 8–10).

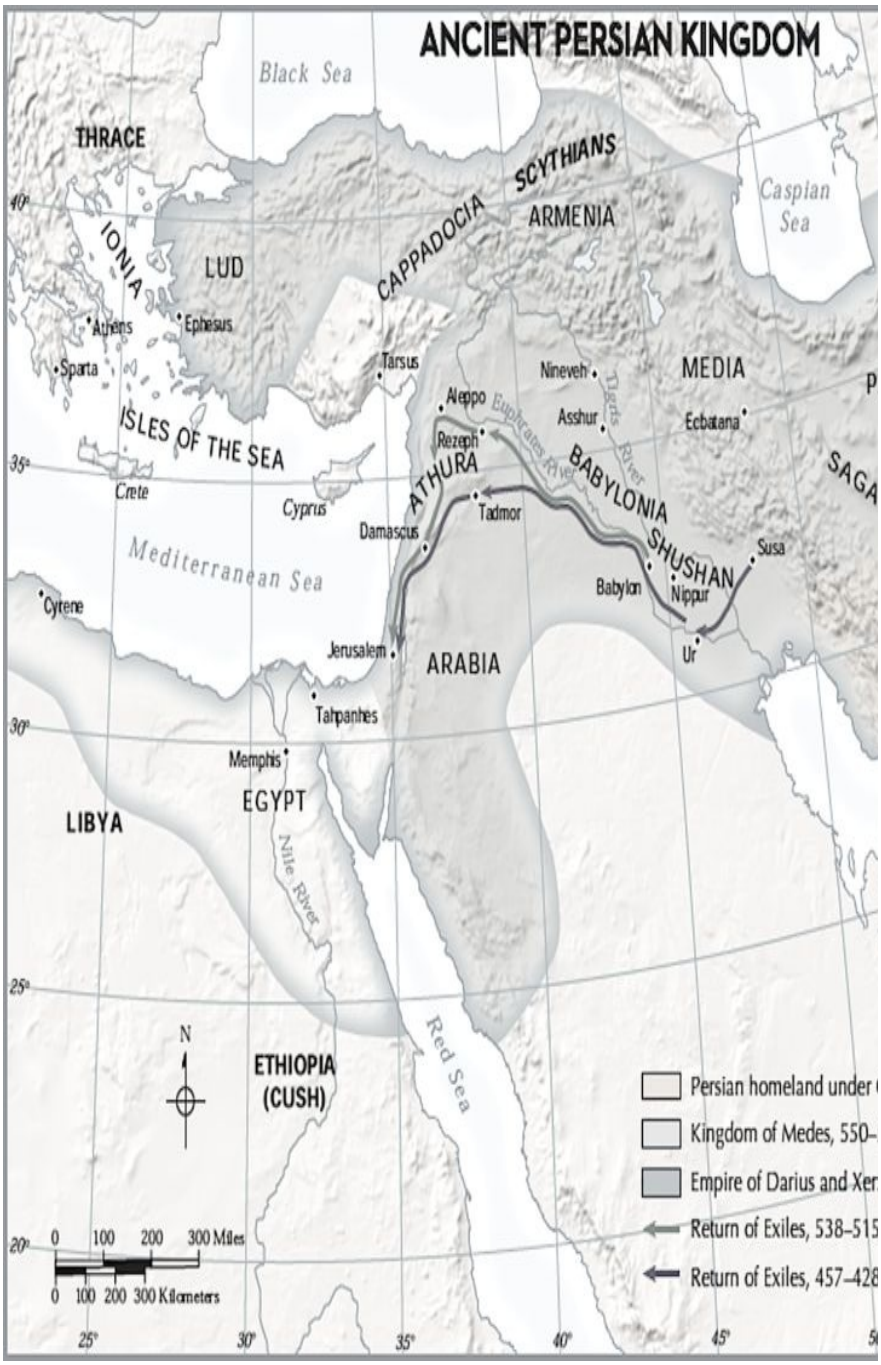

Figure 10.1 Map of Journeys in Ezra/Nehemia

The historical background of the mission of Ezra and his relationship to Nehemiah are unclear.

Sidebar 10.5 Chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah

The uncertainty over the historical relationship of Ezra and Nehemiah arises from the confusion surrounding the Persian ruler associated with the mission of Ezra. If his mission is commissioned by Artaxerxes I (465–423 BCE), Ezra arrives prior to Nehemiah in 458 BCE, but if the reference is to Artaxerxes II (404–398 BCE), Ezra arrives after Nehemiah in 398 BCE. For discussion, see Joseph Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*).

It is likely that Ezra was inserted into the story of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8–10) by later editors to combine the two heroes of the post-exilic community of Yehud into a single account of covenant renewal.[1] The history of composition creates still further problems in dating the mission of Ezra since there are signs of editing in Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8–10 well beyond the setting of the story in the Persian period.[2] Regardless of the date of composition, central motifs within the narrative provide insight into the transformation of the Pentateuch into the Torah of Moses for the post-exilic community in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

The mission of Ezra (Ezra 7–10) includes the description of the central character (7:1–11); the edict of Artaxerxes (7:12–26), and the subsequent enforcement of restrictive marriage law (Ezra 8–10). Ezra is idealized as promulgating the written “torah of Moses.” He is identified as a priest in the lineage of Aaron through a genealogy (7:1–5) and as a scribe trained in the “torah of Moses” (7:6), later equated with the “torah of Yahweh”: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the torah of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (7:10).

The author further associates Ezra with law in the edict of Artaxerxes (7:12–26); although written in Aramaic, the edict is not an original document but the creation of the author of the book. Ezra is again described as a “scribe” of the “commandments of Yahweh” (7:11) and of the “law of the God of heaven” (7:12, 21). Artaxerxes commissions Ezra to investigate the situation in Judah and

Jerusalem according to the “law of your God, which is in your hand” (7:14), indicating that the author has in mind a written document. Ezra must appoint judges who know the “law of God” to teach the people in the Beyond the River province (7:25); the “law of God” will have the same status as the “law of the king” (7:26).

The author does not specifically identify the “torah of Moses” in Ezra 7–10. The larger literary section focuses only on the prohibition against mixed marriages, which reflects aspects of marriage legislation in the Pentateuch but does not correspond to any one law. David J. Clines notes that marriage to foreign women was not categorically forbidden in the Pentateuch, citing, among others, Joseph (Gen 41:45), Moses (Num 12:1), and Abraham (Gen 16:3). “But marriage with the non–Israelite inhabitants of Canaan was clearly disallowed (Exod 34:11–16; Deut 7:1–6).”[3] Thus, even though the author is clearly idealizing a written form of the “torah of Moses,” it is not possible to discern whether the content reflects the Pentateuch.

The account of Ezra leading the covenant renewal ceremony (Nehemiah 8–10) provides further details on the “torah of Moses.” It is described as a “book” (8:1), the “book of the torah” (8:3); the “torah” (8:7; 9:29), the “book of the torah of God” (8:8; 9:3), the “words of the torah” (8:9, 13), and the “torah which Yahweh had commanded by Moses” (8:14), all of which is “written” (8:15). The book becomes the center of worship: Ezra reads it (8:3) from a platform (8:4) in the sight of all the people who rise to hear it (8:5) and respond to the hearing liturgically stating “Amen, Amen” (8:6). The reading required further interpretation “so that the people understood” it (8:8). The result was the rediscovery of the festival of booths described in a general way in Deuteronomy (16:13–15) and with more detail in Leviticus (23:23–33, 39–43): “Yahweh had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should live in booths during the festival of the seventh month” (8:14).

The prayer of Ezra and the reforms of Nehemiah provide multiple parallels to the Pentateuch; the following diagram is a partial summary from Lester L. Grabbe.[4]

Table 10.3 Parallels between Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Pentateuch

Table 10.3a Prayer of Ezra: Neh 9:6–37

Topic	Nehemiah 9	Pentateuch
Creation	9:6	Genesis 1
Abraham	9:7–8	Genesis 12–25
Exodus from Egypt	9:9–11	Exodus 1–18
Wilderness Journey/Revelation of Law	9:12–21	Exodus 18–Numbers 19
Conquest of Transjordan	9:22	Numbers 20–36
Conquest of Canaan	9:23–25	Joshua

Table 10.3b Reform of Nehemiah: Neh 10:1—13:31

Topic	Nehemiah	Pentateuch
Sabbath	10:32; 13:15–22	Gen 2:2–3; Exod 20:8–11; Lev 23:3–8
Sabbatical Year	10:32	Deut 15:1–3; Lev 25:1–7
Annual tax of ½ shekel	10:33	Exod 30:11–16
Tithe to Priest	10:38	Num 18:21–32
First-Fruits as Priestly dues	10:36	Num 18:12–13
Firstling as Priestly dues	10:37	Num 18:14–18

Grabbe concludes from the list that the author intends the “torah of Moses” (Neh 8:1) and the “book of the torah of Yahweh” (Neh 9:3) to represent some form of the Pentateuch. The parallels indicate that the author(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah locate the formation of the Torah of Moses during the Persian period of rule even though the composition of the text may extend into the Hellenistic period.

10.2 Persia and the Torah

The story of Ezra states that the Persian emperor Artaxerxes authorized the promulgation of the Torah of Moses as the law of the land in Yehud: “And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment” (Ezra 7:25–26). Interpreters explore the degree to which Persian imperial policy may have influenced the codification of the Torah of Moses, so that the “law of [Ezra’s] God” was also the “law of the king.”

Peter Frei has argued that Persian imperial authorization of local laws is a catalyst for the formation of the Torah of Moses[5]; by this, he means the polity of the Persian government to support regional law codes within the empire. Frei cites the authority of Persian law in local affairs in the story of Ezra (Ezra 7:12–26); the reforms of Nehemiah (Neh 13:30–31); the law of Purim in the story of Esther (Esth 9:20–32); and the story of Daniel as a satrap (Daniel 6). The Aramaic decree of Artaxerxes in the story of Ezra is particularly important; it describes the Torah of Moses in the possession of Ezra (“the law of his God”) and equates it with Persian law (“the law of the king”). Frei acknowledges problems of composition and dating in all of the texts, including the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra, but he also underscores that in each story, the Persian ruler authorizes local law and that it may reflect historical practice.

Frei reinforces Persian authorization of local law by noting the same practice outside of the Hebrew Bible. Three examples provide illustration. Persian imperial authorization of local religious law is evident in the letter of Hananiah from the Elephantine community in Egypt to his brother Jedoniah.

Sidebar 10.6 Elephantine Papyri

Elephantine is an island known as Abu or Yebu in ancient Egypt, located near the First Cataract at the southern border of Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia. The Elephantine papyri are 175 legal documents and letters written primarily in Aramaic by a Jewish community of mercenaries for the Persians who lived on the island of Elephantine in the fifth century BCE. For translation and discussion, see Bezalel Porten (*The Elephantine Papyri in English*).



Figure 10.2 A letter from the Elephantine Papyri, a collection of fifth-century BCE writings of the Jewish community at Elephantine in Egypt. Authors are Yedoniah and his colleagues the priests and it is addressed to Bagoas, governor of Judah. The letter is a request for the rebuilding of a Jewish temple at Elephantine, which had been destroyed by Egyptians. The letter is dated year 17 of king Darius (II), which corresponds to 407 BCE.

The letter is written to clarify the Persian authorization of the Passover legislation; Hananiah quotes the order of king Darius (most likely Darius II) in his fifth year of reign (419 BCE) to Arsames, which authorizes the time for the local observance of Passover (Porten, B13). Additional evidence is the Egyptian letter from the local ruler Pherendates to the priests of the Khnum temple in Elephantine that is part of the Demotic Chronicle. Pherendates provides instruction on how the chief priest of the temple must be selected; he notes that the authority for the legislation derives from the Persian ruler Darius, again

suggesting Persian imperial authorization of local religious law.[6] The same practice may also be evident in Udjahorresene's reform of the Egyptian temple of Neith in Sais. He too refers to the Persian ruler Cambyses as the one authorizing the reform of local cultic practice.[7] Frei concludes: "It seems evident that the Achaemenid government was conscious of the principle of local autonomy" ("Persian Imperial Authorization," 40).

Erhard Blum builds on the research of Frei to argue that the practice of Persian imperial authorization of local law was the social setting for the codification of the Pentateuch and that it accounts for the peculiar form of the Torah of Moses.[8] He notes that the literary structure of the Torah is filled with irreconcilable conflicts on a range of legal and religious practices. Examples include the structure of the priesthood (Numbers 3; Deuteronomy 18); the handling of blood in slaughter (Leviticus 17; Deuteronomy 12); the teaching on Passover as well as other differences in cultic calendars (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28–29); and the evaluation of holiness in the laity (Leviticus 17–26; Deuteronomy 7). The conflicts are, for the most part, between Priestly teaching (e.g., Leviticus) and Deuteronomy. Blum identifies the conflicting compositions as the KP and KD.

Blum argued that the bringing together of the fundamentally distinct Priestly (KP) and Non-P (KD) teachings into a single Torah could not be accounted for simply by assuming an internal development within competing groups in Second Temple Judaism. The traditions are too far apart in their religious outlook and they are presently juxtaposed with little harmonization. The external influence of the Persian policy to encourage the codification and authorization of local law provides a broader external social setting to account for the compromise between Priestly and Non-Priestly teachings and the nature of the editorial combination.

The insight that the Pentateuch represents a compromise between competing factions in the post-exilic period is not new; Morton Smith came to the same conclusion (*Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament*). Blum builds on Smith's social analysis by adding the external political influence of the Persian rule in post-exilic Yehud. He concludes that the Torah of Moses represents an inner-Jewish compromise to codify local law, while the mission of

Ezra recounts and idealizes the promulgation of this codification of law under the authorization of the Persians.

The Persian authorization of the Torah of Moses continues to undergo critical evaluation and modification. Joseph Blenkinsopp questions whether the mission of Ezra actually conforms to the evidence of Elephantine, where local groups requested advice from the central Persian government on the Passover.[9] The authority to punish local residents in the decree of Atraxerxes (Ezra 7:12–26) was restricted to Persian officials, according to Lisbeth Fried, and thus, would likely not have been given to Ezra.[10] Donald Redford concluded that the Persian imperial authorization of local Egyptian law in the Demotic Chronicle more likely indicated its translation into Aramaic.[11]

In spite of the qualifications, the authorization of local law in the Persian period remains one possible influence in the formation of the Torah of Moses. Konrad Schmid concludes: “Ezra 7 shows us that the author of this text was familiar with processes of authorizing local norms and that he described Ezra’s presentation of the Torah to his readers in this context.”[12]

10.3 Judaism and the Torah

The formation of the Pentateuch as Torah reflects the gradual change from oral to written transmission of tradition. Konrad Schmid characterizes this transition as the "scripturalization" of religion in Second Temple Judaism.[13] The growing authority of written law begins well before the Second Temple period. Sid Z. Leiman notes a series of references in the Hebrew Bible to the emergence of written law in reference to the Book of the Covenant (e.g., Exod 24:7) and especially to the book of Deuteronomy (2 Kgs 22:8; 23:2, 21) during the Josianic reform.[14] But it is the portrait of Ezra reading the Torah of Moses from a podium, accompanied by interpreters, that most vividly clarifies the scripturalization of religion in the post-exilic period, in which there is a growing emphasis on writing and written documents in conjunction with oral recitation and teaching.

The idealization of Ezra reading the Torah of Moses underscores for David Carr that the "Pentateuch gained a supreme authority in postexilic Judah."[15] Carr traces the increasingly prominent role of the Torah in education from the Persian through the Hellenistic periods, noting that the Pentateuch became a dynamic resource for identity formation and enculturation, while Moses was idealized as the author of divine law. Sirach illustrates the growing idealization of Moses and the foundational role of the Torah by the second century BCE: The memory of Moses is blessed (45:1–7); he heard of the voice of God, who "gave him commandments for his people," which were the "law of life and knowledge." Thus, the Torah of Moses becomes the foundational source of education and religious development; the one who devotes himself or herself to the study of the law will be filled (32:15), protected from loss (32:24) and gain wisdom (33:2).

The emergence of the Torah of Moses resulted in its authoritative status among the different forms of Judaism in the Second Temple period. The Priestly temple religion associated with Jerusalem is likely reflected in the story of Ezra; the Priestly version of the Pentateuch is contained in the Masoretic Text (MT),

which becomes the authoritative canon for later Rabbinic Judaism. The MT eventually contains three sections of literature, including the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

The Samaritans who worshipped at the northern mountains of Ebal and Gerizim near Shechem also adhere to the Pentateuch as authoritative scripture, while rejecting the Prophets and the Writings of the MT. The Samaritan version of the Pentateuch contains separate teachings from the MT that support worship at Ebal and Gerizim (e.g., Deut 27:2–8). The conclusion to the Decalogue provides illustration when the Samaritan version extends the command against coveting to include directions for worship at Mount Gerizim: "And when it so happens that Yahweh God brings you to the land of Canaan, which you are coming to possess, you shall set up there for you great stones and plaster them with plaster and you write on the stones all words of this law. And it becomes for you that across the Jordan you shall raise these stones, which I command you today, in mountain Gerizim" (Exod 20:17).

Sidebar 10.7 Samaritans

The Samaritans live north of Yehud and represent a distinctive form of Yahwism in the Second Temple period. The classical view has been to date the separation between the Samaritans and the Judeans early in the exile as an influence in the self-definition of the returning exiles to Yehud and in the creation of the Pentateuch. The reason is that 2 Kings 17:24–41 states the Samaritans originate from the Assyrians who repopulated the Northern kingdom after its fall in the eighth century BCE; and from the polemical statements in Ezra (e.g., 4:3:3; 4:1–4) and Nehemiah (e.g., 2:10, 19–20; 3:33—4:1; 6:1–2) about their adversaries and the "people of the land." This view assumed that the Samaritan Pentateuch was a sectarian adaptation of the MT version of the Hebrew Bible. Nehemiah is described as driving off Jehoiada, the son of the high priest Eliashib, the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite (Neh 13:28), suggesting the Samaritan Pentateuch stems from this event. Josephus elaborates stating the Samaritans acquired their version of the Pentateuch from this renegade priest, who established a rival cultic site at Mount Gerizim (*Ant*. 11.306–312). More recent research places the schism between the Samaritans and the Judeans much later in the Hellenistic era, perhaps during the Hasmonean period when John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim, but certainly no

earlier than the time of the building of the temple at Mount Gerizim in the fourth century. In this case the Samaritan Pentateuch is not a sectarian movement within Second Temple Judaism, but one of the many forms of emerging Judaism in the period that adhered to the teaching of the Pentateuch as the authoritative Torah. For discussion, see Reinhart Pummer (*The Samaritans: A Profile*).

Hellenistic Jews of the diaspora translate the Hebrew into the Greek Septuagent (LXX), thus introducing the title "Pentateuch" for the five books of the Torah of Moses. Although the LXX is a translation of the Hebrew, it departs in places from the MT, suggesting that the Greek translators also introduce readings that reflect their particular Hellenistic setting. The differences can be extensive over large blocks of literature, as in the description of the tabernacle, which departs in significant ways from the MT version (Exodus 25–31, 35–40); or it can be confined to a single verse as in the divine warning to Cain (Gen 4:7): In the MT, God warns Cain that he must master sin, which lurks at his door and desires him; while in the LXX, God comments on sharing sacrifice, before informing Cain that he will rule over his brother Abel.

Sidebar 10.8 Hellenistic Judaism

Hellenism describes the influence of Greek language and culture on the Ancient Near East from the death of Alexander the Great (323 BCE) to the Roman conquest that began under Pompey (65 BCE). The influence of Hellenism was promoted through urban colonization aimed at creating a universal cultural identity based on Greek ideals. Alexandria in northern Egypt and Antioch in northern Syria (contemporary Turkey) were two significant urban colonies with large Jewish populations, which became centers for relating Greek culture with Jewish religion. The translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew to the Greek Septuagint represents a significant literary achievement by Hellenistic Jews in Alexandria; tradition states that the Greek translation of the Pentateuch was commissioned by Ptolemy II (309–246 BCE) for Alexandrian Jews who only spoke Greek, the primary language of the city. For discussion, see Jennifer M. Dines (*The Septuagint*).

The Qumran community rejected the form of Judaism represented by the Priestly leaders in Jerusalem, but they too adhered to the Torah of Moses. Many copies of the Pentateuch have been discovered in the caves at Qumran, including Deuteronomy (1Q5); Exodus (1Q22); Numbers (4Q27), as well as reworkings of the Pentateuch (4Q364, 365, 366, 367). The influence of the Torah is also evident in additional literature at Qumran such as the Rule of the Community: "As it is written, 'In the desert, prepare the way of [YHWH] make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God [Isa 40:3]' This is the study of the Torah which he commanded through the hand of Moses, in order to act in accord with all that has been revealed from age to age, and according to what the prophets revealed through his holy spirit" (1QS VIII, 14–16).

Sidebar 10.9 Qumran Community

Qumran is a settlement on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea; it was the home of the Qumran community, a sectarian group of priests identified as Essenes. These sectarians followed their leader, the "Teacher of Righteousness," in separating from the Jerusalem temple in the second century BCE because of disagreements over worship, calendar and ritual purity. The Romans destroyed the site of Qumran in 68 CE. In the 1950s, Roland de Vaux headed an archaeological team that uncovered many manuscripts of the community hidden in the Qumran caves. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal the complex belief system of the group, including messianic expectations that would lead to the reclaiming of the Jerusalem temple. The manuscripts also provide a rich resource in the textual and literary development of the Pentateuch. For discussion, see John J. Collins (*Beyond the Qumran Community*).

These few examples illustrate the central role of the Torah throughout the diverse Jewish communities in the Second Temple period. They also underscore that even when the Pentateuch becomes written, it remains dynamic and even flexible as different communities embrace its authoritative teaching in distinct

social and religious contexts and in the process shape the text to reflect their particular religious beliefs.

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1. Timothy H. Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 69. ↵
2. Juha Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe*, 145–79; Lisbeth Fried, *Ezra and the Law in History and Tradition.* ↵
3. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 116. ↵

4. *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, 336–37. ↵
5. "Persian Imperial Authorization," 5–40. ↵
6. "Persian Imperial Authorization," 23–24. ↵
7. "Persian Imperial Authorization," 22–23. ↵
8. *Studien*, 333–60. ↵
9. "Was the Pentateuch the Civic and Religious Constitution of the Jewish Ethnos in the Persian Period?" 41–42. ↵
10. "You shall appoint judges," 63–89. ↵
11. "The So-called Codification of Egyptian Law under Darius I," 135–59. ↵
12. "The Persian Imperial Authorization as a Historical Problem," 38. ↵
13. *The Old Testament: A Literary History*, 223. ↵
14. *The Canonization of the Hebrew Scripture*, 19–20. ↵
15. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 171. ↵

11

Pentateuch and History

The traditional view of the authorship of the Pentateuch was that Moses composed the account of the patriarchal age, the events of the Exodus, and the wilderness wandering with the aid of divine revelation. Although Moses foresaw the conquest, another author composed the events in Joshua and Judges. The historical-critical study of the Pentateuch was focused on authorship, not history; it rejected Mosaic authorship in an effort to identify the anonymous authors. But the rejection of Mosaic authorship also introduced the problem of the historical reliability of the events in the Pentateuch. It raised the question: If the authors of the Pentateuch were anonymous, writing from a much later time, were the accounts of the patriarchal and the Mosaic ages rooted in history? Spinoza articulated the problem at the outset of the modern era, when he concluded that "the history of the Bible is . . . untrustworthy." He also foresaw the close relationship between the study of the composition of the Pentateuch and the history of Ancient Israel when he stated the new aim of biblical interpretation was to uncover "a trustworthy history of the sacred writings."[1]

This chapter will build from the previous chapters on composition (chs. 2–4) to describe the changes that have occurred in the evaluation of the Pentateuch as a resource for recovering the history of Ancient Israel. The Pentateuch recounts two important periods in the early history of Ancient Israel: the patriarchal age and the Mosaic age.

Sidebar 11.1 Chronology of the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages

Table 11.1 Chronology of the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages

Archaeological/Historical	Ancient Near Eastern

Period	Chronology	Israelite History
Middle Bronze Age	2100–1550 BCE	Patriarchal Age (2100–1550)
Late Bronze Age	1550–1150 BCE	Patriarchal Age (1550–1400) Mosaic Age (1300–1150)
Iron Age I	1150–900 BCE	Tribes (1150–1000)

The chart includes: (1) the list of the archaeological and historical periods, (2) the chronological outline of the history of the Ancient Near East, and (3) the approximate dates of cultural transition in the history of Ancient Israel.

The dates for the patriarchal, Mosaic and tribal periods are approximate.

The patriarchal age is recounted in Genesis; it states that the origin of Israel begins with the migration of the ancestor Abraham from Babylon to the promised land of Canaan; and that the ethnic identity of the Israelites emerges through the family genealogy of Abraham, Isaac, and finally, Jacob, whose sons are the eponymous ancestors of the twelve tribes. The historical interpretation of the patriarchal age would span the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BCE), and perhaps, the initial stage of the Late Bronze Age (1550–1400 BCE).

The Mosaic age includes the biography of Moses, from his birth in Egypt at the outset of the book of Exodus to his death at the conclusion of the book of Deuteronomy. The Mosaic age includes the Israelite slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, and the wilderness journey with the revelation of law at the divine mountain in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These events take place in the Late Bronze Age (1300–1200 BCE). But the broader description of the Mosaic age could also include the conquest of the land at the end of the Late Bronze Age (1200–1150 BCE) or in the first part of the Iron I Age (1150–1100 BCE), depending on how different interpreters date the events. The reason for extending the Mosaic age beyond the lifespan of Moses is that the Exodus-conquest is a single continuous event in the literature of the Pentateuch, even

though the conquest spills over into the books of Joshua and Judges 1–2 which exceeds the life of Moses in the narrative events.

11.1 Patriarchal Age

The early researchers in source criticism concentrated on the identification of the source authors, especially the J and E writers of the monarchy period. The history of Israel prior to the monarchy period was outside of their scope of study, which influenced the assessment of the history of the ancestors in the Pentateuch. Wellhausen doubted that a modern researcher could recover the history of the patriarchal period, or trace the stories back to their origin.[2] The researchers in form criticism and especially tradition history in the early-to mid-twentieth century disagreed. They were confident that the oral traditions of the ancestors were historical and that it was possible to recover their history, especially when the literature of the Pentateuch was combined with a broader study of archaeology and compared to recently discovered Ancient Near Eastern literature from the second millennium BCE.

Two influential histories of ancient Israel illustrate the results of the research in tradition history, archaeology, and comparative literature to recover the history of the patriarchs: Martin Noth's, *The History of Israel* (1960^2); and John Bright's, *A History of Israel* (1972^2). These histories represent the cumulative research of the German school headed by Albrecht Alt and of the American school led by W. F. Albright. The schools of research differ significantly in methodology and in their appraisal of the literature of the patriarchs in Genesis (see ch. 4 for discussion). But they agreed that the history of the patriarchs could be recovered.

Bright acknowledged the problem of using the narrative of the patriarchs in Genesis as a resource for recovering history, especially in light of the results of the documentary hypothesis, which located the composition of the material a millennium later. But Bright remained confident that he could identify the "patriarchal age" in the Middle Bronze period (2000–1550 BCE). Thus, *A History of Israel* begins with a sweeping summary of the history of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Palestine during this period. The history of Mesopotamia was of particular importance for creating external evidence "that

the stories of the patriarchs fit unquestionably and authentically in the milieu of the second millennium."[3] The second millennium began with the collapse of the Third dynasty of Ur (Ur III, 2060–1950), in part, by the invasion of a seminomadic, Northwest-Semitic people, called Amorites or Amurru ("westerners").

Sidebar 11.2 Amorites

The Amorites are a Semitic-speaking people who likely originated from Syria, migrated east, and established city-states in northern Mesopotamia, including Mari and Babylon, which becomes a significant center of power under the rule of Hammurabi (1810–1750 BCE). The era of the Amorites extends from 2000 to 1595 BCE, before they were defeated by the Assyrians.

The Amorites became rulers of Mari, a city in Upper-Mesopotamia, as well as penetrating all parts of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and eventually, Egypt with the rise of the Hyksos (ca. 1800–1600 BCE), who were also "basically of Northwest-Semitic stock."

Sidebar 11.3 Chronology of Mesopotamian Kingdoms in the Middle Bronze Age

Date	Egypt	Palestine	Hittites	Mesopotamia
2100	Middle Kingdom		City States	Ur 2060–1950
2000				
	XII Dynasty 1991–1786		Hittite Old Kingdom	
1900		Patriarchs		
			Labamas	**Babylon 1** 1830–1530

1800	Intermediate Period Hyksos 1800–1600			“Mari Age” 1750–1697	
1700		Hebrews in Egypt?	**Hattusilis I**	Zimri–lim	Hammurabi
	XV Dynasty (1650–1642)				
1600					
			Mursilis I		
1500	New Kingdom XVII Dynasty 1552–1306 Hyksos Expelled				

See the full chart in John Bright (“Chronological Charts,” *A History of Israel*).

The history of the seminomadic patriarchs could be recovered when the stories of Genesis were read against the background of the Amorites. The patriarchs are presented as wandering semi-nomads, who migrate from the Upper Mesopotamian city of Haran (Abraham, Gen 11:32; Laban, Gen 27:43). The names of the patriarchs and the place-names from their stories correspond to Amorite names and places-names from Mari and from the Egyptian Execration Texts.

