

A Short Introduction to the  
**Hebrew Bible**

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## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE

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## Introduction

# What Are the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament?

### KEY POINTS

- **Hebrew Bible:** Law, Prophets, Writings (Torah, Nebiim, Ketibim = **TANAK**).
- **Protestant Old Testament:** same books; different order.
- **Catholic Old Testament:** includes deuterocanonical or apocryphal books.
- **Septuagint (LXX):** Greek Bible.
- **Vulgate:** Latin Bible, translated by Jerome.
- Gradual development of canon.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls,** discovered 1947–1956: oldest biblical manuscripts.
- **Biblical chronology:**
  - Adam to the flood: 1,656 years, 10 generations (Genesis 5).
  - The flood to Abraham: 290 years, 10 generations (Genesis 11).
  - Abraham to the descent of Jacob and his family to Egypt: 290 years, 3 generations (Genesis 12–50).
  - The sojourn in Egypt: 430 years, 3 generations (Exodus 12:40).
  - The conquest of Canaan: 5 years.
  - The Judges: 470 years.
  - David and Solomon.
- **Divided kingdom:**
  - Israel (northern kingdom) survived 200 years;
  - Judah (southern kingdom) survived 335 years.
- **Babylonian exile:**
  - The Postexilic or Second Temple period.
- **Modern chronology:**
  - 1250 B.C.E: Exodus
  - 950: Solomon
  - 722: Destruction of northern kingdom.
  - 586: Destruction of Jerusalem. Babylonian exile
  - 539: Restoration
- **Methods in Biblical Study:**
  - Source criticism
  - Form criticism
  - Redaction criticism
  - Archaeology
  - Literary criticism
  - Sociological approaches

The writings that make up the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Old Testament are by any reckoning among the most influential writings in Western history. In part, their influence may be ascribed to their literary quality, but mainly it derives from the fact that they are regarded as sacred scripture by Jews and Christians and are viewed as authoritative in a way that other

literary classics are not. The idea of sacred Scripture, however, is by no means a clear one, and it means very different things to different people. Some conservative Christians regard the Bible as the inspired word of God, verbally inerrant in all its details. At the liberal end of the spectrum, others regard it only as a witness to the foundational stages of Western religion.

## The Different Canons of Scripture

The Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament are not quite the same thing.

The *Hebrew Bible* is a collection of twenty-four books in three divisions: the Law (*Tōrah*), the Prophets (*N'bi'im*), and the Writings (*K'tūbim*), sometimes referred to by the acronym Tanak.

The Torah consists of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (traditionally, the books of Moses).

The Prophets are divided into the four books of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are each counted as one book) and the four of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve; the twelve Minor Prophets [Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi] are counted as one book).

The Writings consist of eleven books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs (or Canticles), Ruth, Lamentations, Qoheleth (or Ecclesiastes), Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (as one book), and Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles as one book).

The *Christian Old Testament* is so called in contrast to the New Testament, with the implication that the Old Testament is in some sense superseded by the New. There are significant differences, however, within the Christian churches as to the books that make up the Old Testament.

The *Protestant Old Testament* has the same content as the Hebrew Bible but arranges the books differently. The first five books are the same but are called the Pentateuch rather than the Torah. Samuel, Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles are each counted as two books,

and the Minor Prophets as twelve, yielding a total of thirty-nine books. The Former Prophets are regarded as historical books and grouped with Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Daniel is counted as a prophetic book. The (Latter) Prophets are moved to the end of the collection, so as to point forward to the New Testament.

The *Roman Catholic canon* contains several books that are not in the Hebrew Bible or the Protestant Old Testament: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (or the Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach = Ben Sira), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah (= Baruch 6), 1 and 2 Maccabees. Furthermore, the books of Daniel and Esther contain passages that are not found in the Hebrew Bible. In the case of Daniel, these are the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, which are inserted in Daniel 3, and the stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon.

The additional books are called Apocrypha (literally, "hidden away") in Protestant terminology. Catholics often refer to them as "deuterocanonical" or "secondarily canonical" books, in recognition of the fact that they are not found in the Hebrew Bible.

### Why Are There Different Canons of Scripture?

The *Hebrew Bible* took shape over several hundred years and attained its final form only in the first century c.e.

The *Torah* may have been substantially complete in the fifth century b.c.e., but there were still some additions or modifications later than that.

The *Prophets* formed a recognized category in the second century b.c.e. We find references to the Torah and the Prophets in the second century b.c.e. in the book of Ben Sira (Eccle-

siasticus) and again in the Dead Sea Scrolls (in a document known as 4QMMT). The book of Daniel, which was composed about 164 B.C.E., is not included in the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and this may indicate that the collection of the Prophets was already fixed.

The *Writings*: The preface to the book of Ben Sira also mentions other writings that were regarded as authoritative, but there was no definitive list of these before the first century C.E. Most references to the Jewish Scriptures in the writings of this period (including references in the New Testament) speak only of "the Law and the Prophets." The Psalms are sometimes added as a third category. The first references to a fixed number of authoritative Hebrew writings are found toward the end of the first century C.E. The Jewish historian Josephus gives the number as twenty-two, while the Jewish apocalypse of *4 Ezra* (= 2 Esdras 3-14) speaks of twenty-four. It is possible that both had the same books in mind but that Josephus combined some books (Judges-Ruth and Jeremiah-Lamentations) that were counted separately in *4 Ezra*.

The fixing of the Hebrew canon is often associated with the so-called Council of Jamnia, the discussions of an authoritative group of rabbis after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. It is misleading, however, to speak of a "Council" of Jamnia, since it suggests a meeting like the ecumenical councils of the Christian church. The rabbis debated the status of some books (Qoheleth and Song of Songs), but there is no evidence that they proclaimed a formal list of Scriptures. Nonetheless, it is at this time (70-100 C.E.) that we first find references to a fixed number of authoritative books.

