

Critical Theory and Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch

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The first five books of the Old Testament form the most seriously challenged section of the Bible, in particular, Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch (the five books of the Law) through what has been called the *documentary hypothesis* or *JEDP theory*. Challenges to Mosaic authorship have been an issue since the seventeenth century AD, when Benedict Spinoza voiced his denial of it in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1677). Jean Astruc, in 1753—actually, in an attempt to refute Spinoza—was the first to propose a primitive version of the documentary theory.

Soon after, in the nineteenth century, many critical scholars adopted this theory. Astruc limited his analysis to Genesis. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn was the first to apply this theory to the entire Pentateuch, with a series of publications beginning in 1780. Wilhelm M.L. de Wette also made a significant contribution to this discussion in positing that Deuteronomy was its own independently constructed source in his *Dissertation Critico-Exegetica* in 1805; a year later this hypothesis was repeated in his *Beitraege zur Einleitung*. De Wette actually went so far as to say that none of the Pentateuch was composed prior to the time of David! However, it was Julius Wellhausen who popularized (not created—a common misconception) the idea that the Pentateuch was written by various persons whom he called *Jehovist* (J, also known as Yahwist), *Elohist* (E), *Deuteronomist* (D), and *Priestly* (P), each one supposedly distinguished by their literary characteristics. Thus, the name *JEDP theory* refers to the various sources hypothesized.

However, the JEDP theory has come under increasing attack by scholars in recent years for many reasons, among others, there have been no JEDP “documents” ever found—no traces

can be seen in the hundreds of biblical texts found in the Dead Sea Scrolls or anywhere else.

Yale scholar William W. Hallo points to the paucity of the theory:

The literary-critical study of the Hebrew Bible has had a checkered history. The [JEDP] documentary hypothesis with which it began over two centuries ago remains to this day a hypothesis, the [JEDP] documents which it reconstructed [are] beyond recovery; their precise extent, their absolute and relative dates, and their changes over time [are] all matters of dispute; and the applicability of the hypothesis beyond the Pentateuch [is] severely limited.... Given such disparate and even desperate reactions to two centuries of modern Biblical scholarship, it is perhaps not surprising that much of the most exciting work...has been...from...epigraphic [archaeological] discoveries.*

There also exist further independent reasons for rejecting JEDP theory and affirming Mosaic authorship.

First, *Scripture itself attributes authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses*. Within the Pentateuch itself it is repeatedly stated that Moses wrote down the words of the law given directly to him by Yahweh (Exodus 17:14; 24:4,7; 34:27; Numbers 33:1-2; Deuteronomy 31:9,11). Books within the rest of the Old Testament also give witness to this fact.

The book of Joshua attests to Mosaic authorship in 1:8 and 8:31-32, identifying them as the “book of the law” or the “book of the law of Moses.” The title “law of Moses” is used by David in 1 Kings 2:3 to refer to the first five books written by Moses, while 2 Kings 14:6 gives the same title, quoting from Deuteronomy 24:16. Again, 2 Kings refers to the same title of the Pentateuch.

Other references to the Mosaic authorship are found in Ezra 6:18, Nehemiah 13:1, Daniel 9:11-13, and Malachi 4:4. The authorship of the Torah is always attributed to Moses throughout the Old Testament and even into the New Testament. The Gospels refer to the writings of the Torah as “Moses” in John 5:46-47 and 7:19 and Acts 3:22. Other places in the New Testament refer to Moses as the author of the Torah, such as in Romans 10:5. It is also interesting to note that Mark 12:26 states that God Himself uttered the words written in Exodus 3:6 to the historical Moses.

Second, upon further investigation, *other internal evidences attest to Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch as well.* Independent investigation of the historical events recorded, of the contemporary issues of Moses's day, of the descriptions of the plants and wildlife, and of the conditions of geography and climate has led scholars to believe that the author was originally a resident of Egypt and not of Israel. Investigation also confirms that the author of the Pentateuch was an eyewitness of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, and one who possessed a very high degree of education, literary skill, and familiarity with Egypt and the Hebrew way of life. Moses is the most reasonable choice as author since he appears to have possessed all the qualities and training necessary to fulfill the role of author.

The many geographic details recorded in passages such as Exodus 15:27 suggest that the author was an actual participant in the events themselves. Genesis and Exodus show the author's familiarity with the land of Egypt and with Egyptian names, expressions, customs, and culture. In addition, the unity of arrangement and harmony that underlies the Torah also points to a single author of the text. And taking into account that the Pentateuch was written over a period of about four decades through progressive revelation given by God, we would expect differing writing styles.

Third, *the late date many critics assigned to Deuteronomy (the seventh century BC) has been thoroughly discredited* by the research of Meredith Kline and the archaeological data. In his landmark work *The Treaty of the Great King* he demonstrates that Deuteronomy follows the form of the typical Hittite suzerainty treaty of the second millennium BC. This is the very time during which Moses would have written Deuteronomy.

*William W. Hallo, *The World's Oldest Literature: Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 677.