1. Of Pillars and Foundations: Seven Thesis Statements Concerning the Hermeneutics of the Pentateuch

De pilares y fundamentos: siete tesis respecto de la hermenéutica del Pentateuco

Gerald A. Klingbeil

Abstract

The study of the composition of the Pentateuch has been at the center of critical scholarship since the nineteenth century. While there is general agreement that the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis, as originally presented, is untenable, most of current Pentateuchal research has worked within the framework of the existence of divergent sources that underwent a number of editorial changes. Considering the basic physical law of input determining output, this study challenges the basic presupposition of the existence of divergent sources and calls for a fresh approach to the hermeneutics of the Pentateuch that approaches the biblical text on its own terms and that does not *a priori* negate the notion of inspiration, thus challenging the philosophical and methodological presuppositions of standard historical-critical scholarship. As a starting point for this new conversation, it offers seven thesis statements focusing on basic hermeneutics as well as promising methodological approaches that may point this important discussion beyond the well-worn tracks of critical scholarship.

Keywords

Hermeneutics — Pentateuch — Graf-Wellhausen — Old Testament — Historical-Critical method

Resumen

El estudio de la composición del Pentateuco ha estado en el centro de la erudición crítica desde el siglo XIX. Mientras hay un acuerdo general de que la hipótesis documental de Graf-Wellhausen, como fue presentada originalmente, es insostenible, la mayor parte de la investigación del Pentateuco ha trabajado dentro del marco de la existencia de fuentes divergentes que pasaron por una cantidad de cambios editoriales. Considerando la ley física básica de que el ingreso determina la salida, este estudio desafía la suposición básica de la existencia de fuentes divergentes y pide un enfoque nuevo de la hermenéutica del Pentateuco que aborda el texto bíblico en sus propios términos y no niega *a priori* la noción de inspiración, desafiando así las suposiciones filosóficas y metodológicas de

la erudición histórico-crítica. Como punto de partida para esta nueva conversación, ofrece siete tesis que se concentran en una hermenéutica básica como también promete abordajes metodológicos que pueden dirigir este debate importante más allá de las huellas gastadas de la erudición crítica.

Palabras clave

Hermenéutica — Pentateuco — Graf-Wellhausen — Antiguo Testamento — Método histórico-crítico

Introduction

Questions involving the composition of the Pentateuch and the search for an appropriate way of reading and interpreting these foundational texts are not new. In fact, generations of scholars, representing different traditions and religious creeds, have struggled with this topic. Since Graf-Wellhausen's proposals in the nineteenth century brought this quest into mainstream academic research,[1] uncounted studies have challenged, fine-tuned, reworked, or re-imagined the appropriate framework for reading the Torah.[2]

---

[1] See here the helpful research history in Cees Houtman, *Der Pentateuch. Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung*, CBET 9 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994) and Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture. Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). I also benefitted from reading the earlier work of Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today. An Analysis of Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation and Proposals for the Interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God* (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers/Biblical Research Institute, 1985). The present study is a revised version of a plenary paper read on April 4, 2016, at the Composition of the Pentateuch Symposium, held at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA. Many of the revisions reflect the important questions and observations raised by my colleagues during that event. In places, elements of the oral presentation have been kept in place.

[2] Some of the early book-length critical voices looking at the big issues and larger picture of the composition of the Pentateuch included Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1941); M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Authorship* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967); and R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch. A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup 53 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). More recent contributions to the discussion include Gordon J. Wenham, "Method in Pentateuchal Source Criticism", *VT* 41 (1991): 84–109; E. W. Nicholson, "The Pentateuch in Recent Research: A Time for Caution", in *Congress Volume, Leuven 1989*, ed., J. A. Emerton, VTSup 43 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 10–21; F. López García, "De la antigua a la nueva crítica literaria del Pentateuco", *EstBib* 52 (1994): 7–34; Rolf Rendtorff, "Directions in Pentateuchal Studies", *CurBS* 5 (1997): 43–65; David M. Carr, "Controversy and Convergence

However, in spite of the often-predicted demise of Wellhausen's basic framework, it seems that the prevailing paradigm has not really changed after all[3]—even though many historical-critical scholars recognize that the paradigm is broken.[4] Scholars still take the notion of the existence or, at least, partial existence of varied sources called J, E, D and P, as their point of departure.[5] These sources then underwent several complex editions requiring a series of unknown editors—though that notion has been challenged from within historical-critical scholarship by John van Seters.[6]

Most introductions to the Hebrew Bible or the Pentateuch begin their journey by recounting and re-interpreting critical scholarship's quest to write a coherent composition history. De Wette, Graf, Kuenen, Wellhausen are ever-present in scholarly thinking about these texts—even when their suggestions are modified, revised, challenged or even negated. In other words, the existing paradigm determines to a certain

---

in Recent Studies of the Formation of the Pentateuch", *RSR* 23 (1997): 22–31; Jean Louis Ska, *Introducción a la lectura del Pentateuco. Claves para la interpretación de los cinco primeros libros de la Biblia* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2001); Georg Fischer, "Zur Lage Der Pentateuchforschung", *ZAW* 115 (2003): 608–616. Helpful introductions to recent approaches and trends in Pentateuchal research can be found in Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, eds., *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

3   The idea of a paradigm change was argued by Rolf Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing: Hopes—and Fears", *BibInt* 1 (1993): 34–53, in an influential essay published in 1993. While there are signs of a multiplicity of methods and approaches, it appears as if the basic underlying paradigm or framework has not fundamentally changed.

4   See the lucid introduction found in Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Rethinking the Pentateuch: Prolegomena to the Theology of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1–10; see earlier Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993). A recent defense of the standard historical-critical reading of the Pentateuch can be found in Joel S. Baden, *Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

5   The work of Erich Zenger focuses on the final canonical text and represents a refreshing new voice. See also his comments on the state of Pentateuchal studies in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 8th ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 69, echoing some of the sentiments expressed earlier. Eckart Otto's monumental 4-volume commentary on Deuteronomy (*Deuteronomium*, 4 vols., HThKAT [Freiburg: Herder, 2012–2017] includes a strong synchronic and canonical component, suggesting a broader hermeneutical perspective.

6   John van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the 'Editor' in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

degree the expected outcome. The basic physical law of input determining output illustrates this dilemma. Little can change when we start at the same (or a similar) place again and again—and again. While recent years have witnessed a veritable explosion of methods and approaches[7]—there have been few attempts to consider and change the basic underlying operating system.

In this study I am retracing my own journey into the Pentateuch—a journey that started more than 25 years ago while pursuing graduate work in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. However, instead of merely interacting with specific assumptions and results of critical scholarship that depend on the philosophical and methodological presuppositions of the historical-critical method (something I have done repeatedly in the past),[8] I would like to propose a different route. Taking as my point of departure a high view of Scripture and the recognition of faith—even encompassing our academic work—I propose seven thesis statements and would like to invite an ongoing conversation, similar to the conversation Martin Luther initiated 500 years ago when he fastened his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany.

---

[7]   A quick look at the varied sections, consultations, and study groups inviting scholars during the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature confirms this notion of an explosion of methodologies.

