Torah: Introduction Resources

# Genesis to Joshua as a Stepped Structure or Sideways Pyramid or Chiasm

Like a number of larger and smaller units in the OT (and elsewhere), Genesis to Joshua follows the outline of a sideways pyramid or stepped structure or chiasm. The sections follow one another ABCDEFGHGFEADCB, according to the analysis by Jacob Milgrom in his commentary *Numbers* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990, p. xviii); he himself had adapted it from “A Rhetorical and Theological Analysis of the Hexateuch” by E. G. Newing (*South East Asia Journal of Theology* 22/2 [1981], pp. 1-15).

A Genesis 1 – 11 World origins

 B Genesis 12 – 50 Land promised

 (Joseph’s bones)

 C Exodus 1 – 12 Egypt judged

 (put off your shoes; circumcision; Passover)

 D Exodus 12 – 15 Israel leaves Egypt

 (crossing of sea)

 E Exodus 15 – 18 Israel journeys through the wilderness

 (three days, manna, quails, water)

 F Exodus 19-24 Yahweh speaks at Sinai

 (fire, encroaching)

 G Exodus 25 – 31 The sanctuary planned

 H Exodus 32 – 34 Covenant broken, renewed

 G Exodus 35 – 40 The sanctuary built

 F Leviticus – Numbers 10 Yahweh speaks at Sinai

 (fire, encroaching)

 E Numbers 10 – 36 Israel journeys through the wilderness

 (three days, manna, quails, water)

 A Deuteronomy 1 – 34 Covenant renewed

 D Joshua 1 – 4 Israel enters Canaan

 (crossing of river)

 C Joshua 5 – 12 Canaan judged

 (put off your shoes; circumcision; Passover)

B Joshua 13 – 24 Land distributed

 (Joseph’s bones)

This outline has a number of significant features. It makes clear that the Torah is an incomplete story. The first half of the structure focuses more on liberation, the second half on the land. The center of the structure and of the story is Sinai, but more specifically the center is covenant-breaking and renewal. Genesis 1 – 11 with its most worldwide perspective stands out. Near the end, Deuteronomy with its most Israelite perspective also stands out.

# Genesis to Kings as a Stepped Structure or Sideways Pyramid or Chiasm

Genesis to Kings, too, follows the outline of a sideways pyramid or stepped structure or chiasm. The sections follow one another ABCDEDEDCB, as follows.

A Genesis 1-11: The ultimate context and problem

 B Genesis 12 – 50: Babylon: relationship/nationhood/land promised

 C Exodus 1 – 18: Nationhood attained

 D Exodus 19 – Deuteronomy: Relationship sealed, though imperiled

 E Joshua: Land occupied

 D Judges: Relationship, nationhood, and land threatened

 E 1 – 2 Samuel: Temple, monarchy, and empire established

 D I Kings: Temple, monarchy, and empire diminished

 C 2 Kings 1 – 24: Nationhood imperiled

 B 2 Kings 25: Back to Babylon: Relationship, monarchy, and land lost

Genesis 12 – 50 and 2 Kings 25 pair, as do Exodus 1 – 18 and 2 Kings 1 – 24, and so on. The gloom of the story is that it goes round in a circle and raises the question “Where do we go from here,” especially with regard to the project God initiated in Genesis 1 – 11 (which has no equivalent in the “return” leg of the diagram).

# What the Torah is Not

##  “The Law”?

We have noted that the word “torah” means “teaching.” But in the Greek translation of the Bible the word “torah” was translated by the Greek word for “law,” *nomos*; and when the Greek Bible was translated into Latin, the translators used the equivalent Latin word, *lex*; and when the Latin Bible was translated into modern European languages the translators used the equivalent words in those languages such as “law.” Only in recent decades has this practice sometimes changed.

So the Torah or the Pentateuch is the Law; except that it isn’t, or at least, “Law” is only a partial description of its nature.