Sidebar 11.4 Mari

The city of Mari was an important trading center already in the third millennium, before it became the capital of the Amorite Lim Dynasty (1830–1761 BCE). The archaeological discovery of the ancient city of Mari in 1933 also included the recovery of over 25,000 tablets written in Akkadian, which provide insight into the political and economic history of the Amorite Lim Dynasty.

Sidebar 11.5 Execration Texts

Execration Texts are a form of sympathetic magic in which the names of enemies are first written on statuettes, bowls, or clay, then broken and finally buried with the aim of affecting the enemy.



Figure 11.1 Example of an Egyptian execration text and figurine.

Examples include Abram (Abamram), Nahor (Nakhur), Terah (Til-turakhi), Zebulun, and Levi. In addition, the customs of the patriarchs in Genesis, such as Abraham's fear that his slave Eliezer would inherit (Gen 15:1–4), also reflect the same general cultural influence, especially when compared to documents from Nuzi, an ancient city from the Amorite period located in northern Mesopotamia.

Sidebar 11.6 Nuzi

Nuzi is an ancient Mesopotamian city near the Tigris River close to modern Kirkut. The city received its name under Hurrian rule in the second millennium. Archaeologists discovered nearly 5,000 tablets that document routine business transactions, which provide insight into the social, economic, and legal institutions of Nuzi.

The accumulation of these broad cultural analogies led Bright to conclude:

“In view of such evidence, objective method demands that the Biblical tradition that Israel’s ancestors migrated from Mesopotamia be accorded essential historicity.”[4]

Martin Noth was much more circumspect in recovering the historical background of the patriarchs. He noted the aid of archaeology and external documents from the Ancient Near East as valuable historical resources, including the Egyptian Execration Texts and the Mari material. But he also emphasized the need for a “subjective” approach to the literature of the Pentateuch, before it could be used as a resource for historical analysis. The “subjective” approach required the critical examination of the text, especially its history of formation, including the analysis of cultic transmission history, in order to understand the process of selection and the point of view of the authors and tradents. Noth also cautioned against an over emphasis on “hasty parallels” from broad cultural comparisons that create “improper direct biblical connotations: The fact that an event can be shown to have been possible is no proof that it actually occurred.”[5]

Noth began *The History of Israel* at a later point in time than Bright, with “Israel as the Confederation of the Twelve Tribes.” The examination of the patriarchs occurs within the larger discussion of the “Traditions of the Sacral Confederation,” which formed the identity of the tribes in the land, who were unified as an amphictyony around shared cultic sites. Thus, unlike Bright, there is no “patriarchal age.” Instead, the tradition of the patriarchs emerges in the context of the cultic traditions of the tribes as “a historical manifestation from Israel’s earliest history.”[6]

Sidebar 11.7 Amphictyony

Amphictyony means “league of neighbors”; it describes the association of Greek tribes before the rise of the polis (city). The most significant and longest lasting amphictyony in ancient Greece is the Delphic League; it consisted of twelve members formed to support the temples of Apollo and Demster. Martin Noth proposed that the twelve tribe system of ancient Israel was similar to the Greek

Delphic League; it too formed as a league in the pre-monarchy period to support the cult of Yahweh.

The many concrete details about the patriarchs in Genesis raise the question of whether the tradition was based on historical reality. In seeking to answer the question, Noth too cites the correspondence of names between the patriarchs and the Mari and Execration texts of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE, suggesting that they may have been part of the Aramaean migration.[7] But the subjective analysis of the tradition of the patriarchs as a feature of the tribal cult also provided an important criterion for evaluating the historicity of the patriarch.

Sidebar 11.8 Arameans

The Arameans were an Aramaic-speaking tribal confederacy in Syria from the Late Bronze Age—a period of cultural upheaval and migration. The Arameans gain control of Syria (identified as Aramea) in the twelfth century BCE, when they also appear in the Assyrian records of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1077 BCE).

Noth concluded that the memory of the patriarchs was likely carried through to the period of the tribal confederacy through the attachment of individual patriarchs to different cultic sites, such as Shechem, Bethel, Beersheba, or the terebinth of Mamre near Hebron.[8] “If, therefore, the figures of the patriarchs lived on among the Israelite tribes as the recipients of divine manifestations and the founders of cults which continued to be practiced by their descendants and with which their names remained associated, they were clearly men who had once lived as historical persons.”[9]

Additional studies in the late-twentieth century challenged the methodologies of Bright and Noth for recovering the history of the patriarchs from the literature

of the Pentateuch. In *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (1974), Thomas L. Thompson reviewed the archaeological and literary evidence from the Middle Bronze Age that was used as "external evidence" to recover the historicity of the ancestors from the stories in Genesis. He reviewed the second millennium material from Mari, which interpreters argued matched uniquely the names of the patriarchs. Thompson rejected the evidence; after reviewing different forms of the name Abraham from the Old Babylonian through the Neo-Assyrian periods, he concluded: "Abraham is a West Semitic name of quite common sort and can be expected to appear wherever we find names from West Semitic peoples. Therefore it cannot be dated to any specific period and cannot be used to date the patriarchs or to establish the patriarchal period."[10]

Additional conclusions of Thompson were that the term "Amorite" represents different people separated from one another in time, place, culture, and perhaps, even in origin. Thus, the term could not be the basis for identifying the patriarchs with a general Amorite migration in the early second millennium. He concluded further that the parallels between the customs of the patriarchs and Nuzi fail to explain the literary construction of the narratives of Genesis, such as adoption and inheritance (Gen 15:2–4) or the interpretation of the wife-sister stories as diplomatic visits (Genesis 12, 20, 26); and that the historical reconstruction of the patriarchal age based on analogy cannot replace direct evidence of historical realty, which is lacking in the stories of the ancestors in Genesis.

The research of Thompson was reinforced by the similar study of John Van Seters in *Abraham in History and Tradition* (1975). He came to the same conclusion as Thompson. The historical patriarchs could not be recovered through the methodology of analogy with the second millennium Amorite migration, nor from the similarity of names from Mari or from the comparison with Nuzi family law. Van Seters also rejected the tradition-historical argument of Noth that the historicity of the patriarchs could be assumed from their role in tribal worship. Van Seters countered that the assumption of deeply rooted oral tradition, extending back to the tribal period and linking even further back to the second millennium ancestors, was not supported by the literary study of Genesis,

which was clearly the product of an author who was working with an overall literary design. The many anachronisms in the portrayal of the ancestors (such as camels; the Philistines; the use of Chaldea to identify Babylon) indicated that the author was writing from a much later time in the history of Israel. On this basis, Van Seters rejected the use of the Pentateuch to recover the patriarchal age.

The search for the historical patriarchs in the second millennium continues into the present time among contemporary scholars, based on further comparative research[11] or on the assumption that the biblical text provides accurate historical information.[12] But research has, for the most part, abandoned the goal of recovering the patriarchal age behind the literature of Genesis. Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle summarize the present state of research: “the majority of biblical scholars today seem to view the patriarchal narratives as late literary compositions that have distinctive ideological and theological purposes but possess little worth as sources for historical reconstruction of the presettlement period of Israel’s past” (*Biblical History*, 67).

11.2 Mosaic Age

The majority of the Pentateuch is focused on the Mosaic age. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy follow the career of Moses from birth (Exodus 2) to death (Deuteronomy 34), describing his role as the savior of the Israelite nation and as the mediator of divine law to the people in the desert. Three events comprise the core of the Mosaic age: the Egyptian slavery (Exodus 1–2); the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3–15); and the wilderness journey (Exodus 15–18; Numbers 11–36; Deuteronomy 1–3), where the revelation of law takes place at the divine mountain (Exodus 19–40; Leviticus; Numbers 1–10; Deuteronomy 4–34). The Mosaic age concludes with the conquest of the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, after the death of Moses (Joshua; Judges 1–2), completing the sequence of the Exodus-conquest. The study of the history of the Mosaic age has focused on: (1) the dates and the geography of the events of the exodus and wilderness journey and (2) the origin of Israel in the land of Canaan.

Dates and Geography of the Exodus-Conquest

The Pentateuch encourages an historical reading of the Exodus-conquest by providing precise dates and locations for the events. The biblical authors of the Hebrew text (*MT*) date the Exodus to the Year 2666 (Exod 12:40–41) from the creation of the world (*anno mundi* = AM), or Year 1 (Gen 1:26–27) (see ch. 1). In the biblical literature outside of the Pentateuch, the authors state that the fourth year of King Solomon's reign was the 480th year after Israel left Egypt (1 Kgs 6:1). This date allows for the translation of the biblical chronology to Western dating. The reign of Solomon is traditionally considered to be approximately 960–922 BCE, making the fourth year of his reign 956 BCE and the year of the Exodus 1436 BCE. This chronology would place the Israelite Exodus from Egypt in the eighteenth Dynasty of Egyptian rule, specifically during the reign of Thutmose III (1490–1436 BCE) in the Late Bronze age, which conflicts with the information in the Pentateuch, since it states that the Israelites built the cities of Pithom and Rameses (Exod 1:11), suggesting instead the reign of Rameses II during the nineteenth dynasty.

Sidebar 11.9 Egyptian Kings in Dynasties 18 and 19

Dynasty 18 (1550–1295 BCE)

Pharaoh	Dates (approximate)
Ahmose I	1550–1525
Amenhotep I	1525–1504
Thutmose I	1504–1492
Thutmose II	1492–1479
Thutmose III (partial joint regency)	1479–1425
Hatshepsut (joint regency)	1479–1458
Amenhotep II	1427–1400
Thutmose IV	1400–1390

Amenhotep III	1390–1352
Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten	1353–1336
Smenkhkare	1336
Tutankhamun	1336–1327
Aya	1327–1323
Horemheb	1323–1295
Dynasty 19 (1295–1186)	
Pharaoh	Date (approximate)
Rameses I	1295–1294
Seti I	1294–1279
Rameses II	1279–1213
Merenptah	1213–1203
Amenmesse	1203–1200
Seti II	1200–1194
Siptah	1194–1188
Tausret	1188–1186

Biblical authors also provide specific geographical information about the Exodus-conquest, which further encourages an historical interpretation. Jacob and his family settle in the land of Goshen within Egypt (Gen 46:28; Exod 8:18; 9:26), also known as the “land of Rameses” (Gen 47:11). And, as noted above, when the Israelites’ guest status in Egypt turned into slavery, the biblical writers identify the cities of Pithom and Rameses as the product of their slave labor (Exod 1:11). They also include specific locations for the exodus out of Egypt, such as Succoth (Exod 12:37; Num 33:4–5); Etham (Exod 13:20); Pi-hahiroth (Exod 14:2); Migdol (Exod 14:2); and Baal-zephon (Exod 14:2). In addition, the wilderness journey is marked with geographical locations like Kadesh-barnea (Num 13:26; 20:14), and it includes a list of specific nations that Israel encounters on the journey, such as the Edomites (Num 20:14–21). The narrative realism continues in the stories of conquest: Moses is described as defeating Sihon the Amorite king of Heshbon and Og of Bashan in the Transjordan (Num

21:21–35; Deut 2:24—3:7; Josh 12:1–6), while Joshua destroys many Canaanite cities, including Jericho (Joshua 6–7) and Ai (Joshua 8), before establishing a worship site at Shechem (Josh 8:30–35).

The realism of the biblical narrative of the Mosaic age is also intermixed with legendary motifs. For example, the biblical authors state that during the Israelite sojourn in Egypt, their population grew from the original family of Jacob to a nation of 600,000 men (Exod 12:37), making the total number of those leaving Egypt (including women and children) approximately 2–3 million persons, not counting the mixed multitude that accompanied the people upon their leaving Egypt (Exod 12:37). Such a massive group living for a generation in the desert would overwhelm the fragile environment; it is not considered to be historical. The Pentateuch contains many other legendary features; yet the core Exodus-conquest story continues to be judged as having historical value. The histories of Bright and Noth provide illustration of the historical recovery of the Exodus-conquest from the literature of the Pentateuch; their research dominated in the twentieth century.

Bright conceded that there was no direct evidence for the Exodus from Egypt, but that "the Biblical tradition a priori demands belief; it is not the sort of tradition any people would invent!."[13] He located the slavery of the Israelites and the Exodus in the Late Bronze Age. The slavery of Israel and the Exodus took place during the nineteenth dynasty of Egypt (ca. 1306–1200 BCE), which included three pharaohs, whom Bright dated as follows (precise dating varies among interpreters of Egyptian history):

- Seti I (1305–1290 BCE)
- Rameses II (1290–1224 BCE)
- Merenptah (1224–1211 BCE)

Israelite slavery could have begun as early as the reign of Seti I; the Exodus took place during the reign of Rameses II. The slave labor was likely tied to the rebuilding of Avaris, which is the city of Rameses mentioned in Exodus 1:11.

Bright wrote: “The authenticity of the tradition is supported by the fact that the capital [Avaris] was referred to as ‘House of Rameses’ only until the eleventh century, after which it was called Tanis.”[14] Other evidence for the historicity of the exodus included the many Egyptian names of the characters, such as Moses, Phinehas, and Merari.

Moses was key to Bright’s interpretation of the Exodus. He noted that the monotheistic revolution of Amenophis IV, also known as Akhenaten, could have been a precursor to the monotheistic religion of Moses, which emerged only a century later.[15]

Sidebar 11.10 Akhenaten

Amenhotep IV (meaning “Amun is satisfied”) changed his name to Akhentaten (meaning “Effective for Aten”) when he abandoned orthodox Egyptian polytheism to advocate the worship of Aten (the disk of the sun), thus introducing a henotheistic or monotheistic revolution in Ancient Egypt. Egyptian religion returned to orthodox polytheism after the death of Akhenaten (1352–1336 BCE).



Figure 11.2 Image of Akhenaten and family worshiping the Aten (disk of the sun) dating to 1372 and 1355.

Included second from the left is
Meritaten, daughter of Akhenaten.

Whatever the Egyptian influence may have been, “it is with Moses that Israel’s distinctive faith begins,” since “the events of the exodus and Sinai require a great personality behind them. . . . To deny that role to Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name!”[16] The statement indicates the central role played by Bright’s understanding of the nature of Yahwistic religion as a monotheistic revolution; it strongly influenced his historical reconstruction of the Exodus and the formative role of Moses.

Noth was no less sure of the historicity of the Exodus than Bright, even though he conceded that the quest to recover history forced him to “go back to the sphere of the historically inexplicable.”[17] He concluded that the tribal confession “Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt” was based on a “defined historical occurrence” common during the nineteenth dynasty of Egypt, which was the movement of Semites and Bedouin tribes from Canaan and Edom into Egypt. Noth cited the Papyrus Anastasi VI as evidence: “The report shows that the Old Testament tradition refers to the kind of incident that was often taking place and illustrates the sort of motive which led the Israelites into Egypt.”[18] Moreover, the reference to *‘Apiru* in the Amarna Letters provided support for the tradition of slave labor in Egypt.

Sidebar 11.11 Amarna Letters

Amarna is the archaeological site of the remains of Akhenaten’s capital city, named Akhetaten (meaning “Horizon of the Aten”). Modern researchers continue to refer to the site of the ancient city as Amarna. The Amarna Letters are correspondence between Egypt and vassals or diplomats in the Levant region, including Canaan, discovered in the archaeological ruins of Amarna. The Amarna Letters were written during the reigns of Amenophis III (ca. 1417–1379 BCE) and Amenophis IV (ca. 1379–1362 BCE).



Figure 11.3 One of the Amarna Letters: here a letter from Akhenaten 1353−1336 BCE to a Palestinian vassal prince. There are 382 known clay tablets in the collection. The language is Akkadian (the language of ancient Mesopotamia), and the script is cuneiform. From Tell el-Amafrna, eighteenth Dynasty.

In this correspondence, the ‘*Apiru* are foreign fringe groups who create social unrest in opposing Egyptian authority; in later literature, they appear as forced laborers. The description of the Israelites as Hebrews (Exod 1:19; 2:7, 11, 13; 5:3) during their time of forced labor in Egypt recalls the social status and slave labor of the ‘*Apiru*; the name “Hebrew” is even similar in form to the designation ‘*Apiru*.[19] The construction of the cities of Pithom and Rameses further tied the Exodus to history; they were part of the core story, according to

Noth, indicating that Rameses II was the so-called “Pharaoh of the oppression.”[20]

Noth disagreed with Bright on the central role of Moses in the Exodus and in the revelation of law at Sinai. The Israelites more likely escaped Egypt when a “detachment of Egyptian chariots sank in the water owing to some unexpected disaster,” as is recounted in the ancient hymn in Exodus 15:21b: “Sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”[21] Noth concluded that Moses could certainly not be regarded as the “founder of a religion.” He conceded that Moses may have had some role in the Exodus from Egypt; his Egyptian name would support such a conclusion, but he had no historical role with the events at Sinai as the law-giver of Israel. The more concrete tradition of Moses was his burial site in the Transjordan (Deuteronomy 34), which suggested that Moses belonged “historically to the phase of the preparations for the occupation of the land by the tribes of central Palestine.”[22]

The continued research on the dates and the geography associated with the Exodus has raised questions about the historicity of the Israelite slavery and the Exodus from Egypt, at least as it is recounted in the Pentateuch. The central event of the Exodus—namely, the slaughter of the Pharaoh and the Egyptian army—is considered to be legendary, along with the dating of the Pentateuch and the number of Israelites who escape from Egypt; the records of the Egyptians indicate that no pharaoh was killed in conflict, as the Pentateuch describes. The research on the historicity of the exodus, however, tends to focus on more concrete features of the story. Examples include the reference to Pithom and Rameses as the cities that the Israelites built as slaves under Rameses II, and the land of Goshen as the residence of the Israelites in the thirteenth century. Both Bright and Noth cite these locations as secure evidence for placing the slave labor of the Israelites in Egypt in the thirteenth century BCE.


Mediterranean Sea
CANAAN
Jericho
Dead Sea
Ramses
Pithom
Succoth
Bitter Lakes
Kadesh-barnea
Heliopolis
EGYPT
SINAI PENINSULA
Ezio
Nile River
Gulf of Suez
Gulf of Aqaba
Rephidim
Mt. Sinai?
0
100 mi
0
100 km
Red Sea

Figure 11.4 Map of the Exodus.

The Pentateuch states that the family of Jacob migrated to the land of Goshen in the Delta region of Egypt (Gen 45:10; 46:28, 34; 47:1–6, 27; 50:8) and that the Israelites continued to reside in Goshen as slaves (Exod 8:22; 9:26). Bright identified Goshen as the area around the city of Avaris, which the Israelites rebuilt as Rameses; he noted that the region was also called the "land of Rameses" (Gen 47:11) and the "Plain of Zoan" (Ps 78:12, 43).[23] Noth located Goshen in the territory of the Wadi Tumelat; a region that "extends from the most easterly arm of the Nile eastwards to the modern 'Crocodile lake' (*birket et-timsah*) roughly in the middle of the Suez Canal."[24]

Subsequent researchers have questioned the historical reliability of the biblical reference to Goshen, noting that the designation is a Semitic name lacking an Egyptian equivalent. Donald Redford concluded that the name did not function in the thirteenth century, but that it derived from the name Geshem, a dynastic name in the Qedarite royal family of Arab leaders, who controlled the Delta region in the fifth century BCE.[25] The post-exilic book of Nehemiah designates the leader of this region as Geshem (2:19; 6:1, 6).

Pithom means "house of Atum" in Egyptian (*pr-'Itm*) and it appears in the Egyptian records of the thirteenth century BCE, which fits the time period of the Exodus. The name suggests an original reference to a temple, and, indeed, a number of Egyptian texts refer to such a temple (e.g., Papyrus Harris). But whether Pithom refers to a city during this period of time is less certain (Redford, "Exod I 11," 403–8) and depends, in part, on the location of ancient Pithom in the eastern Nile Delta, where two sites have been proposed in the Wadi Tumilat. The site of Tell er-Retabah had a temple to the gods Atum and Seth in the thirteenth century BCE during the reign of Rameses II, which would correspond in time period to the account of slave labor in Exod 1:11. But there is no evidence that a city at this location was ever known as Pithom, as the biblical account states. James Hoffmeier prefers the identification of the biblical Rameses with this location, noting that monuments from the era of Rameses II discovered at Tell el-Maskhuta could have been moved from this site. The

identification of Tell er-Retabah with biblical Rameses would lend support to the historical background of the Exodus.[26] The other location is Tell el-Maskhuta; as noted above, monuments from the time of Rameses II were discovered at this site, but subsequent research has determined that they were brought there secondarily, since the site was unoccupied during the period of Rameses II. Tell el-Maskhuta was called the city of Pithom for the first time in the late-seventh century BCE, which would undermine the historical reliability of the reference in Exodus 1:11 as providing information on the thirteenth century. It may be, however, the late name reflects older tradition, which Graham Davies suggests.[27] Lester Grabbe summarizes the state of research:

> If Tell el-Maskhuta is Pithom, as seems to be the majority opinion, this site was not settled between the sixteenth and the seventh centuries. . . . The nearby site of Tell el-Retabah is another possibility, but it was reoccupied only about 1200 BCE. If Tell el-Maskhuta was known as "Pithom" from about 600 BCE and topographical names with "Rameses" were also widespread in the first millennium BCE, this argues that the tradition of Exod 1:11 was likely to be late, rather than Ramesside. . . . On the balance of historical considerations, the data in the narrative—and probably the narrative in its present form—are no earlier than the Saite period or later (eighth to fifth century BCE).[28]

Pi-Rameses means "house of Rameses; it is the name of a dynastic city in the eastern Nile Delta, built by Rameses II near the ruins of Avaris, which had been the capital city of Amenophis IV (Akhenaten). The location of the ancient city has been identified as Qantir/Tell el-Daba. The Egyptian Papyrus Leiden 348 makes reference to the building of Pi-Rameses and to the slave laborers, described as *'Apiru*: "Distribute grain rations to the soldiers and to the *'Apiru* who transport stones to the great pylon of Rameses." The reference to the slave labor of the Israelites in Exodus 1:11 is often identified with this royal city. Davies concluded: "The reference to Raamses by name seems likely to be an early element of the biblical tradition."[29] The Delta location is further associated with Rameses in Genesis 47:11, when Joseph settles his family in Goshen, "the land of Rameses." Redford has questioned the historical reliability of the references to the city and to the "land of Rameses"; he noted that the "land of Rameses" never existed in Egyptian history[30] and that the absence of the

original “Pi” from the name “Pi-Rameses,” as well as the particular Hebrew consonant used to write the “s” in the name of the city of Rameses, indicate the late composition of the word—not earlier than the ninth century BCE.[31]

The research on the reference to Goshen, Pithom, and Rameses as thirteenth century sites is inconclusive, but it raises questions about the historicity of the exodus.

The problems of recovering the history of the Exodus-conquest also arise in the story of the Israelite escape from Egypt (Exodus 12–14) and the wilderness journey to the Transjordan, where Moses fought the Amorite king Sihon, whose capital city was Heshbon (Num 21:21–35; Deut 2:24–35). Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman question whether a mass exodus was possible during the reign of Ramases II. They note the tight control of borders during this period, when Egypt was at the peak of its power with forts on the eastern border of the Delta, named Migdol—a place-name that appears in Exodus 14:2—as well as fortifications along the important road between Sinai and Gaza, known as the Way of Horus. They conclude that a large group of slaves could not escape from Egypt through the border fortifications without notice, or indeed, without being tracked down. They add that, although there are archaeological records from the Sinai peninsula of early pastoral activity in this region in the third millennium BCE and again in the later Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, “there is simply no such evidence at the supposed time of the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C.E.”[32]

The problem of history continues into the encounter with Edom in the wilderness journey (Num 20:14–21) and the subsequent war against Sihon, whose capital was Heshbon (Num 21:21–35). Bright concluded that the kingdom of Sihon was established at least a generation or more before the war with Moses and that the war with Sihon took place after the Israelites avoided conflict with the Edomites and the Moabites, who were already established nations.[33] Noth too identified Heshbon as a thirteenth-century city and he also placed the nations of Edom and Moab in the Transjordan at this time. Noth departed from Bright by not identifying the war between Moses and Sihon as the historical version of the battle. Instead, Noth focused on the actions of individual tribes to account for the

war, identifying the tribe of Gad as the group who defeated the city of Heshbon.[34] Although Bright and Noth construct different versions of the wilderness journey, they both agree that the account of the wilderness journey into the Transjordan is based on historical events.

Finkelstein and Silberman summarize two historical problems with the interpretations of Bright and Noth. The archaeology of Tell Hesban has clarified that the city of Heshbon did not exist in the Late Bronze Age for either Moses or the tribe of Gad to defeat. Coupled with this, the nation of Edom also did not exist in the thirteenth century. Moses could not have encountered this nation on the wilderness journey, nor could Edom have competed with Gad for land in the Transjordan area.[35] The stories of the confrontation with Edom and the war against Heshbon in the Pentateuch do not represent history. Finkelstein and Silberman summarize the problem:

> The pattern should have become clear by now. Sites mentioned in the Exodus narrative are real. A few were well known and apparently occupied in much earlier periods and much later periods. . . . Unfortunately for those seeking a historical Exodus, they were unoccupied precisely at the time they reportedly played a role in the events of the wondering of the children of Israel in the wilderness.[36]

Origin of Israel and the Land of Canaan

The story of the Mosaic age in the Pentateuch identifies the Israelites as a non-indigenous people to the land of Canaan. It states that Israel became a nation in Egypt, escaped slavery and journeyed to the Transjordan under the leadership of Moses, where they defeated the indigenous kings, Sihon and Og, whose land became the possession of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The story of the Exodus is not complete, however, until the remaining tribes acquire their land in Canaan, west of the Jordan River. Thus, the historical research on the Exodus and the wilderness journey in the Pentateuch spills over into the biblical account of the conquest of Canaan in Joshua and Judges 1–2.

The Egyptian resources provide information for evaluating the story of the Exodus-conquest and the history of Israel in the land of Canaan. The name "Israel" appears for the first time outside of the Pentateuch in the Merenptah Stele, composed during the fifth year of Merenptah's rule (ca. 1213–1203 BCE).

Sidebar 11.12 Merenptah Stele

The Merenptah Stele was discovered at Thebes by Flinders Petrie in 1896; it is presently held at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The stele is approximately a 7.5 foot high basalt monument, written in hieroglyphics.

In describing the Egyptian military successes of Merenptah over the Lybians, the Stele ends with reference to victories in Palestine:

> Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe;
> Ashkelon has been overcome;
> Gezer has been captured.
> Yano'am was made nonexistent;
> Israel is laid waste, his seed is not. (*ANET*, 376–8.)



Figure 11.5 Merneptah Stele known as the Israel stela (JE 31408) from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The Egyptian writing indicates that the middle three references to Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yano'am are defined places; each location is marked by the Egyptian determinative that designates a specific place or city. The word "Israel" lacks the determinative for a designated place or city, and instead is marked with a determinative that signifies a foreign people without specific location. The cities of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yano'am appear frequently in other Egyptian sources; the reference to the people "Israel" is confined to this one source. Although interpreters debate the exact meaning of the term *Israel*, especially whether the Stele provides any geographical information on the location of the "foreign people" (in the highlands, in the lowlands, or even in the Transjordan), the Merenptah Stele indicates that "Israel" could be identified in some way in the late-thirteenth century BCE, most likely in Palestine. This is important historical information. But any attempt to fill out the social and historical context of the reference to "Israel" raises a series of questions about history: Does the Exodus-conquest story account for the presence of a people "Israel" in the land? If not, who were the Israelites and from where did they originate? Were the Israelites always in the land of Canaan or did they enter it as outsiders as the Pentateuch

states? These questions are at the center of current historical and archaeological research.

The review of the research on the historicity of the conquest will begin with a summary of the histories of Bright and Noth. As was the case with the Exodus and the wilderness journey, these authors provide significantly different accounts of the origin of the Israelites in Canaan. But both agree that Israel was not indigenous to Canaan; that they entered the land as outsiders, thus completing the story of the Exodus, and that the Israelite possession of Canaan represented a unique and disruptive event in the history of Canaan. Subsequent researchers have departed from these points of agreement, arguing instead that Israel was indigenous to the land of Canaan, rather than outsiders, and that their emergence as an identifiable group was the result of a mixture of environmental social processes and political changes both in Canaan and in the wider Ancient Near East.

Bright supported the historicity of the Exodus-conquest. He underscored the complexity of the biblical and archaeological evidence, but concluded that the "Israelites" entered Canaan in the thirteenth century and took control through a war against the city-states; thus, he emphasized the story of the conquest in Joshua as the completion of the Exodus. The Merenptah Stele influenced Bright's interpretation of the Exodus-conquest. He wrote that the reference to "Israel" in the Merenptah Stele "demands the presence of Israel there by ca. 1220," since, for Bright, the account of the Egyptian defeat of the people "Israel" indicated the end of the conquest. The invasion of Merenptah may even have been a response to it.[37] Thus, the Exodus-conquest takes place sometime during 1290–1220 BCE.