[8]   See Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Historical Criticism", in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds., T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 401–420. Concerning the foundational philosophical presuppositions of historical-critical scholarship in general and Pentateuchal criticism in particular, I have learned much from the work of my former colleague Raúl Kerbs, "El método histórico-crítico en teología: en busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (parte I)", *DavarLogos* 1, n. 2 (2002): 105–123; and idem, "El método histórico-crítico en teología: en busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (parte II)", *DavarLogos* 2, n. 1 (2003): 1–27. Compare also idem, "La crítica del Pentateuco y sus presuposiciones filosóficas", in *Inicios, fundamentos y paradigmas: Estudios teológicos y exegéticos en el Pentateuco*, ed., Gerald A. Klingbeil, SMEBT 1 (Libertador San Martín, Argentina: EUAP, 2004), 1–43. Regarding presuppositions in biblical hermeneutics in general, see Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture", in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed., George W. Reid, BRIS 1 (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 27–46.

This comparison requires qualification. I do not expect this conversation to be as transformational as the one started by Luther. The reach of the Protestant Reformation is still felt within Christianity (and the larger world) until today. However, while Luther did not set out to reform the Roman Catholic Church and form a new *ecclesia*,[9] his propositions, considered logically to their very end, went far beyond a mere makeover. In fact, his most lasting contribution, at least in my mind, happened at the hermeneutical level. It is this foundational level that this study seeks to address, offering an alternative paradigm and suggesting a credible change of the underlying operating system.

Let me emphasize that this proposal does not argue for an anti-academic stance that reduces scholarship to the choice between rational deduction and faith-affirming acceptance. Rather, it suggests a third option that seriously considers the biblical (and relevant extrabiblical) data, while it is, at the same time, firmly committed to the truth claims inherent in Scripture. It attempts to contribute to the discussion of the composition of the Pentateuch without following a well-worn, predetermined path. In the following seven thesis statements, I hope to dialogue with different methodological approaches, including comparative methods, intertextuality, ritual theory, biblical theology, and linguistics, all of which can contribute to our discussion of the hermeneutics (and, by extension, composition) of the Pentateuch and represent a truly multi-disciplinary approach.[10] I hope that these seven thesis statements will not

---

[9]   See, for example, Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1966), 287–344. I am indebted to my colleague Alberto Timm for this helpful reference.

[10] In two chapters, co-authored with my brother Martin Klingbeil and published in 2000, I have argued for the significance of a truly multi-disciplinary approach to the interpretation of the Pentateuch (and Scripture as a whole) and offered an example for such an approach by interpreting the tower of Babel narrative of Genesis 11,1–9. *Cf.* Gerald A. Klingbeil and Martin G. Klingbeil, "La lectura de la Biblia desde una perspectiva hermenéutica multidisciplinaria (I)—consideraciones teóricas preliminares", in *Entender la Palabra: Hermenéutica Adventista para el nuevo siglo*, eds., Merling Alomía et al. (Cochabamba: Universidad Adventista de Bolivia, 2000), 147–173; and idem, "La lectura de la Biblia desde una perspectiva hermenéutica multidisciplinaria (II)—construyendo torres y hablando lenguas in Gn 11:1–9", 175–198. Compare also Fernando L. Canale, "Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001): 366–389.

only further continued dialogue within scholarship *per se*, but also offer a healthy invitation to consciously go beyond the comfort zone of well-established paradigms and familiar vistas.

Before starting the discussion of the seven thesis statements, let me highlight two unique features of the set. First, right from the outset one notes that statements 1-3 are more foundational, while statements 4-7 function more on the level of the interpretational and exegetical level. Second, every statement is formulated as an action statement using the first person plural. This is not an indication of the royal plural but rather based on my conviction that significant discussion and original thinking really happen in community, the locus of change in most cultures and societies.

Thesis 1: We always bring Ourselves to the Text

This first thesis sounds like a truism and cliché. Most of us are aware of the power of worldview and its (mostly) unconscious influence on our values, beliefs and actions. Scholars working in cross-cultural missions have highlighted the importance of understanding this foundational operating system governing our lives.[11]

I come to the biblical text as a white male, raised and educated in Germany who, over the past 27 years, has lived and worked on four different continents in very diverse cultures. I caught the tail end of modernism but am now living in a postmodern secular society. Different from that,

---

[11] For a helpful review of the concept of "worldview" in western philosophy and theology, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). Worldview and missions have been discussed exhaustively in Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion. A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), and Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). The importance of worldview within hermeneutics has been discussed in Craig L. Blomberg, "The Globalization of Hermeneutics", *JETS* 38 (1995): 581–593; Dennis E. Johnson, "Between Two Wor(l)ds: Worldview and Observation in the Use of General Revelation to Interpret Scripture, and Vice Versa", *JETS* 41 (1998): 69–84; and Heikki Räisänen, et al., *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Helsinki* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). Compare also Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, BBR-Sup 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 1–21.

rationalism and enlightenment (leading to modernism) informed the worldview of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century pioneers of Pentateuchal criticism.[12]

These pioneers sought to transcend subjective cultural and religious limitations in order to establish the objective historical meaning of the text—once and for all.[13] Their approach was characterized by general skepticism and universal doubt of the historical reliability of a text that was clearly governed by theological concerns—a typical stance of the post-enlightenment period.[14] They adopted—consciously or unconsciously—three foundational principles advocated by nineteenth century German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch, including (a) the principle of *correlation* (history is a closed system with no space for supernatural intervention); (b) the principle of *analogy* (fundamental historical homogeneity) often cited when encountering miracle reports or supernatural occurrences described in the biblical text);[15] and (c) the principle of *criticism* (there are no absolutes; everything requires a critical evaluation).[16]

---

[12] See Joshua Berman, "Historicism and Its Limits: A Response to Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert", *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 4 (2013): 297–309, where Berman argues methodologically against the wholesale negation of comparative Hittite material relevant for the dating of Deuteronomy.

[13] *Cf.* Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 262–63. Note also the helpful comments by Ellen T. Charry, "Hermeneutics, Biblical", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, ed., Samuel E. Balentine, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1:459–460.

[14] See Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 281; and Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 84–92.

[15] New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener has written extensively on miracle reports in the gospels and the questions raised by the analogical argument. See Craig S. Keener, "Miracle Reports and the Argument from Analogy", *BBR* 25, n. 4 (2015): 475-495. *Cf.* also his entry "Miracles", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, ed., Samuel E. Balentine, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2:101–107, where he reviews the philosophical and theological implications of these "signs" and "wonders" as they relate to the biblical data.

[16] John Collins, while in general agreement with the three basic underlying principles postulated by Troeltsch, suggests a fourth, i.e., the principle of *autonomy*, which highlights scientific freedom from church and state. *Cf.* John Collins, "Is Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed., William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 2. Collins took this principle from Van A. Harvey,

This is not the place to engage Troeltsch and his epistemology critically—a task already undertaken by other scholars more qualified for this task.[17] However, as we have better understood the concept of worldview and its influence on culture, beliefs, and values, the extreme emphasis on objectivity and objective evaluation that is so prevalent in historical-critical scholarship needs to be—at least—questioned.

