The Pentateuch

Lesson 1

Introduction to the Pentateuch

Lesson Guide

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**

  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.

  - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.

- **While you are watching the lesson**

  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.

  - **Record comments and questions —** As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.

  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.

- **After you watch the lesson**

  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.

  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I.   Introduction (0:20)

II.   Modern Critical Approaches (1:30)

      A.   Presuppositions (3:34)

      Modern critical views on the Pentateuch flowed from the Enlightenment in Western Europe.

            1.   Naturalism (4:30)

            The belief that if spiritual realities exist, they have no discernable effect on the visible world.

            Led biblical scholars to reject the belief that the Pentateuch was inspired by God.

            In naturalism, the Pentateuch is viewed and handled like all other merely human writings.

2. Historical Development (5:38)

"Naturalistic historicism": to understand any subject we must understand how it developed over time through natural causes.

- Biologists – attempted to explain how life originated and evolved.

- Linguists – traced historical developments of human languages.

- Archeologists – reconstructed the backgrounds and advancements of human societies.

- Religious scholars – worked to describe the naturalistic, historical evolution of world religions.

Western scholars reconstructed the evolution of world religions:

- Animism: belief that objects in nature have spirits.

- Polytheism: belief in many gods.

- Henotheism: belief that one god was greatest among all gods.

- Monotheism: belief in one god.

The Pentateuch presents Israel's faith as consistently monotheistic.

In the days of Moses, Israel's faith was "codified" (written down).

Modern critical scholars deconstructed the biblical portrait of Israel's faith in order to conform it to modern ideas.

B.   Authorship (12:39)

1.   Divine Names (13:40)

Early critical interpreters argued that the variety of names for God in the Pentateuch evidenced a long evolution of Israel's faith:

- *Elohim* – "God"

- *Yahweh* – "the Lord"

- *Yahweh Elohim* – "the Lord God"

- *Yahweh Yireh* – "the Lord provides"

- *El Elyon* – "God Most High"

- *El Shaddai* – "God Almighty"

2.   Duplicate Accounts (16:20)

Critical interpreters have argued that duplicate accounts in the Pentateuch reflect different oral traditions that were written down:

- "two creation accounts" (Genesis 1:1–2:3; 2:4-25)

- accounts of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-11)

3.   Inconsistencies (17:36)

Critical scholars claim that inconsistencies in the Pentateuch support their reconstructions of its authorship:

- Regulations for Passover (Exodus 12:1-20; Deuteronomy 5:6-21)

- Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21)

C.   Interpretive Strategies (20:55)

1.   Source Criticism (21:21)

- Originated in K.H. Graf, *The Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1866)

- Refined by Julius Wellhausen, in *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1883).

Focused on parts of the Pentateuch they believed came from independent written sources during the monarchical period:

- "J" (the Yahwist) – scattered through Genesis and Exodus.

- "E" (the Elohist) – in Genesis and Exodus.

- "D" (the Deuteronomist) – primarily in Deuteronomy.

- "P" (the Priestly writers) – wrote Leviticus and edited other portions.

2. **Form Criticism (24:51)**

Originated in Hermann Gunkel's *The Legends of Genesis* (1901).

Form critics focused on oral traditions that predated Israel's monarchs.

Twofold method:

- Analyzed passages to discover ancient oral genres (myths, folk-tales, sagas, romances, legends, parables, etc.).

- Associated these genres with the "*Sitze im Leben*," or the life settings of these oral traditions.

Example: Genesis 32:22-32 was thought to be an ancient supernatural tale that was later associated with Jacob.

3.   Tradition Criticism (27:33)

Focused on how primitive oral traditions and written texts developed into complex theological and political perspectives.

Leading tradition critics:

- Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1948)

- Gerhard von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament* (1957)

Identified what they believed were competing theological beliefs found in the Pentateuch.

4.   Redaction Criticism (29:15)

Focused on how hypothetical documents were edited together into today's version of the Pentateuch.

Began as a way to explain the differences between the Gospels.

They attempted to explain how different editors wove original sources together until the Pentateuch reached its final shape.

5.   Contemporary Criticism (30:30)

Modern scholars have concentrated on the theological unity and depth of the traditional Hebrew text.

Some forms of contemporary criticism:

- rhetorical criticism

- canonical criticism

- new literary criticism

III.   Modern Evangelical Approaches (31:24)

A.   Presuppositions (32:07)

1.   Supernaturalism (32:48)

God ordinarily directs history in patterns discernable by science and reason.