The books that were included in the Hebrew Bible were only a small selection from the religious writings that were current in Judaism. A larger selection was preserved in

the Greek Scriptures that were taken over by the early Christians but had been current in Jewish communities outside Israel, especially in Alexandria in Egypt. According to legend, the Torah had been translated into Greek at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, king of Egypt, in the first half of the third century B.C.E., by seventy-two elders. The translation became known as the Septuagint or LXX ("Septuagint" means "seventy"). The name was eventually extended to cover the whole collection of Greek Scriptures. This larger collection included translations of some books that were written in Hebrew (e.g., the book of Ben Sira, 1 Maccabees) and also some books that were composed in Greek (2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon). The Jews of Alexandria did not set a limit to the number of the sacred writings. The Jewish community in Alexandria was virtually wiped out in the early second century C.E. Christians who took over the Greek Scriptures of the Jews inherited a larger and more fluid collection than the Hebrew Bible. There is still considerable variation among the lists of Old Testament books cited by the church fathers centuries later.

When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin about 400 C.E., he based his translation on the Hebrew. He also translated the books that were not found in the Hebrew but accorded them lesser status. His translation, known as the Vulgate, was very influential, but nonetheless the Christian church continued to accept the larger Greek canon down through the Middle Ages. At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther advocated a return to the Hebrew canon, although he also translated the Apocrypha. In reaction to Luther, the Roman Catholic Church defined its larger canon at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century.

It should be apparent from this discussion that the list of books that make up the

## Canons of the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament

### Hebrew Bible

#### Torah

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### Prophets (Former)

Joshua  
Judges  
Samuel (1 and 2)  
Kings (1 and 2)

#### Prophets (Latter)

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Ezekiel  
Minor Prophets  
("The Twelve"):  
Hosea, Joel, Amos,  
Obadiah, Jonah,  
Micah, Nahum,  
Habakkuk,  
Zephaniah, Haggai,  
Zechariah,  
Malachi

#### Writings

Psalms  
Proverbs  
Job  
Song of Songs  
Ruth  
Lamentations  
Qoheleth  
(Ecclesiastes)  
Esther  
Daniel  
Ezra-Nehemiah  
Chronicles (1 and 2)

### Protestant Old Testament

#### Pentateuch

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### Historical Books

Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1 Samuel  
2 Samuel  
1 Kings  
2 Kings  
1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Esther

#### Poetry/Wisdom

Job  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
(Qoheleth)  
Song of Solomon  
(Songs)

#### Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel  
Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

#### Apocrypha

1 Esdras  
2 Esdras  
Tobit  
Judith  
Additions to Esther  
Wisdom of Solomon  
Ecclesiasticus  
(Wisdom of Sirach)  
Baruch  
Letter of Jeremiah  
Prayer of Azariah  
and Song of the  
Three Young Men  
Susanna  
Bel and the Dragon  
Prayer of Manasseh  
1 Maccabees  
2 Maccabees

## Canons of the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament (cont.)

### Roman Catholic Old Testament

#### Pentateuch

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### Historical Books

Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1 Samuel  
2 Samuel  
1 Kings  
2 Kings  
1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Ezra (Greek and  
Russian Orthodox  
Bibles also include  
1 Esdras, and Russian  
Orthodox includes  
2 Esdras)  
Nehemiah  
Tobit  
Judith  
Esther (with additions)  
1 Maccabees  
2 Maccabees (Greek  
and Russian  
Orthodox Bibles  
include 3 Maccabees)

#### Poetry/Wisdom

Job  
Psalms (Greek and  
Russian Orthodox  
Bibles include  
Psalm 151 and Prayer  
of Manasseh)  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
(Qoheleth)  
Song of Solomon  
(Songs)  
Wisdom of Solomon  
Ecclesiasticus  
(Wisdom of Sirach)

#### Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Baruch (includes  
Letter of Jeremiah)  
Ezekiel  
Daniel (with  
additions)  
Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament emerged gradually over time. The various canons were eventually determined by the decisions of religious communities. Christian theology has often drawn a sharp line between Scripture and tradition, but in fact Scripture itself is a product of tradition. Its content and shape are subject to the decisions of religious authorities.

## The Text of the Bible

Modern English translations of the Bible are based on the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible and the principal ancient translations (especially Greek and Latin). These printed editions are themselves based on ancient manuscripts. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, the most important manuscripts date from the tenth and eleventh centuries c.e., almost a thousand years after the canon of the Hebrew Bible was fixed. The text found in these manuscripts is called the Masoretic text, or MT. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves near Qumran, south of Jericho, beginning in 1947, brought to light manuscripts of all biblical books, except Esther and Nehemiah, that are more than a thousand years older than these manuscripts. The oldest of these scrolls date

from the third century b.c.e. Many of these texts agree with the MT, but some differ and are closer to the Greek.

There are fragments of Greek biblical manuscripts from the second century b.c.e. on. The oldest complete manuscripts date from the fourth century c.e. The Greek translations were generally very literal and reflected the Hebrew text closely. Nonetheless, in many cases they differed significantly from the MT. The books of Jeremiah and Job are much shorter in the Greek than in the Hebrew. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain Hebrew texts of Jeremiah that are very close to the Greek, although other copies agree with the MT.



Fig. 0.1. A few lines of the Hebrew Bible (from Isaiah). Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource.

### *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

In 1947, ancient Hebrew scrolls were found in a cave near the site of Qumran, on the shore of the Dead Sea, south of Jericho. These included a copy of the book of Isaiah that proved to be 1,000 years older than the oldest extant Hebrew biblical manuscripts. Over the next decade, many more scrolls came to light, fragments of more than 800 manuscripts in all. Some of these scrolls describe a quasi-monastic sectarian community that is thought to have lived on the site of Qumran. Some of the scrolls



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deal with matters of legal interpretation, on which the sect disagreed with the rest of Judaism. Some provide the earliest formal commentaries on biblical texts. Others speak of a coming war between Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness or refer to the expectation of messianic figures. These scrolls are important evidence for Judaism in the century or so before the rise of Christianity. They provide evidence of some Jewish trends that were taken up in Christianity and others that were developed in rabbinic Judaism.

