

The Pentateuch

Lesson 1

Introduction to the
Pentateuch

Forum



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The Pentateuch

Lesson One: Introduction to the Pentateuch

Forum

With

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Dr. Larry J. Waters

Question 1:

Why is it important for evangelicals to become familiar with critical approaches to the Pentateuch?

Dr. David T. Lamb

It's important for evangelicals to be familiar with critical approaches to Scripture because — particularly the Pentateuch — because a lot has been written about the Pentateuch, and for any evangelical who's preaching and teaching from this part of the Bible, you're going to want to read the commentaries, you're going to want to read literature, secondary literature, about it, and if you're not familiar with the critical approaches, it's not going to make a lot of sense. It's a little bit like learning a language. Let's say you want to go to Spain. You love Spain, you want to travel there, but you know no Spanish at all. You're going to have a hard time when you go to Spain if you know absolutely no Spanish. Well, it's a little bit like an evangelical who is trying to study the Pentateuch. As you become familiar with the language of critical scholarship, it will make more sense to you, and you will gain a deeper appreciation of the Pentateuch, not always agreeing with what you're reading, but you will be learning from a wider variety of people. And I think it's important for evangelicals to be reading people that we don't always agree with because we have things to learn from them.

Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

Well, it's important for evangelicals to become familiar with critical approaches to the Pentateuch because as you read commentaries, as you read the literature, you'll be exposed to it. You need to understand the background of some of the things that are said so that you know the presuppositions and the methodology. Sometimes some Bible interpreters or pastors might not realize that they're buying into a critical approach that might end up undermining faith in their audience, or their own faith, if they don't understand the background of what's behind it. ... So, the book of Deuteronomy is ... a good test case because we're told a half dozen times in the book

that Moses delivered this particular speech, and then after we finish one of the speeches in the book, we're told that Moses then handed this speech, or this Torah, this instruction, to the priests. And then the priests took that written speech and, we're told several times in the book, they stored it in the Ark of the Covenant, or placed it next to the Ark of the Covenant, and then Moses instructed them that every seven years the Israelites would come and they were to take it out and then to read it to the nation. So, what the book itself then tells us, part of the process of the preservation of the text, that Moses had a series of speeches that he wrote, delivered orally, and then handed these texts to the priests that preserved them. So, it appears that at the beginning, what we call now the book of Deuteronomy was originally made up of several different literary pieces that Moses handed to the priests, and then at one point, maybe by these priests, or we don't know who did it, then cobbled these speeches that Moses had written and handed them, and cobbled them together and gave us the book of Deuteronomy. Now, at the beginning of the book, 1:1-5, we have a narrative: "This is the law that Moses began to teach the Israelites on the other side of the Jordan." And at the end of the book we've got a third person narrative about Moses' death. So, it gives us kind of these end-caps to the book. And because it tells us that Moses wrote this law on the other side of the Jordan — and, of course, Moses didn't get onto this side of the Jordan — it sounds like that's from another hand. That third-person narration then becomes the bridge throughout the book that bridges one speech to the other, so we're able to see, if you will, the process of composition, that somebody at some time — we're not quite sure who or when — took these materials Moses gave to the priests and then gave us our book.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

There are several critical approaches to the Pentateuch which really undermine, I think, the Christian faith. I think the one key issue is the authorship of the Pentateuch. Traditionally, over the centuries, we've understood that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, and there are certain sections, especially his death notice, that he didn't write, but overall that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch around about fifteenth century BC. Well, critical scholars have raised questions about that and, in fact, undermined Mosaic authorship, really dating a number of the sections of the Pentateuch anywhere from tenth century all the way through to the fifth, sixth century, you know, so, and what that means is that those changing the dates and undermining Mosaic authorship locates it, at the least, kind of four hundred years later, but up to eight, nine hundred years after the events themselves. So you have an enormous period of time that there is a gap between the events themselves and when they were written. And, we also have authors, these hypothetical authors, who actually don't have real names. They have names based on the names of God that it's used. So, I think it undermines the authority of the biblical text. I think it raises questions about the whole process of transmission of the biblical text as well.