Bright evaluated the historical reliability of the conquest, in part, on the archaeology of the Canaanite city-states located in the coastal and lowland regions; he noted that the research on Jericho (Joshua 6) was too inconclusive to assist in the historical reconstruction of the conquest. But the story of Ai was originally an account of the destruction of Bethel in the thirteenth century, which correlated with the violent destruction of a number of other city-states, including Debir, Lachish, Eglon, and Hazor. The archaeology of the Canaanite city-states

showed “beyond a doubt that in the thirteenth century, just as Israel was establishing herself in the land, various towns mentioned in the Bible—and some others as well—did in fact meet violent destruction at the hands of some foe.”[38]

The “foe” in the quotation of Bright that destroyed the cities was Israel, but not the entire nation. A smaller “Exodus group,” who escaped slavery in Egypt, carried out the conquest of Canaan. This mixed group was no more than a few thousand, perhaps including elements of the tribes and even Hyksos who remained in Egypt. The Exodus group formed covenant at Sinai under the leadership of Moses, dwelt at Kadesh, and eventually destroyed Heshbon in the Transjordan. Throughout the process new members joined the group, forming an army that crossed the Jordan to undertake military action against the city-states of Canaan, where more disenfranchised persons also participated in the war. Thus, the Israelites of the conquest grew to include far more people than the Exodus group; there were also many indigenous people, disenfranchised ‘Apiru and even descendants from the patriarchs now absorbed into Canaanite culture, who participated in the overthrow of the city-states and joined the coalition of tribal Israel at Shechem.[39]

Noth also argued for the historicity of the infiltration of pre-Israelite tribes into Canaan, but he focused more on the model of individual tribal penetration and assimilation in Judges 1–2. Thus, Noth too assumed that the Israelites were not indigenous to the land of Canaan and that they entered the territory in sparsely inhabited areas, where the city-states were not located. He did not clearly state from where the tribes originated, nor would he even identify the reference to “Israel” in the Merenptah Stele with tribal Israel. He concluded that it is “impossible to say with any certainty what the ‘Israel’ referred to [in the Merenptah Stele] actually was in the Palestine of circa 1225 B.C.” It may refer to “an older entity which bore the name ‘Israel’ and then for some now obscure historical reason passed it on to the ‘Israel’ we know.”[40]

Noth speculated on the origin of biblical Israel; he reflected on whether the Rachel tribes in the Transjordan might be the “Exodus group,” since only a limited mixed band experienced the Exodus from Egypt. But in the end, Noth rejected this hypothesis, stating that the traditions of the Exodus and the

occupation of the land were not originally related and that the most a historian could conclude was that the Rachel tribes likely controlled the traditions of the occupation of the land, which were eventually combined with the Exodus at a later time.[41] Noth reviewed the variety of ways in which the different tribes may have infiltrated Canaan. Whatever the differences in geographical location, he stressed an overall similarity in that the tribes tended to change their lifestyle to agriculture, while entering into peaceful coexistence with the indigenous Canaanites. But there were also wars, especially later in the process of development, such as the conflict with Sisera (Judges 5) and Shechem (Judges 9).[42]

The research on the origin of Israel has undergone intense study since the histories of Bright and Noth, changing the understanding of the landscape of Canaan in the thirteenth century and the place of Israel in it. The most significant change has been in the methodology of archaeology. The early archaeology of Canaan was local in focus; it targeted individual city-states in the lowlands region of Canaan and the coastal plain that were the centers of political and economic power in the thirteenth century. The focus on particular cities was influenced, in part, by the biblical accounts of the conquest, which described the social disruption of Canaan caused by the unique historical event of the Israelite tribes entering the region as outsiders. Thus, archaeologists looked for evidence of the thirteenth-century destruction of cities such as Jericho and Ai, as well as other cities such as Bethel, Debir, Lachish, Eglon, and Hazor, which may have resulted from the Israelite entry into the land. The research produced mixed results. Central cities in the story of the conquest, such as Jericho and Ai, were not destroyed during the thirteenth century, while other cities were, such as Bethel, Lachish, and Hazor.

The archaeological research on the city-states resulted in three theories about the origin of Israel; all shared the view that the emergence of Israel caused a unique social and political event in the history of Canaan: (1) Israel entered Canaan as conquerors destroying the city-state structure (Albright, Bright); (2) Israel infiltrated Canaan through migration, and eventually, consolidated their power which led to conflict with the city-states (Alt, Noth); and (3) Israel was

part of a social revolution against oppressive city-states that created unjust stratification of power (Mendenhall; Gottwald).

In the late-twentieth century, archaeologists shifted research from the city-states in the coastal plains and the lowlands to the less developed highlands region of Canaan. The highlands represented a distinct culture from the lowlands and coastal city-states; the region included the wooded hill country that runs through the center of Palestine, with the Jordan Valley on the east and the Coastal Plain on the west. The highlands begin in northern Samaria and run southward into the Judean hill country. In the early- and mid-twentieth century, this region was, for the most part, unexplored by archaeologists.

Researchers also expanded the methodology of archaeology in order to study the more remote terrain of the highlands. Rather than digging deeply into the ruined sites of ancient cities to discover evidence of destruction and rebuilding, archaeologists undertook large regional surface studies, surveying settlement patterns over large areas during long periods of time.

The change in methodology influenced the search for Ancient Israel in Canaan. Archaeologists no longer sought the origin of Israel only by searching for unique historical events such as the destruction of cities caused by the new presence of Israel in Canaan. They broadened the scope of study to investigate settlement changes in the highlands over extended periods of time; they looked for patterns of social change that might relate to the natural environment and to broader social processes throughout the Ancient Near East.[43] The research on environmental and regional change shed new light on the origin and development of Israel—not as invaders, but as an indigenous people to the land of Canaan, who emerged as an identifiable group of pastoral nomads in the more remote highlands region.

Israel Finkelstein researched the settlement patterns in the highlands from the Early Bronze Age through Iron Age II (900–586 BCE).[44] He described the population of the region as pastoral nomads, herders of sheep and goats, who were also undergoing a change in lifestyle to farming. The transformation in lifestyle was gradual and uneven because it was dependent on the strength and stability of the agriculturally oriented economies in the lowlands tied to the

villages and city-states. Finkelstein and Silberman describe the relationship in the following manner: “[T]he two components of Middle Eastern society—farmers and pastoral nomads—have always maintained an interdependent economic relationship, even if there was sometimes tension between the two groups. Nomads need the marketplace of settled villages in order to obtain grain and other agricultural products, while farmers are dependent on the nomads for a regular supply of meat, dairy products, and hides.”[45]

They add that the relationship was unequal, since farmers could be self-sufficient, but nomads could not, “they needed grain to supplement and balance their high-fat diet of meat and milk” (p. 118). Thus, the highlands settlements must be studied within the larger regional setting of the Canaanite city-states, even though they represent a distinct social system.

The nature of the highlands settlements changed, depending on the strength of the agricultural economy of the villages and city-states. When there was social and political stability and active trade among city-states and larger nations, the highlands settlements grew and flourished. But when the political and economic systems of the city-states collapsed, the highlanders had to adapt by producing their own grain and shifting their focus away from herding. This interdependency between highlands villages and city-states in the lowlands produced patterns or rhythms of lifestyle change within the highlands communities that was evident in the archaeological remains. Finkelstein identified three such cycles of change in the highlands region: (1) The Early Bronze (ca. 3150–2100 BCE) represents the first cycle of change. In this period, the population of the highlands grew to 100 settlements, which were then abandoned in the years 2200–2100 BCE; (2) The Middle Bronze (ca. 2100–1500 BCE) represents the second cycle of change. In this period, the population of the highlands grew to 220 settlements before there was a decline to twenty five sites in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1150 BCE). (3) The Iron I (1150–900 BCE) is the third cycle of change. In this period, the population grew to 250 settlements; then, rather than decreasing as the previous two cycle, the population increased further to over 500 sites by the eighth century BCE.[46] The emergence of Israel was tied to the third wave of increased settlement activity, when economic activity flourished during the period of strong Egyptian control, which reached its zenith with Rameses III in the mid-twelfth century.

The “Israel” in the Merenptah Stele is a reference to the indigenous pastoral nomads of the highlands; it indicates the growth of the highlands settlements during this time and their emergence into a defined group.[47] The Egyptian

control over the Canaanites collapsed shortly after the reign of Rameses III (1186–1155 BCE), causing the surplus agricultural economy of the villages and city-states to cease, which in turn, forced the pastoral nomads in the highlands to concentrate on agriculture, rather than herding. This cycle had occurred two previous times in the history of the region. But, unlike the previous Early and Middle Bronze Age cycles, when the highlands settlements were reduced during the time of social collapse, the settlements continued to grow in the Iron I Age, even while transitioning to the more agricultural lifestyle. This social process represents the development of the highlands people of "Israel" into what would eventually evolve into more complex social systems with monarchs.[48]

The archaeological research on the highlands has led to a hypothesis about the origin of Israel that departs in nearly every way from the account of the Exodus-conquest in the Pentateuch. The biblical account identifies Israel as outsiders who *caused* the social disruption of the Canaanite city-states through conquest, infiltration, or social revolution. The archaeological research on the highlands is just the reverse: it states that the emergence of Israel in the highland is the *result* of the collapse of the city-states along the coast and in the lowlands of Canaan.

The research of Finkelstein has become the framework for continuing work on the emergence and identification of Israel in Canaan, even though there is dispute over the details of interpretation. Shlomo Bunimovitz, for example, agreed with the rhythm of increased development and decline in the highlands in conjunction with the ebb and flow of the city-states described by Finkelstein, but he questioned the departure of this rhythm in the last cycle: Why did the highlands settlements expand in the Iron I Age, as compared to the decline in the previous two cycles? He suggests that the emergence of Israel in the highlands in the Iron I Age required further social and political explanation to account for the change in pattern.[49]

William G. Dever argued that the presence of Israel in the highlands region took place after they left a sedentary life in villages and city-states; thus he sees the cultural development of Israel in the highlands as a transition from a previous life in the lowlands, as compared to Finkelstein, who argued against

any cultural exchange between lowlands cities and the highlands pastoral nomads. The success of Israel in the highlands was the result of new technology, according to Dever, such as the hewing of water cisterns and the terracing of mountainsides for agriculture,[50] which Finkelstein rejects. Robert Coote builds on the research of Dever, adding a more political emphasis to the meaning of tribal Israel in the interpretation of the Merenptah Stele. The Stele is a victory hymn and the reference to Israel indicates a "military force to be reckoned with," perhaps related to migrant fringe groups (*Shasu*) who were considered a political force when the Merenptah Stele was written.[51]

Sidebar 11.13 Shasu

Shasu may mean "those who move on foot"; it is the word Egyptians used to describe Semitic-speaking nomads in the Levant region in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.

The debate over long-term environmental and short-term political reasons for the rise of Israel in the highlands and the meaning of the reference to "Israel" in the Merenptah Stele is ongoing. In whatever direction the research evolves, the account of the Exodus-conquest in the Pentateuch no longer plays a central role in the historical study of the origin and development of Israel in the land of Canaan. Finkelstein emphasizes the indigenous nature of "Israel" in the Merenptah Stele. Dever[52] and Coote[53] leave room for the possibility that slaves from Egypt may have participated in some way in the formation of Israel in the land. But even in the latter cases, the role of outside Egyptian slaves would be marginal to the historical study of the origin and development of Israel as indigenous to the land of Canaan. This was the conclusion of Finkelstein, to which. Dever agrees: "[W]ith new models of indigenous Canaanite origins for early Israel, there is neither place nor need for an exodus from Egypt."[54] Coote extended the conclusion of Dever to the conquest: "It is now clear that there was

no conquest of highland Palestine by outside invaders as told in the Bible, no infiltration of disparate nomads into the Palestine hills . . . and no peasant revolution."[55]

11.3 Summary

The relationship of the Pentateuch and history has undergone significant change with the rise of historical criticism. The overview of research on the patriarchal and the Mosaic ages has underscored the increasing separation between the historical origin of Ancient Israel and the Pentateuchal version of events. The dichotomy between the literary version and the archaeological reconstruction of the origin of Israel has led to the distinction in contemporary research between "biblical" and "historical" Israel. Philip R. Davies has argued that the "Israel" of the Pentateuch must be defined as a separate area of study from the historical reconstruction of ancient Israel.[56] He added that the separation would free the two fields of research from the constraints of the other by introducing methodological clarity. The distinction advocated by Davies is not really new; it has always been the goal of the historical-critical study of the Pentateuch, voiced originally by Spinoza when he stated that the aim of biblical interpretation is to uncover "a trustworthy history of the sacred writings."[57] What Spinoza had in mind was the identification of the anonymous authors of the Pentateuch, which would provide a window into the language, social setting, religious outlook, and political aims of the writers. What this chapter has summarized is that the identification of anonymous authors, who are writing in the periods of the monarchy, exile, and post-exile, is not only a challenge to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; it has also called into question the history of the narrated events.

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12

Pentateuch and Theology

The Pentateuch is a religious document. References to the Torah of Moses at the outset of the Prophets and the Writings underscore that the formation of the biblical canon presupposes the Pentateuch as the source of divine revelation, with the power to provide health, wisdom, and success in life. The book of Joshua begins with the divine advice to the hero: “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful” (Josh 1:7–8). The psalmist echoes the same belief in the power of Torah: “Happy are those [that take delight] in the law of Yahweh, and on his law they meditate day and night” (Ps 1:2).

Post-biblical Jewish and Christian traditions grow out of the quest for divine insight and guidance that Yahweh urged upon Joshua (Josh 1:7–8) and that the psalmist commended to all humans: The Rabbis state that God dictated the entire Torah to Moses (Gittin 60a) and that it continues to provide instruction to Jews (b. Meg. 26b–27a). The New Testament also affirms the continuing authority of the Torah of Moses for Christians. Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17–18). The Rabbinic and New Testament teachings not only reinforce the message of Joshua 1:7–8 and Psalms 1:2, they underscore further that the religious authority of the Pentateuch is grounded in Mosaic authorship. Thus, the rejection of Mosaic authorship in the modern era (traced in chs. 2–4) created a series of challenges to the religious meaning of the

Pentateuch. This chapter will highlight a range of Christian and Jewish theological interpretations of the Pentateuch that emerged with the rise of historical criticism and the rejection of Mosaic authorship.

12.1 Christian Theologies of the Pentateuch

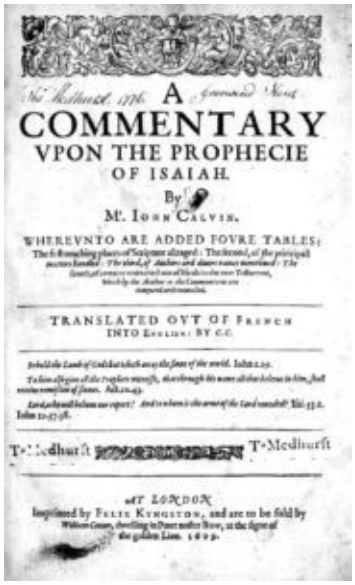
The theological interpretation of the Pentateuch in the modern era occurs within the discipline of biblical theology, whose scope of study is often expanded from the Pentateuch to the entire Old and New Testaments.[1] The discipline of biblical theology emerged within Protestantism in conjunction with the rise of historical criticism; it is a distinctively Christian undertaking in its origin and throughout most of its development.[2] Ludwig Baumgarten-Crusius illustrates the close relationship between history and theology in the emerging Protestant critical study of the Pentateuch: "The idea and the execution of biblical theology are joined essentially with historical interpretation, and each of them has developed in recent times in relation to each other."[3] The quotation indicates a separation between the literary-historical and the theological study of the Pentateuch that did not exist in the same way in the pre-critical period, when the aim of interpretation was to discern the one theological message of the Pentateuch that Moses transmitted under divine inspiration.

The reason for the separation between history and theology in the modern era was the emergence of historical-criticism, which identified many anonymous authors with differing theological perspectives in the long history of the composition of the Pentateuch. The aim of biblical theology was to counterbalance the disintegrating effects of historical-criticism by discerning the unity of the Pentateuch or the central message of the diverse authors. The successful exercise of biblical theology was intended to provide the foundation for Christian theology; it identified core themes at deep levels within the Pentateuch that related to the New Testament and also informed the central propositions of Christian theology. But the identification of multiple authors with distinct points of view, along with the complex and even arabesque literary character of the Pentateuch, did not conform well to the carefully constructed categories of Christian theology. As a result, the discipline of biblical theology underwent constant change as interpreters searched for the center or the organizing religious significance of the Pentateuch. This section will trace the

tension between the rise of the historical-critical study of the Pentateuch and Christian biblical theology in three stages: (1) Literal Interpretation of the Mosaic Pentateuch in Early Protestantism; (2) Multiple Authors and the Identification of the Center of the Pentateuch; and (3) Pentateuch as Canonical Literature and Theological Pluralism.

The Literal Interpretation of the Mosaic Pentateuch in Early Protestantism: John Calvin

The literary problem of the Pentateuch as a resource for Christian theology is evident already at the outset of Protestantism before the emergence of historical criticism and the rejection of Mosaic authorship. John Calvin illustrates the tension and the potential relationship between the Pentateuch and Christian theology in the two-volume *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* and the four-volume *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of A Harmony*.



A
COMMENTARY
VPON THE PROPHECIE
OF ISAIAH.
By
M. Iohn Calvin.
WHEREVNTO ARE ADDED FOVRE TABLES:
TRANSLATED OVT OF French
INTO English: BY C.C.
T. Medhurst
T. Medhurst
AT LONDON
Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, and are to be sold by
the golden Lion. 1609.

Figure 12.1 The title page from Calvin's Commentary on Isaiah published in 1609 by Felix Kyngston.

The exegetical perspective of Calvin, according to David L. Puckett, was part of the "sixteenth-century reorientation in biblical studies—one that was serious about historical interpretation."[4] This meant that Calvin rejected the past tradition of Christian Old Testament interpretation, which employed proof-

texting, forced historical interpretation and allegorizing at the expense of the literal meaning.

Sidebar 12.1 Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical interpretation assumes the text of the Pentateuch has levels of meaning: (1) the literal meaning of events in a story; (2) the anagogical discerns the future meaning of the text; (3) the typological relates the Pentateuch to the New Testament life of Christ; and (4) the tropological explores the moral significance for the present time of the reader.

Over against this, Calvin emphasized a strong historical orientation that sought the literal or plain sense meaning of the Pentateuch, governed by careful study of Hebrew and literary structure, often informed by Jewish commentaries. Calvin's emphasis on history, coupled with the focus on the literal sense of the text, meant that the aim of exegesis was to determine the meaning for "the original writer's contemporaries" before explaining how it "applies to the person of the sixteenth century."[5] In the case of the Pentateuch, the first task was to discern the instruction of Moses for the Israelite people; only then could Calvin explore the theological meaning for the sixteenth-century Christian church.

Calvin adhered to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He praised Moses for guiding the reader of Genesis away from foolish speculation on the essence of God's nature to a clear and plain understanding of the power of God in creation.[6] The same was true for Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. What Moses dictated in these books "was excellent in itself, and perfectly adapted for the instruction of the people."[7] The "perfect adaptation" included a combination of historical narrative and doctrine or laws. Both forms provided important resources for revelation. But what may have been clear

instruction for the audience of Moses was less so to the sixteenth-century Christian church, according to Calvin. The reason was that the present arrangement of the history and the doctrine did not conform well to Christian theology. Moses did not relate "the history in the continuous form" and he delivered "the doctrine unconnectedly, as opportunity occurred." As a consequence, the reader in the sixteenth century could easily be led "astray" because of the lack of a "regular plan."[8]

Calvin did not use the term "biblical theology" in his commentaries on the Pentateuch. It would not appear for another two hundred years until Johann P. Gabler (1753–1826) delivered a lecture as his inaugural address at the University of Altdorf, entitled "An Oration on the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each." But Calvin's commentaries begin to model what would become the discipline of biblical theology in later Protestant theological interpretation of the Pentateuch. Calvin refashioned the unruly structure of the Pentateuch into a compendium "to assist unpractised readers, so that they might more easily, more commodi-ously, and more profitably acquaint themselves with the writings of Moses."[9] To this end, Calvin had to discern the central meaning of the Pentateuch as Moses wrote it, in order to reorganize the literature into a harmony that would clarify the intention of Moses for the sixteenth-century Christian church.

The *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* illustrates Calvin's theological interpretation of the Pentateuch. Calvin separated the literature of the Pentateuch into history and doctrine; history was the narrative and doctrine the laws. Calvin also reorganized and harmonized Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy into four topical sections that departed altogether from the structure of the Pentateuchal books. The chart identifies the organization of history and doctrine (law), the content of the four sections, and the pages that Calvin devoted to each section.

Table 12.1 Calvin's *Harmony*

History	Law (Doctrine)	History	Song of Moses
Exodus and Revelation at	Decalogue and Related Laws	Building of Tabernacle and	Song of Moses and Transition

Sinai		Wilderness Journey	of Mosaic Leadership
Vol. 1, 19–338	Vol. 1, 338–502 Vol. 2, 1–472 Vol. 3 5–289	Vol. 3, 298–463 Vol. 4, 5–333	Vol. 4, 334–409

The history sections of the Pentateuch have two applications for theology: they provide insight into the boundless mercy of God, which instills confidence; they also create awareness of the terrible punishments of God, which creates awe and reverence. Calvin followed the storyline of Exodus and Numbers to explore the two-sided nature of God, weaving in the parallel accounts from Deuteronomy to harmonize the different versions. Thus, for example, he incorporated the account of the selection of judges in Deuteronomy 1:9–18 in the commentary on Exodus 18 and the story of the golden calf in Deuteronomy 9:7–29; 10:1–5, 10–11 within the interpretation of Exodus 32.

The focus of Calvin's commentary is on the doctrine or law in the Pentateuch; it takes up the majority of the four-volume *Harmony* of Exodus–Deuteronomy, and thus, functions as the theological center. Calvin stated at the outset that the legal doctrine of the Pentateuch instructed the church in true piety—consisting of faith and prayer, as well as in the fear and worship of God and in the rules that make up a just and holy life.[10] In order to clarify the power of the law as doctrine, Calvin rearranged all the legal material in the Pentateuch under the rubrics of the Decalogue, which he separated between the Preface to the Law (Exod 20:1–2) and the Law itself (Exod 20:3–17). Sections on the Sum, Use, and Sanctions of the Law follow, as illustrated in the chart:

Table 12.2 Legal Material in the Pentateuch in Calvin's *Harmony*

Preface to the Law	**Law**	**Sum of the Law**	**Use of the Law**	**Sanctions of the Law**
Exod 20:1–2	Exod 20:3–17	Love God above all; neighbor as self	Rule of living well and righteously	Promises and Threats
Vol. 1, 338–417	Vol. 1, 417–502 Vol. 2, 1–472 Vol. 3, 5–189	Vol. 3, 190–6	Vol. 3, 196–201	Vol. 3, 201–89

Each of the five sections begins with the interpretation of Exodus 20 before branching out to include a wide range of legal material that supplements or clarifies the particular law of the Decalogue under study. The Preface (Exod 20:1–2; Deut 5:1–6) is not a law, according to Calvin, but it provides an example of the methodology in the *Harmony*. The Preface establishes the dignity of Yahweh as the lawgiver: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Once the primary texts (Exod 20:1–2; Deut 5:1–6) were interpreted, Calvin included commentary on additional material from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which clarified further the dignity of Yahweh as the lawgiver:

Table 12.3 Preface to the Law: Exod 20:1–2; Deut 5:1–6

Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
23:20–31	19:36–37 20:8 22:31–33	15:37–41—a repetition of Deut 6:6–9; 9:18–20 and Exod 23:13	4:20; 4:1–2; 5:32–33; 13:18; 4:4–14; 4:32–40; 7:6–7; 10:14–17; 27:9–10; 26:16–19; 6:20–25; 27:1–4, 8; 31:10–13; 6:10–12; 9:1–6; 9:21–22; 11:1–7; 8:1–9; 24:2–9; 8:7–10; 8:11–18; 29:29; 30:11–14; 1:1–5; 4:44–49; 29:1

The same process of interpretation continues with each of the laws in Exodus 20:3–17; Deuteronomy 5:7–21, until all the cultic, political, individual, and communal laws in Exodus–Deuteronomy are reorganized within the structure of the Decalogue. Through this method of reorganization, Calvin sought to illustrate the hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets Scripture when guided by the rule of faith.[11] The rule of faith is the gospel contained in the New Testament. Calvin is, after all, constructing Christian biblical theology in the interpretation of the Pentateuch, in which righteousness by faith in Christ is at the heart of religion. But Calvin rejected the sharp dichotomy between Law and Gospel that was prominent in early Protestantism, in which the instruction of Moses was rejected altogether. Over against this, Calvin concluded that "Christ and Moses perfectly accord in the substance of their doctrine," once the righteousness of faith in Christ is secured as the starting point of theology.[12] With this hermeneutical perspective, the instruction of Moses becomes crucial for Christians. The literal interpretation of law provided a mirror that reflects the power of Christ in the New Testament, especially the ceremonial and sacrificial

laws that did not continue in Christian practice, such as Passover and the Day of Atonement, since these laws explain the role and power of Christ in the life of the church. At the same time, the literal interpretation of the law also provided the "rule of living well and righteously" for sixteenth-century Christians.

Sidebar 12.2 Law and Gospel

The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* written by Philip Melanchthon (1531) provides an early Protestant formulation of the relationship between Law and Gospel [promises]: "All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal. Moreover, in this discussion, by Law we designate the Ten Commandments, wherever they are read in the Scriptures. Of the ceremonies and judicial laws of Moses we say nothing at present" (Article IV.5).

Historical Criticism, Multiple Authors, and the Identification of the Theological Center of the Pentateuch

The problems of the literary organization and the theological meaning of the Pentateuch were complicated with the rise of historical criticism. Calvin had identified the legal portions of the Pentateuch with Christian doctrine. Thus, the problem for Calvin was to reorganize the literature so that the theology of the Pentateuch corresponded more clearly with the structure of Christian theology and ethics. Historical criticism of the Pentateuch rejected the identification of biblical theology with any form of Christian dogmatic theology. Johann Gabler severed any relationship between the two in his 1787 lecture (see above, p. 594), providing a paradigm that continues to the present time. He argued that biblical theology was historical in focus; it sought to interpret the message of sacred books at the time of their composition. Dogmatic theology, on the contrary, was didactic in focus; it clarified how universal truths move through time and change. Many subsequent interpreters disagreed with the specific content of Gabler's contrast, while adhering to his general distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology.

The identification of multiple anonymous authors in the com-position of the Pentateuch signaled a further contrast to Calvin's *Harmony*. It meant that the disunity of the Pentateuch was more than the result of Moses's literary style requiring only rearrangement as Calvin thought; it was caused, rather, by the combination of distinct compositions, each with a different author developing unique themes or theologies. Thus, what had been a problem of literary organization to discern the theological intention of Moses became far more complicated, since historical critics were now forced to clarify the overall central theological teaching of the Pentateuch among multiple, overlaying compositions by unknown authors.

New hermeneutical principles were necessary to discern the theological center of the multilayered Pentateuch. Three related presuppositions guided interpretation; each reflecting emerging Protestant views of religion:

1. The essence of ancient Israelite religion was charismatic in nature, representing the immediate encounter between the divine and humans, exemplified in prophets. Charismatic religious experience was potentially universal in scope.

Sidebar 12.3 Charismatic Religion

The Greek word *charisma* means "gift"; it is used to describe a direct experience of divine grace or favor. Charismatic religious experience, according to Max Weber, accentuates the "quality of an individual personality," which sets a person apart as being "endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities . . . regarded as of divine origin" ("The Nature of Charismatic Authority and Its Routininzation").

2. The earliest literature of the Pentateuch reflected the power of charismatic religion; it provided the subject matter for the theology of the Pentateuch. The history of composition represented a movement away from the free form of charismatic religion, until it eventually gives way to more externally controlled and ritualized practice, monitored by law. The move toward a more legally controlled form of religion limited its universal significance.

3. The canon was unimportant or even an obstacle to theological interpretation. It obscured the central theological significance of the Pentateuch both in literary design, with the mechanical combination of conflicting religious texts, and in religious outlook, with the movement away from charisma to externalized ritual and law in the later compositions and in the formation of the canon.

These generally held presuppositions encouraged modern inter-preters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to emphasize more charismatically oriented traditions—judged to be the oldest material whether in oral form or written

sources—as representing the theological core of the Pentateuch. The interpretations of W. M. L. de Wette, G. von Rad, and W. Eichrodt illustrate distinct theologies of the Pentateuch within the framework of the presuppositions outlined above.

Developmental View of Israelite Religion in the Pentateuch: W. M. L. de Wette

W. M. L. de Wette illustrates the hermeneutical principles in the emerging Protestant theology of the Pentateuch, even before the formation of the documentary hypothesis, which identified the Priestly source as a post-exilic composition. The summary of the history of composition in chapter 2 clarified the way in which de Wette related the composition of the Pentateuch with the formation of Israelite religion and cultic practice, as an historical process from less structured to more controlled forms of worship. For de Wette, the literary process progressed from the Elohist and Yahwist documents, composed in the monarchy period, to the book of Deuteronomy, written in the late monarchy and exilic periods. An important criterion for arranging the history of composition was the emphasis on controlled worship at a single sanctuary in Deuteronomy, which was absent in the Elohist and Yahwist documents.

