

Variations in the Pentateuch

Variations found in the Pentateuch do not reflect its authorship by various writers other than Moses (the so-called Documentary Hypothesis; see App. A). Rather, it reflects the compilation of material by Moses over an extended period of time and its final composition by his scribes at the time of his death. For example, the book of the covenant was composed shortly after Yahweh gave the commandments and judgments at Mount Sinai (Exod., 24:1–8). Moses then went back up to Mount Sinai and received the instructions for the building of the ark and the tabernacle, for the establishment of the Levitical priesthood, as well as receiving the Ten Commandments on stone (Exod., 24:9–31:18).

After the revolt by the Israelites at Mount Sinai (the incident with the golden bull), Yahweh then had Moses write the Levitical regulations of sacrifices, which did not come into effect until the beginning of the next year (Exod., 32:1–40:38; Lev.; Num., 1; and cf. Jer., 7:21–25). The laws and speeches recorded in Deuteronomy did not come into existence until forty years later, when the Israelites were encamped on the east side of the Jordan river (Deut., 1:1–5). These details alone show that there were great spans of time that separated the various manuscripts that formed the basis of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Genesis also shows clear signs of containing different source documents. For example, the creation story as recorded in Genesis, 1:1–2:3, a second version in Genesis, 2:4–4:26. Genesis, 5:1–9:29, certainly starts another independent book, beginning with the statement, “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” Genesis, 10:1–32, begins still another text with, “And these are the generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Kham, and Yapheth.” Such statements indicate that Moses had at his disposal various source materials much earlier than himself. But we must keep in mind that Moses was also a prophet and had direct communication with Yahweh. These

various books may well have been written during different periods of instruction about the history of the world. In either case, the difference in time alone would account for normal variations between the different books which were combined together to form Genesis. Neither does the realization that Moses used earlier books, themselves derived from earlier prophets of Yahweh, detract from the fact that the Pentateuch was produced by him.

Another reason for variation was the different intentions of some of these smaller books within the larger books. The different purposes were recognized even by Jewish writers of the first century C.E. Josephus, for instance, in his Preface to his work on Jewish Antiquities, writes:

Some things the lawgiver (Moses) shrewdly veils in enigmas, others he sets forth in solemn allegory; but wherever straight-forward speech was expedient, there he makes his meaning absolutely plain. (preface, 4)

Signifying the separation between the book that formed Genesis, 1:1–2:3, and the book that formed Genesis, 2:4–4:26, Josephus writes:

And here, after the seventh day, Moses begins to interpret nature, writing on the formation of man in these terms (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:2)

It is at this very point that modern critics separate the “P” and “J” documents. Yet, the fact that different documents were placed together into one book hardly justifies the conclusion that the Pentateuch, as a single work, was the product of different authors.

Another detail used as justification to remove Moses as the author of the Pentateuch is the editorial annotations and comments that were made by someone other than Moses.

Throughout Exodus until Deuteronomy we find someone speaking in the third person, noting the things that Moses said or did. At the end of Deuteronomy, someone describes the death of Moses, which hardly could have been done by Moses himself. Yet, internal evidence, at minimum, proves that Moses was the undeniable author of numerous documents in the Pentateuch, since these are directly said to be his: i.e. Exod., 17:14, 24:4–8, 34:27; Num., 33:1f; Deut., 31:9–13, 24ff; etc.

Next, there is no reason why Moses, who was an aged man of 80 years when he was first called as a prophet and 120 years when he finished, would not have used his own scribes to write his final work. K. A. Kitchen, from the University of Liverpool, notes that “there is no objective reason why Moses should not have written, or have caused to be written (at dictation—hence Third person pronouns), considerably more of the contents of the present Pentateuch” than the utter minimum specifically charged to him in the text (NBD, pp. 849f).