Postmodernism has, in a sense, helped to shake up and partly demolish that concept, replacing it with a lack of absolutes, as recently noted by Charry:

> Spearheaded by some currents in French philosophy, secular postmodern philosophy and cultural theories—deconstruction, poststructuralism, feminist theory, and queer theory—are now questioning both the desirability and the possibility of objective interpretation that dominated modernity.[18]

When historical-critical scholars approach a biblical text, they come—knowingly or unknowingly—with underlying presuppositions (including also the ones formulated by Troeltsch). In an intriguing study on the composition of the Book of Job, Douglas Lawrie, professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, questions the "critical stance" of scholars using the historical-critical method. Rather, he suggests, it seems to be the subjective opinion regarding the book as a whole that shapes the interpretive stance of Job scholars and guides them in their exegetical studies.[19] Lawrie's observations reiterate thesis 1: *We always bring ourselves to the text*. That is, undoubtedly, also true for conservative scholars who approach the biblical text from a distinct perspective. This leads seamlessly to thesis 2.

The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

[17] See the very detailed analysis by Kerbs already referenced. Compare also the intriguing study of Alvin Plantinga, "Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship", in *'Behind' the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 19–57.

[18] Charry, "Hermeneutics, Biblical", 1:459.

[19] Douglas Lawrie, "How Critical is it to be Historically Critical? The Case of the Composition of the Book of Job", *JNSL* 27 (2001): 101–120.

Thesis 2: We take Scripture's Self-Claims Seriously

As we read and interact with Scripture, we recognize that Scripture itself is full of truth claims and suggests a worldview that is significantly different from our western twenty-first century worldview.[20] Right from the outset in Genesis, we are confronted with the most prominent truth claim of Scripture: A God, not confined by time, location, and history, creates a world and its inhabitants (including humanity) and then continues to speak into this world that becomes separated from the Creator by sin and torn in conflict. Troeltsch's principles of correlation, analogy, and criticism all appear to stand in direct opposition to these truth claims. Systematic theologians discuss God's speaking in Scripture (including the Pentateuch) under the heading of revelation and inspiration.

The Pentateuch contains specific divine commands for Moses to write down what he had seen and heard. The first explicit reference to writing down YHWH's words and acts can be found in Exodus 17,14. Other Pentateuchal references to scribal activities include Exodus 24,4; 34,27; Numbers 33,2; Deuteronomy 31,9, as well as Exodus 34,1, referring to God as a scribe, and 39,30 with the description of the two artists, Bezalel and Oholiab, engraving "Holy to the Lord" on the priestly crown.

When we consider the composition of the Pentateuch, literacy and writing is an important topic. The issue of literacy in Israel, however, cannot be solely resolved with reference to archaeological data—even though the recent spate of in-situ alphabetic paleo-Hebrew epigraphic discoveries dating to Late Bronze Age (LBA), Iron Age I (IAI) and early

---

[20] I am interested here in revelation and inspiration itself—not the rhetoric of revelation, even though the varying communicative strategies are intriguing. *Cf.* Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

Iron Age II (IAII) from Izbet Sartah,[21] Khirbet Qeiyafa,[22] Lachish,[23] Tel Reḥov,[24] Tel Zayit[25] and other sites[26] suggests, at minimum, the ability of people (perhaps an elite?) living *outside* of Jerusalem to communicate in a written format.[27]

As has been noted by Schniedewind, writing had often magical connotations in the Ancient Near East (ANE), limited to a small elite, and was frequently associated with religious texts.[28] Hurowitz has suggested

---

[21] Aaron Demsky, "A Proto Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and its Implications for the History of the Alphabet", *TA* 4 (1977): 14–27

[22] On the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon see H. Misgav, Y. Garfinkel and S. Ganor, "The Ostracon", in *Khirbet Qeiyafa, Vol. 1: Excavation Report 2007–2008* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009), and a number of publications offering distinct readings. On the Khirbet Qeiyafa incised jar, see Y. Garfinkel, M. R. Golub, H. Misgav, and S. Ganor, "The 'Išba'al Inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa", *BASOR* 373 (2015): 217–233.

[23] See Benjamin Sass, Yosef Garfinkel, Michael G. Hasel, and Martin G. Klingbeil, "The Lachish Jar Sherd: An Early Alphabetic Inscription Discovered in 2014", *BASOR* 374 (2015): 233–245.

[24] The eleven inscriptions, mostly incised on storage jars, have been dated to early IA II. *Cf.* Shmuel Aḥituv and Amihai Mazar, "The Inscriptions from Tel Reḥov and their Contribution to the Study of Script and Writing during Iron Age IIA", in *"See, I Will Bring a Scroll Recounting What Befell Me" (Ps 40:8): Epigraphy and Daily Life from the Bible to the Talmud Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Hanan Eshel*, eds., Esther Eshel and Yigal Levin, JAJSup 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 39–68.

[25] Ron E. Tappy et al., "An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century from the Judean Shephelah", *BASOR* 344 (2006): 5–46.

[26] See also the study by William H. Shea, "The Earliest Inscription and Its Implications for the Writing of the Pentateuch", in *Inicios, paradigmas y fundamentos*, 45–60, who suggests that the Wadi el-Hol alphabetic inscription found on a rock wall alongside a military road north of Thebes and possibly dated to c. 1800 B.C., as well as the earlier discovered proto-Sinaitic inscriptions dated to the fifteenth century B.C. offer a possible historical parallel for the writing of the Pentateuch in the fifteenth century B.C.

[27] On literacy, see Ian M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence. Part I", *VT* 48.2 (1998): 238–253; idem, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence. Part II", *VT* 48.3 (1998): 408–422. Young is not alone to posit the prophetic period as the time where literacy became more widespread in Israel. It should be remembered, however, that written and oral traditions could coexist in ancient cultures, as has been suggested by the research of Victor A. Hurowitz, "Spanning the Generations: Aspects of Oral and Written Transmission in the Bible and Ancient Mesopotamia", in *Freedom and Responsibility*, eds., R. M. Griffen and M. B. Edelman (New York: Ktav, 1998), 11–30.

[28] See here particularly William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book. The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24–34

that in Israel (as in other ancient cultures, including Mesopotamia and Egypt) written and oral traditions coexisted perfectly well, suggesting a gradual increase in literacy without ignoring the power of the spoken (and memorized) word.[29] Most recently, Demsky, in a study focusing upon literacy in ancient Israel, has argued for "minimal literacy" that, based on rabbinic literature, involves the ability to write at least two letters. This minimal literacy co-existed in an Israelite society that emphasized orality. However, neither literacy nor orality are two contradictory modes of expression but rather complement each other.[30]

The biblical text reports hundreds of instances where God (or YHWH) speaks to individuals[31] and this divine speaking into humanity's realm carries weight that goes beyond any other speech—something also recognizable in other ancient cultures. For example, the Akkadian text "Erra and Ishum" affirms the divine inspiration of the text in the following way:

> The one who put together the composition about him was Kabti-ilani-Marduk son of Dabibi. (Some god) revealed to him in the middle of the night, and when he recited it upon waking, he did not miss anything out, nor add a single word to it.[32]

A similar concept was noted by Egyptologist Alan Gardiner in Egyptian texts associated with the "House of Life:

> Osiris my possibly have occupied a central position in the conception of the House of Life (33). If, as I have conjectured, the name of that institution referred

---

29 Hurowitz, "Spanning the Generations", 11–30.

30 Aaron Demsky, "Researching Literacy in Ancient Israel: New Approaches and Recent Developments", in *"See, I Will Bring a Scroll Recounting What Befell Me" (Ps 40:8): Epigraphy and Daily Life from the Bible to the Talmud Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Hanan Eshel*, eds., Esther Eshel and Yigal Levin, JAJSup 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 89–104.