De Wette superimposed a theological interpretation on the literary formation of the Pentateuch. The earliest compositions reflected the most dynamic form of religion, which he characterized as Hebraism. The Elohist document especially represented the Hebraic form of religion; it conveyed a “theocratic spirit,” in which religious experience was pure, simple, and even childlike in the way that it attributed all events to the deity, without legal structures or complex philosophical systems.[13] The Yahwist source was similar in outlook. De Wette characterized the mythological worldview of these early narratives as representing “theocratic-religious pragmatism,” in which all events are attributed to God and the divine influence is immediately apparent in history through miracles and revelation. This was especially evident in Genesis; it required the modern interpreter to penetrate the spirit of the text in order to discern its

theological meaning, rather than treat the book as though it were philosophical literature. Interpretation as a form of intuition achieved the goal of biblical theology to understand the inner nature of the Hebraic human spirit. In this way, the identification of the Elohist and Yahwist sources provided the central theological meaning of the Pentateuch; they represented a pure religion, which remained fundamental to all other forms of Christian dogmatic theology.[14]

The immediacy of religious experience in Genesis faded in Deuteronomy, because the dynamic form of mythological history in the Elohist and the Yahwist became more remote,[15] while the post-exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah left the world of "theocratic-religious pragmatism" altogether to become pure historical writing.[16] De Wette judged this development negatively; it represented the loss or the decay of the vigorous spirit of Hebraism in the early literature. The reason was the exile, which forced the dynamic Hebraic religion to become mixed with the metaphysical teachings of Babylon and Persia. In the process, the spiritual universalism of Hebraism was transformed into the legal particularism of Judaism, as evidenced in post-exilic biblical books (e.g., Chronicles), apocryphal literature (e.g., Maccabees); Josephus, Philo, and pseudepigraphy (e.g., Sibylline oracles); and the Talmud.[17] The prophetic and spiritual form of Hebraism was reborn, however, in the mission of Jesus, which linked the earliest literature in the Pentateuch with the New Testament.[18]

The hermeneutical principles and theology of de Wette were reinforced in the formation of the documentary hypothesis. The separation of the Elohist document of de Wette into the sources E and P allowed Wellhausen to date the legal and ritual material in the Priestly source to the post-exilic period. What emerged was an even more pronounced outline of the development of Israelite religion according to Wellhausen from the charismatic, law-free form in J and E to the growing dominance of law in D, and finally, in P. The result, according to Wellhasuen, was that the revelation in the J and E sources ceased being a living reality in the life experience of Israel and became, instead, dogma from the past in the P source.[19] Although Wellhausen never wrote a fully developed history of the religion of Israel or a theology of the Pentateuch, the presuppositions

embedded in the theological reading of the documentary hypothesis influenced subsequent Christian research on biblical theology.[20] As a result, the Christian theological interpretation of the Pentateuch tended to emphasize the evolution of the literature from its allegedly law-free origin to the dominance of law in the later writings, with the center or core theological message of the Pentateuch located in the earlier law-free literature.

Salvation History in the Pentateuch: Gerhard von Rad

Gerhard von Rad rejected the developmental theology of the Pentateuch in the research of de Wette and Wellhausen, even though he shared many of the presuppositions of their work. He praised the results of historical criticism; it provided valuable insight into the diverse and independent traditions embedded in the Pentateuch.[21] But historical criticism could not be the basis for the theology of the Pentateuch. The best it could do was to provide a critical history of Israelite religion. Von Rad criticized the work of Wellhausen as too Hegelian in perspective; it constructed a history of ideas from the perspective of spiritual evolution. The result was a developmental view of religion in which the spirit was freed from the bonds of nature and the corporate to become more moral—"a history of piety and of the contents of consciousness." Von Rad countered: "There was no such thing as a spiritual religion of Israel." Such a conception is simply a "reflexion of the religion of modern Protestant Europe" and does not represent in the slightest a theology of the Pentateuch.[22]

The subject matter of a theology of the Pentateuch should be Israel's own explicit assertions about Yahweh, not the reconstruction of its history or its history of religion.

The central content of Israel's confession about Yahweh is clarified in the organization of the independent traditions into the account of salvation history, in which "all Israel" is identified in the accounts of the ancestors, Exodus, wilderness, Sinai, and land.[23] Thus, for von Rad, it is the *structure* of the Pentateuch as salvation history that provides the clue to its theological unity, as opposed to a single organizing theme or a view of the history of Israelite

religion. This organization is the key to the inner unity of the Pentateuch for biblical theology. Von Rad cautioned contemporary biblical theologians to resist creating links between the separate traditions that do not exist in the text in a vain effort to systematize the structure of the Pentateuch into a more abstract thematic unity.[24]

The theology of the Pentateuch as salvation history emerged from the old cultic credos (such as Deut 26:5–10), where the once independent revelatory acts of Yahweh for Israel were simply placed "alongside one another without differentiation," thus shaping the content of faith.[25] The pre-literary merging of the independent themes (or acts of revelation) into the credo was the "productive stage in the history and theology of the Pentateuch," since it represented the original formation of salvation history.[26] The arrangement of the themes is anything but chance; it is the "outcome of a strong tendency towards unification which dominates the whole process of the growth of a work like the Hexateuch."

The intended unity of salvation history was created through the shared cultic experience of Israel, which was the setting for the ancient credos. For this reason, the modern biblical theologian must recognize that Israel's faith statements about Yahweh in salvation history do not represent the history of Israel; they are rather kerygmatic confessions about "the revelation in word and deed of Yahweh in history."[27]

Sidebar 12.4 Kerygma

The Greek word *kerygma* means "proclamation." In New Testament studies, the term is used to describe the entire message of Jesus, thus signifying the core of his teaching. The description of the ancient confessions as kerygma means that they constitute the core message of Ancient Israel that now forms the center of the Pentateuch.

This insight reinforced von Rad's position that the theology of the

Pentateuch cannot be based on the reconstructed history of Ancient Israel, or even the history of Israelite religion; it must remain focused on the legendary cultic schema, since this represents Israel's own explicit assertions about Yahweh's acts of revelation. "The Hexateuch," according to von Rad, "shows us a picture of the saving history that is drawn up by faith and is accordingly confessional in character."[28]

Once salvation history is fashioned in the old cultic credo, the theology of the Pentateuch/Hexateuch unfolded in Israel's quest to interpret the meaning of Yahweh's acts of revelation throughout its history. The retelling of salvation history in new contexts required charisma; it was the "absolutely constitutive factor in Yahwism."[29] The Yahwist is an especially important point in the charismatic reinterpretation of salvation history. During the creative and intellectual rise of the monarchy, the Yahwist transformed salvation history from the oral credos into a more complex theology of history, juxtaposing the revelation of law (Sinai) and the narrative of redemption (historical credo), which created a tension that forms the core of the Hexateuch. The Yahwist also broadened the scope of salvation history beyond the cult to contemplate the hiddenness of God in daily life, focusing especially on the internal dynamic of religion in the human heart. In the process, the Yahwist transformed the religion of Ancient Israel to include both the sacred and the secular, making the nation of Israel the object of reflection and large-scale interrogation.[30]

The transformation of salvation history continued through the Elohist source and into the book of Deuteronomy, where the revelation of law became the dynamic expression of the divine will, giving rise to the genres of preaching and parenesis. Von Rad argued that the law in Deuteronomy was charismatic, not legalistic; it represented the same revelation of Yahweh as the credos, but the focus shifts from cultic revelation to the revelation of the divine will made known through law and aimed at the human heart, with the goal of creating religious piety.[31]

The Priestly source also represented a dynamic reinterpretation of salvation history that has not been fully appreciated, according to von Rad, in the one-

sided attention to the inward and the spiritual in past Old Testament theology.[32] The Priestly source explores the experience of the holy, not as spirit, but as a "primeval religious datum" made manifest in material holiness, in objects and in sacred places. The charismatic quality of material holiness is the zeal of Yahweh; it stands behind ritual, and thus, cannot be dissociated from "even the most insignificant procedure in the cult." "For it is in the cult first and foremost and not in direct personal relationship with God that Israel encounters Jahweh's zeal, this most personal of all the manifestations of his being."[33]

Von Rad extended the theology of the Pentateuch into Christian tradition through the same process of reinterpretation. New Testament writers followed the same pattern of the Yahwist, the author of Deuteronomy, and the author of the Priestly source. They refashioned salvation history in a similar "structural analogy," only this time through the lens of the mission of Jesus, thus relating the theology of the Pentateuch to Christian tradition.[34]

In advocating for the dynamic quality of the law in Deuteronomy and for the charismatic power of ritual in the Priestly, von Rad sought to break with the developmental view of religion that had dominated past Christian theology of the Pentateuch. The flexibility of salvation history with its combination of law and narrative provided a perspective that was more open to the canonical structure of the Pentateuch and could incorporate a wide range of religious practice as it moved through time.

Von Rad underscored the broad range of salvation history and the challenge that its flexibility presented to past theologies of the Pentateuch in his reflection on the Priestly source:

> Our own theological outlook finds it all too easy to be suspicious of this ritual side of Jahwism, as unspiritual and external. But how can it be made out that the people who submitted to purificatory rites were not touching the heart of the matter? As we said, the unclean is the most basic form of Israel's encounter with what was displeasing to Jahweh. Of course it is hard for us today to size up the experiential content of such observances.[35]

The quotation underscores von Rad's acknowledgement that his own religious experience was limited; it also accentuated his desire to expand the theology of

the Pentateuch on the basis of Israel's own explicit assertions about Yahweh, in which law and cultic ritual played a prominent role.

But in the final analysis von Rad's theology of salvation history continued the core hermeneutical presuppositions of past Protestant biblical theologies of the Pentateuch. "The charismatic [remained] an absolutely constitutive factor in Jahwism," as it was for de Wette.[36] Von Rad also agreed with the larger tradition of Protestant biblical theology, which judged the strongest or purest form of charisma to be in the earliest form of the religion. For von Rad, this was the pre-literary stage of Yahwism; it represented the most "productive stage in the history of the Pentateuch when the individual traditions were brought together."[37] Finally, von Rad also adhered to a developmental view of Israelite religion as a decline in the power of charisma. "Where [charisma] was absent, crisis supervened, and when it finally disappeared the end of ancient Jahwism had been sealed, and the day of scribal religion had dawned."[38] The result was a distinction between Israel and Judaism in the theology of von Rad that is reminiscent of de Wette's contrast between Hebraism and Judaism—distinctions that are not based on the actual study of Rabbinic Judaism.

The key indicator for von Rad in tracing the decline of charismatic Yahwism was the law. When the law functioned as the channel for revealing the divine will in a historical moment—as in the book of Deuteronomy—it retained charismatic power and thus advanced salvation history in a way that potentially had universal significance. But when the law became "an absolute entity, unconditionally valid irrespective of time or historical situation in post-exilic Judaism, "the saving history necessarily ceased moving on." "This Israel," according to von Rad, "no longer had a history, at least a history with Jahweh." In living out the new legal religion "beyond history," Judaism lost its universal significance and became, instead, a religion that was particular in focus, "severed once for all from the solidarity with the rest of the peoples."[39]

Covenant in the Pentateuch: Walter Eichrodt



Figure 12.2 Walter Eichrodt.

Walter Eichrodt (1890–1978) was born in Gernsbach, Baden Germany. He studied theology at Bethel and Griefswald; and he received his doctorate at Heidelberg (1915), writing on the role of the Priestly source in the book of Genesis (*Der Priesterschrift in der Genesis*). Eichrodt began his teaching career in Erlangen (1918–1922), before taking a position at Basel, where he taught for the remainder of his career (1922–1960). Eichrodt's lifelong interest was in biblical theology; he wrote the first edition of *Old Testament Theology* in 1933–35 and he continued to refine the project through six editions (19596). Thus, even though Eichrodt's work preceded von Rad's biblical theology by decades, he eventually incorporated a critique of the salvation history theology of the Pentateuch in the later editions of the *Old Testament Theology*, which will provide the starting point for summarizing his work.

Eichrodt agreed with the aim of von Rad to separate biblical theology from Christian dogmatic theology. He wrote in the Preface to the sixth edition of *Old Testament Theology* that the emphasis on salvation history as the focus for a theology of the Pentateuch was "an understandable aversion from the misuse of the Old Testament in the construction of dogmatic systems of doctrine" (p. 14). But he disagreed with the approach for a number of reasons:

1. Salvation history lacked historical grounding. The gap between history and the Pentateuch in salvation history reduced the tradition to aesthetic language, so that the kerygmatic emphasis became detached from history. Eichrodt questioned whether religious testimony separated from historical reality could be regarded as valid evidence of a historical revelation. The Pentateuch, after all, was not simply a fairy tale, but the interpretation of real events inspired by the mysterious encounter with God, the creator, who controlled history.
2. Salvation history did not provide a coherent or unified interpretation of the Pentateuch. The focus on the structure of salvation history without relating the different themes of the Pentateuch resulted in separate acts of revelation with distinct confessions; such an approach provided no focal point or organic unity to the tradition. Eichrodt added that relating the basic creeds of the Pentateuch was not a retreat to dogmatic theology, since the traditional themes were themselves related.
3. Salvation history provided a weak connection to the New Testament through a form of typology that was dependent on the creativity and freedom of the reader, rather than on a theology of fulfillment grounded in real historical development that culminated in the Christ-event.[40]

Eichrodt argued that the theology of the Pentateuch must penetrate more deeply into the literature than the identification of the separate themes in salvation history; it should uncover the inner coherence by focusing on a central theme that captures the primary historical experience of ancient Israel. The methodology should be both comparative and grounded in the New Testament; the unique character of the religion of Israel only comes into focus when contrasted to the many other religious systems in the Ancient Near East, while the charismatic quality of the religion reached its clearest expression in the Christ-event, which allowed the interpreter to uncover the full significance of the Pentateuch.[41]

The “definitive expression” of the relationship between Israel and God in the Pentateuch was the covenant, according to Eichrodt. Covenant was established at

the outset of Ancient Israelite religion through the work of Moses, who functioned as a prophet[42]; it was anchored in the historical experience of Israel in the wilderness, and thus, testified to "the factual nature of the divine revelation."[43] Covenant explored the innermost nature of ancient Yahwism as a divine power that invaded and transformed the people of Israel, whose resulting unique personality was evident from comparison to other religions.[44] The study of covenant could not be limited to the occurrence of the word in the Pentateuch, it should explore the full range of Israel's dynamic bilateral relationship with Yahweh. Eichrodt preferred to speak of the "concept of covenant" in developing the theology of the Pentateuch, which followed the central hermeneutical principles that governed many other Protestant works on biblical theology.

The essence of ancient Israel's experience of covenant was charismatic in nature, since it represented the immediate encounter between the divine and humans. Covenant was grounded in the earliest revelation of the divine will at Sinai, where it was given expression in the Decalogue: "Only a Mosaic law-giving can explain the remarkable force and persistence of the true personality of Israel."[45] The original revelation of law was not a form of legalism, but a charismatic event: "At the very beginning of Israelite religion we find the charisma, the special individual endowment of a person; and to such an extent is the whole structure based on it, that without [charisma], [covenant] would be inconceivable."[46]

The charismatic nature of covenant required the interpreter to penetrate behind the laws of the Decalogue to the inward transformation of the Israelite people, made evident in the "deep feeling of righteousness" emerging from the revelation. Eichrodt characterized the active revelation of God into the life of Ancient Israel as the "interior overmastering of the human spirit by God's personal invasion."[47] With its origin in revelation and the inner-transformation of feeling, covenant was essentially a personal and spiritual reality with universal significance: "The decisive requirement for admission is not natural kinship but readiness to submit oneself to the will of the divine Lord of the Covenant and to vow oneself to this particular God."[48]

Eichrodt followed the developmental view of Israelite religion that dominated Protestant theology, as a movement away from the universal power of charisma to a more externally controlled religion, monitored by law and particular in focus. Eichrodt argued that the concept of covenant was originally a "living force in community," which made demands on Israel and also oriented the people to the future with promises. Israelite history was therefore modeled on a "deep humanitarian spirituality," which waxed and waned until reaching fulfillment in the mission of Jesus.[49] The Sinai revelation was the core event of the Mosaic covenant; the revelation was transformative, shaping Israel's "interior attitude to life and history."[50] The J and E sources represented a revival of the Mosaic covenant during the monarchy period with their emphasis on the ancestors in Genesis. The "all Israelite" focus of patriarchal revival avoided the development of a "narrow-minded particularism" within the Mosaic covenant.[51]

The later writing of Deuteronomy (D) and the Priestly (P) source invigorated the tradition further, according to Eichrodt, by safeguarding against the possibility of interpreting the election of the ancestors in the J and E sources so rigidly that the belief in election would become "legalistic formulas and lifeless dogma."[52] Deuteronomy maintained the importance of covenant as representing a relationship between God and Israel, based on divine love (55). The Priestly source underscored the dynamic character of covenant as a divine gift with universal significance (56–58). These insights "prove their strength in the straitened circumstances of the exilic and post-exilic periods" (51). But each tradition also contained challenges to the concept of covenant, which sowed the seeds of decline in later Judaism. Deuteronomy introduced a more abstract view of law in which love was tied more closely to legal obedience (55–56); while the Priestly emphasis on the constancy of the covenant excluded the possibility of the further "renewal and perfecting of the Abraham covenant," which opened the door to the emergence of particularism (58). The emergence of legalism and particularism in later Judaism turned the charismatic "religion of Yahweh into a religion of observances."[53]

Summary

The research of de Wette, von Rad, and Eichrodt emerged as significant models of the theology of the Pentateuch, even though they represent only a small sample of the many works written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other examples include G. Ernest Wright, who, like von Rad, focused on the themes of salvation history as the source for the theology of the Pentateuch, but he emphasized more the historical character of the tradition as the source of revelation (*God Who Acts*). John L. McKenzie represented the influence of biblical theology among Catholic interpreters, where the central role of the cult received a more prominent role (*A Theology of the Old Testament*). But whatever the focus, the aim of the theologies of the Pentateuch remained for the most part on identifying the unity or coherence of the literature, either in its structure of salvation history or in deeply rooted central themes.

The quest for some form of unity in Christian biblical theologies of the Pentateuch tended to concentrate on early oral or written tradition, which in turn, fueled a developmental view of the history of Israel, in which the charismatic nature of Israelite religion became more institutionalized and external, with the canonization of law taking on an increasingly formal role in later Judaism. From this perspective, the Torah as canon remained a theological problem, whether it was stated explicitly or not. In “The Canon as Theological Problem,” G. E. Wright illustrates the solution by identifying a canon within the canon. The inner or dynamic canon is determined by the texts or the traditions that are the focus of study for contemporary interpreters: “To find how the Bible actually acts canonically at any given moment, one should not go to formal discussions of the canon. The truth is to be found in actual usage, and here the current theology of the use provides the interpretative principle whereby the canon within the canon can be discerned.”[54] For Wright, the authoritative canon of the Pentateuch was in “the earliest forms of literature which Israel produced,” springing from the revelation of Yahweh in the event of the Exodus.[55]

Pentateuch as Canonical Literature and Theological Pluralism

The shift in focus in the 1960s from oral tradition and written sources to redaction, as the key for discerning the composition of the Pentateuch, represented a direct challenge to past Christian theologies of the Pentateuch (see ch. 4). The emphasis on the creative role of late redactors in the exilic and post-exilic periods called into question the core hermeneutical principles that supported the discipline of Protestant biblical theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including: (1) the privileging of early charismatic religion as the object of biblical theology, whether in oral form or in source documents; (2) the view of redactors as mechanical tradents, who preserved tradition, allowing modern interpreters to recover the early material as the basis for the theology of the Pentateuch; (3) and the assumption that the late formation of the Pentateuch indicated a decline in the history of Israelite religion, especially in the formation of the canon.

Brevard S. Childs and Walter Brueggemann illustrate the changing hermeneutical climate among Christian biblical theologians in the late-twentieth century. Each illustrates, in different ways, the rejection of the past focus on early tradition as providing the theological center of the Pentateuch and of the developmental view of Israelite religion. Each focuses, instead, on the present form of the Pentateuch as containing multiple and even conflicting theologies, which resist a theological center.

Canonical Criticism and the Theologies of the Pentateuch: Brevard S. Childs

Brevard S. Childs (1923–2007) was born in Columbia, South Carolina. After World War II, he received BA and the MA degrees from the University of Michigan, before completing the MDiv at Princeton Theological Seminary (1950). Childs received the PhD from the University of Basel (1955), where he concentrated on form criticism and tradition history. He taught at Yale Divinity

School nearly his entire career (1958–1999). Initially at Yale, Childs published two books in the fields of form criticism and tradition history,[56] before shifting his research to the reevaluation of biblical theology, informed by Jewish midrash, the late formation of the Hebrew Bible, and the inter-biblical literary relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The interpretation of Childs will include: (1) the critique of traditional forms of biblical theology, (2) the description of the methodology of canonical criticism for the theology of the Pentateuch; (3) the hermeneutical implications of canonical criticism; and (4) the continuing influence of the approach.



Figure 12.3 Brevard Childs.

Critique of the Biblical Theology Movement

In *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970), Childs critically evaluated the hermeneutical presuppositions that supported past constructions of biblical theology. It is noteworthy that the use of the term “crisis” in the title of the book occurs during the period of political and social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, where the prevailing culture of criticism challenged many forms of authority, along with the assumption that tradition was stable through time (see ch. 4). Childs was aware of the historical moment; he wrote: “[T]he United States has

entered a period of tremendous political and social change," producing unparalleled "turmoil and soul-searching restlessness." But the turmoil, he noted, also creates "enormous potential for creativity in every area of our culture," including the writing of a new biblical theology: "Biblical Theology would seem to have a decisive role to play in meeting this challenge at this time."[57]

Chapter 4 explored the effects on the study of the composition of the Pentateuch during the same period of cultural criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, when researchers also began to reject the view of tradition as a stable resource that could be recovered through the methodologies of tradition history and source criticism. In their place, interpreters emphasized the creative role of late redactors in the formation of the Pentateuch, who often covered over early tradition in refashioning the material for new purposes. Childs's critical evaluation of traditional biblical theology must be interpreted within the same larger context of the changing study of the composition of the Pentateuch. The rejection of the methodologies of tradition history and source criticism in the writings of Samuel Sandmel or Rolf Rendtorff is similar to Childs's rejection of traditional biblical theology. In creating canonical criticism as the methodology for the theology of the Pentateuch, Childs too was exploring the dynamic role of late redactors in creating the unique literary form of the Pentateuch as the canonical Torah. The overlapping interest among scholars during this period is illustrated in the work of Rendtorff, whose research evolved from the study of redaction to canonical criticism for the purpose of writing biblical theology.[58]

According to Childs, the discipline of biblical theology throughout the twentieth century was focused primarily on recovering the history of Ancient Israel; this history became the resource for the theology of the Pentateuch and for relating the Old and New Testaments. It was grounded in a number of important presuppositions: (1) that revelation must be anchored in the historical past of Israel, rather than in the text of the Pentateuch; (2) that the historical events behind the text disclosed the unique mentality of ancient Israel in contrast to the larger environment of the time; (3) that the contrast provided insight into the unique faith and religion of Ancient Israel which unified the diverse literature; and (4) that the organic unity of the Israelite worldview created

patterns that unified the Old and New Testament.[59] Although these historical-critical presuppositions dominated all modern forms of biblical theology, Childs focused, in particular, on the North American version represented, for example, by E. Ernest Wright, which he described as the Biblical Theology Movement.[60]

Childs rejected the presuppositions of the Biblical Theology Movement. He did not, however, reject the important role of historical criticism in the interpretation of the Pentateuch, only the particular use of the methodology in the Biblical Theology Movement, as a basis for constructing biblical theology. The Biblical Theology Movement employed historical criticism to penetrate behind the text in order to recover the historical events that gave rise to the literature. This goal, however, yielded different results among interpreters, creating ambiguity about defining history and its function as the basis for a contemporary biblical theology; the ambiguity was evident in the many disputes over the meaning of such terms as history (*Historie*) and salvation history (*Geschichte*). The result was confusion "whether the element of revelation claimed for the Bible lay in the text, in some positivity behind the text, or in a combination of text and event or mode of consciousness."[61]

Sidebar 12.5 *Historie* and *Geschichte*

Biblical theologians in the mid-twentieth century contrasted *Historie* and *Geschichte* to interpret biblical literature. *Historie* was the study of the historical details in the text; Geschichte or *Heilsgeschichte* explored the deeper religious significance of the literature that went beyond historical details.

The instability surrounding the recovery of the history behind the text further called into question the crucial assumptions of the Biblical Theology Movement that Israel embodied a unique mentality and that there was a sharp contrast between early Yahwism and the surrounding culture. Without these presuppositions, it was no longer possible to identify the unifying pattern behind

the text, which pulled the diverse literature together and related the Old and New Testaments. Once these assumptions were called into question, the entire basis of the Biblical Theology Movement lost its hermeneutical footing.[62]

Canonical Criticism

Childs proposed to change the context and the medium of revelation for biblical theology from the history of Ancient Israel to the canonical text. The new emphasis required clarification of "canon." Childs rejected a narrow definition of canon as a list of books or a closed collection,[63] in favor of a late literary process, which reflected the dynamic interaction between religious texts and the community of faith for whom they were authoritative. He wrote: "Essential to understanding the growth of the canon is to see this interaction between the developing corpus of authoritative literature and the community which treasured it."[64] The canonical process was evident, according to Childs, in the latest anonymous editing of the Pentateuchal sources J, E, D, and P. There was always editing of these sources throughout the long history of Israel; J and E were combined after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (JE); D reflected the Josianic reform; P reconfigured Yahwism in the post-exilic period. Each instance of rewriting and combination of sources included redaction aimed at recontextualizing the literature into a new social context. But the canonical process of editing was different; it was not intended to relate the different sources to a new historical moment. Instead, it was undertaken to ensure the religious authority of the literature through time for all generations. The result, according to Childs, was that historical traditions were loosened from their social setting; interrelated without harmonization, and in the process, transformed into "theological witnesses" for future readers.[65]

Childs followed I. L. Seeligmann in describing the new aim of the late anonymous editors as "canon-conscious."[66] Canon-conscious editing, unlike other forms of composition and redaction, did not seek to update past tradition for a new historical moment; instead, it sought to loosen the historical traditions

from their distinct social settings in the past, so that the Pentateuch, as the canonical Torah, might always function authoritatively in an immediate way for future faith communities. Canon-conscious editing included literary arrangement, the reconfiguration of plot away from historical chronology, the use of characters to hold historically dissimilar traditions together without harmonizing them, as well as the "skillful use of literary technique, word-plays, and proto-midrashic exegesis which emerged during the final stages of the formation of the canon."[67]

The juxtaposition of the two creation mythologies in Genesis 1 and 2–3 illustrates the canon-conscious redaction in the Pentateuch. Childs summarized the past historical-critical research, in which Genesis 1 was identified as the post-exilic Priestly composition and Genesis 2–3 as the pre-exilic J source. The historical-critical research clarified the separate origins and theologies of the two texts. The clarification of the distinct mythologies provided the starting point to explore signs of late editing in the juxtaposition of the texts, which related the contrasting texts without harmonizing them. Childs identified several editorial features that placed the mythologies in a new context within the canon. The order of composition was reversed, with the later Genesis 1 preceding the early composition of Genesis 2–3. In the process, the J mythology (Genesis 2–3) also acquired a new function; it no longer provided the origin of creation as it likely did in the J source; instead, it was now subordinated to the P version of creation (Genesis 1), and thus, became an account of the unfolding of the creation of the human. The combination also effected the Priestly account of creation, since its closing genealogical formula, "these are the generations of the heavens and the earth," (Gen 2:4a), acquired a new function as the introduction to the J mythology, rather than the conclusion to Genesis 1. In this way, canonical criticism allowed for the reading of historically distinct creation mythologies in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2–3 together, without harmonizing them.

The Mosaic traditions in Exodus–Deuteronomy contain a wide variety of legal and narrative material that also underwent significant canonical editing. Historical criticism identified a variety of dissimilar traditions with divergent legal material in the sources J, E, and P, as well the version of events in

Deuteronomy. These various traditions of law were "joined only after a long period of growth, the exact nature of which is no longer fully clear."[68] Childs noted that the age and function of the Decalogue was particularly difficult to unravel in the history of Ancient Israelite religion and that it remained at the center of debate in historical criticism. But when the Decalogue is interpreted from the canonical perspective, the uncertainty over composition does not parallelize the theological interpretation of the Pentateuch. The strategy of the canonical editors made it clear that regardless of the history of the composition of the law codes, the Decalogue now "functions as a comprehensive summary of the Torah to which the succeeding stipulations serve as expansion and commentary." Thus, the canonical editing accentuated the prominence of the Decalogue, regardless of its role in the history of Israelite religion, while also creating hermeneutical links throughout the Pentateuch among the historically divergent law codes without harmonizing them.[69] The contours of Calvin's interpretation reemerge once again in Child's reading of the Decalogue as the organizing law code for all other forms of law in the Pentateuch.

The anchoring of the revelation of all law in Moses represented a further canonical strategy for relating the divergent law codes as the single authoritative Torah: "In a real sense, the complexity of the shape of the biblical material stemmed from a canonical concern which reasoned in a circle: if a law was authoritative, it must be from Moses. Conversely, if it was from Moses, it must be authoritative."[70] The canonical strategy loosened the law codes and the traditions of Moses from the historical past to ensure the religious authority of the literature through time for all generations.

Presuppositions of Canonical Criticism

The influence of canonical criticism on the Christian theology of the Pentateuch is significant in the late-twentieth century. It represents a series of changes in the understanding of religious tradition, the theological unity in the Pentateuch, the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, and the role of interreligious

dialogue between Judaism and Christianity in the interpretation of the Pentateuch.