The difference between these so-called “utter minimum” documents, all of which are specifically accredited to Moses, demonstrate all of the variations in the so-called J, E, P, and D materials. The simple explanation is that towards the end of his life, and probably with the aid of his brother, the High priest Aaron, and his successor, Yahushua (Joshua) the son of Nun, Moses brought together all of his various books and had his scribes combine them into the Pentateuch (which originally was but one book and then later divided into five parts). The scribes, under the direction of Moses, then wrote the various commentaries and spoke in the third person. At the death of Moses, Joshua, now leader of the Israelites, had the scribes add the description of Moses’ death (a detail acknowledged as late as the B. Baba Bathra, 14b). For these reasons, all ancient accounts properly attribute the Pentateuch to Moses. Scribes acting under the direction of Moses and Joshua can hardly discredit this fact.

There are many other details which also speak for Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. Among these, for example, is the

criterion in the Documentary Hypothesis that assumes that divine names are a basis for separating documents. This logic proves faulty for several reasons. First, evidence from ancient manuscripts and the LXX shows that there was a much greater variety in the use of these names in earlier manuscripts than in the later MT. The scribes of the MT are known to have actually stripped out the sacred name Yahweh in various places. The LXX, in fact, demonstrates that the name Yahweh was used to a much greater extent in earlier manuscripts of the Pentateuch.

Second, a study of divine names used in the Moslem Koran brought to light the fact that certain suras preferred Allah, while others preferred Rab; just as certain parts of Genesis use *eloahim* while others use Yahweh (R. D. Wilson in PTR, 17, pp. 644–650). Yet there is no support among scholars for a multi-authorship approach to studies on the Koran based upon divine names.

Third, the use of Yahweh-*eloahim* in Genesis, 2:4–3:24 (cf. also Exod., 9:30) also gives problems for the Documentary approach. Why would the divine names be combined if they are supposed to represent indications of separate authors? The LXX contains numerous other examples demonstrating that this combination was much more prevalent in earlier manuscripts (e.g. Gen., 4:6, 9, 5:29, 6:3,5).

Other important objections are voiced by Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (*A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1964, pp. 97–98). Archer writes that the documentary view “has been characterized by a subtle species of circular reasoning.” He adds:

The Wellhausen theory was allegedly based upon the evidence of the text itself, and yet the evidence of the text is consistently evaded whenever it happens to go counter to the theory. For example, the documentarians insisted, “The historical books of the Old Testament show no recognition of

the existence of P legislation or a written Mosaic code until after the exile.' When in reply to this claim numerous references to the Mosaic law and P provisions were discovered in the historical books, the reply was made, 'Oh well, all those references were later insertions made by priests' This means that the body of evidence which is relied upon to prove the theory is rejected when it conflicts with the theory. Or to put it in another way, whenever the theory is opposed by the very data it is supposed to explain, the trouble-shooting team of Redactor and Interpolator, Inc. is called to the rescue. Elusive tactics like these hardly beget justifiable confidence in the soundness of the result. (p. 97).

Archer also concludes:

The Wellhausen school started with the pure assumption (which they have hardly bothered to demonstrate) that Israel's religion was of merely human origin like any other, and that it was to be explained as a mere product of evolution. It made no difference to them that no other religion known (apart from offshoots of the Hebrew faith) has ever eventuated in genuine monotheism; the Israelites too must

have begun with animism and crude polytheism just like all the other ancient cultures. The overwhelming contrary evidence from Genesis to Malachi that the Israelite religion was monotheistic from start to finish has been evaded in the interests of a preconceived dogma—that there can be no such thing as a supernatural revealed religion. Therefore all the straightforward accounts in Genesis and the rest of the Torah relating the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses have been subjected to a cynical re-analysis intended to show that a monotheistic veneer has been applied to those old polytheistic worthies by so-called Deuteronomists or the late priestly school. (p. 98)

Finally, it is simply ignored by the critics that if the books of Moses had been of later, multiple authorship the fraud would have easily been discerned. It would have been very difficult, indeed, to pass off recent creations as fathered by so famous a figure as Moses, let alone one book after another. These pseudo-texts would have been quickly discredited by one school or the other, and especially by the supporters of Baal worship, which proved to be the predominant faith in Israel and did much to pollute the people of Judah. Yet the Pentateuch was untouched by such criticism because the authorship by Moses was irrefutable.