God also acts in ways that are without, beyond, and even against ordinary processes and natural causes.

Supernaturalism assures us that God inspired the Scriptures, including the Pentateuch.

2.   Historical Development (35:26)

Evangelicals believe Israel's faith developed through God's special revelation.

Divine revelation caused Israel's faith to develop differently than other religions in the ancient Near East.

B.   Authorship (36:44)

Evangelicals affirm that the Pentateuch came from Moses.

1.   Biblical Evidence (37:27)

- New Testament writers and Jesus himself affirmed Moses' authorship (Luke 24:44; John 5:46, 7:19; Mark 7:10; Romans 10:5; 1 Corinthians 9:9).

- Old Testament books associate the Pentateuch with Moses (2 Chronicles 25:4, 35:12; Ezra 3:2, 6:18; Nehemiah 8:1, 13:1).

- The Pentateuch explicitly states that Moses received God's revelations and was responsible for the Pentateuch (Exodus 24:4; Leviticus 1:1-2; Deuteronomy 31:1, 32:44).

2.   Essential Mosaic Authorship (42:42)

"We do not mean that [Moses] himself necessarily wrote every word…
essentially, however, it is the product of Moses" (Edward J. Young,
Introduction to the Old Testament, 1949).

Three factors of essential Mosaic authorship:

- **Sources**

    o   God's revelations to Moses (e.g., Ten Commandments)

    o   Oral traditions (e.g., Exodus 3:13, 16; 18:17-24)

    o   Independent documents:

        ▪   "The book of the covenant" (Exodus 24:7)

        ▪   "The Book of the Wars of the Lord" (Numbers 21:14,15)

        ▪   "The book of the generations of Adam" (Genesis 5:1)

        ▪   A record of battle for Joshua (Exodus 17:14)

- **Process**

  Moses delivered much of the Pentateuch through oral recitation before it was written down.

  Moses likely employed amanuenses to write much, if not all, of the Pentateuch under his supervision.

- **Updating**

  Some portions of the Pentateuch represent slight editorial updating after the days of Moses:

  - Mention of "Philistines"

  - List of Edomite rulers (Genesis 36:31-43)

  - Use of the name "Dan" (Genesis 14:14; Joshua 19:47)

  - Record of Moses' death (Deuteronomy 34)

o   Hebrew language:

  ▪   Updated from "Proto-Hebrew," the language of Moses'
      day

  ▪   Some parts resemble "Paleo-Hebrew," the language of
      Israel's monarchs

  ▪   Majority resembles "Classical Hebrew," used between
      the mid-8th and early-6th centuries B.C.

C.   Interpretive Strategies (53:45)

1.   Thematic (1:00:43)

Treats the Pentateuch like a mirror that reflects on themes that are
important to us.

Minimizes the fact that Moses' original themes were for the Israelites who
followed him toward the Promise Land.

Jesus and New Testament authors looked to the Pentateuch when they dealt with a variety of themes.

2.   Historical (1:03:27)

Treats the Pentateuch like a window to history:

- Genesis – from creation to the days of Joseph.

- Exodus – from the death of Joseph to Israel's encampment at Mount Sinai.

- Leviticus – laws and rituals received at Mount Sinai.

- Numbers – the march from Mount Sinai to the Plains of Moab.

- Deuteronomy – Moses' speeches to Israel on the plains of Moab, as they were about to enter Canaan.

Historical interpretation gives little attention to Moses and his original audience.

3.   Literary (1:05:44)

Treats the Pentateuch as a portrait designed to impact its original audience in particular ways.

Moses wrote the Pentateuch to prepare Israel for faithful service to God in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

Moses stood between two periods of time:

- "that world" – events that had taken place in the past

- "their world" – the days of Moses' original audience

Three main ways Moses connected "that world" to "their world":

- background accounts that established the origins of their experience (e.g., Genesis 15:12-16)

- models to imitate and reject (e.g., Genesis 2:24)

- foreshadows of his audience's world (e.g., Genesis 25:23)

Literary interpretation discerns how Moses connected "that world" of the past to "their world" of his original audience.

IV.   Conclusion (1:10:29)

Review Questions

1. Explain some significant presuppositions that grew out of the Enlightenment and influenced modern critical outlooks on the Pentateuch.

2. List the modern critical approaches to the Pentateuch's authorship and describe the main evidences critical scholars have used to support their views.

3.   What are five major interpretive strategies that critical scholars have followed in their approach to the Pentateuch? Describe the origin, focus and conclusions of each strategy.