Canonical criticism focused on the present form of the Pentateuch as the basis for uncovering its theological significance, rather than on the history of Israelite religion and literature. Childs wrote: “Even though there is an obvious history of development that lies behind the formation of the canon and even though there are a variety of modes of consciousness involved at various levels and periods, the confession of a canon holds this context of be normative for the Christian faith.”[71] Thus, for Childs, whatever the tradition-historical development of Israelite religion may have been, the proper context for constructing a theology of the Pentateuch was the canon, not the history behind it. This perspective was illustrated, for example, in Childs’s interpretation of the Decalogue noted above; it played a crucial role in the theology of the canonical Pentateuch, whether it was the first or the last law written in the history of Ancient Israel, thus echoing Calvin.

Canonical criticism emphasized the dynamic relationship between the Pentateuch as religious literature and the community of faith over which it had authority. The relationship between the authoritative text and the religious community was a significant hermeneutical force in the creation of the canon. Thus, according to Childs, the rule of faith was both a religious perspective toward the Pentateuch and a methodology for its final editing. The active role of faith in the creation of the canon required the same hermeneutical perspective for any contemporary Christian theology of the Pentateuch. Theological insight could not possible arise from historical criticism, because it assumed that the controlled application of value-free methodology would reveal the theological center of the Pentateuch, or uncover an evolutionary history that progressed from Ancient Israel to early Christianity. The Christian theology of the Pentateuch required the same faith-based hermeneutical relationship between the canon and the contemporary “community of faith” that was present among the original editors, who shaped the Pentateuchal traditions as Scripture.[72]

For Childs, the active role of faith as the central hermeneutic for interpretation meant that the Christian theology of the Pentateuch had to be

grounded in the New Testament, since Christ provided the rule of faith for Christians, thus recalling again the earlier work of Calvin.[73] The role of the faith community, as the hermeneutical context for interpretation, introduced other similarities to Calvin, especially regarding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Childs followed Calvin in stating that the New Testament provided the rule of faith for any Christian interpretation of the theology of the Pentateuch. The relationship between the Testaments arises from Christians choosing to read the Pentateuch as canon, and thus, looking for inter-biblical connections between the two bodies of literature. In so doing, their readings of the Pentateuch become inescapably Christian by choice. The relationship between the Old and New Testaments therefore is not the result of a historical evolutionary process in which Christianity fulfilled the lost charismatic roots of ancient Israelite religion; it is simply created through exegesis from a particular faith perspective, as Christian interpreters apply the hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets Scriptures.[74]

The canonical criticism of Childs also departed from Calvin in advocating the theological pluralism of the Pentateuch because of the research of historical criticism, which had identified multiple authors of the Pentateuch. Calvin assumed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; it was the literary style of Moses that created problems for him in discerning the central message of the Pentateuch. The identification of multiple anonymous authors in the Pentateuch provided a different starting point for the canonical criticism of Childs. But the focus was not on the distinct traditions; it was, rather, on the present relationship of the diverse literature in the formation of a religiously authoritative canon. Thus, the Pentateuch as canon represented a theology of controlled pluralism; it provided the boundaries of possible interpretations, rather than the one acceptable reading at the center.

The presupposition of canonical criticism was that historically dissimilar texts qualify and complement each other as the result of “canon-conscious” redactions, so that the goal of interpretation was to identify the different literary relationships among the traditions and the sources of the Pentateuch, which now form the larger literary corpus. The shape of the canonical Pentateuch provided

the reader with a road map on how to relate historically dissimilar traditions into a holistic reading that was not unified.[75] Historical-critical interpretation aided in identifying the parts of the Pentateuch and it even safeguarded against an artificial unity to the literature. But the interpretation of the parts alone (the designation of a canon within a canon) did not represent the pluralistic theology of the Pentateuch that was created by "canon-conscious" redactors: "The canonical shaping serves not so much to establish a given meaning to a particular passage as to chart the boundaries which the exegetical task is to be carried out."[76] The important role of controlled pluralism in the interpretation of the Pentateuch was not fully developed by Childs, who increasingly focused on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in his later work and the role of the church in providing the hermeneutical rule of faith. As a result, the detailed study of the poetics of canon remains incomplete, requiring future interpreters to catalogue the variety of redactional techniques that link dissimilar traditions in the Pentateuch without harmonizing them.

The emphasis on canon and its interpretation within faith communities also raised the question of "how . . . the Christian interpretation of Scripture relate(s) to the Jewish."[77] In *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Childs stressed the important role of interfaith dialogue between Jews and Christians, as a resource for the Christian theology of the Pentateuch. Judaism was the only community of faith to shape the canon, and it continues to represent "a living community of faith, which continues to find in its Bible the revelation of the divine will for the covenant people." The result is that both Judaism and Christianity "relate themselves in a dialectical movement to the text on the basis of a context of faith." The comparison of Christian and Jewish readings of the Pentateuch would clarify for Christian interpreters that "the Old Testament does not 'naturally' unfold into the New Testament," but that the two Testaments are related through Christian hermeneutical presuppositions that fuel inter-biblical theological exegesis of the Pentateuch.[78] The importance of comparing Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Pentateuch is evident in Child's commentary on Exodus, (1974); but the full implications of interfaith dialogue are not carried

through in Childs's later publications, where the focus of his work is concentrated more on the relationship of the Old and New Testaments.[79]

Continuing Influence of Canonical Criticism

Childs's program of canonical criticism has had a significant influence in the discipline of Christian biblical theology, especially by making the canonical text the basis for a theology of the Pentateuch. But Childs's description of the program of canonical criticism is often ambiguous, and as noted above, it remains incomplete, which has prompted a range of criticisms, clarifications and supplemental studies that continue to the present time.

James Barr criticized the changing meaning of canon throughout the different writings of Childs, as well as the lack of engagement with historical criticism and the overemphasis on dogmatic Christian theology (*The Concept of Biblical Theology*). Rolf Rendtorff judged the repeated claim of Childs that the canon was loosened from history to be "incomprehensible."[80] Walter Brueggemann questioned the overemphasis of Childs on the christological reading of the Old Testament[81]; he also rejected the emphasis on the canonical text as the source of religious authority, arguing instead for a more active role of the interpreter in the creation of religious or canonical authority, as well as the need for more attention to the socially marginalized as the idealized reader of the canon.[82] Christopher Seitz, however, judges the canonical methodology of Childs to be the "most brilliant proposal for theological exegesis offered in recent memory."[83]

Interpreters are also refining the canonical methodology, focusing on aspects of the methodology that were missing or underdeveloped in the work of Childs. James A. Sanders shares many of the hermeneutical insights of Childs regarding canon, including the diversity of traditions within the text, the need to interpret the canon holistically, and the dynamic relationship between the formation of the canon and the community of faith. His interpretation focuses more directly on the function of the canon within faith communities. Thus, in contrast to Childs,

who concentrated on the unique literary features within canon, Sanders explores the nature of the community of faith, who embraces the canon through time in different social contexts. The focus on the community of faith allowed Sanders to describe how a fixed, stable text, like a closed canon, was able to remain dynamic and adaptable through time. The adaptability of canon for Sanders was not in its particular form, but in its reuse by the ever changing communities of faith, who seek identity and an ethical vision from its stories.[84] Rolf Rendtorff narrowed the focus of canon to the Hebrew Bible, rather than the Old and New Testaments, in order to emphasize more the need for Jewish and Christian dialogue in the theology of the Pentateuch: "[T]he biblical text, in the form we now have, forms the basis for the faith and life of the two great communities of faith, the Jewish and the Christian. Theology is done in this context, and it is only meaningful in this context."[85] R. W. L. Moberly also acknowledges the influence of Childs in his theological reading of the Pentateuch, in which he identifies the separation between Genesis and Exodus–Deuteronomy to represent distinct theological dispensations in the construction of the Torah.[86]

Rhetorical Criticism and the Theologies of the Old Testament: Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann (1933–) was born in Tiden, Nebraska. His father was a minister in the German Evangelical Synod of North America. He received his BA degree from Elmhurst College, IL (1955) and the BD degree from Eden Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, MO (1958), before being ordained in the United Church of Christ. Brueggemann received the PhD from Union Theological Seminary in New York City (1961), writing a dissertation under James Muilenburg on the book of Deuteronomy, "A Form-Critical Study of the Cultic Material in Deuteronomy: An Analysis of the Nature of Cultic Encounter in the Mosaic Tradition." Brueggemann joined the faculty of Eden Theological Seminary (1961–86), during which time he also received a second PhD from Saint Louis University (1974), and he completed his teaching career at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA (1987–2000).

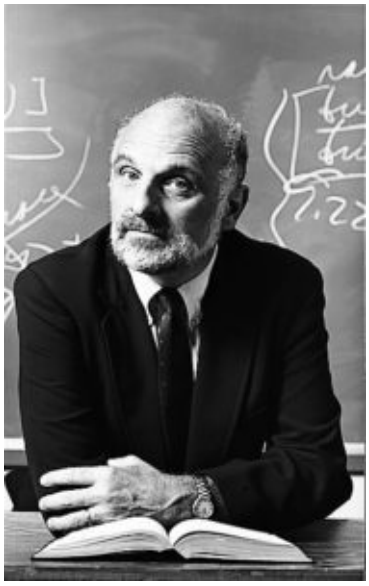


Figure 12.4 Walter Brueggemann.

Early in his career, Brueggemann continued to investigate the form-critical and tradition-historical development of the Pentateuch, writing studies on “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historian” (1968), as well as “The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers” (1972), which culminated in the book, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (1975), co-authored with Claus Westermann. But the rhetorical criticism advocated by Muilenburg became more prominent in his subsequent research; it provided the methodological vehicle to loosen the Hebrew Bible from history in order to explore its more imaginative quality, which gave rise to a series of books, including *The Prophetic Imagination* (1978); *David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination and Memory* (1985); *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (1986); and *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (1993). Imagination, for Brueggemann, freed the Hebrew Bible from its confinement to the past in historical criticism, while also infusing the text with the power to critique the world of the reader with a counter-narrative, as illustrated in the book, *Israel’s Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (1988). These currents of research merge in Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997). Brueggemann’s theology of the Pentateuch will be evaluated in three

parts, including: (1) the critique of modern Christian biblical theology; (2) the focus on rhetoric as the counterproposal; and (3) the implications of rhetorical criticism for the construction of the theology of the Pentateuch.

From the Hegemony of Modernity to Post-Liberal Pluralism

Brueggemann rejected past Protestant biblical theology grounded in historical criticism. In this, he is similar to Brevard Childs, but the basis for his rejection is different. For Childs, the problem of historical criticism is literary; for Brueggemann, it is hermeneutical. For Childs, the aim of historical criticism was to penetrate behind the text to recover an objective account of historical events that were out of synch with the formation of the canon, which was motivated by preserving history; the aim of the editors was instead driven by the faith-commitments about the authority of the text for the ongoing religious life of the community—the securing of events in history played no role in this process nor in the resulting genre of the canon. For Brueggemann, the practitioners of historical criticism functioned with unexamined assumptions about value-free methodology, which, when combined with the quest for one historical meaning, sought to control intellectual creativity and social power among contemporary readers of the Pentateuch.[87]

The core problem of historical criticism was the belief in the objectivity of historical research, which presumed that the researcher was able to recover past events as they happened, thus reinforcing the assumption that a single truth could be established with controlled research. Coupled with this was an unstated Eurocentric view of human experience, in which history was judged to move in a single developmental direction through Protestant Christianity.[88] This enlightenment historicism was a form of “intellectual supersession” that distorted the theological claims of the Pentateuch.[89] The result was an unexamined “innocent” confidence in the ability to recover history as the resource for the theology of the Pentateuch, coupled with intolerance for dissent, since the hermeneutical approach did not allow for competing interpretations or multiple meanings to the same text.

The dominance of historical criticism resulted in a hegemonic elitism, according to Brueggemann, in which a small group of like-minded Protestant researchers controlled the theological meaning of the Pentateuch by reducing it to the recovery of agreed-upon historical events: "[I]t is not difficult to see that such a view of history is remarkably thin; it allows for none of the density or ambiguity of the actual human process, nor for the ways in which different perspectives will yield different versions of the same 'happening.'"[90] The solution to the hegemony of historical criticism was to "bracket out all questions of historicity" in the theological interpretation of the Pentateuch in order to concentrate solely on speech by and about God. Brueggemann explained: "We are not asking, 'What happened?' but 'What is said?' To inquire into the historicity of the text is a legitimate enterprise, but it does not, I suggest, belong to the work of Old Testament theology."[91]

The rejection of "history" for "speech" requires qualification, however; historical criticism does play a significant role in Brueggemann's interpretation of the theology of the Pentateuch, since he identifies the exile as the social setting that provided the contested and multivoiced literature. This historical-critical conclusion corre-sponds to broader research in composition by such scholars as Winnett and Van Seters (see chap. 4), who also interpreted the Pentateuch as a response to the trauma of the exile. For Brueggemann, however, the historical-critical insight in composition opened new hermeneutical horizons for the theology of the Pentateuch.

1. The overwhelming trauma of the exile as the catalyst for the composition of the Pentateuch meant that the theology of the text could not emerge from a developmental and evolutionary view of Israelite religion. The social setting of the exile clarified that the materials in the Pentateuch are "not to be understood . . . in terms of their historical development," but "more as an intentional and coherent response to a particular circumstance of crisis."[92] There may be reuse of older material, according to Brueggemann, but there is also significant discontinuity because of the exile, so that "the final form of the material has become something new."[93]

2. As literature of exiles, the Pentateuch represents the perspective of marginalized persons. Thus, the content of the Pentateuch, with its themes of divine liberation and the promise of land, is in tension with the social-political reality of the authors. Once this historical-critical insight is established, it becomes clear to the contemporary biblical theologian that the literature demonstrates the power of imagination to create a counter-reality or perspective over against oppressive empires: "It is important for a student of Old Testament theology to recognize that this material is an enterprise of counter-reality. It refuses given imperial reality and summons its hearers to an alternative reality."[94]
3. The Pentateuch is disunified in organization and multivalent in perspective because it contains literature from competing groups with distinct interests. The crisis resulting from the displacement of city, king, and temple in Second Temple Judaism was a time of "enormous literary generativity," which gave rise to a variety of "daring articulations of faith" that resist clear organization.[95] Each distinct articulation of faith, moreover, did not represent disembodied ideas about history or past cultic practice, but vested ideological interests among competing exilic groups: "Every textual utterance . . . needs to be understood as engaged in the realities of power, the securing of power, the maintenance of power, or the legitimating of power."[96]

These presuppositions combine to form a post-liberal, pluralistic approach to the theology of the Pentateuch, in which the aim was "to exposit the theological perspectives and claims of the text itself, in all its odd particularity, without any attempt to accommodate to a larger rationality, either of modernity or of classical Christianity"[97]

Rhetorical Criticism as the Counter-Proposal to the Hegemony of Modernity

God is the subject of theology in the Pentateuch. But neither the Pentateuch nor

the entire Hebrew Bible, for that matter, "provides a coherent and comprehensive offer of God"; the "subject matter is more difficult, complex and problematic."[98] The reason is that the Deity does not conform to categories of theology, but is only clarified as a character from the concrete study of particular texts. What becomes clear from such study is that the texts do not "accent thought or concept or ideas, but characteristically speech."[99] The proper subject matter for the theology of the Pentateuch is speech from God and about God, and the appropriate methodology for such a study is rhetorical criticism: "[T]he God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way."[100]

Dialogue, imagination, and dialectical tension are the "grammar of faith" in the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible, revealing the character of God "in the fray." As a result, testimony or witness about God is the preferred mode of knowledge. The law court becomes the fictional stage for Brueggemann to explore four types of testimony: (1) Israel's core testimony about Yahweh's faithfulness; (2) the counter testimony that arises from lived experience, in which there is divine absence, not faithfulness, requiring speech that probes the hiddenness and ambiguity of Yahweh; (3) the unsolicited testimony broadens the scope of discourse from Yahweh alone to the many ways in which Yahweh partners with Israel, the nations, and creation; and (4) embodied testimony about the mediating presence of Yahweh with Israel.

The literature of the Pentateuch constitutes the primary resource for Israel's "core testimony" about Yahweh, while the accounts of revelation at the divine mountain also provide essential insight into the "embodied testimony" of the mediated presence of Yahweh. The grammar or rhetorical structure of the core witness of Yahweh is constituted by "sentences governed by strong verbs of trans-formation," which provide a "narrative portrayal of Yahweh."[101] The content of the core confession, according to Brueggemann, follows von Rad's themes of the historical credo: Yahweh is a God who creates, who makes promises, who delivers, and who leads. After affirming the importance of the themes of the credo, Brueggemann distances himself from von Rad and the larger Biblical Theology of Movement, stating that his focus is limited to the

rhetoric of the confessions and not history.[102] Yet, Brueggemann also embraces the central presupposition of the Bible Theology Movement that the core confessions of Israel articulate a faith that stands over against its environment; further, he applauds the same critical stance of von Rad, who opposed the rise of Nazism, and Wright, who opposed a weak form of cultural religion in the United States.[103]

The theological meaning of the core testimony avoids the clarity and confidence of doctrine, remaining instead in the mode of witness to Yahweh's active power, which reaches its fullest articulation in the exile. The most revolutionary testimony is the witness to Yahweh as the God who delivers; it represents the principal focus of the Pentateuch, which, when combined with the revelation at Sinai, witnesses to "Yahweh's preferential option for the poor, weak, and marginated."[104] This core testimony concerns the power of Yahweh to intervene against oppression. Whatever its origin, the witness to Yahweh as deliverer saturates the imagination of Israel; it generates the "exodus memory" and instills in Israel the "capacity . . . to depart the controlling hegemony of Babylon" with a vision of social newness.[105] The promises to the ancestors may be an old testimony, but the exile also becomes the arena in which Yahweh utters new promises with the power to subvert the present situation,[106] undergirded with the additional testimony of God as creator, which also reaches its fullest articulation in the exile.[107] The core confession of divine leading also provides solidarity during the exile,[108] while the commands at the center of the Pentateuch envision a way forward, testifying to the justice of Yahweh.[109] Theological interpreters of the Old Testament at the end of the twentieth century must "pay primal attention to this irreducible claim of justice . . . a demanding summons even to Yahweh."[110]

The core testimony of Yahweh in the Pentateuch consists of conflicting and vested speech by different groups, who are confronted by the hiddenness of Yahweh through the destruction of the temple and the events of the exile.[111] Two voices emerge from this process. Deuteronomy introduces a hermeneutics of suspicion into the core testimony of Yahweh, which emphasizes an aniconic

form of religion that centers on proclamation, the power of the spoken word, and the need to achieve justice. The Priestly literature, by contrast, accentuates the power of iconic religion to retrieve the lost presence of Yahweh through manifestation and sacramental rituals aimed at holiness.[112] These traditions are juxtaposed in the Torah without harmonization, resulting in ongoing tension within the text and the unresolved openness of the Pentateuch, in which the Torah becomes more than commands, but "also a rich, dense field of imagination" with the text itself becoming a sacramental vehicle of divine presence.[113] The unsettled and contested voices within the Pentateuch translate to the reader, who is forced to negotiate between the different texts, thus ensuring pluralistic readings of the tradition.[114]

Implications of Rhetorical Criticism

Brueggemann's rhetorical-critical approach to the Pentateuch signals a significant transition in Christian biblical theology, which he described as post-liberal. The post-liberal approach to the theology of the Pentateuch is ongoing, and thus, still incomplete. What is clear from the methodology at this point is the rejection of historical criticism as the basis for theology; the insistence that the theology of the Pentateuch can only arise from the detailed rhetorical interpretation of specific texts; the emphasis on justice and liberation as an organizing presupposition; and the inclusion of marginalized readers in biblical theology. It is not surprising, therefore, that Phyllis Trible's overtures for a feminist biblical theology (1978, 1984) are also rooted in Muilenburg's methodology of rhetorical criticism, with whom she too completed her PhD (1963). Like Brueggemann, she also employs the tools of rhetorical criticism to dismantle hegemony, but in her case, the hegemony is not simply of the institutional elitism of historical critics; it is more specifically the patriarchy that permeates the text and the history of interpretation.[115]

Brueggemann's post-liberal theology of the Pentateuch is also undergoing refinement and critical evaluation. Leo Purdue explored in detail the meaning of imagination and its constructive role in linking the ancient text of the Pentateuch

to contemporary theology.[116] Norman Gottwald questioned whether the separation between history and rhetoric is as clear as Brueggemann suggests.[117] Terence Fretheim argued that the cataloguing of rhetorical images alone is insufficient to construct a theological portrait of the Deity, without a more critical evaluation of the narratives, including point of view, character, and genre.[118] James Barr praised the emphasis on rhetoric, but questioned the overly negative appraisal of history and historical criticism, as well as the easy move between the ancient text and the contemporary reader.[119] Postcolonial readers, on the contrary, challenged the emphasis on liberation and justice associated with the exile, since the text may simply represent the social dominance of an elite minority, whose vision of liberation represents the oppression of others.[120]

Summary

Childs and Brueggemann represent new emerging directions in the theology of the Pentateuch. Both interpreters are post-critical, not pre-critical: their theologies assume the cumulative research of historical criticism, in which the Pentateuch is identified as the product of a complex history of composition by many anonymous authors. But Childs and Brueggemann also reject the aims of historical criticism to concentrate biblical theology on the early oral or written traditions; to identify the unity or coherence of the early material in its structure of salvation history or in deeply rooted central themes; and to emphasize a developmental view of the history of Israel, in which the charismatic nature of Israelite religion became more institutionalized and legal. In an effort to move the discipline of Christian biblical theology in new directions, both interpreters seek to redefine the role of history, to incorporate pluralism into biblical theology, and to explore the relationship between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Pentateuch.

History

The problem of history lingers in both the canonical and the post-liberal approaches to the theology of the Pentateuch, but in different ways, which create distinct challenges to the separate methodologies.

The challenge of history in canonical criticism is whether it functions at all in the interpretative process, given the normative status of the final form of the text. Childs insists that the theological agenda of the Pentateuch cannot be established on the basis of the criterion of "what really happened," either with regard to the narrated events or the social setting of the authors.[121] The reason is that canonical editing, unlike other forms of composition and redaction, did not seek to update past tradition for a new historical moment; it sought instead to cross reference texts in order to loosen historical traditions from their distinct social settings in the past. The intent of the new genre was to empower the canon to function authoritatively as an immediate form of revelation for future faith communities. The result, according to Childs, was that historically dissimilar and competing traditions were related in the final form of the text without being harmonized, and in the process, transformed into normative "theological witnesses" for future readers.[122]

The emphasis on the final form of the canon—loosened from its moorings in the historical past—draws canonical criticism into the sphere of contemporary literary theory, which also targets the present text as the object of interpretation. Childs was aware of the close relationship in methodologies; he even encouraged an overlap in methodologies early in his writing. But in later writing, Childs separated the canonical reading from the purely literary, stating that the emphasis on the language (rhetoric) alone runs the danger of "rendering the biblical text mute for theological reflection."[123] The statement implies that some form of historical-critical analysis separates the methodologies, but Childs does not provide a clear explanation, leaving the problem of history to linger unresolved in canonical criticism.

The rhetorical criticism of Brueggemann denies the role of history altogether in the process of interpretation, suggesting easy com-patibility with a range of contemporary literary-critical approaches. But history is actually not bracketed out in the rhetorical theology of the Pentateuch, because of the close relationship

between rhetorical and sociological criticisms, especially during the exile.[124] The social setting of the exile indicates that the Pentateuch is the story of marginalized persons, whose imaginative stories of promise, deliverance, and divinely shared leading through the wilderness represent a theology of liberation; a counter-reality to the lived experience of the authors. But it is doubtful that a strictly rhetorical interpretation of the Pentateuch would necessarily lead to this theological conclusion, without the sociological analysis of the exile as the background of the literature.

The central role of the exile for interpretation introduces an additional problem of the relationship between history and rhetorical criticism, of which Brueggemann is aware: “It may be that the picture of the exile dominating the biblical materials and subsequent Judaism is the imaginative, forceful, interpretative act of an elite minority in Babylon who imposed their ‘Yahweh alone’ conviction on Judaism, and who thereby presented themselves as the only true carrier, embodiment, and interpreters of emerging Judaism.”[125] Brueggemann does not pursue this possibility in advancing the paradigm of the exile. But the quotation foreshadows the postcolonial critique of post-liberal biblical theologies of liberation, in which the liberation of some often implies the oppression of others, whose experience is silenced or restricted from the imagined counter-reality of the story.[126]

Pluralism

The canonical criticism of Childs introduced pluralism into the theology of the Pentateuch. He rejected the past attempts to isolate the central meaning of the text in a developmental history, favoring instead the identification of a range of voices that are related but not harmonized in the Pentateuch. As a result, the canon provides the boundaries of possible interpretation, rather than a single truth.[127] The post-liberal approach of Brueggemann reinforced the conclusion of Childs. The Pentateuch is multivalent; it contains the competing D and P traditions, which are held in tension in the canonical text. But Brueggemann is less concerned about identifying “canon-conscious” redactions, which relate the

traditions in the text. He is more interested in simply acknowledging the range of vested interests in the Pentateuch, with the recognition that any theological interpretation demands choice and selection between competing traditions. The goal of the rhetorical-critical theology of the Pentateuch is about "disputation and testimony that refuses closure."[128]

The pluralism in Brueggemann's post-liberal approach goes beyond the distinct traditions in the Pentateuch to include the vested interests of different readers. From the post-liberal perspective, there is no "innocent" or value-free theology of the Pentateuch. This conclusion too is in agreement with canonical criticism. A central weakness of the Biblical Theology Movement for Childs was the inability of the methodology to recognize that the contemporary biblical theologian always has a vested interest in reading the Pentateuch, making it impossible to achieve an objective theological interpretation. For Childs, the subjectivity in the Christian interpreter was the rule of faith, which meant that any biblical theology of the Old Testament necessarily begins with the New Testament, since it functions as the rule of faith for Christians. Thus, the subjectivity of the rule of faith in canonical criticism is corporate, representing the power of the community of faith on individual interpreters. Given this situation, there is no value-free history of Israelite religion that leads to the New Testament, as past Protestant biblical theologies assumed. Instead, the New Testament provides the hermeneutical lens for any Christian theological reading of the Pentateuch, because the Christian interpreter is inevitably located in this body of literature, whether or not it is acknowledged.

Brueggemann approaches the subjectivity of the interpreter more from the perspective of ideology and social power than from the religious category of the rule of faith. The inevitable pluralism embedded in any theological interpretation of the Pentateuch is certainly influenced by the religious experience of the reader; but the more fundamental influences are the social and political presuppositions of the interpreter, especially hegemonic systems of social control that hid behind the claim of historical-critical, value-free methodologies. For Brueggemann, the hermeneutical goal of the interpreter in writing biblical theology is not simply the recognition of the corporate rule of faith in the

interpretation of the Pentateuch, whether Jewish or Christian; it is, rather, the awareness of social and political presuppositions and the (re)fashioning of these assumptions by the individual reader toward liberation: The “theological interpretation of the Old Testament is the disestablishment of our usual modes of interpretation and the parallel disestablishment of the institutional vehicles of such interpretation.”[129] This statement suggests an emphasis on the power of individual readers, as opposed to the more institutional community of faith in the work of Childs. In the postmodern age, Brueggemann notes, there are no interpretative institutions that can sustain a hegemonic authority; there is no metanarrative, only context- and interest-driven interpretations that take place through disputation and accommodation.[130]

Relation of the Testaments and Jewish–Christian Dialogue

The Old and New Testaments are inseparable in the canonical criticism of Childs, because of the formative role of the New Testament as the rule of faith for the church. The rule of faith represents an institutional hermeneutic that empowers and overpowers individuals. Thus, every Christian theology of the Pentateuch is biased by faith commitments that are deeply embedded from the influence of the institutional church on the life of believers. As such, no Christian interpreter can escape religious presuppositions, which means that all Christian theological interpretation of the Pentateuch is limited in scope by the hermeneutical influence of the community of faith. What this also means for Childs is that no Christian reading could ever exhaust the interpretative capacity of the Pentateuch, especially since the shapers of the text were Jews, not Christians. Thus, for Childs, the active role of the rule of faith safeguards against the implied superiority of Christianity over Judaism in past biblical theologies, which traced the development of early Israelite religion into Christianity, as though it were an objective historical process. The same limitation, however, is also present in ongoing Jewish theological interpretation of the Pentateuch; it too proceeds within its own interpretative tradition, which also functions as the institutional rule of faith. The result is that both Judaism and Christianity “relate

themselves in a dialectical movement to the text on the basis of a context of faith." In view of this, interfaith dialogue becomes important in canonical criticism for Christian biblical theology; it reveals the multiply ways in which the Pentateuch can be read beyond the horizon of Christian interpretation, while also clarifying that "the Old Testament does not 'naturally' unfold into the New Testament," but that the Testaments are related through inter-biblical exegesis. [131]

Brueggemann's approach to the relationship of the Testaments and interfaith dialogue is just the opposite of Childs. The Old and New Testaments must be kept separate. The long history in Christian theologies of the Pentateuch to override Jewish religious claims cautions against relating the Testaments from the outset; in addition "the Old Testament does not obviously, cleanly, or directly point to Jesus or to the New Testament."[132] Neither of these conclusions separates the post-liberal and the canonical approaches to the theology of the Pentateuch, since Childs would agree with both of them. The distinction between the two approaches arises from differing views of the central hermeneutical influences upon the reader and the aim of biblical theology. For Childs, the institutional rule of faith is the central hermeneutical influence on the reader; the goal of biblical theology is to establish Christian theological identity through a critical reading of the canon. For Brueggemann, cultural ideology and social location are the most significant hermeneutical influences on the reader; the goal of biblical theology is to create a counter-reality, which certainly includes identity, but whose primary goal is ethical action against the oppression from the dominant culture of military consumerism.[133] The theology of the Pentateuch, therefore, is not the "exposition of the faith"; it is, rather, "doing theology,"[134] by which Brueggemann means working toward the goal of distributive justice. [135]

The goal of justice, as the aim of "doing theology" through rhetorical criticism, embeds Jewish and Christian dialogue into any theology of the Pentateuch from the outset: "Jews and Christians share . . . much more extensive, much more important, much more definitional [theological interests] than what divides us."[136] The shared goal does not preclude differences in

interpretation, especially in light of the “polyphonic, elusive and imaginative power of the text.” Thus Christians are able self-consciously to bend the Pentateuch toward the New Testament, while Jewish interpretation moves in its own distinctive direction, based on the lived experience of faith and tradition. Neither trajectory of reading, however, need to preempt or foreclose the other, especially given the shared threat of modernity to each religious tradition: “It appears to me that the waiting of Jews (for Messiah) and the waiting of Christian (for the second coming) is a common waiting that stands against a despairing modernity.”[137]

12.2 Jewish Theologies of the Pentateuch

Biblical theology was a Christian discipline throughout the modern period. Jewish interpreters may have explored the theological significance of particular texts or themes, but they did not contribute to the field of biblical theology as it emerged among Protestant Christian interpreters. As recently as 2000, Tykva Frymer–Kensky wrote: “It is a truism that Jews don’t do theology.”[138] Her statement echoes similar conclusions by Matitiahu Tsevat[139] and Moshe Goshen-Gottstein[140]; both agree that biblical theology is not part of Jewish scholarship of the Torah or of the entire Tanakh, for that matter. Thus, the growing interest in the theology of the Torah among Jewish interpreters in the past decades is noteworthy. This section will trace the emerging voice of Jewish biblical theology of the Pentateuch in two stages: (1) Jewish responses to Christian biblical theology, and (2) a recent example of a Jewish theological interpretation of revelation at Sinai.