The other area where critical scholarship has raised questions about the biblical text is also in Near Eastern material, especially in the early chapters of Genesis, we have other material outside the biblical account of the flood stories — and these are wonderful texts that have been found like Gilgamesh Epic and so forth — but what

some scholars have said, “Well, this means, therefore, that the Old Testament’s not so reliable because they’re just borrowing from the ancient world.” And I think, as evangelicals, we don’t need to be afraid of these Near Eastern materials; they’re wonderfully rich and they do have parallels with the biblical material — an example would be the flood — because it seems to underscore that there was a flood and that the other cultures are actually giving witness to that. Even when we see parallels in the ancient Near Eastern material with the Pentateuch, it also reminds us that God is communicating in the culture of his day, and he’s not using our culture, or whatever that may be, well, he’s not using that. He’s using the culture of the day. So, I think using the Near Eastern material in a way that looks at how biblical themes and what God is communicating, how they’re being used, sometimes it’s in contrast. And an example would be in the flood story where God says the reason why he’s bringing a flood is because of human sin and wickedness, whereas, in the Near Eastern Mesopotamian texts it’s the overpopulation of people. So, I think we can learn from it. I don’t think we need to be afraid of it. But we also need to come back to the reliability of God’s Word and its authority and stay within that tradition of the Mosaic authorship and the long history of the church on this. And also affirming, then, Jesus’ words when he says, “the law of Moses” or “Moses said,” really keeping within that history of the Christian tradition.

Question 2:

Do critical methods for interpreting the Pentateuch have any value?

Dr. Dan Collett

Critical tools usually attempt to open up the historical dimension of the Bible, and they are different ways of... used in different ways of uncovering Scripture’s historical dimension. The historical dimension of Scripture is important for evangelicals and not just critical thinkers. So, I think it really comes down to knowing the difference between a good and a bad use of these tools. It’s not really the tools that are the problem so much as the theological assumptions and the worldviews that are connected to the use of the tools. And so, I would say it’s important to know why these approaches are out there so that we can know the difference between a good and a bad use of a historical method and historical tool.

Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

I find studying critical scholarship helpful even though I disagree with so many of the conclusions because it surfaces the issues for me. If I’m reading a source critic and he is arguing that these two passages contradict in some way, well, that’s a challenge to me. Because of my presuppositions regarding Scripture, I don’t think they contradict. There may be a tension, but I need to explain what’s going on with those passages. And so, I find it helpful. It surfaces issues that I might just have missed if I had used the typical evangelical, conservative, "let’s-trust-the-Bible-on-everything" kind of approach.

Question 3:

Critical scholarship often assumes that ancient religions were lower and less evolved. How should evangelicals evaluate this critical mindset?

Dr. David Talley

When considering the critical approach to the Pentateuch, they will often use as their conclusion that religion began with lower, less evolved forms and then it matured or evolved into what we might read about as a more advanced understanding with priests and different washings, sacrifices, a temple, etc., all those items. The way we need to approach that as evangelicals is understand that their bottom-line reasoning is that there is no God; therefore, there is no, “Thus saith the Lord.” There is no God speaking from Sinai, “This is the way I want you to do religion as you’re in a covenant relationship with me.” God laid all of that out for them. Now, we all need to understand that there is some kind of development of sacrifice and different forms of doing religious ceremony that’s grown throughout the years. Where it all originated, we don’t fully understand. It could have been in Genesis 3 when God took the fig leaves, clothes that they had been wearing, and gave them animal skins. That could have been the first sacrifice. It could have grown from there. Cain and Abel were offering offerings to the Lord. We see that Noah, when he got off the ark, he offered a burnt offering. Where all that comes from, we don’t really know, but God was instituting something along the way and people were responding to that in worship. But when they get to Mt. Sinai, God lays it out there for them. And he does it in light of all the other religious practices. Many different nations were practicing religion, but God sets the record straight — “This is how you worship me.”

Dr. Craig S. Keener

The view that ancient religious beliefs reflect a lower evolutionary approach is basically ethnocentric. I mean, it comes from an era of racism and ethnocentrism that’s found in a lot of other ways. You actually read the people who came up with the ideas; it’s very degrading to other peoples.

Dr. Erika Moore

You know, there’s a critical mindset that argues that all ancient forms of religion were a lower, subpar form of religion that evolves into a higher form. And I think we need to be so careful here. That simply undercuts the biblical witness, and it also imbibes of that general evolutionary model of development, or Hegelian, even, a synthesis that comes out of a thesis and a contra-thesis. And that’s just not what Scripture tells us. Scripture tells us that God has entered time and space and has come and taken a people, blessed them to be missionaries to the rest of the world. And if we imbibe and buy into the critical mindset ... if we see that Israel’s religious understanding of Yahweh developed over the centuries and that what we have in the

Pentateuch is simply the exilic or postexilic self-reflection, what happens is Yahweh ends up becoming a textual ontology, something on paper. So, it's very dangerous to imbibe of that view. We need to take the text and understand it for what it says. There's a great analogy: When you want to study stars, you use the proper equipment; you use a telescope. When you want to study microorganisms, you use a microscope. When we study Scripture, you've got to study something according to the integrity of its nature. So, we come — we're a faith people — we come, and we study Scripture in faith, and we see that what God tells us here is that he's entered time and history; he's revealed himself as Yahweh early on in the biblical text.

