



Class 2 Appendix - Who Wrote the Pentateuch, and When?

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Who wrote Genesis (and the Pentateuch as a whole), and when? The Bible itself generally credits Moses as the author in whole (Josh. 1:7, Dan. 9:11-13, Luke 16:29, John 7:19, Acts 26:22, Romans 10:19) or in part (Ex. 17:14, 24:3-7; Deut. 31:24-26) of the first five books of the Bible.

Composition was probably undertaken during Israel's wandering in the wilderness (c. 1446-1406 B.C.). Moses would have been the best-qualified person for the task. Although Israel was a nation of slaves, Moses had been well-educated while in Egypt (Acts 7:22).

Many scholars argue that the Pentateuch cannot be trusted as history, claiming it was stitched together by a collection of writers during the period of the monarchy, hundreds of years after the time of Moses.

This theory is often referred to as the "Documentary Hypothesis." In its most developed form, the Documentary Hypothesis argues that the Pentateuch as a whole is a patchwork document that has at least four major literary sources or authors, which are labeled J, E, D, and P.

In other words, the Documentary Hypothesis says Moses did not write the Pentateuch, that the Pentateuch cannot be trusted as history, and that it was written hundreds of years after Moses' death.

However, we have no compelling reason to doubt what the Bible seems clearly to say about itself – that Moses was the principal author of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, that he wrote the Pentateuch during his lifetime, and that other writers inspired by the Holy Spirit may have made minor additions.

Even though the Documentary Hypothesis is still the dominant teaching about the Pentateuch, it has come under increasing criticism. Among other points, critics maintain that:

1. *The Bible itself seems to say clearly that Moses had help in writing the first five books of the Bible.* One example is Deut. 34:5, where we are told about Moses' death. Unless this is a prophecy by Moses about his own death, it seems plainly to signal the contribution of another editor inspired by the Holy Spirit, perhaps Joshua. In addition, it was common for ancient writers to use other sources. One example of this is 1 and 2 Chronicles, which use

substantial sections of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. We might also think of Luke's use of Matthew and Mark.

2. *In part, the Documentary Hypothesis stemmed from assumptions about the ancient near east that are no longer valid.* For example, scholars long believed that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because writing did not exist at that early time. However, subsequent archeological discoveries have shown that alphabetic writing existed long before the time of Moses.
3. *The Documentary Hypothesis assumes too much.* One central focus of the Documentary Hypothesis is that the Pentateuch uses several different names for God. This, it is argued, shows that different authors made contributions at different times, and that therefore (it is said) the Pentateuch is wrongly portrayed as a unified work.

About this claim, three points (among many others) might be made:

- a) The fact that the Bible uses different names for the same person does not raise questions about its truthfulness. The Bible frequently uses more than one name for persons, and even places. Jerusalem, for example, has several names. In one short passage alone (1 Chron. 11:4, 5), Jerusalem is given four different names – Jerusalem, Jebus, Zion, and the City of David. Simon Peter is also known as Cephas, and Levi is also known as Matthew. Many other examples could be cited.
- b) The use of different names doesn't necessarily signal different authorship; different names may be used for theological emphasis. This is especially true for names of God. *Yahweh*, for example, communicates God's quality of aseity, or self-existence, while *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) emphasizes his power. We see this most clearly in Jesus, who has more names and titles than anyone in the Bible, each of which focuses on important aspects of his person and work.
- c) The Documentary Hypothesis sometimes is inconsistent in its most fundamental claims. For example, some sections of the Pentateuch are designated "J" sections. Backers of the Documentary Hypothesis say the work of the author J can be detected because in those sections God is described as *Jahweh*, or *Yahweh*. The same is true for "E" sections (where God is named *Elohim*) and others.

The problem is that, in some cases, J describes God as *Elohim*, and vice-versa for E and the other authors. These inconsistencies are by themselves, sufficient to call the Documentary Hypothesis into question, because they undermine its most basic claims.

4. *Structure is evident.* Advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis argue that Genesis, for example, displays a fragmented literary structure that betrays the work of several authors. But Genesis shows consistent themes and patterns that bear evidence of unity and clear structural design.

For example, the formula *this is the account of* (also translated as *these are the generations of*) is found at 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1 and 9, and 37:2.

In addition, Genesis displays a multi-layered structure that highlights key themes. One example is the importance of the land; Chapters 1-11 tell the story of those who had land but who lose it, while Chapters 12-50 tell us of those who have no land as yet but journey to it in expectation.

There is other evidence of clear design. For example, Gen. 1-11 takes place in Babylonia, Gen. 12-36 takes place in Palestine, and Gen. 37-50 is set in Egypt.

In sum, there is no compelling reason to doubt what the Bible itself strongly suggests:

1. Moses is the main author of the Pentateuch
2. He received revelation directly from God (Ex. 3, Numbers 12, etc.)
3. He may have drawn from earlier writings and oral traditions
4. And that a compiler, inspired by the Holy Spirit, may have updated some portions of the text after Moses' death.

More importantly, says Derek Kidner in his commentary on Genesis, it is better to remember that all such discussions, if pursued as ends in themselves, serve only to distract us from the Christ to whom the Bible points.

”One has the feeling that Paul, if he were inveigled into such a discussion, would say sooner or later ‘I speak as a fool;’ though he might add, ‘You forced me to it’ [2 Cor. 12:11] - for the debate, once started, has to continue. Perhaps the last word, again from the New Testament, would be more appropriately the gentle reminder to Simon Peter when he was too fascinated by Moses and Elijah, on the mount, to remember their reason for being. Whether we are tempted, in our pentateuchal studies, to erect many tabernacles or few, for Moses or a multitude, the answer of heaven is, ‘*This is my beloved Son: hear him.*’ ”