Jewish Responses to Christian Biblical Theology

Ehud Ben Zvi attributes the increased interest in biblical theology among Jewish scholars to the interaction of Jews and Christians as colleagues in North American universities and divinity schools.[141] The new interaction he notes is not without tension for Jewish interpreters; any Jewish scholar who approaches the discipline of biblical theology must engage an established Christian method of interpretation in a larger social setting, where Christianity is the majority culture and the discipline of biblical theology reflects a long history of inner Christian discourse. As a result, Jewish biblical scholars who pursue biblical theology cannot escape the interpretative framework of the majority Christian culture. The challenge for Jewish interpreters is to recognize the inevitable influence of Christian discourse in the discipline of biblical theology, "but also to express their own constructions of self-identity" (40).

Jon Levenson provides a critique of Christian biblical theology in the essay, "Why Jews are not Interested in Biblical Theology." The career of Levinson illustrates the significant changes in religious education in North America at the end of the twentieth century noted by Ehud Ben Zvi, in which Christian universities and divinity schools began to include Jewish scholars on teaching faculties. Levenson received the Ph.D. from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University (1975), before teaching at Wellesley College (1975–82), the University of Chicago Divinity School (1982–88), and the Divinity School of Harvard University (1988–).

Levenson gives voice to the changing cultural situation, recalling a request from a Christian colleague for bibliography on Jewish biblical theology to balance the reading assignments for a course. He notes his awkward response, since "there is no Jewish equivalent" to the works of Eichrodt or von Rad. The interaction prompted Levenson to explore the reasons for the absence of Jewish biblical theology.

Jewish biblicists, according to Levenson, avoid biblical theology because of "the intense anti-Semitism evident in many of the classic works in the field"

(40). Such works simply continue the ancient polemic against Judaism "in which the New Testament writers and the church fathers excelled" (40). He cites Eichrodt, noting his pronouncement that Judaism has only "a torso–like appearance . . . in separation from Christianity" without feeling the need even to engage post-biblical Jewish literature to support the claim. Levenson concludes: "Healthy persons will not willingly put themselves into a situation in which they will hear themselves defamed" (42).

The methodology in Christian biblical theology also presents problems for Jewish interpreters. The merging of Christian biblical theology with historical criticism initially stifled the development of the critical study of the Pentateuch among Jewish scholars in the early-twentieth century, hindering a rigorous intellectual engagement with both Christianity and the modernity that fueled biblical theology (43). The initial retreat from historical criticism forced Jewish interpreters to take defensive positions rather than offer counter-proposals about the theological significance of Torah in contemporary Jewish scholarship (44). The developmental view of religion in many models of salvation history excluded Jewish interpreters even further, since they often progressed directly from early Israel to the mission of Jesus. In so doing, Christian interpreters judged the book-centered religion of Second Temple Judaism as "cut off from its spring of vitality" (58), while ignoring the "inconvenient facts that most Jews did not think so and that Jewish literature remained alive, vigorous, and growing" (41).

The Protestant confession of *sola scriptura* also clashes with the role of the Torah in Jewish interpretation (51). The separation of scripture and tradition provides the central inner-Protestant dynamic for Christian biblical theology, but such a hermeneutical perspective could not possibly be the model for any authentic Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch, where the written text of Torah flows seamlessly into the oral tradition of post-biblical interpretation. Thus, in a Jewish theological interpretation of the Pentateuch, there could be no separation between Scripture and tradition; the Torah could not stand alone as the norm without its oral tradition of interpretation (47).

The merging of the Torah and tradition creates a further conflict with

Christian biblical theology, where the aim is to identify the central theme of the multivoiced Pentateuch. Jewish interpretation avoids a constructive theology, preferring instead to discern problems in the Torah in order to draw out a variety of logical inferences without spiritualizing or abstracting the potential solutions into a single solution (56). As a result, there is no center to the Torah in the Talmud; there are, rather, majority and minority reports on ambiguities and problems of interpretation.

But not all agree with Levenson's stark separation between Christian and Jewish theological readings of the Pentateuch. Although biblical theology may have been a Christian discipline throughout the modern period, many contemporary Jewish interpreters have concluded that it should be a broader interfaith discipline of study in the postmodern period. Marvin Sweeney, the Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Claremont School of Theology, notes the dramatic changes in the field of biblical studies in the article, "Why Jews are Interested in Biblical Theology." He states that the theological study of the Pentateuch is increasingly undertaken through joint research among Christian and Jewish scholars. Christian scholars avidly consult Jewish scholarship and regularly study the religious practices and worldview of Judaism to understand the Pentateuch. At the same time, Jewish scholars are inevitably becoming drawn into theological discussions with Christians. These interactions pave the way for the development of Jewish biblical theology, as is evident in Sweeney's own contribution to the field: *Tanak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*.

Jewish Dialogical Biblical Theology

Benjamin D. Sommer reflects the new cultural and academic environment where Jewish and Christian scholars work closely together in the interpretation of the Pentateuch; he received his PhD in Religion from the University of Chicago (1994) before teaching at Northwestern University (1994–2008) and the Jewish Theological Seminary (2008–). Sommer's early work focused on the methodology of inner-biblical interpretation, examining the multiple ways in which Second Isaiah reworked older biblical texts in the composition of Isaiah 40–66,[142] and on the organic relationship between conceptions of the deity in biblical texts and in later Jewish philosophy and mysticism.[143] The research on Scripture as an inner-biblical dialogue among authors and its extension into later Jewish philosophy provides the foundation for exploring a biblically oriented Jewish theology in *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (2015). A Jewish dialogical theology of revelation at Sinai may be summarized in three related topics: (1) Torah and Tradition; (2) Torah and Historical Criticism; and (3) A Modern Jewish Approach to Scripture.



Figure 12.5 Benjamin Sommer.

Torah and Tradition

Sommer agrees with the conclusion of Levenson that the Protestant confession of *sola scriptura* cannot provide the basis for a Jewish theological reading of Bible, because it isolates the Written Torah from the ongoing oral tradition of interpretation. He notes that the separation between text and tradition was already problematic for Christian theological readings of the Pentateuch throughout the modern period, but it was destructive for Jews, especially when Christian interpreters extended the hermeneutic "to distinguish between the Bible and Judaism altogether, insisting that the Bible is not really a Jewish book at all" (21). The interreligious and social consequences of *sola scriptura* created "a firewall between biblical religion and Jewish culture, between Israel and Judaism," supporting supersession in which "the church replaced Jews as the true Israel and the true inheritor of the Bible" (21).

In Judaism, there is no such thing as the distinction between Scripture and tradition as in classical Christian Protestant biblical theology; there is only tradition in written and oral forms, both of which "stem from revelation at Sinai" (148). The account of the revelation at Sinai, therefore, is foundational to the creation of the religion and the ethnicity of Judaism. "Jewish liturgy says repeatedly: 'God gave Torah to the Jewish people.'"

Pirkei Avot describes the process by which the revelation was transmitted: "Moses received Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly." This text underscores that the revelation received by Moses and passed on orally in Jewish tradition cannot be separated; they form an intrinsic relationship in which the Written Torah and the Oral Torah are an organic whole stretching throughout Jewish history, from the most ancient texts to contemporary philosophy. This is the starting point for Sommer to fashion a Jewish dialogical theology in which the "Bible itself is a work of Jewish thought, a repository of ideas and questions that stand in direct continuity with the rabbinic, medieval and modern texts" (2).

Sidebar 12.6 Written and Oral Torah

The Written Torah is the Pentateuch composed by Moses; the Oral Torah represents the laws, statues and legal interpretations not written but passed on until their initial codification in the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE).



Figure 12.6 Torah procession in worship.

The unity of tradition in written and oral form changes the role of the Pentateuch as a resource for a Jewish theological reading of Bible. Definition of the two forms of Torah provides the starting point for interpretation. The Written Torah has clear boundaries; it includes the Pentateuch as well as the entire twenty-four books of the Jewish Bible, forming a closed canon in Judaism with special significance. The Written Torah is used in ritual practice; it functions as an icon and sacred object in corporate liturgy; it is the resource for lectionary reading in worship; and its ritual authority extends from the synagogue to the doorpost of Jewish homes (*mezuzah*) and is even attached to individuals during prayer (*tefillin*).



Figure 12.7 Mezuzah (Hebrew meaning "doorpost") is a piece of parchment attached to the doorpost of a Jewish home. The parchment contains specific verses from the Torah, including the Jewish prayer, "Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH is One" (Deut 6:4-9). The mezuzah pictured here is located near the entrance to the Museum of the History of the Jewish People in Warsaw.

The authority of the Written Torah is *formative* in Judaism; its texts are read, taught, transmitted, and interpreted, providing shared vocabulary and values that shape individual and communal religious identity. The ritual use of Written Torah also enhances its prestige as a resource for manifesting the sacred into the profane world (170–75). "[B]ut [the Written Torah] is not the location of legal norms that Jews follow. When one wants to know [specific ritual and legal procedures or crucial beliefs] one does not open up a Bible. One turns instead to works of Oral Torah" (171).



Figure 12.8 At prayer with talith (prayer shawl) and tefillin (philactery) on arms and head. Tefellin(Aramaic meaning "prayers") is a collective term for Jewish phylacteries worn during prayer. The black leather tefillin boxes contain verses from Torah.

Oral Torah has vague boundaries; it includes primarily the classical rabbinic literature (sixth–first centuries BCE) and the post-talmudic texts and teachings from the geonic period (eleventh–sixth centuries BCE), but it also extends through the Middle Ages and after. Although the boundaries are more open-ended than the Written Torah, "the existence and importance of Oral Torah, however large its periphery may be, are quite clear" (148–49). Oral Torah represents *normative* authority, rather than the descriptive authority of the Written Torah; it is an open canon that provides guides to specific ritual and legal procedures as well as crucial beliefs (170–73). The Oral Torah does not share the central cultic role of the Written Torah, but it does include noncultic ritual "reading practices peculiar to Jewish cultures through the ages"; the transmission of its law is always interpersonal and dialogical, requiring teacher, student, or study partners with the focus on the fluid and changing rules, attitudes, and habits of Jews in the present time.



Figure 12.9 In this nineteenth century painting by Carl Schleicher, a group of rabbis are engaged in an argument over the meaning of a passage in the Talmud.

The relationship between the Written and Oral Torah is crucial for a Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch, requiring a reevaluation of the more traditional view of canon as the Scripture of the Written Torah. Sommer states: "The English term *scripture* is misleading in a Jewish context, because it obscures the extent to which traditional Judaism conceptualizes the Bible as both oral and written" (159). "Rabbinic sources blur the boundary between Oral Torah and Written Torah, and others effectively eliminate it"; both "Torahs were revealed to Israel, both are sacred, and both carry authority" (151). Thus, a Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch as Torah requires a *transcanonical* canon, meaning "a canon that goes beyond the twenty-four books of the Jewish Bible to encompass rabbinic literature" (157).

A *transcanonical* theological reading of the Pentateuch does not begin with the Written Torah as in *sola scriptura*. Sommer clarifies: "The words of *torah* are a unity that includes scripture, repeated tradition (*talmud*), discussion of tradition (*talmud*), laws (*halakhot*), and lore (*aggadot*)."[144] In Sommer's view, Scripture is only one form of the larger entity that is tradition, and as a consequence, the authority of Oral Torah does not depend on the Written Torah, nor is its function "to explicate the Written Torah and to fill in its gaps" (155). If anything, the relationship between the Written Torah and Oral Torah is just the

reverse, with the Oral Torah maintaining the primacy of place for interpretation since it better characterizes tradition as a whole, making the Written Torah its subset. Thus, “Written Torah is one manifestation of Oral Torah,” blurring the boundaries between them (147).

The “Oral Torah has a conceptual and even temporal priority over the Written Torah” in a Jewish theological interpretation of the Pentateuch (156). The Pentateuch as Written Torah requires the Oral Torah both to raise the appropriate theological questions at any given time in tradition and to distill the specific guidelines and practices from the Written Torah, which has “didactic and edifying” authority (formative), but lacks “prescriptive” authority (normative) (172). The nineteenth-century Orthodox rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch illustrates the perspective: “The role of the Written Torah is only to provide notes and samples of the larger whole so as to prompt the memory of the reader.” In other words, “the Written Torah provides the Cliffs Notes to the Oral Torah, but in no way supplant(s) it” (155). Theological reading of the Pentateuch is therefore always a dialogue within tradition, conceived as oral and written.

The unity of Written and Oral Torah influences the concept of revelation at Sinai in a Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch. Sommer distinguishes stenographic and participatory conceptions of revelation. The stenographic theory privileges the Written Torah over the Oral Torah. God speaks all the words at Sinai, thus employing language in revealing law through dictation to Moses. Revelation, therefore, is embedded in the content of the laws within the Written Torah, since these laws are the actual words of God (2, 43, 103). God also revealed the content of the Oral Torah to Moses, but its inscription fifteen centuries after Moses means that the exact words of divine revelation are paraphrased. As a result, theological interpretation concentrates on the Written Torah to discern the meaning of the laws as divine revelation.

The participatory theory of revelation requires both the Written and Oral Torah. The reason is that the revelation at Sinai is a numinous experience of the divine voice (*qol*) without verbal content; God does not actually speak the words of the law at Sinai. The Decalogue and the other laws at Sinai represent a human response to the divine self-manifestation—the attempt to translate God’s non-

verbal voice into human language. The Written Torah, therefore, cannot be the sole object of theological interpretation, because its laws are the product of humans who translated the divine voice into human language (2, 43, 102–3). Thus, the wording of the Written Torah already contains divine and human contributions requiring the unity of Scripture and tradition for theological interpretation. Historical criticism underscores the important role of participatory revelation in the Written Torah, since it identifies multiple human responses to the wordless revelation at Sinai, indicating theological dialogue already in the composition of Exodus 19–24.

Torah and Historical Criticism

The rise of historical criticism in Christian Protestantism severed the relationship between the Pentateuch and its interpretation in Jewish tradition; it limited the meaning of the biblical text to its historical context, while also emphasizing the discontinuity between Bible and Judaism (21). But it need not, according to Sommer. The identification of multiple accounts of revelation in Exodus 19–24 actually embeds the Pentateuch in tradition, rather than separating the two. Historical criticism clarifies that the Pentateuch is composed of different accounts or responses to the revelation at Sinai, making it impossible to identify the content of divine revelation with any one source. The insight underscores that the "Bible, along with all of Jewish tradition, is a response to God's act of revelation." Sommer quotes Abraham Heschel approvingly: "As a report about revelation the Bible itself is a *midrash*." "The Bible remains holy as a response to God's self-manifestation, but its working (or most of its working) is the product of human beings" (29–30).

Law is central in a Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch: "[T]he Pentateuchal sources that narrate what happened at Sinai agree on the principle that Israel's response to God expresses itself through law, but they differ on what that law actually is" (126). The E, P, and J sources reflect the range of human responses to the revelation of law at Sinai (45–64). The E source (Exod 19:2b–9a, 16aa–17, 19; 20:1—23:33; 24:3–8, 11bb–15, 18b) provides the most content

to revelation during the immediate event, including the Decalogue (20:1–17) and the Book of the Covenant (21:1—23:33); these law codes form the basis of covenant. Even though the revelation of law is unmediated, E maintains a degree of ambiguity about its content through the multiple meanings of the divine voice (*qol*) in theophany (Exod 19:16a*a*–17, 19) and the paradoxical description of the people's perception of revelation (Exod 20:18). The P source (Exod 19:1–2a; 24:16b–18a; 25:1—31:18; 34:29–35; 35:1—Num 10:28) provides no legal content to revelation in the immediate experience of theophany, but anchors the legislation as later mediation by Moses, thus eliminating the possibility of understanding revelation as being direct in the E source. The J source (Exod 19:9b–16a, 18, 20–25; 24:1–2, 9–11a; 32:9, 26–29; 33:1–15, 12–23; 34:2–3, 5–17, 18–26) too provides no legal content to the revelation mediated through Moses, even though legislation remains crucial to the divine–human relationship (see Exod 34:27).

The sources were written independently; each was intended to provide a comprehensive theology of revelation: "Each source presents its story about the giving of law without any sense that other laws were given at some other point in time" (73). Historical criticism qualifies the comprehensive claims of the individual sources, because the recovery of multiple sources prohibits any one version from functioning as the authoritative Written Torah. Comparison indicates that the sources range widely in identifying the process and content of the revelation at Sinai. The diversity clarifies that each source is a provisional human response to revelation, and thus, part of the tradition of interpretation.

The redaction of the sources into the final form represents yet an additional human response to revelation at Sinai, in which the sources are "jumbled" into a "disarray," which "relativizes the sources, replacing their clarity with cacophony" (74). The effect is to introduce yet another level of ambiguity about the nature of revelation in Scripture, since redaction ensures that no one source dominates the Pentateuch: "What the Pentateuch presents to us is not univocality but argument, not clarity but perplexity" (74). The effect of redaction is to embed the sources in the present form of the Pentateuch as varied memories of revelation. "By presenting a jumbled set of memories as to what happened at the

lawgiving, how it happened, why and when and where it happened, the final version of the Pentateuch forces us to wonder about revelation and to contemplate its nature" (74). Indeed, contemplation, participation, and dialogue that the final version forces upon its readers are themselves part of the revelatory process. As a result, "[t]he varied memories found in the Pentateuchal sources serve as religiously valuable testimonies that provide guidance to people for whom the Bible functions as scripture" (45).

The process by which Scripture prompts memory and rein-terpretation is already evident in the Written Torah itself—in Deuteronomy. Its authors refer back to the event at Sinai in order to "clarify ambiguous statements, revise material, and react to ideas the older sources express." As inner-biblical interpretation, Deuteronomy is both Written Torah and "the oldest Jewish commentary" on the revelation at Sinai, providing its own unique perspective on the revelation of law (64). The movement within the Pentateuch from the multiple accounts of the revelation at Sinai to the recounting of the event in Deuteronomy is "crucial for any Jewish attempt to wrestle meaning from Bible"; it illustrates the way in which the Written Torah models participatory revelation in its composition and demands the same participation from the reader (64, 75). Revelation through dialogue means that the words of the Written Torah are tentative and searching as in the Oral Torah, rather than fixed and definitive divine pronouncements.

Modern Jewish Approach to Scripture

The modern Jewish theological reading of the Pentateuch may be summarized with the following building blocks: (1) recovering multiple accounts of revelation at Sinai to reveal the Written Torah as a sourcebook of debate; (2) reading the Pentateuch for disunity allows for a greater unity in Jewish tradition because it blurs the boundaries between the Written and Oral Torah; and (3) "fleeing the center" in a Jewish theological reading of the revelation at Sinai follows the practice of classical Rabbinic interpretation, thus linking text and

tradition and avoiding the aim of unifying the multivoiced Pentateuch around select themes.

Historical criticism is essential to a modern Jewish theological reading of Scripture. The prevailing attitude, that historical criticism confines itself to antiquity in the study of the Pentateuch, and thus, is irrelevant or even harmful for a constructive Jewish theology, could not be further from the truth, according to Sommer. Historical criticism has not isolated the text of the Pentateuch from the ongoing Jewish tradition of interpretation, but just the reverse; it has allowed modern Jewish interpreters to rediscover the multivoiced character of Scripture as the original dialogue within the covenant community of Jews. The identification of the J, E, D, and P sources clarifies that the tradition of dialogue in Judaism is an extension of debates originating in the Bible itself. This insight leads to the conclusion that the Pentateuch represents the earliest form of Oral Tradition and that relegating the study of the Pentateuch's composition to the past would exclude the first Jews from the ongoing dialogue of tradition, creating a Jewish form of supersession.

The literary character of the Pentateuch as an anthology of debate rather than a unified document embeds the Written Torah within the larger tradition of Oral Torah, thus blurring the boundaries between them. The blurring is especially evident in Deuteronomy, which recounts the past event of revelation at Sinai as though it were the present experience of the second generation on the plains of Moab. The suspension of time, along with inner-biblical reinterpretation of Exodus 19–24, identifies Deuteronomy as a work of Oral Torah attempting to be Written Torah (198). Once Deuteronomy is established as Written Torah, inner-biblical interpretation may reverse direction, giving rise to a circular form of composition, in which the earlier source texts eventually come under the influence of the later teachings in Deuteronomy. The result is a strong sense of the continuity of tradition, in which later teachings may actually "boomerang" into early teachings.

The continuity of tradition, in which interpretation moves back and forth suspending a linear development between texts, is not restricted to the composition of the Pentateuch; it continues into post-biblical Jewish tradition,

which also blurs the boundaries between Written and Oral Torah so that the inner-biblical debate within Written Torah extends into post-biblical Judaism, creating long trajectories in Jewish intellectual history that may also move back and forth in tradition. For example, the debate among the Pentateuchal sources (J, E, P, and D) on the degree to which the law was mediated repeats among the classical rabbis and medieval interpreters. Thus, Rav Hamnuna in b. Makkot and Rabbi Joshua in Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabba have a minimalist view of revelation, similar to that of P, J; while Midrash Mekhilta and Rashbam have a maximalist view of revelation similar to D (75).

Finally, a Jewish theological reading of the Bible would follow the practice of classical rabbinic interpretation, and thus, avoid harmonizing the conflicting sources in the Pentateuch. Traditional Jewish reading never sought a holistic reading of the Pentateuch, nor did it seek the center or the overarching unity of the text. Rather, it "flees from the center" and is "oriented toward multiplicity" in two ways: first, classical midrash is an atomizing form of reading, focused on individual verses or small collections of verses, with the aim of linking words from one part of Scripture with words or verses from elsewhere"; and second, classical midrash is careful to "record exegetical controversies among rabbis," and thus, always include alternate interpretations of a verse (218–23). The recovery of the J, E, D, and P sources through historical criticism and the recognition that a compiler avoided any harmonization of the versions clarifies that the Bible contains the seeds of the rabbinic method of reading. The redaction of multiple accounts of revelation at Sinai "marks the beginning within Jewish tradition of the attitude that both these and those are the living words of God" (224). A Jewish theological reading of revelation at Sinai would follow the guidelines of the text and also hold together the multiple accounts of revelation at Sinai as representing dialogue or perhaps better debate that continues into post-biblical Jewish tradition. In this way, reading the Pentateuch for disunity allows for a greater unity in Jewish tradition because it anchors the biblical text itself in the ongoing tradition of Jewish interpretation.

Summary

The dialectical theology of Sommer provides a distinctive Jewish interpretation of the Pentateuch that also engages the Christian biblical theologies of Brueggemann and Childs. These emerging Jewish and Christian voices open a new horizon in interreligious dialogue that overlap in methodology, including an emphasis on the biblical text, rather than the history behind the text, the important role of historical criticism as a literary methodology, the identification of theological pluralism in the canon, and the rejection of *sola scriptura*. They also raise questions about the composition of the Pentateuch, the role of redactors, the nature of the canon, and the function of tradition.

The theologies of Sommer, Brueggemann, and Childs share a range of interpretative perspectives. Each work focuses on the text as the basis for biblical theology, rather than the historical development of ancient Israelite religion. Childs rejects the emphasis on history in the Biblical Theology Movement stating that it cannot provide a theology of the Pentateuch; Brueggemann stresses the rhetoric of the text as the basis for a theology of dispute; and Sommer embeds the Written Torah within the ongoing tradition of Oral Torah. In each case, the text of the Pentateuch is interpreted within the context of tradition, rather than history. Each author also employs historical criticism to emphasize the multiauthored character of the Pentateuch. The result is that the Pentateuch is judged to be an anthology representing theological pluralism, whether conceived as the independent J, E, D, P sources or a process of supplementation and inner-biblical revision. Finally, each author also rejects the principle of *sola scriptura*, emphasizing instead the active role of the reader (Brueggemann), the community of faith (Childs) or Oral Torah (Sommer) in the theological interpretation of the Pentateuch. As a result, interpretation does not emerge solely from the text, but requires the active role of the reader or tradition to fashion a biblical theology from the Pentateuch.

The emerging Jewish and Christian theologies also raise lingering questions about history, the literary formation of the Pentateuch, and its relationship to ongoing tradition. The role of history remains unresolved in current theological

interpretations of the Pentateuch. Childs, Brueggemann, and Sommer rightly reject past Christian biblical theologies based on developmental reconstructions of the history of Ancient Israel religion; each favors, instead, the text of the Pentateuch as the resource for biblical theology. As a result, the social context of the different compositions within the Pentateuch plays little or no role in interpretation. Brueggemann's focus on the trauma of the exile as the catalyst for theological reflection and dispute represents the strongest emphasis on history to account for the formation of the Pentateuch. Childs and Sommer, however, focus almost exclusively on the text and its relationship to ongoing tradition, thus detaching the Pentateuch from the social history that produced its various literary compositions, leaving unresolved the role of the history of Ancient Israel in the theological interpretation of the Pentateuch.

Childs and Sommer present conflicting views on the role of the redactor in creating the final form of the Pentateuch, which raise additional questions for further study about the composition of the Pentateuch and its relationship to ongoing tradition as a theological resource. Childs identifies literary intention in the redaction of the Pentateuch; the aim of "canon-conscious" redactors is to link historically dissimilar texts into a larger literary whole without harmonizing. Sommer disagrees, arguing that the redaction of the Pentateuch lacks the literary intention suggested by Childs; the effect of redaction is to create a disarray of jumbled literature in which the clarity of the sources becomes a "cacophony," prompting no roadmap for interpretation, only contemplation and wonder in the reader (74). Sommer writes: "I cannot see why, from a Jewish point of view, the redactor of the Pentateuch should have a more important voice than the P authors, or the D authors who came before him, or than various commentators on the Pentateuch who came after" (230). This debate is unresolved and it raises questions for further study. Does the literary intention of "canon-conscious" redactors privilege the final form of the Pentateuch and lead inevitably to a unified theological interpretation of the text in the research of Childs? Does the collection of independently written sources into random disarray support the dialogical Jewish theology of Sommer? Would not an inner-biblical and redaction-critical reading of composition provide a more coherent basis for

Jewish dialogical theology? These questions and others can only be resolved through ongoing Jewish and Christian theological interpretations of the Pentateuch.

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13

Pentateuch and Reception History

The Pentateuch is one of the most influential literary works in Western culture. The accounts of the ancestors in Genesis and of Moses in Exodus–Deuteronomy shape the development of the three major Western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As Carol Bakhos notes, each religion identifies itself as part of the family of Abraham.[1] Abraham receives the promise that he will be the ancestor of the nation of Israel: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). The Apostle Paul broadens the promise to non-Jewish Christians: “he is the father of us all,” declares Paul to the Roman church (Rom 4:16). Islam is the restoration of “the religion of Abraham” (Qur’an 2.135) in tracing its origin from Abraham’s son Ishmael.[2]

Sidebar 13.1 Abrahamic Religions

The comparative study of Abrahamic Religions extends beyond Judaism, Christianity and Islam to include Baha’I and Druze. The Abrahamic religions represent very distinct traditions, while also exhibiting “family resemblances” most notable an adherence to monotheism. For discussion, see Adam J. Silverstein and Guy G. Stroumsa (*The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*).