Dr. Don Collett

Evangelicals should evaluate the idea that ancient religious beliefs are lower forms of religion with the Old Testament in mind. When the Christian church decided to give its witness to Jesus, its first witness was the Old Testament. So, the way that this impacts our understanding of the Canon is through the Old Testament. Israel is an ancient religious body of people, and if we look at that as a lower form of religion, we've got a real difficulty involved in understanding how that relates to Christianity. Was the Old Testament just a lower form of religion that sort of dropped off when the New Testament came along? I think those assumptions tell us more about modern views of history than they do the Bible's own self-presentation. The Bible speaks from the perspective of God as the one who speaks eternally, both in the past, the present and the future. So, the view that the Old Testament is a lower form of religious belief or that Israel represents, Israel's faith represents a lower form of religious belief would be something that Scripture's own self-witness doesn't support, but that comes from assumptions outside the text that have to do with modern ways of understanding our present in relation to the past.

Dr. John Oswalt

When we approach Old Testament religion, it's very, very common these days to argue that Old Testament religion is simply one more of the religions of the ancient world, all of which are sort of lower level, not very highly developed. In fact, the religions of Mesopotamia, of Egypt, of Greece, of Rome were very highly developed. These concepts were not those of primitives who couldn't think better. They are the concepts of people who have intentionally chosen these ways of thinking. And the Bible then stands against these, not because it's necessarily more highly developed, but because it's the result of revealed religion and not religion based on speculation, so that we must never say that those religions were not very highly developed. In fact, they were very highly developed.

Question 4:

How do you explain the variation in the names for God in the Pentateuch?

Prof. Thomas Egger

Readers of the Old Testament have thought of different explanations for why God is referred to in the Old Testament by different names. I mean, he's referred to as Yahweh; he's referred to as Elohim, which means God; and he's referred to as El, another word for God. Historical critical scholars in the last few hundred years have especially focused on these different names as a way to piece apart what they speculate are different sources, different source documents that have been brought into the Pentateuch... I think that that's really kind of an unnatural explanation and that it makes perfect sense that God would be referred to by different names as the narrative goes along, just as we refer to God by different names in our day. We refer to him as Lord and Father, and God, Jesus, Yahweh, Jehovah. But why? Why in a given passage would he be called one name and in another passage another? Well, there's a long tradition that there is really kind of a different accent to the name Yahweh than to the name Elohim or El within the narrative, that the name Yahweh is the familiar covenant name of God, the fulfiller of his promises to his people. It's the intimate name that's used of God in context, especially where he is the covenant God of Israel; whereas, Elohim, God, is a more cosmic name, a more transcendent name. It pictures God in his majestic rule over all the nations and over all the peoples. And I think that that difference, that explanation, can be helpful and does seem to apply in some places. But I also think that it's helpful to remember that these different names from God are different kinds of words, that they aren't just equivalent names for God, but that one of them is a personal name. Yahweh is a name like my first name is Tom. God's first name, his given personal name, is Yahweh. The name Elohim is technically not a name but a title. It means "God." It refers to his divinity, and also the name El. So that, in usage in the Old Testament, there would be times when it would be appropriate to use one rather than another. For example, if I want to say "your God," I would not use the word Yahweh with a descriptor "your." We don't say "your Yahweh." We say "your God"... In Hebrew, they like to use the divine name El when they use an adjective, so if you say, "a gracious and compassionate God," you would use El rather than Elohim or Yahweh. So, there are just some grammatical rules that govern the usage of the names as well.

Dr. David T. Lamb

In the Pentateuch, God is called a variety of different names: Yahweh, God's personal name; God, in the Hebrew, Elohim; Adonai, which is often translated as "the Lord." It's sometimes a little confusing when we encounter these names for God, in the Pentateuch, but what I like to think about is, as I speak about my wife, and often I will often call her Shannon, or sometimes Shan, or I have, actually, a variety of other names. When I'm talking to my sons I will say "your mother"... But, a lot of it depends on the context, and for my wife Shannon, she is the person that's the most important to me, the person I am closest to. I have a lot of names for her, and likewise, in the Pentateuch, we see a variety of different names that Israel calls their God, and I think we learn about the depth of their relationship, or their intimacy of their relationship, because of this wide variety of names. And so, yes, we can talk about in the different contexts, and it can be a little bit confusing, but I think one of the main reasons is just they had a special relationship, between God and Yahweh.

