

Hexateuch - Tetrateuch

p. 337 Still another significant result of the emphasis on oral tradition has been its refutation of the rectilinear view. Before this emphasis, the older theory implied that when P appeared, D disappeared. But suppose that P and D represent schools or viewpoints that long existed side by side. D need not disappear simply because PP appeared. Accordingly, scholars at the turn of the century held that the four major documents extended beyond the Pentateuch and into the sixth book, Joshua; scholars customarily spoke of the Hexateuch ("six books"), rather than the Pentateuch, as the basic unified compilation. Today, there is a tendency to speak of the Tetrateuch, "four books" (Genesis through Numbers), as the Priestly writing, and of Deuteronomy through Kings as the Deuteronomic collection.

Lastly, . . . . There have been a tendency to credit the Tanak with far-reaching historical reliability, a disposition to declare the Tanak theologically relevant today, and a use of the existentialist approach. Since this attitude is not to my taste, I may do it an injustice. It seems to me that the exponents extract from existentialism an unrestrained subjectivity, which they combine with an exaggeration of the historical reliability of the Tanak. They parrot a limited selection or range of Tanak items which they invest with their own meaning, not that of Scripture. Such "biblical theologians" at their best pay some lip service to the historical study of the Tanak; at their worst they do little studying at all. The old-fashioned orthodoxy can and should command the respect of those who must disagree; this self-styled "neo-Orthodoxy" scarcely commands a similar high regard. To state that the Pentateuch, especially Genesis, contains some or much valid history, is quite different from saying that the Pentateuch is historical. Indeed, not a single document in the Pentateuch was written simply to narrate history.

p. 338 Yet, can the theological interpretation be logical, acceptable, and persuasive if the factual basis is questionable? The candid answer must be a forthright no. But we should notice that while an assembly of facts or pseudo facts existed for the biblical writer to draw upon, he started with the theological conclusions and supported them with facts, rather than the reverse. He did not say, "Here are the facts; see how they reveal God." Rather, he said, "God reveals Himself in history; here is the set of facts which demonstrate this." It is the biblical theology which should challenge modern debates and not the bare facts of biblical history. . . .

p. 338 The J Code, and here I oversimplify the scholarly view, was a written saga which used a much older oral tradition and one older written source. The code (J1) can be dated conveniently about 800, and the older written source about 850. Later developments in the code (J2) were recorded about 500. While older commentators associated J with Judea, the southern kingdom, more recent ones do not consider it markedly southern in its early stages; similarly, older scholars consider E markedly northern and later ones do not. (Indeed, there is a minority of scholars who do not consider E a written saga, such as J, but rather a conglomerate mass; E to them consists of theological and literary recastings of portions of J, containing some items which are as ancient as, or even more ancient than, J.)

Skepticism

p. 348 What archaeology has confirmed, however, is that the general picture of early Palestinian life as depicted in the Tanak is reliable. This confirmation has been desirable, even necessary, to refute a skepticism found in some nineteenth-century scholars who found absolutely nothing in Scripture credible. But we should not move from excessive skepticism to excessive credulity. The traditions in Genesis are folk tales modified and embellished by religious belief. To seek to authenticate these as historically valid in the form in which Genesis relates them is to misapply a useful science.