More than 200 manuscripts are fragments of biblical books. These are by far the oldest biblical manuscripts that we have. They include fragments of every book in the Hebrew Bible except Esther and Nehemiah. On the whole, the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the text now printed in our Hebrew Bibles (the Masoretic text) had taken shape before the time of Jesus. But they also show some interesting variations. In some cases, Hebrew manuscripts found at Qumran agree with the Greek Bible (the Septuagint, LXX). For example, the Masoretic text says that 70 of Jacob's descendants went with him to Egypt. The LXX and a text of Exodus found in Cave 4 at Qumran say 75. A more significant variation occurs at Deut 32:8, where the Masoretic text says that God divided the nations according to the number of the sons of Israel. Scholars had long suspected that the Greek, which reads either "angels of God" or "sons of God," was correct. A manuscript from Qumran preserves the reading "sons of God." In the story of David and Goliath, the Masoretic text gives Goliath's height as six cubits and a span, or about nine feet nine inches. The Greek measures him at four cubits and a span (about six feet nine inches). A manuscript from Qumran supports the Greek. The Greek translation was made long before the scrolls containing the Masoretic text were copied, and it sometimes contains superior readings.

The differences in some books are more far-reaching still. The Greek text of Jeremiah is about one-eighth shorter than the Masoretic Hebrew. Both forms of the text are found in the scrolls. A scroll containing psalms from Qumran arranges the last part of the psalter in a different order from the Masoretic Bible and includes an extra psalm that is also found in the Greek.

All of this provides a rare glimpse of the process by which the text of the Bible was formed. Few of the variations involve matters of major importance, but they teach us to be wary of any claims based on the literal words of the Bible. Often these words exist in more than one form.

## Chronology

### Approximate dates implied in Bible for early history

4000 B.C.E.	Creation
2400	Flood
2100	Abraham
1875	Descent into Egypt
1445	Exodus
1000	David

It now seems likely that the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew texts were not due to the translators but reflect the fact that the Greek was based on a shorter Hebrew text. This is also true in 1 Samuel 16–18 and in a number of other cases. There were different forms of the Hebrew text in circulation in the third, second, and first centuries B.C.E. In some cases, the Greek may preserve an older form of the text than the Hebrew. For example, the shorter form of Jeremiah is likely to be older than the form preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

In light of this, it makes little sense to speak of verbal inerrancy in connection with the biblical text. In many cases we cannot be sure what the exact words of the Bible should be. This is not to say that the wording of the Bible is unreliable. The Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that there is, on the whole, an amazing degree of continuity in the way the text has been copied over thousands of years. But even a casual comparison of a few current English Bibles should make clear that there are many areas of uncertainty in the biblical text. We do not have a perfect copy of the original text. We only have copies made centuries after the books were originally composed, and these copies often differ among themselves.

## The Bible and History

The Bible is a product of history. It took shape over time, and its content and even its wording changed in the process.

The Bible is also immersed in history in another way. Much of it tells the story about the people Israel that has at least the appearance of a historical narrative. For most of Jewish and Christian history there has been an uncritical assumption that this story is historically true. In the last 200 years, however, other information about the ancient world has come to light, through archaeological exploration and through the recovery of ancient literature. This information is often at variance with the account given in the Bible.

### Biblical Chronology

The following outline of history emerges from data in the biblical text:

Adam to the flood: 1,656 years, 10 generations (Genesis 5)

The flood to Abraham, 290 years, 10 generations (Genesis 11)

Abraham to the descent of Jacob and his family to Egypt: 290 years, 3 generations (Genesis 12–50)

The sojourn in Egypt: 430 years, 3 generations  
(Exod 12:40)

The conquest of Canaan: 5 years

The Judges: 470 years

Transition period under Saul and David

According to 1 Kgs 6:1, Solomon began to build the temple in Jerusalem 480 years after the exodus. This figure is incompatible with the number of years assigned to the Judges.

In the generation after Solomon, the kingdom was divided in two:

Israel (the northern kingdom) survived 200 years.

Judah (the southern kingdom) survived 335 years.

Then came the Babylonian exile, followed by the postexilic or Second Temple period.

The destructions of northern Israel and its capital, Samaria, and of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, allow us to correlate the history of Israel with the general history of the Near East, since these events are also recorded in Assyrian and Babylonian records. From these records we get the following dates:

722 B.C.E.: The fall of Samaria

597 B.C.E.: First capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians

586 B.C.E.: Second capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the beginning of the Babylonian exile.

If we work back from the dates of the destructions and add up the years of the kings of Israel and Judah, we arrive at the following dates:

About 950 B.C.E.: Solomon

About 1450 B.C.E.: The exodus

About 1876 B.C.E.: The descent of Jacob and his family into Egypt

About 2100 B.C.E.: Abraham

The seventeenth-century Irish Anglican bishop James Ussher famously calculated the date of creation as 4004 B.C.E.

Modern scholarship has generally accepted the biblical chronology of the period of the monarchy, since it can be correlated with nonbiblical sources at several points. The dates for the exodus and the patriarchs, however, are viewed with great skepticism. The life spans of the patriarchs are unrealistic, ranging from 110 to 175 years. The 430 years in Egypt are supposed to cover only three generations. Most scholars place the exodus about 1250 B.C.E., but many now question whether we can claim any historical knowledge about the patriarchs or even the exodus.

Both the biblical record and modern scholarship place the emergence of Israel as a people in the second half of the second millennium B.C.E. Modern reconstructions favor the last quarter of that millennium, roughly 1250–1000 B.C.E. The biblical dates put it about two centuries earlier.

One implication of this chronological survey is that Israel was a late arrival on the stage of Near Eastern history. The great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia had already flourished for a millennium and a half before the tribes of Israel appeared on the scene.