Later in the Old Testament, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of a priest called Ezra who lived in Babylon, which had become part of the Persian Empire. His family had not been among those who accepted the opportunity to go to live in Jerusalem when the Persians allowed Judahites whose ancestors had been transported to Babylon to do so. Ezra did make the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, in 458 BC, as a scholar who was an expert in Moses’ Torah. Indeed, he was commissioned by the Persian king to see that the life of Judah and Jerusalem was lived in accordance with “Yahweh’s Torah,” which Ezra took with him. So this “teaching” becomes the law of the land in Judah, by Persian edict.

Given that Exodus to Deuteronomy is dominated by tracts of material that lays the law down for the people of God, this does reflect the nature of the Torah. Yet there are two related senses in which it is misleading to see the Torah as a whole as law.

We have seen that these tracts of material that lay the law down are set in the context of that story of God’s creating the world, making promises to Abraham, and starting to fulfill them. In that sense the Torah has the same combination as a New Testament Gospel , especially Matthew, which sets the teaching of Jesus in the context of the story of Jesus. Matthew follows the Torah. Jesus’ expectations (for instance, as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount) concern the way people are to respond to his having come to inaugurate God’s reign in Israel’s life in a new way. The expectations expressed in Exodus to Deuteronomy concern he way people are to respond to God’s having acted to adopt Israel in the first place and deliver them from their serfdom in Egypt.

There is a further parallel. Jesus’ expectations concern the way people are to respond to what Jesus *intends* to do – God’s reigning in Israel’s life and in the world was something to become complete in the future, as is still the case. Again, that follows the pattern of the Torah’s expectations. The way the Torah tells the story, these are laid down when God has rescued Israel from serfdom but not yet taken them into their own country. The song Moses and Miriam sang after the people’s deliverance at the Reed Sea declared in light of this act of power that Yahweh will reign forever (Exodus 15:18). Yet so far God’s reign is only partial, and it will remain so all through their story (and not only because they resist it). The Torah implies that its teaching concerns the way Israel is to respond to what God is going to do as well to what God has already done.

So the Torah is a distinctive combination of a story about what God has done or begun to do, and some sets of instructions concerning what Israel is to do. It’s thus a neat fact that the word “Torah” means “Teaching.” (The related Hebrew word *moreh* means a “teacher.”) It combines these two forms of teaching. The Torah as a whole is not law.

## Law and Gospel

The related sense in which it is misleading to see the Torah as law is as follows. Christians have often conceptualized the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament as involving the difference between law and gospel. On this misunderstanding, the Old Testament tells people that they must live in accordance with what the Torah says if they want to get into a relationship with God. The New Testament brings the good news that God sets up a relationship with us that is based on grace rather than law. While there is something illuminating about this model, it is not the way either the Old Testament or the New Testament sees things. One aspect of its helpfulness is that as human beings we have an inclination to assume that the basis of a relationship between us and God is that we do what is right and then God is okay about having a relationship with us. To put it theologically, instinctively we believe in justification by works. In New Testament times, some Christians were inclined to believe that Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus needed to start living by the requirements of the Torah, so that (for instance) the men would be circumcised and/or people would keep the rules in Leviticus about purification. New Testament writings such as Romans and Hebrews oppose such views and see them as compromising the essential nature of the gospel, which affirms that God’s grace is the decisive factor in the setting up of a relationship between God and people and that Gentiles do not have to obey the rules in the Torah.

Romans and Hebrews don’t speak in terms of a contrast between the Old Testament and the gospel. Partly this is because they are not dealing with a theoretical question about the interpretation of Scripture. They are dealing with the Torah as it is (mis)understood and (mis)applied in some parts of the church. So they can sound if they are critiquing the Torah when they are actually critiquing misuse of the Torah. Perhaps in a strange way it helps that they speak in terms of “the Law,” because that draws attention to the fact that the framework of thinking they work with is not the Torah’s own framework of thinking – because the Torah is not “Law.”