31 Some of the nomenclatura of divine speech in the Pentateuch (and the larger HB) include דְּבַר־יְהוָה, "the word of the Lord" (Gen 15,1.4; Exod 9,20; Num 3,16.51; Deut 5,5; etc.); נְאֻם־יְהוָה, "says the Lord" (or "saying of the Lord"; Gen 22,16; Num 14,28); כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה, "thus says the Lord" (Exod 4,22; 5,1; 7,17; etc.); בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה, "though the hand of Moses" marks the close link between Moses literary work and God's revelation and law (Lev 10,11; Num 15,23). For more on this, see Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 229–327, esp. 280–284.

32 "Erra and Ishum", trans. Stephanie Dalley (*COS* 1.113:415). I am grateful to Prof. Daniel Block for drawing my attention to this text.

to *the power of divinely inspired writings* to vivify that which was dead, no fitter object to benefit by their potency could have been found than Osiris himself, he being the prototype and pattern of all the dead [italics mine].[33]

In light of these examples from Mesopotamia and Egypt, the biblical claim to divine inspiration does not appear outlandish and should not be disregarded *a priori*. The biblical view of inspiration is first and foremost conceptual and personal. Divine revelation meets the human authors in many ways (visions, dreams, direct speech, and even research); these authors then used their language capabilities, their cultural background and experiences, their communicative skills and their research abilities to express what they had seen and heard.[34] Like seasoned communicators, they also incorporated relevant available material that enhanced their divinely inspired communication.[35]

This self-understanding of Scripture as the expression of God's will suggests also that the framework for biblical interpretation should not be rely solely on philosophical, linguistic or even theological frameworks, but should emanate from Scripture itself—a point that has been emphasized again and again in the work of Fernando Canale.[36] This is closely related to the Bible's implicit epistemology, which Miller equates with the Bible's "implicit philosophy of realism", pointing to a real material world

---

[33] Alan H. Gardiner, "The House of Life", *JEA* 24, n. 2 (1938): 178. This unique reference to the power of inspiration from an Egyptian context was brought to my attention by my colleague Prof. James Hoffmeier.

[34] A more systematic discussion of the issue of revelation and inspiration and Scripture's own testimony regarding the concept can be found in Peter van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration", in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed., Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 22–57. Compare also Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration", in *Understanding Scripture*, 47–74.

[35] Key biblical texts regarding inspiration include 2 Timothy 3,15 and 2 Peter 1,19–21.

[36] See Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 31 (1993): 91–104; idem, "Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 31 (1993): 171–194; and, more expanded, idem, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2010).

within the larger context of God's unseen, yet equally existing world.[37] This biblical philosophy of realism leads naturally to thesis 3.

Thesis 3: We pay attention to Scriptures's big Picture

An appropriate reading of the Pentateuch (and Scripture as a whole) needs to pay attention to the unity and (or, if you please, metanarrative, even though the use of that phrase has been criticized) of the biblical text.[38] In educational studies, we call this the "hidden curriculum"[39] or the key values or topics that help organize the overall presentation.

Richard Davidson has suggested a two-component metanarrative for Scripture as a whole.[40] These two components can also be easily recognized in the Torah. Davidson argued for a twin-foci, including (a) the *cosmic war* between Good and Evil (and their human stand-ins); and (b) the *sanctuary* (both earthly and heavenly) as the cosmic battleground in that war. Both themes are clearly present in the Pentateuch. In an essay focusing upon historiography, myth, and comparative studies, Richard Averbeck discussed Genesis 3 and its foundational purpose for the concept

---

37   Nicholas P. Miller, "Divided by Vision of the Truth: The Bible, Epistemology, and the Adventist Community", *AUSS* 47, n. 2 (2009): 241–262, esp. 253–57.

38   For a helpful introduction to the important topic of Scriptural unity see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009). This unity does not mean a lack of diversity (including also an extremely wide spectrum of literary genres and styles). It does, however, suggest an underlying metanarrative or agenda.

39   For a helpful introduction to this educational concept and its application in a particular area of educational research, see Debby Cotton, Jennie Winter, and Ian Bailey, "Researching the Hidden Curriculum: Intentional and Unintended Messages", *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 37.2 (2013): 192–203.

40   Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11.1–2 (2000): 102–119. See also, more recently, his study of the metanarrative in the book of Job. *Cf.* Richard M. Davidson, "Ezekiel 28:11–19 and the Rise of the Cosmic Conflict", in *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Ángel Manuel Rodríguez in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed., Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute/Review and Herald, 2015), 57–69.

of a cosmic battle (or war).[41] While Averbeck was primarily interested in chapter's nexus to comparative myths from the ANE, he suggested that

> it seems eminently reasonable to assume that the Israelites would have seen a great deal more in Genesis 3 than a simple tale about snakes and mankind. This was the great serpent, the archenemy of Yahweh and the people of God. From their point of view, this would have been the very beginning of a cosmic battle that they were feeling the effects of in their own personal experience (see the curses that follow) and their national history.[42]

Snapshots of this conflict can be encountered repeatedly in the Pentateuch, including the Cain and Abel narrative (Gen 4) focusing upon human interaction with the deity (through sacrifice and obedience) that foreshadows later conflict about worship and sacrifice associated with the tabernacle (e.g., the strange fire in Lev 10). Other examples of this conflict that play out on different levels can be seen in the flood narrative in Genesis 6 (note the enigmatic reference to the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" in Gen 6,4); the conflict between Isaac, the son of the promise, and Ishmael, the son of human ingenuity (Gen 16; 21); the conflict between Pharaoh and Yahweh in the exodus narrative (Exod 5–12; 14–15); the Israelite worship wars (e.g., golden calf episode in Exod 32); the prophet-for-hire episode of Balaam, Balak, and Israel (Num 22–24); as well as the many references to God-as-a-Warrior in the Pentateuch (Exod 15:1–3; Deut 7:1–2; 23:9–14; etc.).[43]

---

[41] Richard Averbeck, "Ancient Near Eastern Mythography as it Relates to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 3 and the Cosmic Battle", in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology. Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions. The Proceedings of a Symposium August 12-14, 2001 at Trinity International University*, eds., James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 328–356, esp. 351–354.

[42] Ibid., 352–353.

[43] There is significant literature on the God-as-a-Warrior motif. See, for example, Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); Richard D. Nelson, "Divine Warrior Theology in Deuteronomy", in *A God So Near. Essays in Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, eds., Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 241–259. Compare also the discussion of the relevant textual and iconographic data found in Martin G. Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, OBO 169 (Fribourg: University Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

The sanctuary as the battlefield of the cosmic war theme can be traced from Eden to the edge of the Promised Land in the Pentateuch. The presence of the enticing serpent (reappearing in the New Testament in Rev 12,9 where it is identified as Satan, the devil) in the garden is a hint to the war (or conflict) motif.