A second implication is that there is a gap of several centuries between the date when the biblical books were written and the events that they claim to describe. Traditionally, the books of the Torah were supposed to be works of Moses, but it has long been clear that Moses could not have been their author. It now seems clear that the entire Hebrew Bible received its final shape in the postexilic, or Second Temple period, long after the events it describes.

## Modern Chronology

The historical value of the stories of the patriarchs is uncertain. Modern scholars have often proposed a date of 1800 B.C.E. for Abraham.

1250 B.C.E. (approx.)	Exodus from Egypt (disputed).
1250–1000	Emergence of Israel in the highlands of Canaan.
1000–960 (approx.)	King David. Beginning of monarchy in Jerusalem (disputed).
960–922 (approx.)	King Solomon. Building of Jerusalem temple (disputed).
922	Division of kingdom: Israel in the north, Judah in the south.
722/721	Destruction of Samaria, capital of Israel, by the Assyrians. End of kingdom of Israel.
621	Reform of Jerusalem cult by King Josiah. Promulgation of “the book of the law” (some form of Deuteronomy).
597	Capture of Jerusalem by Babylonians. Deportation of king and nobles to Babylon.
586	Destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonians. More extensive deportations. Beginning of Babylonian exile.
539	Conquest of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia. Jewish exiles allowed to return to Jerusalem. End of exile. Judah becomes a province of Persia.
520–515	Rebuilding of Jerusalem Temple.
458	Ezra sent from Babylon to Jerusalem with a copy of the Law.
336–323	Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire.
312–198	Judea controlled by the Ptolemies of Egypt (a Greek dynasty, founded by one of Alexander's generals).
198	Jerusalem conquered by the Seleucids of Syria (also a Greek dynasty).
168/167	Persecution of Jews in Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of Syria. Maccabean revolt.
63	Conquest of Jerusalem by Roman general Pompey.
66–70 C.E.	First Jewish revolt against Rome. Destruction of Jerusalem Temple.
132–135 C.E.	Second Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba. Jerusalem rebuilt as Aelia Capitolina, with a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus.

## Chronology of Modern Biblical Scholarship

- 1735 Jean Astruc observes multiple names for the divinity in the Pentateuch.
- 1805 W. M. L. de Wette dates Deuteronomy later than the rest of the Pentateuch.
- 1822 Jean-François Champollion deciphers Egyptian hieroglyphics for the first time.
- 1860s Karl Heinrich Graf and Abraham Kuenen establish a chronological order for the various “sources” in the Pentateuch: (J, E, D, P).
- 1870s Discovery of great works of Akkadian literature, such as the creation story *Enuma Elish* and the Gilgamesh epic.
- 1878 Julius Wellhausen, in *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, presents his classic study of the Documentary Hypothesis.
- 1890–1920 Hermann Gunkel pioneers form criticism, which examines the literary genre of shorter biblical passages and their *Sitz im Leben* (social location).
- 1920s–1930s Discovery of Canaanite texts at Ugarit (1929) and the efforts of W. F. Albright to confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible through archaeology.
- Mid-20th c. Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth examine the editorial history of biblical texts through redaction criticism.  
American scholarship dominated by Albright and his students.  
John Bright’s *History of Israel* (1959) provides synthesis of biblical data and ancient Near Eastern history.  
Biblical Theology Movement, emphasizing the “acts of God in history” typified by archaeologist G. Ernest Wright.
- 1947–54 Discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.
- 1960s–present Biblical scholarship characterized by a multiplicity of approaches, including study of religion and literature of Israel in light of Near Eastern, especially Ugaritic, traditions (F. M. Cross); sociological (N. K. Gottwald), literary (R. Alter), feminist/literary (P. Tribble) approaches; canonical approach to biblical theology (B. S. Childs); revisionist Pentateuchal studies; questioning traditional sources (see overview by E. W. Nicholson); revisionist approaches to Israelite history (see I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman).

## Methods in Biblical Study

Most of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible were composed in several stages over many centuries. Consequently there are many gaps and inconsistencies in the biblical text, and it seems to reflect several different historical settings.

The history of biblical scholarship is in large part a sequence of attempts to come to grips with the composite character of the biblical text:

1. **Source Criticism.** In the nineteenth century “literary criticism” of the Bible was understood primarily as the separation of sources (source criticism), especially in the case of the Pentateuch. This phase of biblical scholarship found its classic expression in the work of the German scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) in the 1870s and 1880s, and it remains important today.

2. **Form Criticism.** A reaction against this kind of source criticism appeared in the work of another German scholar, Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932). Form criticism focuses on the smaller units that make up the biblical text, such as the individual stories in Genesis. Gunkel drew attention to the importance of literary form or genre, and to the importance of social location (the *Sitz im Leben*) for the meaning of a text. Gunkel also made extensive use of newly available Babylonian literature for comparison with the biblical material.

3. **Redaction Criticism.** One disadvantage of form criticism was that it tended to break up the biblical text into small fragments. In the mid-twentieth century, a reaction against this fragmentation arose in the form of redaction criticism. Here the focus was on the way in which the smaller units were combined by an editor, who imposed his own theological agenda on the material. The classic works

of redaction criticism were again by German scholars, Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) and Martin Noth (1902–1968). Redaction criticism showed the beginnings of a shift of interest that has continued in more recent scholarship, placing the main emphasis on the later rather than on the earlier forms of the text.

4. **Archaeology.** The scholarship mentioned thus far all developed in Germany, where the most influential biblical criticism developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A different tradition of scholarship developed in North America, which attached great importance to archaeology as a source of independent confirmation of the biblical text. Archaeological discoveries could also help to fill out the context of the biblical material. The dominant figure in North American scholarship through the first half of the twentieth century was W. F. Albright (1891–1971). Albright also made extensive use of the literature of the ancient Near East as the context within which the Bible should be understood. Albright’s view of the history of Israel found classic expression in the work of his student John Bright (1908–1995).