Dr. John Oswalt

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Dr. Carol Kaminski

There are several different names for God used in the Pentateuch. And I think it's actually a wonderful, rich way to look at the character of God. Sometimes a name is given to God by someone, and it relates to something to do with his characteristic. We have, for example, God names like El Roi, "the God who sees." And so, this is using the term "El" which is a term for God, and then it's giving some other characteristic about God, that he's a God who sees, or we might have El Shaddai, and so forth, "God Almighty." So, there are some variations used, but really, the two most important names for God would be Elohim, which is used in Genesis 1, and then Yahweh, which is the personal name of God, or what we call the tetragrammaton used in chapter 2. So, in Genesis 1 you have the name Elohim, which is a common name for God in the ancient world. It's also a plural, it has a plural ending on it, and that doesn't mean that we have a multiplicity of gods, because all the verbs in Genesis chapter 1 are singular. So, "and he said" is singular, and so some scholars have suggested that the plural ending is an honorific way of referring to God. But the term Elohim, Genesis 1 begins with the creation of the world, so it's this kind of cosmic view in chapter 1. And so you have this common term for God. But what is interesting then, in Genesis 2:4, you are then told that the Lord God is the Creator God. Well, why is that important? Because the term "Yahweh" is used in Genesis 2 and 3, and this name of God is what we call the tetragrammaton, and it gets picked up when God comes to Moses and says... You know, Moses says, "Well, who will I say has come to me," and he says, "I AM." Now, "I am" is a form of the same verb "to be," and it's either "I will be" or "I am." And that then gets picked up in Exodus 32–34. Now, here's what I just want to underscore with the divine name: in Exodus 32–34, this is really where God reveals his name. And what the context of it is that here you have the Israelites, Moses is up on the mountain receiving God's law, and the Israelites build an idol, and God wants to destroy them because they have just broken the covenant and disobeyed his commandments. Moses pleads on their behalf, and then God says to Moses, "I'm going to show you... let all my goodness pass before you. And he proclaims the divine name in Exodus 34:6. And this is really the heart of

the Old Testament theology, the divine name, where he says the Lord God who is slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness. And what it means is that this name Yahweh and the character of his name is that he is gracious and compassionate. And, in fact, I think that's the character of God that is seen throughout all the pages of the Old Testament. Nehemiah 9 appeals to it in many places. So, now think about the character of God in Exodus 32–34. Now Moses, who's writing Genesis 2 and 3, so when God comes to Adam, and especially in Genesis 3 in the Fall, it's the Lord God who comes because he's the God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger. And you know the story with the Fall, that they eat from the fruit, they disobey the command, and yet God in his grace doesn't destroy them. And so, Genesis 3 focuses on the Lord God, I think, to underscore his grace and his mercy. And notably, the serpent doesn't use Yahweh Elohim; he just uses Elohim. So, you can see the contrast even within the narrative that they have theological significance, most importantly the divine name, Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim.

Question 5:

Why do so many scholars teach that there are contradictory theological viewpoints in the Pentateuch?

Dr. Don Collett

One of the reasons why diversity is troubling to people when it comes to reading either one of the Testaments, Old or New Testament, is because they fail to contextualize that diversity in the theological frame of reference that the Bible contextualizes it in. Let me state that more concretely. They don't read it as the revelation or the disclosure of one God speaking in both Testaments. Really, diversity has origins in the inner life of the Trinity. What the Bible is disclosing is the being of God in all its richness. So, no one voice is ever going to be able to fully state that richness, and this is the reason why we have all kinds of different theological viewpoints and diversity in the Old Testament. It's simply a witness to the richness of the reality that Scripture is talking about, which is the Triune God. So, I think it's because they don't read it in that context that they end up saying, well, what we have here is just a bunch of conflicting theological viewpoints. What we actually have is a collection of different perspectives on a very rich reality we call the Triune God who speaks in Christ.

Dr. John Oswalt

The great thing about the Pentateuch is that it is not sort of a homogenized view of theology or of God or of religious truth. It presents the various truths in sort of undiluted form. I've always liked what G.K. Chesterton once said. He said there are no pastels in the Bible, they're all pure colors, and it's up to each generation to mix the colors in the way that is appropriate for that generation. And this is what you have in the Pentateuch. You have strong statements about God's absolute transcendence, and you have strong statements about his nearness, his immanence. And in a real

way, then, as Chesterton had said, it's where each culture, each situation is that we can relate to these truths in various ways. But in the end, they are not truly contradictory. It's not the idea that, well, in one place you have one God and in other places God is many. Not at all. He is the one God, the one Yahweh throughout, but sometimes presented in differing aspects, and sometimes people latch onto those differences. They will argue, "Well, if it was all inspired by God, it ought to be all even, shouldn't it?" Well, that's not the way God did it. He related to different people in different times and places and presented himself to them as they needed to hear him.