Recent studies have underlined the concept that the Garden of Eden should be considered earth's first sanctuary,[44] thus suggesting the intersection between both key motifs. The topic of the sanctuary in the shape of the mobile tabernacle takes center stage in Exodus and, to a lesser degree, Leviticus. The transportability and mobility of the tabernacle highlights the fact that function trumps location (or, better, an absolute location) in the Pentateuchal sanctuary texts. The focal point of Exodus 25,8 is divine presence—a presence that echoes the intimacy of the Garden of Eden and also anticipates John's tabernacling metaphor associated with the living Word (John 1,14).[45] Considering the importance of the sacrificial system in Israelite religion, the close link between God's presence and the resolution of the sin problem anticipated in Israel's sacrifices becomes apparent. As I have argued elsewhere, "sacrifices and offerings lie at the very heart of ritual activity"[46] in the Hebrew Bible (HB) and underline the human need to reach out to the divine. The sanctuary was the place this encounter took place.

We have already briefly mentioned the Nadab and Abihu episode in Leviticus 10. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the אֵשׁ זָרָה, "strange [or unauthorized] fire". Milgrom suggests that the

---

[44] See, for example, Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative", 108–11, for 17 textual and linguistic arguments linking Eden to the sanctuary and for additional references. Other scholars who have noticed this link include Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story", in *'I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood*, eds., Richard S. Hess and D. Toshio Tsumura, SBTS 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 2004); G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014).

[45] I have discussed this in more detail in Gerald A. Klingbeil, "El santuario, el ritual y la teología: En busca del centro de la teología adventista", *Theo* 27.1 (2012): 66–85.

[46] Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Sacrifice and Offerings", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, ed., Samuel E. Balentine, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2:251.

"fire" (or "coals") must have come from an unauthorized source.[47] What seems to be clear, however, is that it represented a profane human intrusion into God's holy space.

Finally, the sequential nature of the metanarrative needs to be considered.[48] In the Pentateuch we can observe three distinct storylines, which are finely connected by an internal interplay of poetry and prose. While Genesis 1–11 focuses upon primordial history and includes the origins of humanity (including creation, fall, universal flood and main people divisions), Genesis 12–50 continues with the patriarchal history and concentrates upon one family and its descendants, and at the same time begins to describe its destiny in connection with other people (as can be seen in the story of Joseph in Egypt).

Finally, from Exodus 1 onwards to the end of Deuteronomy, the biblical text focuses upon a specific people, the exodus event, the journey, the covenant, the stipulations, and the preparations for the conquest of Canaan. This third section is very specific, including a large number of legal and religious/ritual sections, which are always connected to the people of Israel and which often contain an echo of earlier histories of the first two sections.[49] This increase in specifics represents a subtle literary strategy—common also in modern homiletics—where an author (or preacher) starts from the general and finally ends with the very specific.

Thesis 4: We recognize that Theology (or God-Talk) informs History

History, historicity, and historiography are hot topics in current HB scholarship. Historical-critical scholarship affirms unequivocally that biblical historiography is not up to scratch for writing a reliable (dare I

---

[47]   Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3a (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 598. James W. Watts translates the phrase "other fire" and links it to Exod 30,9 "other [or strange] incense" (*Leviticus 1–10*, HCOT [Leuven: Peeters, 2013], 527).

[48]   The following section is based on my comments in Klingbeil, "Historical Criticism", 404.

[49]   John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative. A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, LBI (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 32–46.

say, "objective") history of ancient Israel.[50] Since the Pentateuch contains a significant number of historical narratives (including personal histories [such as the patriarchal narratives], national histories [note in Exod 1,9 the transition from בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "sons of Israel", to עַם, "people"], religious histories [consider the construction, inauguration, and use of the sanctuary in Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers], and social histories [consider Num 27,1–11 dealing with inheritance rights]), its historiography requires consideration.

Right from the outset, it becomes very clear that significant differences exist between biblical historiography and history writing and their modern (or postmodern) cousins. Critical scholarship has concluded that this makes the biblical text historically unreliable. I will argue that divine activity in human history does not automatically disqualify a text from being "historically reliable". God's presence in all aspects of human activities has long been a mainstay of ancient texts, as noted by Albrektson who studied the issue from a comparative perspective.[51] While Egyptians, Babylonians or Moabites considered divine intervention in human activity not a sensational concept, writes Albrektson, "it would seem that the idea of historical events as divine manifestations has marked the Israelite cult in a way that lacks real parallels among Israel's neighbours".[52]

In other words, theology informs history in biblical thinking. God's activities in history do not make history less reliable (see also thesis 2) and do not disqualify the biblical text from representing a major source of information for the reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel. While historians will consider material culture, archaeology, iconography, and

---

[50] Consider here the well-known works of Lemche, Thompson, Davies, van Seters, and Whitelam. See, for example, Niels Peter Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, BZAW 133 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, JSOTSup 148 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); K. W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London-New York: Routledge, 1996).

[51] Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, ConBOT 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1967, reprint 2011).

[52] Ibid., 115.

other comparative material, the biblical text telling the story of ancient Israel needs to be taken seriously.

I have described elsewhere the characteristics of historical writing in the Pentateuch (as well as in the Bible as a whole).[53] Let me summarize my findings here. Pentateuchal historical writing is marked by an increasing specificity (see also above) and is anchored in the narratives describing origins (of humanity, sin, Israel as a people, etc.) in Genesis. It is also unashamedly theological and selective when it focuses upon individuals or groups of people as they related to YHWH as their covenant deity. As has been noted by Long, "historiography, ... like portraiture, is driven by an overarching aim to 'paint a picture' that truly represents and interprets the significant features of its historical subject".[54]

In the case of the Pentateuch, this means practically that the biblical text contains significant time gaps that are not covered in the narrative. For example, based on biblical internal chronology, there is a gap of about 335 years between Jacob's death (Gen 50) and Moses' birth (Exod 2). We also don't know the exact time between the tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11,1–9 and the call of Abraham (Gen 12,1; as well as Terah's earlier departure from Ur in Chaldea described in Gen 11,31). These time gaps were filled by including genealogies (e.g., Gen 11,10–32) which are often abbreviated and incomplete (e.g., the genealogy of Moses in Exod 6,14–25).

Furthermore, this kind of historiography is unabashedly interpretive and evaluative. Events are commented upon from YHWH's perspective. Noah finds favor in YHWH's eyes in a time of unprecedented evil (Gen 6,8), while the activity of the tower builders of Babel are judged by their (unexpressed) motivations (Gen 11,7–8). YHWH's evaluation of the comportment of the people during the golden calf episode is another example of the Pentateuch's interpretive, yes even judgmental, stance. In a society striving for political correctness, this characteristic of biblical

---

[53] Klingbeil, "Historical Criticism", 404–406, and additional references there.

[54] V. P. Long, "Old Testament History: A Hermeneutical Perspective", in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed., Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1:88.

literature is plain frightening. Readers—both ancient and modern—are drawn into the stories and are invited to look at events and processes from God's perspective. Obviously, this requires a worldview that considers an "open system" (over against the Troeltsch-required "closed system") and allows for divine interventions and God's active engagement in history (see thesis 1 and 2).

Finally, biblical historiography is profoundly biographical—and the Pentateuch is a prime example of it. Characters such as Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others have a high name recognition factor for those reading Scripture—and beyond. This emphasis on individuals (over against nations), which van Seters considers a trait characteristic of unhistorical writing,[55] is closely tied to the broader issues of culture and identity.[56] The focus on the individual is offering the perfect avenue for readers to personally connect—an important communicative strategy long recognized by preachers and public speakers.

