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Introduction to Deuteronomy

A Survey of Authorship, Date, Critical Issues, and Theology

Critical Introduction

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Scholarly positions regarding the date, authorship, and content of Deuteronomy have seen drastic shifts in the last two hundred years or so. As each new idea comes to the fore, however, adherents to older ones remain. Today, there is an almost unbelievable range of positions on who wrote or compiled the book and when that was done. This paper looks at four books' presentations of the authorship, date, critical issues, and theology of Deuteronomy. Authorship and date are very closely tied to a scholar's critical views of the book, and separating them is difficult.

The first of these works is *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, edited by Paul J Achtemeier and Roger S Boraas (San Francisco: HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins, 1996), 238-239. This source has the least to say, being the only single-volume dictionary being examined.

This dictionary views Deuteronomy through 2 Kings as a single Deuteronomistic history, presented by a historian who is distinct from the Priestly writer and the Chronicler (p 238). It does not attempt to assign a date.

Theologically, Deuteronomy is seen here as the bridge between "the grace of God manifested in the Exodus, Sinai, and wilderness traditions, and the ensuing failure of the people to remain faithful to God seen in the traditions relating to the settlement in the land" (p 239).

The second is T. Desmond Alexander, and David W Baker's *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. [Ivp Bible Dictionary Series, 1]. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 127-143, 322-328, 970-984.

Authorship and Date: After a survey covering the pre-Enlightenment position, Spinoza and Hobbes, Geddes, de Wette, and several iterations of the Documentary Hypothesis, this dictionary concludes that the Pentateuch is a compilation with an unknown editor (or editors) and unknown compilation date, and that Deuteronomy itself is compiled from multiple sources, though the main bulk of it is one consistent body of law. The frequent references to The Book of the Law in the Samuel-Kings history are posited as referring to Deuteronomy 5-26, placing these chapters before the conquest of the land of Canaan. This dictionary does not take a firm position on authorship, instead declaring that insufficient evidence exists for any confidence in a particular author.

Alexander and Baker's history of criticism is perhaps the most extensive of the four sources. They touch on the Talmud, Mishna, New Testament, and Josephus. Then they describe 18th century positions of Astruc and Eichhorn, followed by the 19th century fragmentary and supplementary hypotheses of de Wette, and Ewald, Vatke's developmental approach rooted in Hegelian idealism, Hupfeld and Reihm's three- and four-source hypotheses, and the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis. Enter the 20th century and William Albright, bringing studies of the ancient Near East to bear on Biblical studies, rejecting not the documentary approach, but the historical development of ancient Israel. Then comes form criticism, best represented by Gunkel, who in turn influenced Alt and Noth, who restored the possibility of "historical reality behind the

early traditions” (p 978) as they applied form criticism to the law and social structure of early Israel, and von Rad’s theory that “Israel had preserved its basic history in ... historical creeds still apparent in certain passages” (p 979). In the 1970s, Rendtorff argued for “large strands of material that had been joined end to end” (p 980) rather than multiple threads woven together. The 20th century was rounded out by the canonical criticism of Childs and Sanders and by literary critics who largely rejected the older source criticism. Alexander and Baker conclude with the collapse of older consensus on the documentary hypothesis, and this statement: “The various critical methodologies are not inherently antisupernaturalistic.” They take the position that the Christian scholar should “embrace the concept of divine intervention, which must also be brought together with the intellectual achievements of modern Western civilization” (p 928).

In this dictionary, Deuteronomy is “largely responsible for creating the OT’s covenant theology” (p 319). The people of Israel are sovereign, ruled by Yahweh, and appointing an earthly king is optional (p 320). They, unlike other nations, are chosen, and they are all elect; this is based on Yahweh’s love for them, not on their size or righteousness (p 321). The land is plentiful, and is a gift from God, but possessing it and His blessings are conditional on keeping the covenant (p 323). Centralized worship in the place of Yahweh’s choosing and the divine name are also key (p 323-324).

Third is *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* First ed. (edited by David Noel Friedman, New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:160-183, 6:162-171.

This dictionary is fairly firmly in the source critics’ camp that there are at least four sources for the Pentateuch (J, E, D, and P). Supposed inconsistencies, repetitions and

doublings, and stylistic differences are all cited as clear reasons for the composite nature of both the Pentateuch and each of its books. Trafton devotes but a single sentence each to doubt that the Elohist source is distinct and to post-World War II Israeli scholars arguing that the Priestly source is ancient. In the very next sentence, Trafton brings up Schmid and Seters's position that even the J source is post-exilic.

Weinfeld presents Deuteronomy as a later, secondary addition to canon, like the “*šanû* (‘second’/‘an- other’)” material that was a later addition to Mesopotamian sacred literature. He roots this in the position that Deuteronomy is a product of Hezekianic-Josianic reforms. He dates Deuteronomy to the 7th century B.C. because of relationship to Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties of Essarhaddon, making no mention of the earlier Neo-Hittite treaties.

Weinfeld presents Deuteronomic theology as distinct from the Tetrateuch and more in line with the Hezekiah-Josiah period. “Deuteronomy defines the sanctuary as ‘the place where YHWH chose to cause *his name* to dwell there.” (Weinfeld, p 175). Weinfeld agrees with von Rad that “to cause his name to dwell” is a “new theological conception of the Deity” and that the Deuteronomic school strictly adhered to this naming. Worship is centralized to a single place, sacrifice is personal rather than institutional, and both the tithe and the firstborn animal are eaten by the owner rather than the priest. Weinfeld notes that parts of Deuteronomy which have no parallels in the Tetrateuch have parallels in Wisdom Literature, both within the Old Testament and in other sources.

Finally, Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard's *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), chapter 6, "Deuteronomy," 102-119.

Longman and Dillard spend six pages on the authorship of Deuteronomy, its historical background, and issues in the history of interpretation. As they prepare to dive into criticism from the 19th century and beyond, they give this warning: "Any effort to collate and summarize will unavoidably oversimplify." Their warning most assuredly applies to this paper. They cover 19th century Documentary Hypothesis positions that identified the book as both being the one discovered during Josiah's reign and being written as a pious fraud at that same time. They then describe the late 19th to early 20th century investigations into multiple strata within Deuteronomy: singular vs. plural address, apparent contradictions between Deuteronomy and the Tetrateuch, suggesting a non-Mosaic origin, and differences in treatment of priests in relation to Levites, suggesting a Priestly stratum for the Pentateuch that comes after Deuteronomy. They proceed to cover von Rad's position that Deuteronomy is Levitical in origin, based on the Sinai tradition being separate from the exodus and being reflected in Deuteronomy, with both being "the same cultic occasion." From there, they visit Wellhausen, Driver, Alt, and Nicholson arguing against Levitical authorship. "Ultimately, all of the major authority centers in Israel (Levites, prophets, elders, sages at the royal court) have been suggested as possible sources for this book" (p 108). They then cover Noth's view that Deuteronomy's present form is from the exilic period, but it contains many ancient materials.