In Albright’s lifetime, archaeology was believed to support the historicity of the biblical account (not necessarily in all its details), although there were some troubling discrepancies (for example, archaeologists found no evidence of the destruction of a walled city at Jericho in the time of Joshua). In the last quarter of the century, however, the tide has turned on this subject. Discrepancies between the archaeological record and the biblical narrative are now seen to outweigh the points of convergence.

5. **Current Methods.** At the dawn of the twenty-first century, biblical scholarship is characterized by a diversity of methods. Here I will comment only on two broad trends, the

rise of literary criticism and the influence of sociological methods.

a. **Literary Criticism.** The Bible is literature, whatever else it may be, and any serious biblical study must have a literary component. Literary scholarship, however, is of many kinds. Beginning in the 1960s, literary criticism of the Bible was heavily influenced by a movement called "New Criticism" in the study of English literature. New Criticism was a formalistic movement that held that the meaning of a text can be found through close examination of the text itself, without extensive research into questions of social, historical, and literary context. The attraction of this method was that it directed attention to the text itself. Nonetheless, it has obvious limitations insofar as it leaves out of account factors that may help to clarify and explain the text. In general literary studies, a reaction against the formalism of New Criticism has arisen in a movement called "New Historicism," which appreciates the importance of contextual information while still maintaining its focus on the literary text.

Another consequence of the rise of literary criticism has been increased attention to the final form of biblical books. On the whole, this has been a positive development. We should bear in mind, however, that the books of the Bible are not governed by the same literary conventions as a modern novel or treatise. In many cases they are loose compilations and the conventional book divisions are not always reliable guides to literary coherence. There is more than one way to read such literature. If we are to appreciate the "composite artistry" of biblical literature, then the final form of the text cannot be the only focus. Questions of genre and literary conventions are fundamental, but we are dealing with ancient genres and conventions, not those of modern literature.

b. **Sociological approaches.** The second major trend in recent biblical studies is the increased use of sociological methods. These methods also vary. They may be viewed as an extension of traditional historical criticism insofar as they view the text as a reflection of historical situations. Perhaps the most fundamental contribution of sociological theory to biblical studies, however, is the realization that interpretation is not objective and neutral but serves human interests and is shaped by them. On the one hand, the biblical texts themselves reflect the ideological interests of their authors. This insight follows naturally enough from the form-critical insistence on the importance of the *Sitz im Leben*. On the other hand, the modern interpreter also has a social location. Feminist scholarship has repeatedly pointed out male patriarchal assumptions in biblical scholarship and has made little secret of its own agenda and commitments. Jewish scholars have pointed out that Christian interpretations are often colored by theological assumptions. But no one is exempt from presuppositions and special interests. One of the clearest gains of recent "postmodern" scholarship has been the increased attention to figures and interests that are either marginal in the biblical text or have been marginalized in previous scholarship. Feminist scholarship has led the way in this regard.

### **The Approach of This Introduction**

This introduction builds on the tradition of historical-critical scholarship. I view the text in its historical context, relating it where possible to the history of the time and respecting the ancient literary conventions.

Placing the Bible in its historical context is not, however, an end in itself. For most readers of the Bible, this is not only a document of

ancient history but also in some way a guide for modern living. The responsible use of the Bible must begin by acknowledging that these books were not written with our modern situations in mind, and are informed by the assumptions of an ancient culture remote from our own. To understand the Bible in its historical context is first of all to appreciate what an alien book it is. But no great literature is completely alien. There are always analogies between the ancient world and our own. Biblical laws and the prophetic preaching repeatedly raise issues that still confront us in modern society. The Bible does not provide ready answers to these problems, but it provides occasions and examples to enable us to think about them and grapple with them.

## Further Reading

### Formation of the Canon

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### Methods in Biblical Scholarship

Barton, John. *Reading the Old Testament*. Rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster, 1996.

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## 2

# The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative

### KEY POINTS

- The first five books of the Bible, the Torah or Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (books of Moses).
- The Documentary Hypothesis: Pentateuch a combination of four major sources:
  - The Yahwist, or J, includes many of the well-known tales of Genesis and Exodus (including the story of Adam and Eve) and is associated with Judah and the south; it is possibly as early as the 9th century B.C.E.
  - The Elohist, or E, is dated slightly later than J; this source has particular associations with the northern tribes of Israel.
  - The Deuteronomist, or D, basically Deuteronomy. Connected to the reforms of King Josiah of Judah in the 7th century B.C.E.
  - The Priestly source, or P, an exilic or postexilic composition largely concerned with issues of ritual practice; it is easy to identify by its dry, formulaic style. Includes a distinct source H, the Holiness Code, in Lev 17–26.
- J refers to the God of Israel by the divine name Yahweh (German Jahweh) in Genesis. E and P refer to him by the Hebrew word Elohim, meaning "God," until the exodus.
- Julius Wellhausen formulated the classic form of the Documentary Hypothesis at the end of the 19th century.
- Recent critics of Documentary Hypothesis: Rendtorff, Blum.
- Final editing of Pentateuch no earlier than the postexilic period

### Mosaic Authorship

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; collectively known as the Pentateuch) tell the story from creation to the death of Moses. These books are traditionally known as the Torah and as the books of Moses. The Torah is commonly, but not quite accurately, translated as "Law." Much of the Pentateuch is a presentation of laws, but

Genesis and the first half of Exodus consist of narratives.

The problematic nature of Mosaic authorship was noticed at least as early as the Middle Ages. The medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra (twelfth century) noted that Gen 12:6, "the Canaanites were then in the land," must have been written at a later time, when this was no longer the case. Similarly, Gen 36:31, which refers to "the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites," must have been written after

the establishment of the monarchy. Others noted that Moses could not have written the account of his own death at the end of Deuteronomy. Attention was gradually drawn to various repetitions and contradictions that suggested that the Torah was not the work of any one author but was rather a compilation long after the time of Moses. Such observations proliferated in the wake of the Reformation, when the Bible was subjected to a new level of scrutiny.