In effect Paul makes this point clear in the systematic argument of Romans. In the opening chapters of the letter he expounds the basic nature of the gospel. He demonstrates from Scripture that both the Gentile world and the Jewish world are under the domination of sin. They would therefore be cut off from God, but the way God resolves this problem is by sending Christ to die for us, and drawing us into a response of trust in Christ and in what God has done for us in Christ. The question Paul then has to handle is whether this gospel of his is scriptural – whether it fits the Torah and the rest of the Jewish scriptures. If he cannot demonstrate that this is so, he cannot expect to be taken seriously. Fortunately, he can do so. In effect, he points out in Romans 4 that the Torah does not start with law but with gospel. It starts with God’s promise to Abraham. Only in Genesis 17, nearly half way through the Abraham story, does God start talking about an observance on Abraham’s part. As far as the detailed instructions at Sinai are concerned, Paul points out in Galatians 3 that they were given more than four centuries after Abraham’s day.

The Torah thus makes clear that the original basis of the relationship between God and Israel is God’s promise, not Israel’s obedience to the instructions in Exodus to Deuteronomy. The basic nature of Old Testament faith and New Testament faith is the same. It is not that one is based on law, the other on gospel. In both, the origin of the relationship lies in God’s grace, in what God has done, even though both then expect that people will respond to God’s grace both by trusting in God’s promise and by living in accordance with God’s expectations. The relationship between God and us is covenantal, in the Torah and in the New Testament. It starts with God’s making a covenantal commitment; it requires a covenantal commitment in response.

## A Sneak Preview of Jesus?

When Christians think about the significance of the Old Testament , they often start from the assumption that its main importance is to give Israel an advance picture of what the Messiah would be like, and thus to provide part of the basis for believing that Jesus is the Messiah. Very little of the Torah relates at all directly to such an aim.

When he appeared to two of his disciples as they were walking to Emmaus on the day of his resurrection, Jesus explained to them the things that were said about him in all the Scriptures, beginning with Moses. “Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the Prophets, and the Psalms had to come true,” he later added (see Luke 24:27, 44). It would be nice to have a transcript of this conversation, but it would be surprising if the Gospels do not contain the kind of information it would have included. But nearly all the passages the Gospels describe as being fulfilled by Jesus come from the Prophets and the Psalms. Indeed, the only passage in the Gospels that describes an aspect of Jesus’ life as fulfilling a passage from the Torah is John 19:36, where John comments that this is what happens when the Roman soldiers at the crucifixion do not need to break Jesus’ legs to hasten his death, because he is already dead. The relevant passage from the Torah is Exodus 12:46 (the point recurs in Numbers 9:12), which requires that none of the bones of the Passover lamb are to be broken.

Not only is this the only passage the Gospels quote. It is not a passage that in any sense could have given people a sneak preview of Jesus. It does not say, “One day the Messiah will come, and they will not break any of his bones.” Nothing in the passage suggests it is speaking of something that will happen one day. Rather, it illustrates the process that is often involved when the New Testament quotes passages from the Old Testament. While some such passages are explicitly prophecies, many are descriptions of (for instances) kings or prophets or ordinary people. But when the New Testament writers looked back at the Old Testament, they found many passages that helped them understand Jesus even though they were not written as prophecies. Within the Torah there are many other passages that function in this way outside the Gospels. Hebrew, for instance, expounds its understanding of Jesus in light of the Torah’s material on sacrifice and priesthood, but this does not mean that material was given to Israel as a sneak preview of the Messiah.

Even if we take all that material into account, it covers only a small amount of the Torah as a whole. So seeing the Torah as pointing to Jesus doesn’t help us very much in understanding the Torah in itself

Does the Torah, then, point to anything beyond itself, or is it complete on its own? Its ending with the Israelites still on the edge of their promised land shows that it’s not a complete story. We continue to get that impression when we read it in the context of Joshua to Kings, which is even less of a complete story. The Torah relates how God took Abraham from Babylon and took his descendants to the edge of their promised land; Joshua to Kings relates how they came to possess that land but then lost it again and ended up back in the Babylon from which God had taken Abraham. It is a story that goes round in a circle.

In an essay on “Prophecy and Fulfilment” in a book of *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (John Knox Press, 1963), New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann described the Old Testament as the story of the miscarriage of God’s plan. It as in light of this miscarriage that God then sent Jesus as another way to fulfill this plan. I’m not sure this is an appropriate way to view the Old Testament as a whole, in its own right, but it is a fair description of Genesis to Kings. The story as a whole is a gloomy one. It leaves us exiting the movie theater rather somber.