Furthermore, as the biographical sketches found in the Bible amply demonstrate, biblical biography is not hagiography (and in this sense rather distinct from other ANE examples of biographical historiography). Abraham's half-truths, Jacob's scheming activities, David's murderous plots, or Solomon's blatant unfaithfulness are all well documented, thus making truth claims more realistic and credible. Biblical historiography is not blatant propaganda—except for its main protagonist, God. Yet even with God, there is space for penetrating existential questions (see Job or Habakkuk for examples).

---

[55] John van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).

[56] See Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons. Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 107–112, for more on this. This story-telling quality focusing on key individuals connects to Israel's identity and creates community. Any Israelite would identify with Abraham and his experience and the notion of being "Abraham's children" often comes to the forefront in New Testament contexts of conflict between Jesus and his audience (*cf.* Matt 3,9; Luke 3,8; John 8,39). Paul suggests that kinship lines in God's Kingdom are not blood-based but go through Christ (Gal 3,29).

Thesis 5: We appreciate the Structural Design
of the Pentateuch

This particular thesis presupposes the canonical final text instead of a hypothetical patchwork of source documents and editions followed by more revisions. Its candid call to look at the big picture of the Pentateuch, however, goes beyond the mere preference for the canonical text which has been argued widely.[57] Rather, it is an invitation to look at possible structural organizers in the Pentateuch whose presence may suggest intentionality and design, rather than haphazard cut-and-paste operations working on an editorial level. Obviously, there is no way of telling from the outset *who* included (or introduced) these structural markers—beyond the fact that they appear to represent a conscious effort to give shape to the Torah.

The first line of evidence comes from literary and narrative analysis. Scholars using this approach began publishing their findings in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They recognized that their focus upon the final canonical text and the overall literary structure represented a stark break with traditional historical or redaction criticism. Spanish scholar Luis Alonso Schökel, whose careful exegetical and literary work in the Psalms[58] (and elsewhere) made him one of the foremost practitioners of this approach, characterized the relationship between the two mutually exclusive methods in his opening address to the International

---

[57] A convenient and succinct synthesis of canonical criticism can be found in Mary C. Callaway, "Canonical Criticism", in *To Each Its Own Meaning. An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed., Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 142–155. Two names, Brevard Childs and James Sanders, have been associated with the focus upon the final canonical text, even though they really represent two distinct approaches. See, for example, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, MN: Fortress, 1979); idem, Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, MN: Fortress, 1985); and James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia, MN: Fortress, 1984).

[58] See, for example, Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, Subsidia Biblica 11 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988); and his impressive Spanish commentary on the Psalms, Luis Alonso Schökel and C. Carniti, *Salmos I (Salmos 1-72): Traducción, introduciones y comentario* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1992), and idem, Luis Alonso Schökel and C. Carniti, *Salmos II (Salmos 73–150): Traducción, introducciones y comentario* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1993).

Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) congress in Salamanca in 1983 as a "cold war of mutual condemnation".[59]

Biblical scholars such as Thomas Mann, Winfried Warning, John Sailhamer, and H. C. Brichto have contributed significantly to the concept that the Pentateuch is an integrated narrative and represents narrative unity.[60] This narrative unity has also been highlighted by literary critics R. Alter and L. Ryken using standard literary conventions. Both have argued for conscious narrative strategies where others only saw doublets or distinct (and even contradictory) sources.[61] While not all of these scholars would subscribe to the exclusive use of literary analysis for biblical studies, their focus upon the intentionality and artistry of biblical authors argues strongly against the fragmentary nature of the Pentateuch postulated by critical scholarship.

Scholars studying the function of inset poetry within the larger context of the Pentateuch have also contributed to the recognition of the larger structural unity of the Pentateuch.[62] My brother Martin Kling-

---

[59] Luis Alonso Schökel, "Of Methods and Models", in *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983*, ed., J. A. Emerton, VTSup 36 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 7.

[60] See Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, BIS 35 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999); Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*; H. C. Brichto, *The Names of God: Poetic Readings in Biblical Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Longman has pointed out (I think correctly) three basic research aims shared by most scholars working in the field of literary analysis: (1) literary theory reveals the conventions of biblical literature; (2) it stresses whole texts; and (3) it focuses on the reading process. *Cf.* Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, FCI (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 58–62.

[61] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), and L. Ryken and T. Longman III, eds., *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993). A more recent analysis of the impact of this method has been offered by Robert S. Kawashima, "Literary Analysis", in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, eds., Craig A. Evans et al., VTSup 152 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012), 83–104.

[62] See, for example, the pioneering work of James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, JSOTSup 139 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). Other contributions focusing upon the Pentateuch include Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 35–37, and particularly Martin G. Klingbeil, "Poemas en medio de la prosa: Poesía insertada en el Pentateuco", in *Inicios, paradigmas, y fundamentos*, 61–85; and idem, "Éxodo 15: Entre la poesía y la prosa", in *'Y Moisés escribió las palabras de YHWH'. Estudios selectos en el Pentateuco*, ed. Merling Alomía, Investigaciones Bíblico-Teológicas UPeUenses 1 (Ñaña, Lima: Ediciones Theologika, 2004), 153–161.

beil published a helpful study on the topic in 2004 where he built on earlier research of Watts and others. Klingbeil suggests intentionality of the overall Pentateuchal structure as evidenced by shared vocabulary (c. 30–40%) between the Pentateuchal poems[63] and their narrative contexts, the clear linguistic markers signaling the transition to poetry and the reversal to prose at the end of the poems, as well as the integral part within the micro and macrostructure of the Pentateuch and the development of the narrative plot.[64]

A final argument in support of a carefully developed overall Pentateuchal structure is taken from my own research in ritual texts, pointing to Leviticus as its center.[65] A careful reading and classification of ritual texts in the Pentateuch suggests a quasi-chiastic structure. While 8.74% of all verses in Genesis can be classified as containing ritual content, Exodus boasted 14.34%, with Leviticus being the ritually densest book of the Pentateuch at 60.53%, followed by Numbers at 19.95% and framed by Deuteronomy with 8.64% (nearly identical with Genesis' ritual density).

<div align="center">

A. Genesis: 8.74%

B. Exodus: 14.34%

X. Leviticus: 60.53%

B'. Numbers: 19.95%

A'. Deuteronomy: 8.65%

</div>

Both, Jürgens and Warning, have recognized the chiastic structure of Leviticus and agreed that the Day of Atonement ritual should be

---

63 The poetic sections of the Pentateuch included in Klingbeil's study were Gen 3,14–19; 4,23–24; 9,6–7, 23–24; 14,19–20; 16,11–12; 27,27–29, 39–30; 48,15–16; 49,1–27; Exod 15,1–18; Num 6,24–26; 10,35–36; 12,6–8, 17–18, 27–30; 23,7–10, 18–24; 24,3–9, 15–24; Deut 32,1–43; 33,2–29. He excluded Gen 2,23; 8,22; 24,60; 25,23; 48,20; Exod 15,21; 32,18; and Num 21,14–15, based on Freedman's criteria of length and quantity. *Cf.* Klingbeil, "Poemas en medio de la prosa", 71.