4.   Summarize some evangelical presuppositions that contrast with critical approaches to the Pentateuch.

5.   How have evangelicals confirmed the longstanding Jewish and Christian belief that the Pentateuch came from Moses?

6.   What are three main interpretative strategies evangelicals have followed in regard to the Pentateuch? Explore the benefits and drawbacks of each strategy.

Application Questions

1. What are some potential dangers of using modern critical approaches to study Scripture?

2. Why is it important for us to be familiar with the approaches of modern critical scholars?

3. Why must we believe in supernatural events to properly interpret and apply the teachings of the Pentateuch in our lives?

4. What is the value of affirming that God's revelation throughout Scripture is consistently monotheistic? How does this understanding affect your ministry today?

5. There are a variety of names for God found in the Pentateuch. How can this variety allow us to emphasize various aspects of God's character in our preaching and teaching?

6. God displayed himself through supernatural means and miraculous acts in the Pentateuch. What are some ways that God's supernatural activity in the past might give us confidence about God's supernatural promises for our future?

7. How important is it to believe that Moses is essentially the author of the Pentateuch? Explain your answer.

8. The purpose of the Pentateuch was to prepare Israel for faithful service to God in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land. How can you apply this to your present life and ministry?

9. What are some themes in the Pentateuch that reflect concepts that are important for us to apply today? Give an example of how you might apply one of these themes to your present work and teaching.

10. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

amanuensis – Secretary or scribe

Book of the Covenant – A collection of laws found in Exodus 20:18–23:33 that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai

contemporary criticism – More current influential critical approaches that tend to focus on interpreting the Bible in its final form

Deuteronomist ("D") – According to source criticism, the third literary source responsible for the Pentateuch; called "D" because these materials appear primarily in the book of Deuteronomy

El Elyon – Biblical name of God meaning "God Most High"

El Shaddai – Biblical name of God meaning "Almighty God"

Elohim – Hebrew term (sometimes shortened to "El") meaning "God"

Elohist ("E") – According to source criticism, the second literary source responsible for the Pentateuch; called "E" because God normally is called "*Elohim*" in these passages

evangelical/evangelicals – Term used to describe a variety of Christians and Christian movements; often used by Reformers to distinguish Protestants from Roman Catholics; in modern use it usually refers to Christians who affirm the unquestionable authority of Scripture

form criticism – A critical approach to the Old Testament that concentrated on the supposed oral traditions that led to the documentary sources of the Pentateuch

Graf, Karl Heinrich – (1815-1869) German Old Testament scholar and author of *The Historical Books of the Old Testament*

henotheism – Belief in the existence of many gods, but offering special dedication to one primary god

naturalism – The belief that if spiritual realities exist at all, they have no discernible effect on the visible world, and they have no place in academic research

naturalistic historicism – The belief that the best way to understand any subject is to understand how it developed over time through natural causes.

Paleo-Hebrew – A form of the Hebrew language used between 1000 B.C. and 600 B.C.

Pentateuch – First five books of the Old Testament

polytheism – Belief in multiple gods

Priestly ("P") – According to source criticism, the fourth literary source responsible for the Pentateuch; called "P" because these materials were assumed to be written by a group of priests

Proto-Hebrew – An ancient form of Hebrew, closely related to Canaanite dialects used in Moses' day

redaction criticism – A critical approach to the Bible that focused on how hypothetical documents were edited together to form the biblical texts we have today

Sitz im Leben – German phrase meaning "life setting" or "cultural context"

source criticism – Also called literary criticism; an early critical approach to the Old Testament that concentrated on identifying and interpreting parts of the Pentateuch believed to have come from independent written sources

that world – The world that biblical authors wrote about

their world – The world of Scripture's original audience

tradition criticism – Also called traditio-historical criticism; a critical approach to the Bible that focused on how primitive oral traditions and written texts developed into complex theological and political perspectives

Wellhausen, Julius – (1844-1918) German theologian who developed the documentary hypothesis about the Pentateuch

Yahweh – Hebrew name for God that comes from the phrase, "I Am that I Am"; often translated "LORD"

Yahweh Elohim – Hebrew phrase (transliteration) for "the Lord God"

Yahweh Yireh – Hebrew phrase (transliteration) for "the Lord provides"

Yahwist ("J") – According to source criticism, the earliest literary source responsible for the Pentateuch; called "J" because the prominent name for God in passages identified with this written source is "Yahweh" (spelled with a "J" in German)