The way Genesis to Kings ends with Israel losing its land may suggest another reason for separating off Genesis to Deuteronomy from what follows. The Torah came to be the most important part of the Scriptures for the Jewish community, and it leaves Israel outside its land, poised on the edge of entering it but not yet doing so. That is where its readers stand, waiting for God to make it possible for them to possess the land again. The story points beyond itself. It is a story about a purpose for Israel that is not fulfilled. Christians know that Jesus came to bring about the restoration of Israel.

The Torah is also about a purpose for the entire world that is not fulfilled by the end. Genesis 1 – 11 sets the Torah’s narrative in a worldwide perspective. It establishes that God is creator and lord of the whole world. It is concerned for the fulfilling of a purpose of God’s in which all humanity is involved. That concern for the world underlay God’s promise to Abraham, which was designed to bring blessing to Abraham but also to cause the world to seek the same blessing as Abraham would experience. By the time we reach the end of the Torah, the worldwide concern of its opening is all but lost. The story again therefore points beyond itself for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. In this connection, too, the Torah does not specifically lead towards Jesus, but it does leave its readers to recognize that God needs to do something along the lines of what Jesus eventually came to do.

The Torah is the beginning of the story that leads from creation to Jesus and explains Jesus. It is a revelation of the life Jesus makes a commitment to and wants us to live. And it is a revelation of the God whom Jesus incarnates and whom he makes it possible for Gentiles also to relate to.

## A Collection of Dusty Stories?

A student once described the impression he had been given of the Torah as follows: “It’s a collection of dusty stories; it’s very important that they actually happened but they aren’t directly relevant to us. “

Here’s a description of the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole from the New Testament that belies that description.

From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in right living, so that people who belong to God can be equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

While this description fits the New Testament, it was not written as a description of the New Testament, which was still being written at the time. The sacred writings or Scriptures are the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. For our present purposes, the striking aspect of that passage is its assumption that the whole of the Torah is significant for an understanding of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and for growth toward Christian maturity.

We have noted how Paul gives expression to one aspect of this significance in the argument of Romans, and specifically in Romans 4, which takes up the fact that God’s promise and Abraham’s response of faith preceded God’s laying down any expectations of Abraham. Paul gives another expression of it in 1 Corinthians 10. There he reminds the Corinthians of the basics of the story in the latter part of Exodus and the middle part of Numbers. In undertaking its journey from Egypt towards its promised land, the entire community traveled under the cloud and through the Reed Sea, so that metaphorically speaking, they were baptized in the cloud and in the sea (thus the Corinthians are in a similar position to them, as people who have been baptized). The Israelites all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, of which you could say the physical food and drink were a symbol (thus again, the Corinthians are in the same position as them). But God got displeased with most of them and they died on the journey to Canaan. Paul’s inference is then not “How lucky we are that God does not treat us that way” but “this story is an example for us not to desire evil or worship idols or engage in sexual immorality or put God to the test or complain as they did” (just the kind of thing the letter reveals to be problems at Corinth), or we will end up the same way. “These things happened to them as an example; they were written down as a warning to us” (1 Cor 10:11). The stories in the Torah – not least the devastating ones – are there for a Christian congregation to learn from.

Rather than a collection of dusty stories that are not worth listening to, they are like the DVD release of a collection of classic old movies that appear in the film buffs’ Top Ten but that no ordinary moviegoers ever get round to seeing –though they may be amazed at them when they do so. If that appreciation is to happen, however, they will have to watch them on their own terms. You cannot watch *Citizen Kane* as if it were a twenty-first century Hollywood movie. You will only “get it” if you watch it in light of the conventions of its day. In a similar way, we have to understand the Torah on its own terms, as writings produced two or three millennia ago in a culture or series of cultures very different from those of the modern West, if we are to let it speak to us.

## A Revelation of a God of Wrath?

When Christians look for ways of characterizing the Torah and the gospel, alongside the contrast of law and gospel is the contrast of the God of wrath and the God of love.