Dr. Erika Moore

You know, there are people who will argue that there are contradictory theological viewpoints in the Pentateuch. I think we need to be real careful here. I think many who embrace that sort of view have been trained in the historical critical method to look at sources. But we're never commanded in Scripture to do biblical paleontology, to try to excavate to see what the sources are of the text; we're command to read the text as it stands. And so, I think a lot of disagreement between those with a high view of Scripture and those with a low, has to do with presuppositions. So, somebody with a low view of Scripture, who has embraced the historical critical model, will come and say, "Well, there's Genesis 1 and there's Genesis 2. It's a second creation account, look at the contradictions." Well, I say, "Not so fast." Okay? A typical characteristic of Hebrew narrative is to state something generally and then unpack something important. So, what we have in Genesis 1 is creation stated in general terms, and in chapter 2 we have the zoom-in lens, so to speak, where we have extra time spent on the creation of Adam. And so, when we see that chapter 2 is simply explicating a particular part of chapter 1, there's not a contradiction there. What it is is a focusing in to highlight the creation of humanity. Another great example of those who argue for different theological, contradictory theological viewpoints in the Pentateuch will say, "Deuteronomy 12 argues for the centralization of worship, yet we have people worshipping at any altar at any place." Well, context is king. Deuteronomy 12... What keeps getting repeated by Moses in Deuteronomy? "When you're in the land..." "When you're in the land..." The idea is, Moses, who will not enter the land with the people, is preparing the people for when they enter the Land of Promise. And when they enter the land, at some point they are going to centralize worship. That's not contradicting the practices of the patriarchs before Israel enters the land and becomes a covenant nation before Yahweh.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

There's sometimes a popular belief that there are contradictory theological viewpoints within the Pentateuch, and the reasons for that are kind of interesting. Probably the biggest reason that there is that popular perception is that modern expectations are used in reading the text. So, we bring expectations of precision, perhaps, that Old Testament writers weren't "meeting" and, frankly, modern historians don't meet as well. It's a theological history, it's not a scientific history, although, where it does speak of history, it's important that we accept its basic truthfulness. But when we impose our modern kind of scientific mindset, rationalist mindset, on any piece of

literature, we're going to perceive contradictions. So, we need to read the literature on its own terms, and those perceived contradictions often fall away very quickly, especially if we read it sympathetically rather than with the hubris of modern people. Another reason people might perceive there are theological contradictions is it's an inherently complex matter; the subject matter is God. God is not a simple, single-cell organism. Because God is inherently complex, we would expect the Bible to reflect an inherent complexity about God. And so, there is a unity of the message, just as God is one, but there's also a variety within the message because God is the one and the many, he's the three-in-one. And the Bible, as a reflection of who he is, also reflects those things.

Question 6:

Why is belief in supernatural events so important for a proper understanding of the Bible?

Dr. Larry J. Waters

Belief in the supernatural events of the Bible is extremely important... In Genesis alone we have the six days of creation, we have the flood, we have the exodus itself, we have the ten plagues before the exodus; we have many, many years, 40 years in the wilderness and shoes didn't wear out and food was provided and water was provided. We have all of those things that are brought out by way of a miraculous activity within the Pentateuch itself. And so, if you delete, really, the miraculous from the Scripture, what you basically are doing is deleting God, and if not deleting, at least minimizing him to a God out there somewhere. And so, I think, if we accept the miraculous, we have a better idea, a better concept of who God really is and what the Bible really has to say to us... And this comes out in the providential lives of many of the patriarchs in the Pentateuch itself. And so, once again, it is important that we accept the miraculous if we're going to accept the Bible as God's inspired word.

Rev. Dr. Michael Walker

Belief in supernatural events is so important for a proper understanding of the Bible because the Bible, really, is the story of a supernatural God's acts in history and his promises for the future, which anticipate his supernatural intervention in activities and involvement in this world for the future. That is the story, the essence of the Bible. And it calls us to trust in this continuous, supernatural presence of God and, really, to understand the everyday life of God's people and what it means to be human as inherently supernatural. So, if we don't believe in the supernatural, then the story of the Bible will be distant from us. We won't be able to enter into that story, enter into the world that the Bible describes, which is the real world that we all live in. So, we need to believe in the supernatural so that we can receive the teaching of the Scriptures and the story of the Scriptures as the story in which our own life's story finds its meaning and its purpose and so that we can genuinely trust in the promises of the gospel, which anticipate God's supernatural activity in the future, so we can live

by faith, so that we can live in obedience to the gospel as the Scriptures call us to. That's why it's important for us to believe in the supernatural.

Dr. Stephen J. Bramer

It seems to me, as we come to the Bible, to properly understand it that we have to know the God of the Bible, and the God of the Bible is an omnipotent God who has all power. He's a God who can know and predict the future. And so, if we come to the Scripture declaring that we won't accept any miracles or anything supernatural, we really have come to a Scripture that would be less than the God who inspired it. And so, God has those miracles within the Scripture to prove that he is God and that all humankind will ultimately be responsible to him. And so, when we come through Scripture and even get to the places of judgment if we don't understand that God is the God who created everything and God is the God who can bring about his will when he chooses in this world, we really can't understand and appreciate the Scripture the way we need to. He is a God of miracles. It's a Scripture of miracles as well.