A major advance in the study of the Pentateuch is credited to Jean Astruc, a convert to Catholicism who became private physician to King Louis XV. In 1735, Astruc observed that in some passages God is called by the general Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, while in others he is called by the proper name Yahweh. (It is often written without vowels, YHWH, so as not to profane the name by pronouncing it. Jewish tradition substitutes the word *Adonai*, "the LORD." The mongrel form "Jehovah" is a combination of the consonants of YHWH, or JHVH, with the vowels of *Adonai*.) Astruc supposed that different source documents had been woven together in the composition of Genesis.

Astruc's observation was gradually developed into a theory of the composition of the entire Pentateuch. The book of Deuteronomy was recognized as a distinct source. A distinction was made between passages that refer to God as *Elohim*. Some of these (e.g., Gen 1:1—2:4a, and various passages dealing with genealogies) were recognized as part of a Priestly source (P) that is represented extensively in Leviticus. The remaining narrative material was seen as a combination of a Yahwistic source (J, following the German spelling *Jahweh*) and an Elohist one (E). From the 1860s, P was viewed as the latest (or next to latest) document, and the order was established as J, E, D, P (or J, E, P, D). The theory received its clas-

sic formulation from Julius Wellhausen in the 1870s and 1880s.

The Documentary Hypothesis, the view that the Pentateuch is a combination of (at least) four different documents, enjoyed the status of scholarly orthodoxy for about a century. Many variations of the theory were proposed, but the four-source theory was by far the dominant view. Only in the last quarter of the twentieth century has it come to be widely questioned. Before we can evaluate these objections, however, we need to appreciate the observations on which the hypothesis was based.

## Indications of Multiple Authorship

In Exod 6:2-3: "God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them." Yet in Gen 4:26 people began to call upon the name of YHWH in the time of Enosh, grandson of Adam. God is often called YHWH in his dealings with the patriarchs, especially with Abraham. It is apparent, then, that Exod 6:2 comes from a different source than these passages in Genesis.

The variation in divine names is by no means the only criterion. In numerous cases we have doublets, or variant forms of the same story. The account of creation in Gen 1:1—2:3 is quite different from the story of Adam and Eve. Two versions of the flood story are intertwined in Genesis 6—9. Abraham identifies his wife Sarah as his sister to a foreign king in two separate stories (in chaps. 12 and 20). In a third story, Isaac identifies his wife Rebekah as his sister (chap. 26). There are two accounts of God's covenant with Abraham (chaps. 15 and 17), two accounts of Abraham's dealings with Hagar and

Ishmael (chaps. 16 and 21), two accounts of the naming of Beersheba (chaps. 21 and 26). There are variant accounts of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14–15 and different accounts of the revelation of the commandments in Exodus 19–20 and in Deuteronomy. The mountain of the revelation is variously named Sinai or Horeb. The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) is given three times, with some variations (Exod 20:1-17; 34:10-28; Deut 5:6-18). The list of forbidden animals is given twice (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). Many further examples could be given.

The argument that these duplications result from the combination of different documents can be well illustrated from the story of the flood, where J and P versions of the story can be separated. The two versions have not been preserved in full. Noah is never instructed to build the ark in J. But the outline of the two stories is clear. In one account Noah takes only one pair of animals into the ark. In the other he takes seven pairs. In one account the flood lasts 150 days, in the other, 40 days and 40 nights. Moreover, these two accounts can be aligned with strands or sources elsewhere in Genesis. There are clear links between the Priestly version and the Priestly account of creation in Gen 1:1—2:3, typified by the command to be fruitful and multiply. The anthropomorphic character of God in the J account (he regrets that he made humankind and is pleased by the odor of sacrifice) is typical of the J source.

#### The Flood Story in Genesis 6–9

J, the Yahwist	P, the Priestly source
6:5-8	6:9-22
7:1-5	7:6-15a
7:16b-23	7:24—8:5
8:6-12	8:13-19
8:20-22	9:1-19

The example of the flood should suffice to show that sources are combined in the Pentateuch at least in some cases. It also shows that it is possible to line up consistent features of these sources in different passages. Proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis insist that consistent profiles can be established for each of the four sources, with strands that run through several biblical books.

#### Profiles of the Sources

The Priestly document is the easiest source to recognize. The dry, formulaic style is familiar from the account of creation in Genesis 1. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. It is marked by a strong interest in genealogies, in dates, and in ritual observance (the Creator observes the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day). The book of Leviticus is quintessential Priestly material, as is the description of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. In P, history is punctuated by a series of covenants, with Noah, Abraham, and finally Moses. P has no angels, dreams, or talking animals. There is little dispute about the identification of P, although its date remains very controversial. I shall examine this strand of the Pentateuch in more detail in chapter 7.

P: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."  
—Genesis 1:3

The D source is also relatively unproblematic. It is found primarily in the book of Deuteronomy, although some scholars now try to identify Deuteronomistic passages also in Genesis and Exodus. There are a few independent passages in Deuteronomy 32–34, but the main body of the book constitutes the basic D

corpus. This material is written in a distinctive style. YHWH is said to love Israel, and Israel is commanded to love YHWH “with all your heart and soul,” to listen to his voice, and to do what is right in his sight. YHWH brought Israel out of Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.” The central theme in Deuteronomy is the covenant, and its most distinctive commandment is that it forbids sacrifice outside of the central sanctuary. Since the work of W. M. L. de Wette at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Deuteronomy has been associated with the reform of King Josiah in 621 B.C.E. Deuteronomy is also the subject of chapter 8 below.