64 Klingbeil, "Poemas en medio de la prosa", 61–85, for the detailed statistics and additional bibliography.

65 The following comments are based on Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap,* 154–157, and the appendix "Ritual Texts in the Pentateuch" in ibid., 245–52.

considered the center of this particular book.[66] Not surprisingly, this has also been noted in Zenger's synchronic reading of Leviticus within the larger Pentateuch.[67] The underlying rationale for this idea is the conviction that a text (and particularly Lev 16) cannot be read and understood as an independent and unrelated literary unit but needs to be understood within its wider context. Thus, literary structure reflects organization of the larger system—in this case, the ritual system.

Thesis 6: We look at the Afterlife of Pentateuchal Themes and Clusters

Themes and topical clusters first appearing in the Pentateuch reappear throughout the remainder of Scripture. I see two repercussions for this well-known fact. First, it underlines the foundational nature of the Pentateuch anchoring the remainder of Scripture. Second, it forms a web-like structure that links in surprising ways distinct textual genres from different historical periods, written in different languages and reflecting changing cultures. Our constant connectedness today (mostly done wirelessly) somewhat helps us understand this interconnectedness of Scripture even better. Hackers may attack thousands of websites and take down hundreds or thousands of servers or routers—and yet, redundancy is built into the system and somehow our never-ending sequences of 1s and 0s make it to the other side of the world as we send an e-mail or text message to a friend or colleague.

The same principal can be applied to Pentateuchal themes and clusters which reappear in (sometimes) surprising places in Scripture. Before discussing a select number of these it is good to remember that I understand intertextuality to be a conscious authorial activity. When we make

---

[66] See Benedikt Jürgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung. Levitikus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext*, Herders Biblische Studien 28 (Freiburg: Herder, 2001), esp. 187–302; Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, passim. Compare also earlier Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure", *AUSS* 34 (1996): 269–286.

[67] Erich Zenger, "Das Buch Levitikus als Teiltext der Tora des Pentateuch. Eine synchrone Lektüre mit diachroner Perspektive", in *Levitikus als Buch*, ed., Heinz-Josef Fabry and Hans-Winfried Jüngling, BBB 119 (Berlin-Bodenheim b. Mainz: Philo, 1999), 47–83.

reference to earlier texts (or movies, music or key concepts), we usually have a communicative agenda. The reference to the earlier text triggers a reaction, an emotion, or anchors a new idea. The same seems to happen when we consider biblical intertextuality—as will be argued below.

In my mind, the most foundational Pentateuchal theme echoing throughout the Bible is the topic of creation. Much has been written on this topic, including also a volume I edited in 2015.[68] The echo of creation in different literary genres and time periods (including the larger Pentateuch, the Psalms, wisdom literature, as well as the prophets), suggests to me that creation is not just an important theological motif (among others), but rather should be the most foundational topic connecting biblical theology to biblical exegesis. This is not to claim (as some have done) that creation should be considered *the* theological center of the HB (or even Scripture). However, as has been widely recognized, the motif appears throughout the Bible and is taken as a given by the biblical authors.

---

[68] Following is a quick sample of current work on creation in the HB and beyond. Bernard F. Batto*, In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013); Annette Schellenberg, *Der Mensch, das Bild Gottes? Zum Gedanken einer Sonderstellung des Menschen im Alten Testament und in den weiteren altorientalischen Quellen*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 101 (Zürich: TVZ, 2011); Hermann Spieckermann, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil als Horizont alttestamentlicher Theologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 100 (2003): 399–419; Paul R. House, "Creation in Old Testament Theology", *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5 (2001): 4–17; Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation. Old Testament Perspectives*, Overtures in Biblical Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994); Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation. Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994); R. J. Clifford and J. J. Collins, eds., *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, CBQMS 24 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992); and the classic Bernhard W. Anderson, ed. *Creation in the Old Testament*, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984). Compare also a number of doctoral dissertations written here at Andrews University over the past two decades: Wann Marbud Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss.; Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2001); Gnanamuthu. S. Wilson, "A Descriptive Analysis of Creation Concepts and Themes in the Book of Psalms" (Ph.D. diss.; Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 1996). Compare also most recently Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015).

Intertextuality offers helpful insights as we seek to discover Penta-teuchal topics and theological clusters. Much has been written as to its methodology and philosophical underpinnings.[69] In fact, some would prefer the phrase "innerbiblical exegesis" in order to avoid some of the possible methodological pitfalls associated with the practice of intertex-tuality in some quarters.[70] I am using the term intertextuality in its tech-nical sense (as opposed to a more philosophical perspective),[71] focusing upon thematic, lexical, and literary links connecting different texts. In a recent contribution to the Festschrift for my colleague and friend Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, I have probed intertextual links between the book of Numbers and the New Testament Book of Revelation.[72]

Most New Testament scholars recognize the rootedness of the Apoca-lypse in the HB—both in terms of lexicon and motifs. Yet, when we seek to recognize and understand intertextual links between texts we should avoid the pitfall of a "flat" reading that only looks for similarities without contrasting the differences (see also thesis 7 on "compare and contrast" in comparative approaches). I have adapted the framework that I suggested for the analysis and interpretation of ritual texts to the study of intertex-tual connections, focusing upon four key categories, including (a) events/ action; (b) places; (c) objects; and (d) people.

---

[69]   I have benefited from the work of Patricia K. Tull, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah*, SBLDS 161 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997); idem, "Intertextuality and the Hebrew Scriptures", *CurBS* 8 (2000): 59–90; *cf.* also Kirsten Nielson, "Intertexuality and Hebrew Bible", in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998*, ed., André Lemaire and M. Sæbø, VTSup 80 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 17–31.

[70]   See, for example, Segundo Teófilo Correa, "Intertextualidad y exégesis intra-bíblica: ¿Dos ca-ras de la misma moneda? Breve análisis de las presuposiciones metodológicas", *DavarLogos* 5 (2006): 1–13, and earlier William M. Schniedewind, "Innerbiblial Exegesis", in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed., Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, A Compen-dium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 502–509. Michael Fishbane's groundbreaking contribution to this discussion should not be overlooked (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985]).

[71]   See the helpful methodological discussion of intertextuality and additional bibliography in Martin Pröbstle, "Truth and Error: A Text-oriented Analysis of Daniel 8:9–14" (Ph.D. diss.; Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2006), 565–580.

[72]   Gerald A. Klingbeil, "'From the Wilderness to the Promised Land': Echoes of Numbers in the Book of Revelation", in *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil*, 203–216.

Intertextual connections and echoes can have a number of effects on readers. They function to activate memories, suggest associations, and can become trigger points to further action.[73] In the following I include a few significant links between Numbers and Revelation taken from each category as a sample of many more that I have discussed in my earlier research.

The ten-day testing of the faithful of Smyrna (Rev 2,10) echoes the tenfold testing of God by Israel in the wilderness (Num 14,22).[74] The "teaching of Balaam" (Rev 2,14) uses the narrative in Numbers 22–25 as its subtext and, more particularly, the reference to Balaam's counsel to Balak in Numbers 31,16.[75] The wilderness, one of the central themes of Numbers, can be found repeatedly in Revelation (12,6.14; 17,3). Intriguingly, this is a theological motif that shows transformation: while the wilderness in Numbers is a place of murmuring (e.g., Num 10,11–21:20), of conflict, of waiting and only finally, of redemption, its use in Revelation is much more positive. The wilderness is the place where the persecuted woman can find refuge.[76]

The final example belongs to the object category. Trumpets appear repeatedly in Numbers and in Revelation. In Numbers they communicate divine orders (Num 10,2–10) while in Revelation they announce judgment—again, another example that intertextuality is more than a citation or quote.[77] Rather, it is the conscious effort to connect something known with something new, often creating a new perspective or reality.