Dr. Douglas Stuart

Supernatural events are all over the place in the Bible because the Bible is a supernatural book from a supernatural God. C.S. Lewis, the great British thinker, Christian, and biblical scholar, along with many other areas in which he was a really smart man, said you really can't read the Bible just as literature the same way you would read other literary works because, he said, the Bible is so entirely holy, it's so sacred, it's so much infused with God's truth. And a big part of who God is, and a big part of what he wants us to realize about him, what he can do in our lives, what he can do for a country, for a culture, for a family, for a continent, is the supernatural. God is not limited by the things that limit us. We're natural, we are human ... easy to discourage; we're easy to get sick; we're easy to marginalize, but God's got the power, and when he wants to, he shows it. And in the Bible, he shows it repeatedly. Supernatural events are one of the things that let us understand who we're dealing with. We're dealing with heaven, not just earth, and the power of God is great enough even to overcome those principalities and powers that plague us so often. So, it's a wonderful thing that the Bible has those stories. They mean a lot and they're not to be put aside. They're to be embraced and appreciated for what they tell us about who it is we're dealing with. Whose word is this? And can he do the same things for us if he needs to and we need to? The answer is, you bet.

Question 7:

Why should we interpret the Pentateuch as coming from the days of Moses?

Dr. John Oswalt

Many people these days would say that the Pentateuch has very little to do with

Moses, that it was written far later than he. The problem that I have with such a position is, that's not what the Pentateuch says. The Pentateuch very clearly says to us that Moses wrote certain portions of the book, particularly the covenant. And that makes sense because covenants were required to be written. So, when the Pentateuch says, Moses wrote it, that makes a good deal of sense. In the same way, when we come to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, we are told Moses wrote this entire law — I think it's referring to the book of Deuteronomy in particular — from beginning to end. So, that's the issue. If the Bible didn't maintain that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch, we would be free to go many different directions. But the Bible itself calls for this. Now, the question of Genesis, we're not told that Moses wrote Genesis, but I think in the context of the Pentateuch, it makes sense to think that here they are at Sinai, the book of the covenant is being written down; who is this God of the covenant? He's the God of the fathers, as Yahweh told Moses at the burning bush, so, hmm, we really ought to record all of these other traditions, some oral, some written, that have existed before and put them together. So... is Moses responsible for Genesis? I think all the evidence is yes.

Prof. Thomas Egger

I think that the most natural way to read the book of Exodus is to interpret it against the background of the time period and the events which it describes, and as having been written for the people who emerge from that situation, by Moses, God's spokesman and leader in that situation. It has become very popular, or very common, in our day not to interpret the book of Exodus against that historical situation and against that time period. But in classical historical criticism, classical biblical scholarship of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, it was common to assume that this story was a composite narrative based on sources that came, at the earliest, perhaps from the time of King David, and then spanning to the period of the exile and even after. In our own day, it now has become very much the dominant view amongst scholars that the book of Exodus was, in large part, composed after the exile and that, really, the historical situation that lies behind it, the concerns that it's trying to address, are concerns of the Persian period, in Israel, after the exile, especially with the competing interests of the priests in Jerusalem and the landholders and common people outside of Jerusalem, and that it's kind of a compromised document... It's really a very different way to approach the book of Exodus than the book of Exodus itself on the surface seems to invite. And so, I think it does matter what our assumptions are about its background, and if there is a God, and if that God really did reach into history and redeem his people with a mighty hand from Egypt, if he really did raise up a spokesman and a great prophet to speak to his people, it makes sense to me that the great spokesman of his people at that time would have recorded that and that that's what we have in the Exodus narrative.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Of course, we know that there was editing that went on after the time of Moses, for instance in Genesis where it talks about before there was any king in Israel, and of course, Moses' death in Deuteronomy. We know that there were sources before the time of Moses, but it looks like the substance of it was pulled together in the time of

Moses for a couple of reasons that I can mention offhand. One is that the structure of Deuteronomy fits the structure of Hittite covenants from the time of Moses much better than it fits the majority of covenants from the time of Josiah and other periods. Another is, if you look at the structure of the first part of Genesis where you have Adam, Noah and Abraham, and each of those is connected by a genealogy with ten generations ending in three sons, and they're selective; it doesn't include every name in the genealogy as genealogies often didn't do. But you also notice with each of these, there's a blessing; God blesses them. He says basically be fruitful and multiple to Adam and Noah, and then to Abraham he says something similar to that. There's a curse in each one of them. "Cursed be the serpent and his seed." In Abraham's time, it's "cursed be those who curse you." But in Noah's time, it's "cursed be Canaan." Even though it was Ham who did it, Canaan is the one who's cursed. Well, for what generation would that be relevant? Especially for a generation getting ready to go in and take the land. And the land of Canaan gets emphasized over and over again, that the promise of this land, it's something that would be relevant to the generation getting ready to go in and take the land. But it's built even into the structure of how the first cycle of stories is recounted.