One way of undermining that antithesis is to point out how much wrath there is in the New Testament. It’s Jesus who talks about outer darkness and a blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Torah has nothing of that kind. Indeed, it talks rather little about God’s wrath.

Genesis never speaks of God’s wrath, so that Paul’s account of the aftermath of humanity’s turning away from God in Romans contrasts with that in Genesis. In Genesis the only emotion attributed to God in connection with human sin is hurt or pain or grief. That reflects the fact that Genesis (and the Old Testament as a whole) is a revelation about God’s love for the world.

Likewise Leviticus never speaks of God’s wrath. Christians often assume that sacrifice is designed to placate God’s wrath, but Leviticus does not see sacrifice this way (as we will see when we come to Leviticus).

Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy do speak of God’s wrath, and what is worrying about the way they do so is that they speak not of God’s wrath with the world but with God’s own people – the wrath whose significance Paul takes up in 1 Corinthians 10, not to reassure us that God is not now wrathful but to warn us that God is exactly this way. Hebrews 12 makes the point in its own fashion. It draws a contrast between the way the Israelites came before God at Sinai with its blazing fire and terrifying darkness, and the way Christians come before God. You think it is going to reassure us that we do not need to fear God’s wrath, but it does the opposite in warning us to be careful about the way we listen to God, “because our God is a consuming fire.” As 1 Peter 4:17 puts it, judgment starts with God’s household, God’s family.

## A Story or a Revelation about an Ideal World or an Ideal People?

The Bible is always confounding our expectations. It isn’t what one would have thought a holy book would be. Many of its heroes are not very nice people. The Torah is about a real world and real people, of the kind that we know and are. It’s about Abraham who is often a wimp and Jacob who is a deceiver. Its greatest hero, Moses, is a killer who dies before reaching the promised-land.

Many of the Torah’s regulations are of a lower standard than we would have expected. As Jesus puts the point, it’s teaching about behavior for a people who are stubborn and have closed minds (Mark 10:5). It’s God’s attempt to pull this people a bit nearer to what God’s people could be).

# The Torah: A Story in Six Acts

So the Torah consists in five books, but it is a story that goes through six stages; it resembles a play with six acts and a number of scenes in each act.

## Act 1 (Genesis 1—11):

## How God created and blessed the world, then recreated it and blessed it again

The first scene of the drama (Genesis 1 – 6) relates how God creates and blesses the world and humanity, but then how things go wrong between humanity and God in a way that also affects marriage, family life, social life, and relationships between earth and heaven. God therefore decides to destroy the world and humanity. But God preserves one family and some examples of all the animals in order to be able to give the world a new start, which leads into scene two (Genesis 6 – 11). God makes the first covenant with the family that is preserved, and blesses it as he had blessed things at the first, but things go wrong again as they did in the first scene.

The question Act 1 raises is whether God’s purpose to bless the world will be achieved or whether the forces that lead to a curse on the world will triumph.

## Act 2 (Genesis 12-50):

## How God made promises to Israel’s ancestors and blessed them

The beginning of Act 2 announces God’s intention to continue with the intention to bless the world. God will do so by taking hold of one family and by so blessing it that all the families in the world will seek that blessing. The blessing is spelled out in terms of the family becoming a great people and the people possessing their own land. The three scenes in Act 2 relate the story of three generations of this family.

The first scene (Genesis 12 – 25) concerns Abraham and Sarah, whom God brings from Babylonia to Canaan with that promise of blessing. God makes a further covenant with this family to guarantee the fulfillment of the promise of blessing. The second scene (Genesis 26 – 36) concerns their son Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Even more than the first, this scene focuses on the life of their sons, particularly Jacob, who will be the means of the promise’s fulfillment. The third scene (Genesis 37 – 50) concerns Jacob and Rachel, and Jacob’s other wives; again it focuses on their sons, who will be the heads of the twelve Israelite clans.