---

[73] Note this observation by linguists Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 236–237: "The hearer or reader can go beyond just exploring the immediate context and the entries for concepts involved in it, accessing a wide area of knowledge . . . . The result is quite a complex picture, for which the hearer [or reader] has to take a large part of responsibility, but the discovery of which has been triggered by the writer".

[74] Klingbeil, "'From the Wilderness to the Promised Land'", 207; note the clear linguistic links suggested there.

[75] Ibid., 207–8.

[76] Ibid., 212. Most commentators would equate the woman with the church.

[77] Ibid., 213.

More key themes of the Pentateuch could be mentioned here, including the covenant,[78] the exodus[79] or the law.[80] They represent foundational theological topics requiring constant engagement, re-imagination, and (often) conscious contextualization.

Thesis 7: We compare and constrast Biblical and Extrabiblical Data

The comparative method is nothing new or revolutionary. Biblical scholars have long recognized that the biblical text—including the Pentateuch—did not appear in a vacuum, but in a world where people lived in interconnected cultures. To be sure, we are not talking about the incredible level of interconnectedness existing in 2016. Yet, even without the Internet, social media, e-mail, or telephones, people living in the ANE enjoyed networks that went beyond the local village or the tribal or regional entity.

The method advocated in the final thesis statement calls for comparison and contrast and is indebted to William Hallo whose call for careful attention to similarities and differences has guided my own thinking as I wrote my doctoral dissertation.[81]

Right from the outset, the comparative method envisioned here is biased towards the biblical text.[82] This is not a conversation about two

---

78   Already recognized as a key theme in T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land. An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995).

79   See, for example, Ronald Hendel, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory", *JBL* 120 (2001): 601–622.

80   *Cf.* J. Gordon McConville, "Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality", in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, eds., Craig G. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 259–281.

81   See Gerald A. Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369* (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1998), 325–340. I will not repeat the long list of Hallo's contribution to this important topic referenced in my published dissertation. Another helpful resource can be found in Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies*, AOAT 227 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990).

82   Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1980), 16: "When applying comparative material to the biblical text, the interpreter must allow the biblical text itself to be the controlling factor in the exegetical process".

equal texts, but a search to grasp the cultural, social, political, and religious contexts that helped shape the biblical authors. This has nothing to do with the supposed superiority of Israel or the suggested inferiority of the surrounding nations. Rather, it is the recognition that our main interest lies in the Bible—not in Middle Assyrian legal texts. I appreciate Greenspahn's recognition that "whether Israel was superior or inferior to the others is a different matter, a value judgment not susceptible to objective evaluation [whatever that may be; see thesis 1]. Nor is any of this relevant to the theological debate about the Bible's validity or divine origins, both of which necessarily rest on commitments outside of the Bible itself".[83]

Generally, it is preferable to use comparative data belonging to the same historical and cultural stream. The ability of a fifteenth century A.D. Hindu ritual to contribute significantly to our understanding of a biblical ritual found in Leviticus is limited. Comparisons on the "grand scale" should be avoided.[84] Once similarities (and differences) have been recognized, the main purpose of the comparative method suggested here is not to establish historical timelines or dependencies, but to better understand the biblical text. A better understanding of the comparative material should then lead to clearer view of a particular biblical ritual or law.

In my work on the ordination rituals found in Leviticus 8, and the LBA Akkadian text Emar 369 I described numerous similarities and differences. I chose the Emar 369 text because it can be dated archaeologically to the LBA—a time that represents the same historical stream suggested by the internal chronology of the biblical text for the Pentateuch. Both texts belonged to the same genre and dealt with a similar topic, i.e., ordination. However, before attempting the comparative work, I spent

---

[83] Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Introduction", in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed., Frederick E. Greenspahn, Essential Papers on Jewish Studies (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 11.

[84] This phrase was coined by Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Comparative Method in Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Problems", in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977*, eds., Walther Zimmerli et al., VTSup 29 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 322, 356.

considerable time trying to understand Leviticus 8 within the larger context of the book of Leviticus, the Pentateuch, the HB, and Scripture as a whole.

The outcomes of the comparative section of my dissertation cover 23 dense pages and shall not be repeated here and include many similarities and differences.[85] As a historical footnote: I was particularly intrigued by the fact that the Emar 369 ritual used—similar to the priestly ordination ritual in Leviticus 8—anointing subrites that utilized oil-based liquids to mark the priestly candidates for their future responsibility. Up to that point, most historical-critical commentators had dismissed this practice as a reflection of late fifth century B.C. practice, totally unknown in the LBA and IA periods of the ANE.[86] More examples of fruitful interaction between the biblical and the extrabiblical material could be cited, suggesting that, indeed, this represents a significant hermeneutical step as we seek to understand biblical texts.[87]

Instead of a Conclusion

Most introductions to the Pentateuch begin their journey by recounting and re-interpreting the quest of historical-critical scholarship to write a coherent composition history. However, because existing paradigms determine expected outcomes, this study attempted to start a new conversation about challenging the basic underlying operating system (or the hermeneutical foundation) of Pentateuchal studies. The seven thesis statements discussed in this study are by no means revolutionary—they have been considered before. They emphasize the importance of worldview and the existence of our intellectual operating systems and challenge

---

[85]   Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination*, 547–569.

[86]   See Gerald A. Klingbeil, "La unción de Aarón: Un estudio de Lev 8:12 en su contexto veterotestamentario y antiguo Cercano Oriental", *Theo* 11 (1996): 64–83; and its updated English version in idem, "The Anointing of Aaron. A Study of Lev 8:12 in its OT and ANE Contexts", *AUSS* 38 (2000): 231–243. Independently, Daniel E. Fleming, "The Biblical Tradition of Anointing Priests", *JBL* 117 (1998): 401–414, came to similar conclusions.

[87]   See, for example, the important recent work on the larger ritual calendar by Bryan C. Babcock, *Sacred Ritual: A Study of the West Semitic Ritual Calendars in Leviticus 23 and the Akkadian Text Emar 446*, BBRSup 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

scholars to take seriously the Bible's own truth claims and underlying metanarrative. Based on this foundation and premise, they then acknowledge the fact that the Pentateuch's perspective of history is God-centered, something shared with many other ancient documents. Finally, the focus upon the larger literary structure of the Pentateuch and the recognition of the important conscious intertextual echoes and connections by later biblical writers, as well as the acknowledgement that ANE culture and texts have left recognizable traces in the biblical text, all suggest a revamped workflow. This workflow will not in itself resolve all the difficult questions that we may face when studying the Pentateuch. It will, however, offer an alternative foundation that should prove strong enough to build a new edifice of Pentateuchal studies.

Instead of constantly revisiting a paradigm that reflects the intellectual framework of the nineteenth century or arguing for incremental alternative interpretations within this intellectual framework, I hope that a new generation of Pentateuch scholars will be able to break free and allow the biblical text to speak in new, relevant, and perhaps even surprising ways.

Gerald A. Klingbeil
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University
Michigan, United States of America
klingbeil@andrews.edu