D: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

—Deuteronomy 6:5

The most problematic part of the Documentary Hypothesis is the distinction between the narrative sources, J and E. The distinction emerges clearly in three doublets in Genesis: Gen 12:10-21 (J), with its parallel in 20:1-18 (E; the wife-sister motif); 16:4-14 (J) and parallel in 21:8-21 (E; Hagar and Ishmael); and 26:26-33 (J) and parallel in 21:22-34 (E; controversy at Beer-sheba). The E versions use the name Elohim for God and associate revelation with dreams. They reflect on problems of guilt and innocence and emphasize the “fear of God.” E has no primeval history; it begins with Abraham in Genesis 15. Abraham is called a prophet in 20:7 and is said to receive revelations in visions and dreams. Jacob and Joseph also receive revelations in dreams. The call of Moses closely resembles the call of prophets in the later books.

The J source is more colorful. It is familiar from the story of Adam and Eve, with its

anthropomorphic God and talking snake. God is described in very human terms. He walks in the garden, regrets that he made humanity, is pleased by the odor of sacrifice, and gets angry. Abraham argues directly with YHWH over the fate of Sodom, and the deity is also represented by “the angel of the LORD” who appears on earth. The call of Abraham in Genesis 12 and the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 are ascribed to J. The theme of promise and fulfillment is prominent in this strand. Abraham is told that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3).

J: “Then they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.”

—Genesis 3:8

While J and E are clearly distinguished in some passages, they are more difficult to disentangle in others. The narratives of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 and of Jacob’s dream at Bethel in Genesis 28 are mainly E stories, but they also mention YHWH. It is possible that different forms of the stories were spliced together. The story of the burning bush in Exodus 3 is especially difficult. Moses was guarding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, when he came “to Horeb, the mountain of God (Elohim). There the angel of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush. . . . When YHWH saw that he had turned aside, God (Elohim) called to him out of the bush.” It is possible to explain this passage as the close intersplicing of J and E narratives, but we must assume that the editor took half a verse from one source and the other half from the other. Some scholars prefer to speak of JE, without attempting to separate the sources. The distinction between J and E becomes even

more elusive in the book of Exodus, after the revelation of the name YHWH to Moses, and only scattered verses there are ascribed to the Elohist with any confidence. Some scholars dispute whether E ever existed as a distinct, coherent source, while granting that J incorporated fragmentary E traditions.

E: "Then God said to him in a dream. . . ."  
—Genesis 20:6

"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**. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, **God called to him** out of the bush. . . ."  
—Exodus 3:1-4  
(**bold** = E; italics = J)

### Dating the Sources

Once it became clear that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, the dates of its various parts became matters of speculation. One fairly firm point of reference is provided by the date of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 12 restricts sacrificial worship to the one "place that YHWH your God will choose," and calls for the destruction of all the places of worship at the "high places." Yet there were still multiple sacrificial sites after Moses, according to the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. Lead-

ers of Israel (Samuel, in 1 Samuel 7; Elijah in 1 Kings 18) build altars and offer sacrifices at various locations. Even prophets such as Amos, who are very critical of cultic practices, never mention a law forbidding worship at more than one place. We only know of two attempts to centralize the Israelite cult. The first was by King Hezekiah, at the end of the eighth century (2 Kings 18), and the second was by his great-grandson, Josiah, in 621 B.C.E., roughly a century later (2 Kings 22). Only Josiah's reform was based on a written law—the "book of the Torah" that had just been found in the temple. It appears that the law of centralization was an innovation of Josiah, and that the "book of the Torah" was Deuteronomy, or at least parts of it. This datum provides a fixed point for the dating of biblical narratives and laws. Texts that allow or endorse worship at multiple sanctuaries are probably older than the time of Josiah. Those that reflect knowledge of this law are presumably later.

Until recent years, most scholars have assumed that the narratives ascribed to J and E are pre-Josianic. Julius Wellhausen put J in the ninth century, E in the eighth, D in the seventh, and P in the sixth or fifth, but he paid little attention to the dates of J and E. His main argument was that P was later than D. This argument was controversial and remains so more than a century later. I will consider it in detail in chapter 8 when I discuss the relation between P and D.

Gerhard von Rad popularized the view that J should be associated with the reign of Solomon, which he held to be a time of enlightenment. It is widely agreed that J originated in Judah, in the southern part of Israel. Abraham is associated with Hebron, a village near Jerusalem. There are analogies between J's account of Abraham and the story of David. Both are associated with Hebron (David was crowned

king there) and both are given covenants that require only that they be faithful to their God. Both Abraham and Isaac are associated with the cult at Beersheba, in southern Judah. Judah is especially prominent among the sons of Jacob. Only J includes the long story from the life of Judah found in Genesis 38, which ends in the birth of Perez, the supposed ancestor of David and the kings of Judah. Judah is said to save Joseph from the older brothers who plan to kill him. In the J account of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, God promises that Abraham's descendants will rule over the land "from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates." It has been claimed that these were the bounds of the kingdom of David and Solomon, although recent historians have been very skeptical about this claim. In von Rad's view, the Yahwist was a court historian, who wrote to explain how a people that had been slaves in Egypt became a kingdom. The Solomonic empire was the fulfillment of a promise made to Abraham centuries earlier.

Von Rad's hypothesis has not stood the test of time. On the one hand, scholars have been increasingly troubled by the lack of any evidence outside the Bible for the glory of Solomon. On the other hand, even if Solomon's empire extended from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, at most this would mean that Genesis 15 was written no earlier than the time of Solomon. It would not guarantee a Solomonic date.