Moses also plays an influential role in each of the three major Abrahamic religions. He is the founder of Judaism, receiving the revelation of law at Mount Sinai, with the majority of the Pentateuch recounting his biography from birth (Exod 2:1–10) to death (Deut 34:1–12). The rabbis reinforce the central role of

Moses, stating that he received the revelation at Sinai (*Sanhedrin* 99a) and composed the Torah (*Bava Batra* 14b). Moses is also one of the most referenced characters in the New Testament and in the Quran. Moses is with Jesus during the transfiguration story when the identity of Jesus is revealed: “Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus” (Mark 9:3–4). Moses is also one of six inspired prophets in the Qur’an (3.3). Qur’an 19.51–52 elaborates on his special status: “And mention in the Book Moses. Indeed he was exclusively dedicated [to Allah], and an apostle and a prophet. We called him from the right side of the Mount and We drew him near for confidential discourse.” The references clarify that Moses is involved in the most intimate revelation from God in both Christianity and Islam.

The influence of the Pentateuch exceeds the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and also impacts politics, culture, and art in Western history. Michaelangelo’s sculpture of Moses, for example, translates the physical representation of Moses into the ideals of the Italian Renaissance human (1513–1515 CE), while the Jubilee law from the Pentateuch provides the interpretation of The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, which symbolizes the ideal of the American Revolution: “Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof” (Lev 25:10).



Figure 13.1 Moses by Michelangelo Buonarroti, Tomb for Julius II, San Pietro in Vincoli (Rome).

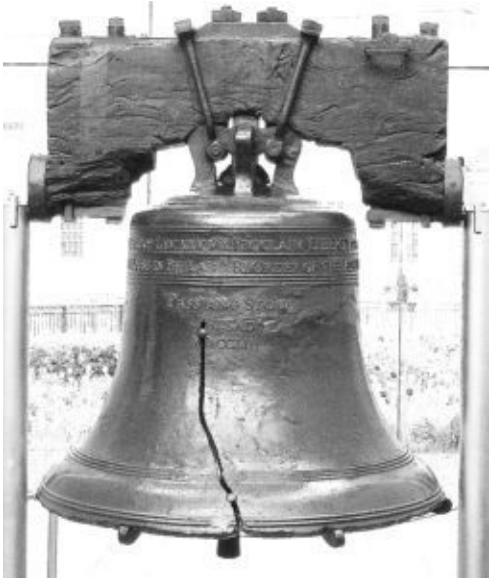

Figure 13.2 The Liberty Bell, Philadelphia (2008).

The methodology of reception history traces the influence of the Pentateuch in shaping Western religion, politics, and culture. Hans Georg Gadamer provides the goal of reception history, when he states that the aim of interpretation is not to reproduce the objective meaning of a text, but “to clarify the conditions in

which understanding takes place.[3]" This definition broadens the lens of interpretation from the study of the Pentateuch as an isolated object in the past to the interaction between the Pentateuch and the reader through time. Gadamer characterizes the dynamic relationship between the text and the reader as *Wirkungsgeschichte*, "the history of the effect" of an authoritative text upon readers. Interpretation of "the history of the effects" of the Pentateuch upon Western history requires the study of the biblical text, but also the social location and the preconceptions of subsequent readers, since both are necessary to describe "the conditions in which understanding takes place." The inherent relationship between the Pentateuch and the social circumstances of readers ensures that interpretation will always change through time, since the horizon or point of encounter between the text and different readers is never the same.

Sidebar 13.2 Reception History

Reception history assumes that any literary work includes the text and its appropriation by the reader who is embedded in a specific cultural context. The objective reading of a text is impossible; subjectivity, prejudice and historical context are inherent in interpretation, creating a dialogue between the past text and the present reader. For discussion, see Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (*The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*).

The changing relationship between the Pentateuch and historically conditioned readers creates tradition for Gadamer; it is formed from the continual merging of the past text with the changing social contexts of its readers.[4] Thus, tradition is not something that the interpreter recovers in the text; rather, it is created through the interaction between text and reader. The creation of tradition, moreover, is not simply the history of interpretation, as though the creative force for new readings resides with the reader, who simply "receives" and refashions the Pentateuch. Rather, reception history assumes the active influence of the Pentateuch upon the reader, who is shaped by the text.

Herbert Schneidau captures the dynamic force of the Pentateuch in reception history, noting that it "uses authors" by "demanding new interpretations."[5]

The reception history of the Pentateuch explores the creative tension between the Pentateuch's demand to be interpreted, especially as it achieves a canonical status as Torah, and the reader, whose changing expectations introduce new ideas and address new problems that exceed the horizon of the original audience. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate the reception history of the Pentateuch in Western culture with two related examples: "Moses and the Decalogue" will trace the influence of the Pentateuch on civil law in Western tradition, focusing in particular on the American revolution; and "Depatriarchalizing the Pentateuch" will examine the unease of women over the prominent role of the Pentateuch in shaping American civil law and culture. The two themes are illustrations of the many ways in which the Pentateuch shapes Western history.

13.1 Moses and the Decalogue in Western Culture

The reception history of Moses and the Decalogue in Western history is too complex to summarize in detail. In view of this, the goal of this section is to illustrate the transformation of Moses and the Decalogue at three moments in Western history: (1) the creation of the Pentateuch as Torah in the Persian period (see ch. 10), in which Moses and the Decalogue provide the religious center for Second Temple Judaism; (2) the reinterpretation of the Pentateuch by Hellenistic Jewish authors to transform Moses and the Decalogue within the ideals of Greco-Roman culture; and (3) the further mixing of the Pentateuch and civil law in Western Christian tradition during the period of the American revolution.

The brief overview will provide an example of the way in which religion, politics, and culture are blurred in the reception history of the Pentateuch in Western history in general, and especially within the North American experience of national formation, with the result that Moses and the Decalogue emerge as central features in a national civil religion.

The Decalogue is a religious document in the Pentateuch; it begins with the divine self-revelation: “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2). The revelation is directed to Israel alone; it is intended to provide insight into the character of Yahweh, the God who saved them from Egyptian oppression. Thus, the revelation of the Decalogue is a unique religious experience of Israel: “When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance” (Exod 20:18). The revelation of the Decalogue also propels Moses into the role of a religious mediator who leads the Israelites in worship: “And Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exod 24:4).

The authors of the book of Exodus leave no doubt that they envision the revelation of the Decalogue to represent the essence of their religion. The knowledge of the law is not innate to the Israelite people or to humans in general for that matter; rather, the Decalogue requires a special revelation from Yahweh that is restricted to the Israelite nation alone. The content and the power of law, moreover, are not simply about general rules of living; rather, the law embodies salvation and health. God promises the Israelites at the outset of the wilderness journey that the revelation of law would be the source of healing: “If you will listen carefully to the voice of Yahweh your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am Yahweh who heals you” (Exod 15:26).

David Daube concludes from the account of the revelation of the Decalogue that “the authors of the Bible saw law as part of religion.”[6] Samuel Greengus adds the anchoring of law in religion may be unique to the legal tradition of Israel in the Ancient Near East.[7] The result, according to Z. W. Falk, is that law

and spirituality become merged into one within the formation of the Pentateuch. [8]

The ideal person exhibiting the spirituality of law is Moses, who contemplates law and perceives the core of divine love. His direct experience of God in the cave at the mountaintop reveals the essence of divine grace (Exod 34:7–10). His repeated trips to the summit of the mountain eventually transform his face into divine light, allowing him to transmit the divine revelation of the Decalogue, to establish the cult, and to lead the Israelites in worship: “Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. . . . Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that Yahweh had spoken with him on Mount Sinai” (Exod 34:29, 32).

Hellenistic Judaism

The portrait of Moses in the Pentateuch as the mediator of the revealed Decalogue and the leader of the Israelite cult undergo transformation when Judaism is confronted with Hellenism. Louis H. Feldman notes that Moses emerges as one of the more prominent figures from Jewish tradition in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, becoming the object of praise and ridicule.[9] In the fourth century BCE, for example, Hecataeus of Abdera characterizes Moses as a wise leader who colonized Judea,[10] which is echoed by the historian and geographer Strabo (64 BCE–24 CE). But Moses also becomes the object of satire and criticism. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (35–100 CE) notes that Moses was "the founder of the Jewish superstition" (3.7.21); the Roman poet Juvenal (late-first century–early-second century CE) extends the criticism, referring to Moses's arcane book in order to mock converts to the superstition of Judaism; and the Roman scientist Galen of Pergamon concludes that Moses lacks honor because he did not limit the power of God to the laws of nature.[11]

These references to Moses draw Hellenistic Jewish authors into the broader world of Greek philosophy and natural law. The aim of their writing is apologetic; they seek to idealize Moses within the standards of Greco-Roman culture and to demonstrate the universal significance of the Decalogue. Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE–50 CE) and Josephus (37–100 CE) represent this new form of apologetic rewriting of the Pentateuch. Both writers seek to counter the claim of Greek and Roman writers that Moses is not a great lawgiver and that he should not be remembered throughout the ages.

In the *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus counters the criticism of Moses by asserting his greatness over all humans who have ever lived.[12] In order to achieve his goal, Josephus rewrites the life of Moses to conform to the Greek ideal of the hero. Louis H. Feldman writes: "Because the *Antiquity* is an apologetic work directed primarily to non-Jews, Josephus portrays Moses as embodying the qualities of the great heroes of the Greeks and Romans; notably the external qualities of good birth and handsome stature, precociousness in his

youth, [possessing] the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice," supplemented by piety. Where the Pentateuchal account of Moses conflicts with the Greek ideal, Josephus further rewrites the story, eliminating for example the account of Moses's murder of the Egyptian or refashioning aspects of Moses's story that conflict with the ideal, such as his low birth, menial occupation as a shepherd, marriage to a foreign woman, or speech impediment. The result is that Josephus's portrayal of Moses begins to blur the boundary between the religious mediator of divine law in Torah and the Hellenistic ideal of the cultural hero, who is more "reminiscent of Thucydides' portrait of Pericles, of Plato's description of the philosopher-king, of Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas, and of the traditional Stoic sage."[13]

Philo also promises his work on Moses will illustrate that he is "the greatest and most perfect man that ever lived" and the "laws which he left behind" have significance for all humanity—they have "reached over the whole world" and "penetrated to the very further limits of the universe."[14] The purity and universal significance of the Decalogue is evident from the setting of its revelation in the desert as compared to the city. Cities are evil and filled with diversity of opinion, while the purity of the desert indicates the Decalogue could not possibly be an invention of humans.[15] The laws of the Decalogue represent general principles of nature, according to Philo. The universal significance of the Decalogue is evident by the prominence of the number "ten," a complete and perfect number,[16] which corresponds to the categories of nature that support all existence: (1) quality, (2) essence, (3) quantity, (4) relation, (5) action, (6) passion, (7) possession, (8) condition, (9) time, and (10) place. "There is nothing which is devoid of participation in these things,"[17] according to Philo, because "it was the Father of the universe who delivered the ten maxims" of the Decalogue.[18] Philo goes further, stating the ten maxims of the Decalogue are not simply laws of action, but principles representing the summary of all other laws; thus, their scope of influence is universal. Philo concludes: "the laws of the Jews are shown to be desirable and precious in the eye of all, ordinary citizens and rulers alike."[19]

Josephus's apologetic rewriting of the history of Moses as fulfilling the Greek ideal of the hero and Philo's interpretation of the Decalogue as representing the universal laws of nature are early examples of reception history. The Torah is authoritative for both authors; it demands interpretation. But the emergence of Hellenism, with its distinctive philosophy of nature and belief in human reason, provides the new "condition in which understanding takes place" for the Jewish authors. These Hellenistic Jewish authors respond to the authority of Torah and their new cultural context by mixing religion, politics, and culture; they create a portrait of Moses and an interpretation of the Decalogue that conforms to the ideals of Hellenistic society. In so doing, they break the traditional religious boundaries of the Torah to claim its universal significance for Jews and Greeks alike. Their work lays the foundation for the interpretation of Moses and the Decalogue throughout Western history.

American Revolution

The reception history of Moses and the Decalogue in Western history builds on the creative interpretation of Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Josephus and Philo. The idealization of Moses and the universal significance of the Decalogue become topics of further reflection through the Medieval (e.g., Thomas Aquinas) and Reformation (e.g., John Calvin; Philipp Melanchthon) periods. But Moses and the Decalogue take on new prominence in the American experience of colonization and nation-building.

In writing about the Pilgrim's travel to America on the Mayflower, James Russell Lowell compares them to Moses and the Israelites: "Next to the fugitives whom Moses led out of Egypt, the little ship-load of outcasts who landed at Plymouth two centuries and a half ago are destined to influence the future of the world."[20] The inspiration of Moses extended beyond the experience of salvation, according to Lowell, to provide a vision of society informed by Judaism: "the spiritual thirst of mankind has for ages been quenched at Hebrew fountains," propelling the Pilgrims "to make the law of man a living counterpart of the law of God."[21]

The impact of Moses and the Decalogue on the Pilgrims could not be clearer than in the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), in which the fourteen capital offences for civil crimes include most of the laws of the Decalogue; the first provides illustration: "If any man after legal conviction shall have or worship any other god, but the lord god, he shall be put to death (Deut 13:6, 10; 17:2, 6; Exod 22:20)." Howard Payson Arnold underscores further the prominence of Moses and the Decalogue as the resource for civil law, noting that when Gov. William Bradford inquired of the laws for the colony in 1642, Charles Chauncy (the future president of Harvard College) replied by referring to Moses and the Decalogue: "That ye judicials of Moyses, that are appendances to ye morall law, & grounded on ye law of nature, or ye decalogue, are imutable, and ppetuall, wch all orthodox divines acknowledge."[22]

The influence of Moses and the Decalogue increases from the experience of

the Pilgrims to the founding of the nation. Howard Payson Arnold wrote in 1899: “As in the estimation of our forefathers, the makers of New England, so with the makers of the United States, Moses towered high, like a mighty column resting on the dread foundation, laid by divine and all-wise Omnipotence and never to be shaken.”[23] Arnold notes the idealization of Moses by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as the “Herculean lawgiver.” Franklin even proposed Moses as the symbol for the national seal, reasoning that the newly formed United States resembled “a constitution . . . framed for the Jews by the Deity himself” which “the Supreme Being personally delivered to his chosen servant, Moses, in the presence of the whole nation, a constitution and code of law for their observance.”[24] Lowell adds: the “Mosaic grip was as tenacious upon [John Adams] as upon [Benjamin Franklin]. . . . Though [Adams] did not believe in the divinity of Christ, he did put implicit faith in the Pentateuch as a revelation from on high.”[25] Adams himself confirms the conclusion: “As much as I love, esteem, and admire the Greeks, I believe the Hebrews have done more to enlighten and civilize the world. Moses did more than all their legislators and philosophers.”[26]

The Pilgrims and the founding fathers of the United States extend the reception history of the Pentateuch, and in so doing, they build on the initial blurring of religion, politics, and culture inaugurated by Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Josephus and Philo. The result is that Moses becomes firmly fixed in the legal and governmental system of the United States, with statutes, paintings, and reliefs in the Library of Congress, the House of Representatives, and the Supreme Court Great Hall.



Figure 13.3 Moses with Ten Commandments and other figures on the south frieze of the Supreme Court building in Washington, DC (Photo: Steve Petteway, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States).

Monuments of the Decalogue also become commonplace in public buildings, schools, and courthouses, raising legal questions about the separation of religion and civil government demanded in the Constitution. The reception history of Moses and the Decalogue is so thorough and so complete in the American experience that it has raised debate whether the Decalogue is a religious document at all or a representation of the moral and legal foundation of civil society in the United States.



Figure 13.4 Monument of the Ten Commandments located on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol.

13.2 Depatriachalizing the Pentateuch

The reception history of the Pentateuch undergoes a new transformation when women criticize the patriarchal structure of law in America as an obstacle to religious and civil rights. In this new "condition in which understanding takes place," the dynamic relationship between Mosaic and civil law—so important to the founding fathers—becomes the object of criticism, not praise, by women in the nineteenth century. Two sections will explore the critique of patriarchy in the Pentateuch: the first is the quest of women interpreters to separate Mosaic law from civil law in *The Woman's Bible* during the suffrage movement of the nineteenth century; the second will examine the recovery of heroic women characters in the Pentateuch as a critique of patriarchy during the period of social criticism in the late-twentieth century.

The Suffrage Movement

The suffrage movement in the nineteenth century addressed the problem of women's civil right to vote.

Sidebar 13.3 Suffrage

Suffrage means the right to vote in a political election. The suffrage movement began with the Seneca Falls Convention (1848) and it achieved its goal with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex" (1920).

The reference to human rights in the Declaration of Independence (1776) provides a point of departure: Thomas Jefferson and the Continental Congress stated in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The initial focus of the document was more on the creation of a new state, than on the subject of human rights. Jefferson, after all, owned slaves. But the contradiction between slavery and the proclamation that "all men are created equal" brought the topic of human rights to the foreground almost immediately in political debates and it came to prominence in the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century. The abolitionist focus on human rights tended to merge religion and civil law even closer together. Bertram Wyatt-Brown wrote that the Bible and the Declaration of Independence became equal resources among the abolitionists in opposing slavery.[27]

Sidebar 13.4 Abolitionist Movement

The Abolitionist Movement was an anti-slavery movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which former slaves (e.g., Sojourner Truth) and free citizens (e.g., George Donisthorpe Thompson) protested against the laws and institutions of slavery, culminating in President Lincoln issuing the Emancipation Proclamation (1862): “And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.”

Abolition and the Right to Vote

Many abolitionists were women. Lucretia Mott (1793–1880), for example, was a Quaker abolitionist who helped form the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (1833).

The activity brought women into new public roles that eventually created tension, as during the General Anti-Slavery Convention (1940), when male leaders sought to exclude women from participation. The cultural resistance to the public and political role of women was grounded in both religious and civil law. Those opposed to women's suffrage argued that the human rights of the Decalogue were addressed only to males; they also interpreted the proclamation "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence restrictively to exclude women. Thus, it was not long before the human rights struggle against slavery branched out to include the rights of women.



Figure 13.5 Painting of Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) by artist Joseph Kyle (1815-1863).

The wedding of Mosaic and civil law to support the subordinate role of women became a significant barrier to equal rights. Mott began lecturing on

religious and civil law, arguing that “the laws given at Mount Sinai for the government of men and women were equal” and that the same must be true for civil law, but to date, “the Church and State have been united” in depriving women of equality under the law.[28]



Figure 13.6 Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), like Mott, was part of the abolitionist movement. Both also became leaders in suffrage for women; they organized the first women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls (1848). The Seneca Falls conference explored the social, civil, and religious rights of women, focusing in particular on civil law and the right of women to vote. The convention produced the Declaration of Sentiments about women’s rights modeled after the Declaration of Independence; it replaced the original charge against the “king of England” with a new charge against males in general for “usurpations on the part of man toward woman.” Thus, the Declaration of Sentiments opposed male oppression, stating: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (1848). But the women quickly realized that the critical evaluation of American civil law alone would not lead to emancipation even though the primary goal

was suffrage, because civil and religious laws were so intertwined at many points.

Woman's Bible

The need to evaluate the oppressive role of religion in support of civil law eventually produced the *Woman's Bible*, a two-volume work consisting of commentary on the Pentateuch (Volume 1, 1895) and the remainder of the literature in the Christian Bible (Volume 2, 1898). Stanton clarifies the aim of the project in the *Introduction*: "The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man." Given the oppressive results from the intertwining of religion and state, Stanton concludes it is no more audacious to "review Moses [Pentateuchal law], than Blackwell [English system of jurisprudence]," warning her reader "your political and social degradation are but an outgrowth of your status in the Bible," whether the reader views the text as useless history or the inspired word of God.

The intertwining of religious and civil law meant that the Pentateuch required critical evaluation, according to Stanton. She concludes "the Mosaic code and customs so plainly degrade the female sex and their position in the church today grows out of these ancient customs." Females are rarely mentioned in the commandments on Mount Sinai. "The regulations are chiefly for males, the offerings are male, the transgressions referred to are male" (commentary on Exod 18:1–7). So too "males only were to witness Moses' ascent to Mount Sinai and the coming of the Lord in a cloud of Fire" (commentary on Exod 18:1–7). This, in spite of the fact that the hero "Moses was indebted to some woman for safety and success at every stage of his existence." The laws on purity also were never complimentary for women (commentary on Exod 19:12–16). Even the more universal laws of the Decalogue are chiefly for men; "we have no hint of the presence of women" (commentary on Exodus 20). "As thoughtful, intelligent women, we question all this" (commentary on Deuteronomy 4).

Stanton adds: Given the male focus of the Decalogue, "the fifth commandment (to honor father and mother) will take the reader by surprise. It is rather remarkable that the young Hebrews should have been told to honor their

mothers, when the whole drift of the teaching thus far has been to throw contempt on the whole sex." She concludes: "Our civil and criminal codes reflect at many points the spirit of the Mosaic. In the criminal code we find no feminine pronouns, as 'He,' 'His,' 'Him,' we are arrested, tried and hung, but singularly enough, we are denied the highest privileges of citizens, because the pronouns 'She,' 'Hers' and 'Her,' are not found in the constitutions. It is a pertinent question, if women can pay the penalties of their crimes as 'He,' why may they not enjoy the privileges of citizens as 'He'?" (commentary on Exodus 3).

The Pentateuch also provides glimpses into a better world for women in the creation story in Genesis, but the ideal gives way immediately to the dominance of men. Stanton comments on Genesis 1:26–28: "The first chapter of Genesis is not the record of the creation of the world. It is a symbolical description of the composite nature of man, that being which is male and female in one." The simultaneous creation of male and female expresses the true nature of the human, with the male reflecting the exterior and the female the interior; the language may even provide insight into the Deity as "Mother" and "Father." The creation of male and female has legal implications: "As to woman's subjection, on which both the canon and the civil law delight to dwell, it is important to note that equal dominion is given to woman over every living thing, but not one word is said giving man dominion over woman." Stanton concludes, however, that this brief glimpse of the ideal vision of creation gives way in the second creation story (Genesis 2). She is aware of the documentary hypothesis; she identifies the duplicate accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and notes the different view of the woman in Genesis 2, concluding "some wily writer, seeing the perfect equality of man and woman in the first chapter, felt it important for the dignity and dominion of man to effect woman's subordination in some way" (commentary on Genesis 2).

The subjugation of woman in the second account of creation (Genesis 2) becomes the norm in the stories of the ancestors (Genesis 12–50). The wives of the patriarchs are anything but heroic, because male oppression has moral implications. Sarah provides illustration: "As Sarah did not possess any of the

heroic virtues, worthy our imitation, we need not linger either to praise or blame her characteristics. Neither she nor Abraham deemed it important to speak the truth when any form of [evasion] might serve them. In fact the wives of the patriarchs, all untruthful, and one a kleptomaniac, but illustrate the law, that the cardinal virtues are seldom found in oppressed classes" (commentary on Genesis 29, 31). Stanton concludes: "Whilst we drop a tear at the tomb of Sarah, we cannot recommend her as an example to the young women of our day, as she lacked several of the cardinal virtues. She was undignified, untruthful, and unkind to Hagar. But our moral standard differs from that of the period in which she lived, as our ideas of right and wrong are not innate, but depend on education. Sarah probably lived up to the light that was in her" (commentary on Genesis 23).

Stanton adds wistfully: "One longs all through Genesis to know what the women thought of a strictly masculine dynasty" (commentary on Genesis 36). But since the answer is unattainable, she concludes: "The only significance of dwelling on these women and this period of woman's history, is to show the absurdity of pointing the women of the nineteenth century to these as examples of virtue" (commentary on Genesis 26). Yet, she adds: "[I]n criticizing the peccadilloes of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, we would not shadow the virtues of Deborah, Huldah, and Vashti."

The Feminist Movement

The women's movement for suffrage reached its goal in the early-twentieth century with the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the United States Constitution (1920), prohibiting any citizen from being denied the right to vote on the basis of sex. The vote, however, did not resolve the many restrictions on human rights that continued to effect women; these issues came into focus with the Feminist Movement in the 1960s.

The 1960s was a time of broad social unrest in the United States, dominated by the Civil Rights Movement for racial justice led by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). The quest for racial justice resulted in the Civil Rights Act (1964), which banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment practices; it also outlawed unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools as well as the workplace. Resistance to the implementation of the Civil Rights Act intensified the Civil Rights Movement with such events as the Selma to Montgomery march (1965), riots in many different cities (1964–70); the conflict even led to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968).

Sidebar 13.5 Civil Rights Movement



Figure 13.7 The Civil Rights March on

Washington, D.C. — Leaders marching from
the Washington Monument to the Lincoln
Memorial, August 28, 1963.

The Civil Rights Movement in the late-twentieth century begins with the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) rejecting segregation in the public school system, thus overturning the "separate but equal" ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). The movement culminates in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banning discrimination on the basis of "race, color, religion, sex or national origin"; and in the Civil Rights Act of 1968 legislating fair housing.

The Feminist Movement was born during the same period of unrest as the Civil Rights Movement, linking race and women's rights in a similar manner as the earlier Suffrage Movement. In her "Address to the Women of America" at the National Women's Political Caucus (1971), Gloria Steinem commented on the linkage of race and gender in North American culture, politics, and labor practices: "Sex and race because they are easy and visible differences have been the primary ways of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups and into the cheap labor on which this system still depends." The National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966 with the aim "to confront, with concrete action, the conditions that now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of choice which is their right, as individual Americans, and as human beings."

Although the Feminist Movement was an outgrowth of the Suffrage Movement, it also represented significant contrasts that influence the reception history of the Pentateuch. The right to vote gave the Suffrage Movement a singular political emphasis requiring the direct engagement with the Pentateuch, since the restriction of women to vote was supported in part by the intertwining of Mosaic and civil law. Stanton warned her readers: "your political and social degradation are but an outgrowth of your status in the Bible." The Feminist Movement lacked the same intertwining of religious and civil law.

The Feminist Movement represented a more secular debate about women's

rights than the Suffrage Movement. Neither the Pentateuch nor organized religion in general played a central role in this conflict. The Feminist Movement focused instead on the general and pervasive lack of equal opportunity, especially for educated white women, who found themselves confined to domestic roles in a male-dominated culture. “Women’s opportunities expanded greatly for about 15 years after they won the vote in 1920,” wrote Gloria Steinem, “but they have been getting more limited ever since.”[29]

In seeking to address the limited opportunities for women in secular public life, the Feminist Movement was hindered by a deeper problem, according to Betty Friedan (1921–2006), which emerged from the lack of opportunity for women. The increasingly limited role of women in society had influenced the nature of female experience itself, which became increasingly confined to the domestic realm or not acknowledged at all, since males controlled the civic and political structures of society, and thus, defined the character of public experience; they even defined acceptable domestic experience by controlling the ideal portrait of the female as housekeeper and childbearer in women’s magazines.

The limitation of female experience to domestic roles and its isolation from civic and political structures was so acute, according to Friedan, that women did not even realize “the problem that has no name”: “The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States.”[30] According to Friedan, the male confinement of women to domestic experience created the “feminine mystique,” the illusion that women were naturally fulfilled in devoting their lives to being housewives and mothers. Liberation from this male construction of femininity required an awakening to a broader experience of life that represented the full humanity of women. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan chronicled her own experience of the problem and of her awakening to a new female identity that is more than sexual reproduction or the domestic role of motherhood.



Figure 13.8 Betty Friedan.

The awakening of women to authentic female experience, as opposed to the feminine mystique, became a central organizing feature in the many activities of the Feminist Movement. The first step in liberation was for women to focus on their own experience, to become conscious of its limitation under patriarchy, and to explore its potential power if set free. In the article “The Personal is the Political,” Carol Hanisch captured the dynamic role of women’s personal experience as the resource for transforming social politics and laws. Consciousness-raising among women, according to Hanisch, was not simply therapy; it was an important political feature in the Feminist Movement. When women became conscious of their full human experience, it empowered them to improve female access to health care, to take control of their own bodies and reproduction, and to claim equal opportunity in employment.[31]

Even through the intertwining of religion and culture was not central in the emerging Feminist Movement of the 1960s as in the Suffrage Movement, the Pentateuch retains a significant role for Feminist biblical interpreters, but from a new hermeneutical perspective grounded in experience. The self-awareness of authentic female experience provides the new “condition in which understanding takes place” in the reception history of the Pentateuch. The focus on experience creates a different reading strategy than that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. No

longer is the aim to distance the reader from female characters in the Pentateuch as “absurd” examples of “virtue” for “the women of the nineteenth century.” Twentieth-century feminist interpreters move in just the opposition direction, to recover the lost stories of women in the Pentateuch through interpretation informed by the awareness of their own experience as women.

Phyllis Trible

Phyllis Trible (1932–) illustrates the emergence of a feminist interpretation of the Pentateuch in the late-twentieth century. Trible earned a PhD at Union Theological Seminary (1963), studying rhetorical criticism with James Muilenburg (see ch. 4); she taught at Wake Forest University (1963–1971), Andover Newton Theological Seminary (1971–1979), Union Theological Seminary (1980–1998), and Wake Forest University School of Divinity (1998–2014). Trible first clarified a feminist approach to the Pentateuch in the article “Depatriarchalizing Biblical Interpretation” (1973), described by Athalya Brenner as the “honored mother of feminist . . . scholarship” (“Quo Vadis Domina? Reflections on What We have Become and What We Want to Be”).