Question 8:

What source materials did Moses have available to him when he wrote Genesis?

Rev. Dr. Cyprian K. Guchienda

Moses had several oral traditions that he used when he wrote the Pentateuch because the Jewish tradition carried their stories orally, and stories that were told from generation to generation, and he grew up in a society that passed those stories orally. So he had that content. Unlike today's society where we depend more on things that are written, they had perfected oral tradition more than we can keep it today. We have perfected writing so that's why we are captives of things that are written; we have to check. But for them, the story was told right, and it was checked and rechecked from time to time... So, particularly from African tradition where I come from, there are oral traditions that have been passed from one generation to another, and because there was no alternative of writing it, it was only transmitted orally. There were mechanisms for checking, making sure that it's right and it's protected... That is what happened with the Jews when the Scripture was not written, when God's revelation was not put into writing. It was protected, it was checked, and it was passed over right because they did not have the luxury of writing so that they can go back and check. This is the only way they heard it and they had to protect it so it's submitted right..

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

It's reasonable to assume that Moses would have had significant oral tradition available to him when he wrote the book of Genesis. Obviously, he wasn't there to observe all that's related. We know he has written sources that he often polemicizes

against to give God's version of history but over against other written histories. But think of how important, for instance, the covenant promises were to Abraham and the emphasis on multiple generations of blessings, the covenant sign of circumcision to pass down the faith from generation to generation, which would be primarily a household responsibility. So, we know there are specific reasons why the oral history would have been important. We also know in the ancient world in general, oral history was very important, if not primary, at least equal to documentary histories. And so, there's nothing problematic about believing that Moses relied substantially on oral history as long as we incorporate the consideration of inspiration, that God superintended his writing of it. And this relieves us from some kind of a mechanical dictation view of inspiration as if God simply dictated to Moses what to write because we see the personality and the authorial influence, the literary style of Moses, manifesting itself in the book of Genesis.

Dr. David Talley

When Moses wrote what we call "the primeval history," the very old, old, old, old stories that begin the book of Genesis, it's obvious that he had to be using some kind of resources. And so, as we think about that book and especially the structure of it, there is a certain Hebrew word that's used — it's the *toledot*, and it can be translated as "these are the generations of" or "this is the history of"; "this is the story of" — and this word is used throughout the book. And it seems to me as we step back from this book that we understand that these were probably individual stories or tablets that somehow Moses had access to. It doesn't explain that to us, it doesn't tell us that, but these were probably historical documents that he was using, and then, through divinely inspired word from God, he is able to pull these together and to create what is God's perspective on creation, God's perspective on the Fall, God's perspective on the flood. Against all the other ancient Near East documents that are out there, God uses these documents that were already in the possession of the people to set the record straight so that people could know this is where life came from, and this is what happened in the early beginning of time.

Question 9:

Did Moses use any written documents as sources for the content of the Pentateuch?

Dr. Erika Moore

We talk about the "essential Mosaic authorship" of the Pentateuch. Are we to envision Moses sitting down and writing everything firsthand? Or are there any examples of him using written sources in the Pentateuch? And I think there are. If you turn to Genesis 5:1, we're told this is the written account of Adam's line, so it does seem that Moses here is reflecting on some sort of written document that he had before him. And then later on in the book of Numbers, and the account is the journey to the plains of Moab, we're told in Numbers 21:14, "That is why the Book of the Wars of the Lord says..." and he quotes from this thing called the "Book of the Wars

of the Lord.” Now, we don’t have any extant copies of that, but it looks like Moses did indeed have written sources at his disposal when writing the Pentateuch.