## Act 3 (Exodus 1-18):

## How God delivered Israel from Egypt

By the beginning of Act 3 one aspect of the promise has been fulfilled; the descendants of Abraham and Sarah have become a numerous people. Unfortunately a famine has made it necessary for them to go and live in the wrong country. The first scene (Exodus 1-12) thus relates how God makes it possible for them to escape from Egypt, through God’s winning a great victory over the Egyptian king who wants to keep them as serfs (“serfs” is more appropriate than “slaves” because their position was one of compulsory service to the Egyptian state). The second scene (Exodus 13 – 18) relates their journey from Egypt to the place where they are to meet with God, and it includes a further, climactic victory over the Egyptian king at the Reed Sea (the traditional term is “Red Sea” and the reference may be to a northern arm of what we call the Red Sea, but “Reed Sea” is the literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase).

## Act 4 (Exodus 19 – Leviticus – Numbers 10):

## How God met with Israel at Sinai

As well as being very long, Act 4 is also very complex. It both relates events that took place at Sinai and incorporates extensive tracts of teaching material concerning worship and everyday life. It is easy to lose one’s way in Act 4. It may help if first we identify three of the blocks of teaching that are inserted into the narrative at logical points, but that slow it down. These are:

1. Teaching about sacrifices in Leviticus 1 – 7.
2. Teaching about cleanness and taboo in Leviticus 11 – 18.
3. Teaching about holiness and other matters in Leviticus 19 – 27.

If we put these sections to one side, Act 4 comprises five scenes. The first (Exodus 19 – 24) relates the reaffirming of God’s covenant with Israel, which is reformulated in light of the fact that God has now rescued Israel from being serfs in Egypt in order to be God’s servants. The second scene (Exodus 25 – 31) concerns God’s giving Moses instructions for building a sanctuary and the ordination of priests. The third scene (Exodus 32 – 34) relates how Israel is meanwhile breaking the terms of the covenant, which leads to the covenant’s further restatement and reaffirmation. The fourth scene (Exodus 35 – 40 and Leviticus 8 – 10) describes how Israel builds the sanctuary and ordains the priests, but how again this leads to some failure on Israel’s part. The fifth scene (Numbers 1 – 10) describes preparations Israel is to make for the journey to Canaan.

## Act 5 (Numbers 10—36):

## How God led Israel to the edge of the land

In the story of Israel’s journey toward the land, the first scene (Numbers 10 – 21) describes the journey itself. Its dramatic center is a failure of faith on the people’s part which makes God determine that they cannot enter the land; it will be the next generation that does so. The exodus generation stays in the wilderness, living like Bedouin, until they have died off. It is their children who arrive at the edge of the land in the steppes of Moab on the east of the Rover Jordan, in the second scene (Numbers 22-36), which then relates a miscellany of events that take place there and teaching that is given there.

## Act 6 (Deuteronomy):

## How God spoke through Moses for the last time

The main part of Deuteronomy is a gargantuan address by Moses to Israel in which he reviews what has happened since they left Egypt (chapters 1 – 3), reminds them of God’s basic expectations of them (chapters 4 – 11), lays down instructions concerning various specific aspects of their life as it will be in the land (chapters 12 – 26), and re-solemnizes the covenantal relation between God and Israel for this new generation and gives them his final reminders and blessings (chapters 27 – 33). If we can call this the first scene of Act 6, the brief second scene (Deuteronomy 34) is the account of Moses’ death.

# The Torah: Pre-modern, Modern, and Post-modern Attitudes to its Origin

## Pre-modern

Pre-modern writings speak about the link between Moses and the Torah in the same way as the Torah does, and that includes Jesus and the New Testament writers. While they may sometimes intend their own statements to refer to authorship (for instance, when they contrast Moses and Plato), even then such statements are not concerned with authorship in our sense. They do not mean, “This was Moses not P.” More commonly, they mean “This is authoritative Torah so you have to take it seriously” or “This is in the Pentateuch not in Isaiah, if you want to check it out.”

## Modern

In the modern period the scholarly world came to accept that most of the instructions in the Torah did not come from Moses’ time, and they thus asked where the instructions did come from and how they came into being. Here are two examples of modern views.