Figure 13.9 Phyllis Trible.

The starting point for a feminist interpretation of the Pentateuch, according to Trible, is the recognition that the text is thoroughly patriarchal in outlook. She writes: “It is superfluous to document patriarchy in Scripture. Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. . . . The legal codes of Israel treat women primarily as chattel.”[32] The history of interpretation simply reinforces the patriarchy in the biblical text, further obscuring the role of women characters in the Pentateuch. But a feminist reading may be able to retrieve the lost characters, and in the process, even depatriarchalize the Pentateuch. Trible’s reflection on Miriam provides aim: “Buried within Scripture are bits and pieces of a story awaiting discovery. It highlights the woman Miriam. To unearth the fragments, assemble them ponder the gaps and then construct a text requires the play of many methods but the dogmatism of none. This enterprise welcomes all lovers of Scripture who seek to redeem life from patriarchal death.”[33]

Trible outlines the meaning of feminist interpretation in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978) and in *Texts of Terror* (1984). The subject matter of both books is women characters; examples from the Pentateuch include Eve (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*), Hagar (*Texts of Terror*), and the feminine within the Deity (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*). Trible is quick to add that a feminist interpretation is not simply a literary study of women characters; it is, rather, “a critique of culture in light of misogyny.”[34] The interpretation of women is intended to counterbalance the patriarchy of the Pentateuch; recovering and highlighting the story of women is, therefore, a prophetic task, since it brings to light tradition covered over by the status quo established through male-dominance.[35]

Lived experience is central to the feminist interpretation of Trible. Both books emerge from personal events that awakened her to the subject matter. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* began to gestate in 1963: the year witnessed the collapse of the status quo in biblical studies, represented by the Biblical Theology Movement, as well as cultural chaos with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the bombing of the Birmingham church that killed four African American girls. But the same year also contained the potential for new beginnings in the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, Sylvia

Plath's *The Bell Jar,* and a teaching appointment at Wake Forest. Trible reflects on these experiences: "Very soon I realized that the theology which informed my life was inadequate for addressing the concerns of students; nor was it still wholly satisfying for me. Ironically, the mighty acts of God in history proved wanting, and the ensuring years have heightened that deficiency" (xv). Personal experience continues to drive the content of *Texts of Terror*: "Choice and chance inspire my telling these particular tales: hearing a black women describe herself as a daughter of Hagar outside the covenant; seeing an abused woman on the streets of New York with a sign, "My name is Tamar"; reading news reports of the dismembered body of a woman found in a trash can" (2–3).

Lived experience also provides the hermeneutical grounding to interpret the stories of women in the Pentateuch. The interactions of the interpreter in her present life provide a lens to see similarity in the world of the Bible, according to Trible, which allows the feminist reader to recognize "an affinity between then and now." The affinity allows the feminist interpreter to "document the case against women in the Bible" and thus uphold forgotten texts; in some cases, shared experience may even allow the feminist interpreter to reframe the negative or marginal presentation of women in the patriarchal text.[36] Thus, Trible documents the patriarchal bias that has traditionally judged woman to be created for man and Eve to be the tempter of Adam (Genesis 2–3), while also reframing the story to underscore the powerful role of Eve in conjunction with Adam, reflecting more the creation of humans as "male and female" from Genesis 1.[37] The same hermeneutical process yields a feminist interpretation from the fragments of Hagar's story, whose victimization provides an occasion for judgment upon the reader.[38]

Through the process of feminist reading, the patriarchal stamp of the Pentateuch remains, but the interpretation of the content begins to change. Trible likens the recovery of new feminist interpretations to the woman in the Gospel of Luke (15:9) who rejoices over finding the coin that was lost.[39] The aim of interpretation is not to distance the text from contemporary women, as Stanton sought to do, but to appropriate the text for contemporary women through shared

experience, and in the process, to depatriarchalize the Pentateuch through new feminist interpretations.

Women's Bible

Feminist interpretation of the Bible developed rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s. It was not long before women reflected further on the central role of experience in feminist interpretations of the Bible and the need for a comprehensive commentary to provide a resource for all women readers. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe addressed this need in creating *The Women's Bible Commentary* (1992). They introduce the volume by highlighting the problem of experience for women: "Although women have read the Bible for countless generations, we have not always been self-conscious about reading *as* women" (xiii). As a result, the dominant male culture often defined women's experience in reading the Bible, invoking it "to justify women's subordination to men." This danger reinforces the crucial role of women's experience for the task of feminist interpretation: "Women have distinctive questions to raise about the Bible and distinctive insights into its texts: our experiences of self and family, our relationship to institutions, the nature of our work and daily lives, and our spirituality have been and continue to be different in important respects from those of men" (xiii). *The Women's Bible Commentary* promises to "gather some of the fruits of feminist biblical scholarship on each book of the Bible in order to share it with the larger community of women who read the Bible" (xv).

The Women's Bible Commentary "pays tribute to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's pioneering work almost a century ago," in which the *Woman's Bible* "attacked both the male bias that had distorted the interpretation of the Bible and the misogyny of the text itself" (xiv–xv). But the editors underscore that the twentieth-century version also seeks to expand upon the original in a number of ways. The *Woman's Bible* lacked professional commentators, and thus, was not a work of biblical scholarship, since female scholars feared academic reprisal if they took part in a project that might "prove very unpopular." The pioneering work of professional feminist interpreters, like Phyllis Trible, for example,

opened new possibilities for female scholars “to read the Bible self-consciously as a woman” (xiv). Another difference is the formative role of female experience. The *Woman’s Bible* underscored the contrast between males and females, but it also assumed unified experience and a singular female perspective in interpretation. Twentieth-century feminism clarified that there can be no single “woman’s perspective.” Female experience is varied, requiring diversity of perspective. This recognition is “one of the insights of feminism,” according to Newsome and Ringe (xv–xvi), prompting the change in title from the singular to the plural *Women’s Bible*.

The commentary on the Pentateuch moves in a variety of directions, documenting the case against women in the text, clarifying male bias in the history of interpretation, inserting new interpretations that accentuate the role of women, and pointing out affinity between women’s experience in the text and in the present time. The goals of interpretation are tentative, however, because male editing makes the recovery of any female experience difficult at best.[40]

The negative portrayal of women in the text is overwhelming and it is often reinforced by male bias in the history of interpretation. Selective examples from the Pentateuch include the restriction of the matriarchs to the domestic sphere in Genesis, where they remain in a marginal status.[41] The same restriction permeates the cultic theology of Leviticus; Judith Romney Wegner writes: “An overriding concern with holiness and cultic purity viewed women’s mysterious bodily functions as a potential source of cultic pollution, which barred them from participation in the public religious enterprise.”[42] In Numbers, men control female sexual behavior (Numbers 5), often judging women as seducers (Numbers 25) or humiliating women in public claims of lineage and land possession (Numbers 27, 36)[43]. In Deuteronomy, men control female sexuality, marriage is a form of female slavery, while male genitals are sacrosanct.[44] The objectification of women in the Pentateuch is often reinforced in the history of interpretation, as, for example, in the common interpretation of women as created for man in Genesis 2–3.[45]

Feminist interpretations also bring the more heroic role of women into

clearer light. Rebekah, for example, functions as a powerful woman in a man's world in orchestrating Jacob's blessing and inheritance.[46] Rachel too represents the power of a female trickster, who uses the male taboo of menstruation against her father.[47] Women are prominent in the opening chapters of Exodus where they function inclusively over against the violence in the male world around them, with the midwives even taking overt political action.[48] Miriam challenges the dominance of Moses in Numbers[49] and women may even be included in the revelation of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy.[50]

The insights from reading about women in the Pentateuch provide analogy and affinity to the contemporary experience of women: "As people attuned to the modern debate about the place of women in contemporary cultures read this ancient book, they may well be first aware of the great gulf between that ancient culture and their own. But it is important that this sense of distance not deceive the reader, for the correspondences to the situation of modern women and men continue to be very great indeed."[51]

Summary

The feminist interpretation of the Pentateuch has branched out at a rapid pace in many directions in the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first centuries. The inability of Stanton to coax professional women scholars to interpret the Pentateuch is no longer an obstacle; today, many women and men explore feminist interpretations of the Pentateuch. Also, what was only a wistful dream for Elizabeth Cady Stanton to uncover the experience of Ancient Israelite women is also becoming a reality through anthropological and sociological research on women in the ancient world (e.g., Carol Meyers; Phyllis Bird; Naomi Steinberg); in her 2014 Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Carol Meyers even questioned whether the modern term "patriarchy" applies to the social role of women in the ancient world ("Was Ancient Israel A Patriarchal Society?"). Throughout the many developments in the feminist

interpretation of the Pentateuch, the central role of women's experience remains foundational.

The grounding of interpretation in the unique experience of women has continued to drive contemporary feminist interpretation of the Pentateuch in many new directions to embrace the lived experience of women from around the world. The "rereading" of Hagar by the African American scholar, Delores Williams, in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (1993) provides one example. Williams accentuates the slave history of African American women as the lens for interpreting the story of Hagar, reinforcing the close relationship between race and feminism that began with Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the nineteenth century.

Sidebar 13.6 Womanist

Alice Walker introduced the term "womanist" to describe "a black feminist or a feminist of color." Excerpts of the fuller description include "willful behavior"; a woman who "loves another woman, sexually and/or non sexually"; "prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility"; is "committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female"; "loves herself. Regardless."; Walker concludes: "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender."[52]

The experience of African American women as African, slaves, surrogate mothers, single mothers, homeless, alien, brutalized by owners, and subject to domestic violence reveals the central themes in the story of Hagar. These shared experiences of exploitation between African American women and the Egyptian slave-girl Hagar provide deep understanding of the Hebrew testament. Williams adds that Hagar's unexpected encounter with the Deity in the wilderness provides further shared experience with the religious practice of African American women, who often "testify" to the nearness of God in order "to resist and to rise above" their oppression.

The shared experience between the Egyptian slave-girl and contemporary African American women provides the basis for a Womanist interpretation, in which the central theme of the story of Hagar is not liberation, as is often the case in male interpretations, but divine participation in suffering, which is meant to aid Hagar and contemporary African American women in “finding a way out of no way.”

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40. Drorah O'Donnell Setel, "Exodus," 27. ↵
41. Susan Nititch, "Genesis," 15–24. ↵
42. "Leviticus," 43. ↵
43. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Numbers," 45–51. ↵
44. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Deuteronomy," 56–57. ↵
45. Nitisch, "Genesis," 13–14. ↵
46. Niditch, "Genesis," 19. ↵
47. Niditch, "Genesis," 21. ↵
48. O'Donnell Setel, "Exodus," 30–31. ↵
49. Sakenfeld, "Numbers," 46. ↵
50. Frymer-Kensky, "Deuteronomy," 53. ↵
51. Sakenfeld, "Numbers," 51. ↵
52. *In Search of Our Mother's Garden's: Womanist Prose*, xi–xii. ↵

Glossary

Aaronide priests: The ruling priesthood in Jerusalem during the Persian period (and beyond), who traced their ancestry to the priestly family of Aaron.

Abib: The first month of the festival calendar in the Spring (approx. March/April), later named Nisan.

Achaemenid: A dynasty of Persian kings (559–333 BCE).

Aesthetics: The study of beauty, taste, and the arts.

Ahura Mazda: The chief deity of Zoroastrian religion and the imperial deity of Persia.

Akhenaten: Pharaoh Amenophis IV (c.1350 BCE), who was devoted to the worship of god Aten (the solar disk).

Alexander the Great: The Macedonian warrior king who conquered the Persian Empire and expanded its boundaries. It is under Alexander that Hellenistic thought began spreading throughout the ancient world.

Amalekites: A nomadic people who generally lived in the Negev and were described as being at war with Israel during the time of the Judges and the early monarchy.

Amarna: The place on the Nile River where Akhenaten had his court.

Amarna Letters: Letters from petty Canaanite rulers to the Egyptian Pharaoh dating from the fourteenth century BCE that provide cultural context for Israel's

history and mention many cities and locations that appear in the Historical Books.

Ammonites: A people to the east of Israel and north of Moab who allied with other peoples against Israel during the time of the Judges and fought with Israel during the monarchy.

Amphictyony: A league of tribes around a central shrine.

Ancient Near East: The region of southwest Asia bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf.

Aniconic/Aniconism: Forms of religion that oppose icons or visual images of any kind.

Anthropology: The study of humans within societies of the past and present.

ʻApiru* (*Ḫabiru): A group of nomadic people living throughout the Ancient Near East including Canaan, who are mentioned in the Amarna Letters (and other texts); some scholars think may be linked to the word Hebrew, and thus, to the Israelites.

Apodictic law: Absolute, declarative law, lacking any conditions..

Aramaic: An alphabetic Semitic language related to Hebrew, adopted by Mesopotamian empires and later, the Persian Empire as the official language of diplomacy. Under Persia, Aramaic also became a sacred language, utilized by scribes and religious scholars for the study of holy texts.

Aram/Arameans: Aramaic speaking tribal confederacy that emerged in Syria in the Late Bronze age, who later had interactions with the Northern Kingdom.

Ark of the Covenant: A sacred portable chest that was associated with the tabernacle in the story of the wilderness wanderings; it is also describe in stories

of the judges and the early monarchy. It was carried into warfare by Israel, most notably around Jericho (Joshua 6). Eventually, it was moved into the temple by Solomon (1 Kings 8).

Artaxerxes I: Persian emperor during 464–424 BCE.

Artaxerxes II: Persian emperor during 404–358 BCE.

Artaxerxes III: Persian emperor during 359–338 BCE.

Atrahasis: One of the Babylonian accounts of creation; the name of a wise human in that Account.

Assonance: Resemblance of sounds; the repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming within phrases or sentences.

Baal: The Canaanite storm-god.

Babylon: Mesopotamian empire that replaced Assyria in the region and conquered Jerusalem in a series of conquests and deportations.

Babylonian Exile: The captivity and forced migration of major populations from Jerusalem and its environs in the early-sixth century BCE, spanning roughly 50 years (587–538 BCE).

Babylonian Talmud: Rabbinical documents dating from the third to fifth centuries recording commentary and interpretation on, among other things, biblical texts, including theories of authorship.

Ban (*herem*)**:** The custom of slaughtering the enemy as a sacrifice to the god of the victors.

Book of the Covenant: Exodus, chapters 21–23.

Book of the Twelve: A literary work that wove together the smaller prophetic

books of the Bible (Hosea–Malachi), probably redacted during the late Persian period.

Booths: *See* Feast of Ingathering.

Cambyses: Persian emperor during 530–522 BCE.

Canaan: The area including Palestine, Lebanon, and part of Syria in the second millennium BCE.

Canaanites: Initial residents of the land of Canaan that the Israelites gradually drove out to take possession of the land.

Canon: The corpus of biblical books, viewed as sacred Scripture.

Canonical criticism: Theological approach to the Old Testament as Scripture, regarding the final form of the text as authoritative.

Cartesian: The philosophical and scientific traditions derived from the writings of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), who argued that knowledge can be obtained through reason.

CBH: Classical Biblical Hebrew; the Hebrew of the monarchy period and perhaps also the exilic period.

Centralization of Cult: The prohibition of sacrifice outside of Jerusalem by King Josiah, 621 BCE; also called the Deuteronomic Reform.

Climactic parallelism: Form of poetry in which part of one line, either a word or phrase, is repeated in the second and third lines to develop a main idea or statement.

Conquest: The Israelite occupation of the Promised Land of Canaan as described in the book of Joshua.

Covenant: A solemn agreement; used especially of agreements between God and Israel.

Credo: “I believe”; a profession of faith.

Cult/cultic: From the Latin, *cultus*, meaning the “care” owed to God or gods and to temples, shrines, or churches. Cultic veneration includes ritual and ceremony within temples.

Cyrus the Great: The founder of the Persian Empire in 539 BCE, who assumed control of the Babylonian empire and who decreed amnesty for all captured people, including former citizens of Judah.

D Source: The Deuteronomic source in the Pentateuch.

Darius I: Persian emperor during 522–486 BCE.

Darius II: Persian emperor from 423–404 BCE.

Darius III: Persian emperor from 336–331 BCE.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur): The holiest day of the year in the Priestly calendar observed on the tenth day of the seventh month.

Day of Yahweh: The significant temporal event to the life of the people of Israel that takes on cosmological significance.

Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)**:** A collection of manuscripts found near the Dead Sea which originated from the ancient community at Khirbet Qumran. Their discovery (between 1946–1956) was a source of great excitement to scholars and others because the scrolls contained not only many works providing invaluable information about religious life in the late Second Temple period, but also the earliest copies of sections of the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, many of the scrolls are badly damaged.

Decalogue (Ten Commandments): Set of commands revealed to Israel at Mount Sinai.

Deuteronomic Reform: The reform of King Josiah, 621 BCE, which centralized the cult in accordance with Deuteronomy 12.

Deuteronomistic History: A term used by scholars for the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, since they contain language reminiscent of the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomistic Redaction: Editing performed by redactors with a strong interest in theological values that stem from the book of Deuteronomy.

Divine Warrior: A concept of the divine in the ancient world where a deity is envisioned engaging in battle against cosmic enemies. In Ancient Israel, this was an important aspect of YHWH, evident in a number of psalms and narratives.

Documentary Hypothesis: The theory that the Pentateuch was composed by combining four main strands or documents (J, E, D, P).

Dream Theophany: Pertaining to the belief in antiquity that divine forces could reveal themselves of their will to humans during a sleeping/dream state.

Edom: The name of a country and a people descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, who dwell in Transjordan, between Ammon to the north, the Dead Sea and the Arabah to the west, and the Arabian desert to the south and east.

El: A Canaanite high god; the word El is a generic name for “god” in biblical Hebrew.

Elders: Traditional tribal leaders in agrarian social groups holding juridical and often ritual authority.

Elephantine papyri: A collection of Aramaic documents found in an archive at the site of Elephantine, an ancient Jewish colony on the Nile River in Egypt.

Elohim: The Hebrew word for God; can be understood as either singular or plural.

Elohist (E): According to the documentary hypothesis, one of four sources of the Torah; name comes from Elohim, the term for God used in this source.

Enneateuch: The nine books from Genesis-Kings in the Masoretic Text (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings).

***Enuma Elish*:** The Babylonian account of Creation.

Ephraim: Tribe named for a son of Joseph, in the central hill country of Israel, often used as a name for Israel.

Ephraimite highlands: The hill country in the northern/central region of ancient Canaan.

Euphrates River: One of the major rivers bounding the region of Mesopotamia. The Euphrates is a well-known boundary marker in a number of biblical texts, and was used by the Persians as a boundary for the organization of adjacent satrapies.

Epic: A story of human heroes, involving actions of the gods.

Etiology: A story that explains the cause of something.

Etymology: A story that explains the origin of a word or name.

Exile: While Israel and Judah underwent at least five deportations, the term "Exile" usually refers to the period when many of the residents of the southern kingdom of Judah were forced to live in Babylonian captivity (roughly, 587–515 BCE).

Feast of Ingathering: Originally an agricultural festival tied to the harvest of crops in the Fall of the year; the feast is later described as Booths (Sukkoth).

Feast of Unleavened Bread: Originally perhaps a spring ritual of riddance to purge impure leaven from bread which becomes historicized with the exodus and attached to Passover.

Feminist criticism: Interpretation informed by the experience and the perspective of women.

Form criticism: Analysis of small units of biblical literature, with attention to genre and setting.

Former Prophets: The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, according to the Hebrew divisions of the Old Testament. The Latter Prophets include the Major and Minor Prophets.

Gerizim: Amountain near Shechem; site of the Samaritan temple in the Hellenistic period.

German Romanticism: An intellectual movement in philosophy, art and culture in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Gilgamesh: The hero of a popular Mesopotamian epic.

Gola Community: A group of Judahites repatriated to their homeland from Babylon, who fostered a sense of exclusive communal identity and a sense of religious elitism based on their exilic experience.

***Grundschrift*:** German for “basic document.”

Habiru: People on the fringes of society in the second millennium BCE, possibly related to Hebrews (see also *‘Apiru*).

Haggadic/Aggadic: The non-legal exegetical texts (tales/lore) in the classical

rabbinic literature of Judaism in the Talmud and Midrash.

Heiros Logos: Sacred oral liturgy.

Hellenistic: An adjective referring to the Greek-speaking world after the conquests of Alexander the Great (who died in 323 BCE).

Henotheism: The belief in and worship of a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities.

Hexateuch: The first six books of the Bible (the Pentateuch plus Joshua).

High Places: Places of worship on hills and mountains that are often associated in the Hebrew Bible with idolatry and were therefore condemned (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:2–3).

Historical Criticism: A form of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand the world behind the text with the goal of discovering the original meaning in its original historical context of composition.

History of Religions School: German Protestant theologians associated with the University of Göttingen in late-nineteenth century.

Holiness Code: Leviticus 17–26; closely related to the Priestly source.

Holiness School: A compositional source in the Pentateuch deriving from a priestly group concerned with the holiness of the community beyond the confines of the sanctuary and its cult.

Holy War: War caused or justified by religion.

Horeb: The mountain of revelation in E and D traditions (instead of Sinai); the name means “wilderness.”

Icon/Iconic Religion: The central role of images in religious ritual.

Inclusio: A literary device wherein the ending corresponds to the beginning.

Israel: Alternative name for Jacob the son of Isaac, also for the people of the land of Israel, the United Monarchy of Israel, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

J (Yahwist): A monarchic narrative source (in the Documentary Hypothesis) and/or an exilic historian.

Josianic reform: *See* Deuteronomic Reform.

Judah: The fourth son of Jacob, also refers to the tribe of his descendants, as well as the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

KD (D Komposition): The exilic or post-exilic pre-Priestly version of the Tetrateuch with literary influence in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History.

KP (P Komposition): The post-exilic Priestly version of the Tetrateuch written to supplement the D Composition.

***Ketubim* (Writings):** The third part of the canon of Hebrew Scriptures.

Latter Prophets: The sub-group of prophetic literature that includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets, which contrast to the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings).

LBH: Late Biblical Hebrew; Hebrew in the post-exilic period.

Legend: A traditional story about a person or place, similar to folktales but sometimes popularly regarded as historical.

Levites: Priests descended from Levi; subordinated to Zadokite priests in

Jerusalem after the exile.

Levite scribes: A collection of writers, editors, redactors, and sages who emerged from the Levite priesthood, often viewed as active in the late monarchic period (ca. 700–587 BCE) through the Persian period (538–332 BCE).

LXX: *See* Septuagint.

Marduk: The main god of Babylon.

Mari: A place on the Euphrates where important texts from the second millennium were discovered.

Masoretic Text (MT): The traditional text of the Hebrew Bible, as fixed in the Middle Ages.

Merenptah Stele: An Egyptian stele dated to the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah, son of Ramesses the Great, which contains the oldest (and the only Egyptian) reference to Israel, currently housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Merenptah: Egyptian ruler from 1224 to 1211 BCE.

Mesha Stele: *See* Moabite Stone.

Midbar: *See* Wilderness.

Midian: People south of Moab; in the Hebrew Bible Midian is a descendant of Abraham and Keturah. Moses marries Zipporah the daughter of the Midainte priest, Jethro. Midain also wars against Israel during the time of the Judges.

Midrash: Rabbinic commentaries on biblical texts.

Mishnah: A compilation of rabbinic law from the second century CE.

Moab: Nation to the southeast of Judah that was at war with Israel throughout

the period of the judges and the monarchy.

Moabite Stone: An inscription of King Mesha of Moab from the ninth century BCE, commemorating victory over Israel. Also known as Mesha Stele.

Monotheism: The belief in and worship of one God.

MT: *See* Masoretic Text.

Mot: Death; a god in Ugaritic myth.

Myth/Mythology: Sacred stories of a god or gods.

Nazirite: A person consecrated to God by a vow (see Numbers 6).

Negev/Negeb: An area south of the hill country of Judah.

Non-P: The non-Priestly writings in the Pentateuch that included J and E in the documentary hypothesis.

Oral Torah: The laws, statutes, and legal interpretations not recorded in the Five Books of Moses (the Written Torah).

P (Priestly Source): A compositional source in the Pentateuch deriving from a priestly group concerned with the dependence of Israelite society upon the exclusive holiness of the sanctuary and its cult.

Paronomasia: The use of a word in different senses or the use of words similar in sound to achieve a specific effect.

Patriarchal: Relating to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

Pentateuch (Torah): The first five books of the Hebrew Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—which immediately precede the Former Prophets. Also called “books of Moses.”

Philo: Jewish philosopher in Alexandria in the early-first century CE.

Post-exilic period: *See* Second Temple period.

Priests: Individuals who represent a bridge between the realm of humanity and the realm of the divine, often charged with specific and exclusive ritual responsibilities and authority.

Primary History: A scholarly model for viewing the books of Genesis–Kings as a single storyline setting the history of Israel within a larger history of the world.

Prophets: A broad-ranging term that is best defined as humans empowered to speak on behalf of the divine to a given audience or community.

Pseudepigrapha: Books that are attributed to famous ancient people (such as Enoch) who did not actually write them.

Qumran: Site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

Rabbinic Judaism: Normative form of Judaism emerging after the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE based on the literature of the Talmud.

Rameses II: Egyptian ruler from 1290 to 1224 BCE.

Redaction: An editorial process where multiple sources are modified to create a unified document.

Redaction Criticism: The study of how books or blocks of material in the Hebrew Bible were edited, embellished and reinterpreted in the formation of the literature.

Redactors: Editors who perform redaction, combining and modifying multiple documents to create one document or reinterpreting existing documents through editing.

Rhetorical Criticism: The study of the symbolic artifacts of discourse, including the words and phrases that are used to communicate in a written text.

Ritual: Religious ceremony performed according to prescribed instructions.

Samaria: Persian province north of Yehud, named after the once capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Samarian Pentateuch: The version of the Pentateuch preserved among the Samaritan community that still persists today and serves as the sole scriptural work for that community.

Scribe: A social profession of great power and responsibility with regard to the production of important (and often sacred) texts. Scribes also often carried political and religious authority due to their literary skills.

Second Temple Period: The period after the Babylonian exile, down to the first century CE (539 BCE to 70 CE).

Septuagint (LXX): A translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek by supposedly seventy (hence the abbreviation, LXX) Jewish scholars in Egypt during the third and second centuries BCE While largely in agreement with the Masoretic Text, there are several significant differences between these two textual traditions.

Sethos I: Egyptian ruler from 1305 to 1290 BCE.

Sinai: Mountain of revelation in Exodus.

***Sitz im Leben*:** German for “setting in life”; a technical term in form criticism for the location in which oral tradition was intended to function.

Sociological Criticism: The study of literature in its social context.

Source Criticism: The attempt to distinguish different sources in the biblical text, especially in the Pentateuch.

Southern Kingdom: During the period of the Divided Monarchy, the remaining tribe of Judah that stayed under the rule of the Davidides (also called Judah).

***Sturm und Drang*:** ("Storm and Stress") German literary movement of the late-eighteenth century that exalted nature, feeling, and human individualism and sought to overthrow the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Sukkoth: *See* Feast of Ingathering.

Sumerian King List: The legendary record of the kings of Sumer who lived before and immediately after the flood.

Suzerainty Treaty: A treaty in which one party is subordinate to the other, the suzerain.

Textual Criticism: The study of the textual versions of the biblical text.

Talmud: Either of two rabbinic compilation of commentaries on the Mishnah, the Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi), which dates from the fifth century CE, and the Babylonian (Bavli), from the sixth.

Targum: A paraphrastic Aramaic translation of biblical texts.

Tetragrammaton: The divine name YHWH, so called because it has four letters.

Tetrateuch: The first four books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers).

Theophany: A moment where a deity reveals his/her nature and will to an individual or community.

Tiamat: The mother goddess in the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish*.

Torah (Pentateuch): The first five books of the Bible, also called "the books of

Moses.”

Tosefta: The collection of rabbinic laws that supplement the Mishnah.

Tradents: Those responsible for preserving and handing on tradition.

Tradition History: The study of biblical literature to trace the process by which biblical traditions passed from stage to stage into their final form, especially how they passed from oral tradition to written form.

Transjordan: The land east of the Jordan River that is often associated with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Eastern Manasseh.

Tribal Confederacy: The pre-monarchy period of ancient Israel, when the tribes were loosely related without a single monarch.

Tricolon: Rhetorical device that employs a series of three parallel words, phrases, or clauses.

Ugarit: Modern Ras Shamra, in northern Syria, where important tablets were discovered in 1929.

Vassal treaty: A treaty in which one party (the vassal) is subordinate to the other.

Wilderness: A mythic space in ancient Near Eastern thought—often but not exclusively identified with desert regions—where threatening cosmic forces lurked.

Womanist: Social and hermeneutical theory grounded in the racial and gender-based oppression of black women.

Writings: *SeeKetubim*.

Written Torah: The five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus,

Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Xerxes: Persian emperor during 486–465 BCE.

Yahweh (YHWH): Proper name of the God of Israel, pronounced “Yahweh”; traditionally, Jews do not pronounce the divine name and do not insert the vowels when writing it; instead, they say “Adonai” (“the Lord”) or “ha-Shem” (“the name”).

Yamm: Sea; a god in Ugaritic myth.

Zoroastrianism: Persian religion based on the teachings of Zoroaster (Zarathustra).

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