Dr. Tom Petter

The question when you think about... the five books of Moses in the German Bible and other traditions... And we have to think about him as a literary scholar writing this magisterial, this awesome piece of literature, five books, you have to remember his background. And we think we don’t know much about him, but when you start parsing and examining what we have available to us, we do know quite a bit. This is a young man who is raised among the royalty, the nobility of Egypt, during the New Kingdom era. This is like... this is a time of imperial splendor. I mean, this is an age of great learning, of great art, great culture. And Moses is part of that. It’s part of his life... and he knows especially what goes on in Mesopotamia, the great cultural connection to Mesopotamia. This is where you have the law codes, you have these traditions of, great traditions of law and order, the code of Hammurabi, the Sumerian law codes, all that preceded his time, that come hundreds of years before he is even born. And he has access to that. We know there is Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultural relations, connections. So, he has access to these texts and resources. And so when he, inspired by the Spirit, starts bringing together the story of origins, he has the Sumerian flood story, Mesopotamian flood stories, he has all of these texts, these traditions, but here he is penning, or inking, or whatever form that he used, he has a unique perspective, and it’s the one perspective from the one and only God, that there was, in fact, a flood, so the Mesopotamian traditions were partially right. There was a universal flood. There was a creation account of how God created everything from the beginning. But now, because of his revelation that he had of Yahweh as the Creator God, and this revelation of Yahweh is one of glory and splendor and grace and law, he has the right take on, this is what really happened... So, yes, he has access to resources as a scholar in Egypt. But that particular revelation, that special revelation that he has been given gives him a unique take because God, yes, does send a flood, but it’s a moral underpinning to the flood. It’s not, you know, all of a sudden God’s angry at man and he just sent a flood. No, there is a reason for it, and it fits into his plan of redemption. So, that’s the background to the written resources that Moses has at his disposal, is a very clear background, the Egyptian context, and so there’s a sense of trustworthiness to what we have in front of us.

Question 10:

Should we be troubled by the fact that the Pentateuch reflects a form of Hebrew that is much later than the time of Moses?

Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

The Hebrew in the Pentateuch, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy, for example, reflects the type of Hebrew that we generally refer to as classical Hebrew of the Jerusalem dialect. By "classical Hebrew" we mean Hebrew from the period of the

early monarchy, the pre-exilic period, and "Jerusalem dialect" because the way that they spoke and wrote Hebrew in Jerusalem was different than in Samaria to the north, more of a southern dialect. This should not be troubling, though, that this would be from the time later than Moses because we do have in Deuteronomy two songs at the end of book: the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 and then the testament of Moses, Deuteronomy 33. And these songs reflect, appear to reflect a Hebrew that's older than the book as a whole, so we know that we've got some early stuff there. Now, the narrative structure, or the rest of the book is speeches that Moses delivered to the priests. The Hebrew in these speeches could have been updated grammatically from the time of Moses to the time of the monarchy. The question would be, well then, why wouldn't these songs at the end of the book have done that? They tended to, from scribal practices it appears that they tended to leave poetry alone; they wouldn't mess with poetry because the poetic structure is more unusual. And we've got examples elsewhere where we can see that they grammatically updated narrative. They didn't have a problem doing that. As an example of the kind of grammatical updating that we could have, one of the languages, ancient languages that was written near to Hebrew was Hittite. We've got examples of scribes that would take early Hittite texts that were written in the early period and grammatically update them to the later form of Hittite. So, the collection of the laws, the laws of Telipinu, the Hittite, it was originally written in the old Hittite period about 1600 BC. It continued to be copied over the centuries, but around 1200 BC, the Hittite language had changed, so we have a copy of the very same text, but the grammar, morphology, the form of Hittite has changed, so it was more from 1200. That could be very similar to what we have happening in the Hebrew Bible with the Pentateuch from the time of Moses. We know that scribes did this, and there's actually a couple of words in Deuteronomy and in the rest of the Pentateuch that are early forms of particular words that appear in the midst of later Hebrew. So, I think some of those early words give us a clue that the book as a whole was early. Most of the forms got updated, but you've still got some early forms that are still embedded in the text.

Dr. Brian D. Russell

The Pentateuch reflects substantially Moses and what Moses wrote when he was leading God's people towards the Promised Land. But if you learn Hebrew and study the Pentateuch, one of the things you'll find is that the Hebrew actually reflects a later time. And that bothers some people, but I want to suggest it really shouldn't, because a key part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus is ultimately that the things we believe are translatable. I mean, just to take Jesus, Christianity is the only religion whose document — I mean the New Testament — wasn't written in the language that its founder would have spoke most of the time. Jesus would have spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, and its New Testament's written in Greek. And so, that's a powerful point right there, the Bible is translatable. Study a lot of other religions, they'll claim you have to actually learn the original language, and you can only really understand it that way. You can think about other religions, like the Qur'an, you have to learn Arabic, and they even say a Muslim... a translation of the Qur'an is not adequate. So, in a sense, if the Pentateuch's having been updated proves that God wants us to be able to read his word. And so, you know, when would it have been updated? We don't know

that precisely. We know if you read the Old Testament, the Scriptures make a powerful appearance during the days of Josiah when he leads a reformation, they find a book of the Law. When you look at the book of Ezra, Ezra the priest, when he comes back and works with God's people who had returned from exile, it says he reads the Torah. So presumably he has the Pentateuch with him, and he's reading it. So, perhaps it's updated during his time. But the point is, language changes over time, and it's important that God's word preserves what was originally said. But the good news is the Pentateuch that we have shows that God's people had already moved from older forms of words to make sure that the words would continue to communicate. And so, in a sense, instead of bothering us, we should be grateful that the gospel is translatable over time.

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