The first partly follows Israel Knohl in his book *The Sanctuary of Silence* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). It sees the teaching in the Torah as more or less in chronological order:

Exodus 20:1-17 came from Moses at Sinai

Exodus 20:22 – 23:33 and 34:14-26 came from the period between Joshua and David

Leviticus 1 – 18 and some of Numbers came from the period between David and Isaiah

Leviticus 19 – 26 and some of Numbers came from the period between Isaiah and Jeremiah

Deuteronomy came from the period of Jeremiah

A more traditional modern view is that of Frank Crüsemann in *The Torah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996):

The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20 – 23) comes from the eighth century (the time of Hezekiah).

Deuteronomy comes from the seventh century (the time of Josiah).

The Priestly and Holiness law (Leviticus and elsewhere) comes from the exile or after (Ezra being a key figure).

## Post-modern

A post-modern view might be as follows. It is clear enough that there are several collections of teaching in the Torah and that most if not all of them come from a time after Moses. We can assume that they represent ways God guided the people over the centuries. But no one is ever going to agree on when they were produced, so establishing how to interpret the Torah cannot be based on establishing when the material came into being. But we can still learn from their differences by comparing the different collections with each other (in the way laid out in the reading suggestions in connection with some passages from Deuteronomy, Exodus, and Leviticus).

# The Pentateuch after JEDP

JEDP held the field as the consensus theory for a century from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, but this consensus then collapsed. No new consensus has developed in the world of scholarship, and in the absence of a better theory I am content to continue to take JEDP as my working hypothesis. But here are some examples of post-JEDP theories.

## A new supplementary theory

In a series of books such as *Abraham in History and Tradition*; *Prologue to History*; and *The Life of Moses*, Canadian scholar John Van Seters has produced a new “supplementary theory” of the Torah’s origin. He suggests that here is no evidence that any of the strands in the Torah was written before the exile. Rather the Torah came into existence as follows:

A brief pre-J narrative had some stories about Abraham (e.g., the basic contents of Genesis 12)

It was supplemented by the material usually credited to E (e.g., Genesis 20)

J turned it into a larger scale story in the exile, using his imagination to create stories

P added chronological material and genealogies after the exile

A later editor made further additions (e.g., Genesis 14).

## New fragmentary theories

German scholar Rolf Rendtorff wrote a book on *The Problem of the Process of Transmission of the Pentateuch*, and his approach has been taken further by Erhard Blum in books such as *Die Komposition der Vatergeschichte*. Rendtorff first emphasizes the weaknesses of JEDP, largely the weaknesses conservative scholars had often emphasized. For instance, sometimes “J” features appear in “E” contexts, and vice versa. He nevertheless still affirmed in principle the attempt to get behind the final form of the Pentateuch to its earlier sources or versions, and produced a complex theory that combines a fragmentary and a supplementary approach. Behind the Abraham story as we have it (for instance) he suggests that the different forms of the promise to Abraham indicate how the stories developed towards the form that we have. Blum does the same with the Jacob story, which he sees as developing during the monarchy. In this way there developed a number of separate large units about creation, the ancestors, exodus, Sinai, the wilderness stay, and the conquest of the land.

It is an important aspect of this approach that these units long stayed separate; for a considerable time there was no continuous narrative linking these units. One version of the ancestral stories came into being after the fall of Ephraim; it was then expanded further in the exile (for instance, by adding most of Genesis 12). Deuteronomy also came into being in this period and formed the introduction to the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua-Kings). After the exile a Deuteronomistic editor worked further on the stories of the ancestors, for instance by adding Genesis 15 and 24, and linked the ancestral story to the Moses story. The Deuteronomistic history thus came into existence before the Pentateuch, which developed as its prequel. Later a Priestly editor edited the Pentateuch further, for instance by adding Genesis 1 – 11 and 17.

## New “start from scratch” theories

English scholar R. Norman Whybray in works such as *The Making of the Pentateuch* and *An Introduction to the Pentateuch* suggested that the Torah came into being in the exile, much of it out of the imagination of the author.

A number of subsequent European scholars have suggested that it was written from scratch in the Persian period, not in the exile.