The Elohist source has usually been dated a little later than J, on the assumption that it was created as a northern alternative account of the prehistory of Israel, after the separation of the northern kingdom (Israel) from Judah after the death of Solomon. There are good reasons to associate the E source with the northern kingdom. In Genesis 28 Jacob names the place where he has a dream Bethel, the "house

of God." Bethel was one of the state temples of the northern kingdom set up by Jeroboam I, the secessionist king. Jeroboam also built the city of Peniel, which is the site of a struggle between Jacob and God or an angel in Genesis 32. In the E story of Joseph, it is Reuben, rather than Judah, who saves Joseph from his brothers. There is a close analogy between the forced labor imposed on the Israelites in Egypt in Exodus 1 and the labor draft, imposed by Solomon and his son Rehoboam, which led to the revolt of the northern tribes. Some stories in the E source are critical of Aaron, the supposed ancestor of the Jerusalem priests. It is plausible, then, that E was composed in the northern kingdom. The prominence of the Arameans in the Jacob story may suggest a date in the ninth century or early eighth century, when the Arameans were the most significant foreign power in relation to Israel. J is generally thought to be slightly older, but the evidence is not conclusive.

The two narrative sources were probably combined after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722, when many refugees from the north fled to Jerusalem, and the size of the city was greatly expanded. Neither J nor E shows any awareness of the Deuteronomic prohibition of worship outside of the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. It is most probable, then, that these sources were compiled and combined before the reform of King Josiah in the late seventh century B.C.E., although some additions could still have been made later.

## Criticism of the Documentary Hypothesis

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, many of the established certainties of the Documentary Hypothesis were called into

question. It has been argued that the migration of Abraham would make best sense in the period after the Babylonian exile, when Jewish exiles in fact returned from Babylon to Israel. Abraham is not described as a returning exile, however, and so the analogy is imperfect. Nonetheless, the early chapters of Genesis (both J and P sources) show extensive points of contact with Mesopotamia, and these contacts can be explained more easily in the exilic period or later than in the early monarchy. The story of Adam and Eve is never cited in the preexilic prophets and becomes prominent only in the Hellenistic period. This does not prove that the J source was written late, but it does create some misgivings about the supposedly early date of the J strand of Genesis. It may be that the primeval history in Genesis 1–11, where most of the Babylonian analogies are found, was a late addition to the J source.

A different line of critique was developed by Rolf Rendtorff, a student of von Rad. Rendtorff noted that Gunkel, the founder of form criticism, treated the stories of Genesis as discrete units, akin to folklore, and paid little attention to the major sources, although he did not deny their existence. Martin Noth, a contemporary of von Rad, analyzed the Pentateuch in terms of five major themes, which both J and E formulated in their different ways. Implicit in Noth's analysis was the insight that the patriarchal stories are different in kind from the story of the exodus, even if one recognizes J and E strands in both. For most readers, the differences between these blocks or themes are more obvious and more significant than the difference between J and E.

Rendtorff went further than Noth and questioned the entire validity of the J and E sources. His student Erhard Blum has proposed an elaborate alternative to the Documentary Hypothesis. Abandoning J and E, Blum finds

two main stages in the composition of the Pentateuch. The first he calls the "D-Komposition" ( $K^D$ ), which was the work of editors from the Deuteronomistic tradition. He dates this composition to the generation after the Babylonian exile. The second stage is the "P-Komposition" ( $K^P$ ), the work of Priestly writers who edited  $K^D$ , and so worked even later. This is not to suggest that all of the pentateuchal narratives are as late as the exile. The authors of  $K^D$  inherited two main documents. One was an edition of Genesis 12–50. The second was a "Life of Moses," which had been composed some time after the fall of the northern kingdom. Both stories incorporated elements from the early monarchy. There have been several other proposals along the lines of Blum's work, but differing in details.

Perhaps the main issue raised by the work of Rendtorff and Blum is whether the composition of the pentateuchal narratives can be ascribed to Deuteronomistic editors, no earlier than the Babylonian exile. There is an obvious problem with this thesis. The signature element of Deuteronomy was the insistence that sacrifice should be offered only at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. Yet much of Genesis consists of stories of the founding of other cult sites, including the northern sanctuary of Bethel, by the patriarchs. Such stories could only lend legitimacy to the sanctuaries that were condemned to destruction in Deuteronomy. Blum allows that the narratives of Genesis 12–50 had already been put together before the exile, but it is still difficult to see why Deuteronomistic editors would let so much of this material stand. It is surely more plausible that the pentateuchal narrative was already established and authoritative before Deuteronomy was added. Also, Blum's argument does not do justice to the clear distinction between J and E in the patriarchal stories noted above. It

remains likely that J and E were composed, and probably also combined, before the Deuteronomic reform, although some material in the primeval history may have been added later.

The recent debates about the Pentateuch show that the reconstruction of earlier forms of the biblical text is a highly speculative enterprise. Perhaps the main lesson to be retained is that these texts are indeed composite and incorporate layers from different eras. The biblical text is not a consistent systematic treatise. Rather, it is a collection of traditional materials that places different viewpoints in dialogue with one another and offers the reader a range of points of view.

The Pentateuch cannot have reached its present form earlier than the postexilic period. There is good evidence that the Priestly strand was added as an editorial layer. It provides the opening chapter of Genesis and connects the narrative with its genealogies and dating formulae. It is not apparent that there ever was a coherent Priestly narrative about the patriarchs. We shall also see that some elements in the Priestly strand were added quite late, long after the Babylonian exile. Nonetheless, it is not clear whether Priestly or Deuteronomic editors should be credited with establishing the shape of the Pentateuch as we have it. The evidence for Priestly editing of Genesis and Exodus is much clearer than that for Deuteronomic editing. This suggests that the first four books of the Pentateuch were edited by Priestly writers before Deuteronomy was added. The fact that Deuteronomy stands as the last book of

the Pentateuch gives the impression that it was added last. There were certainly some Deuteronomic additions in the earlier books, but their extent remains in dispute. Ultimately there is much to be said for the view that the Pentateuch as it stands is a compromise document, in which Priestly and Deuteronomic theologies were presented side by side without any clear indication that one should take precedence.

In the following chapters I do not attempt to extrapolate theologies of J or E to any significant degree. P and D, in contrast, correspond to well-defined blocks of text and present clear and well-developed theologies. These sources will accordingly be treated in separate chapters.

## Further Reading

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